

Adrien Brody

FROM THE SEEDY STREETS OF HOLLYWOODLAND TO THE BULLFIGHTING RING IN SPAIN, THE INIMITABLE—AND STYLISH—**ADRIEN BRODY** KEEPS US GUESSING. (PINK TIGHTS?)

STORY EDDIE BRANNAN

PHOTOGRAPHY BEN WATTS

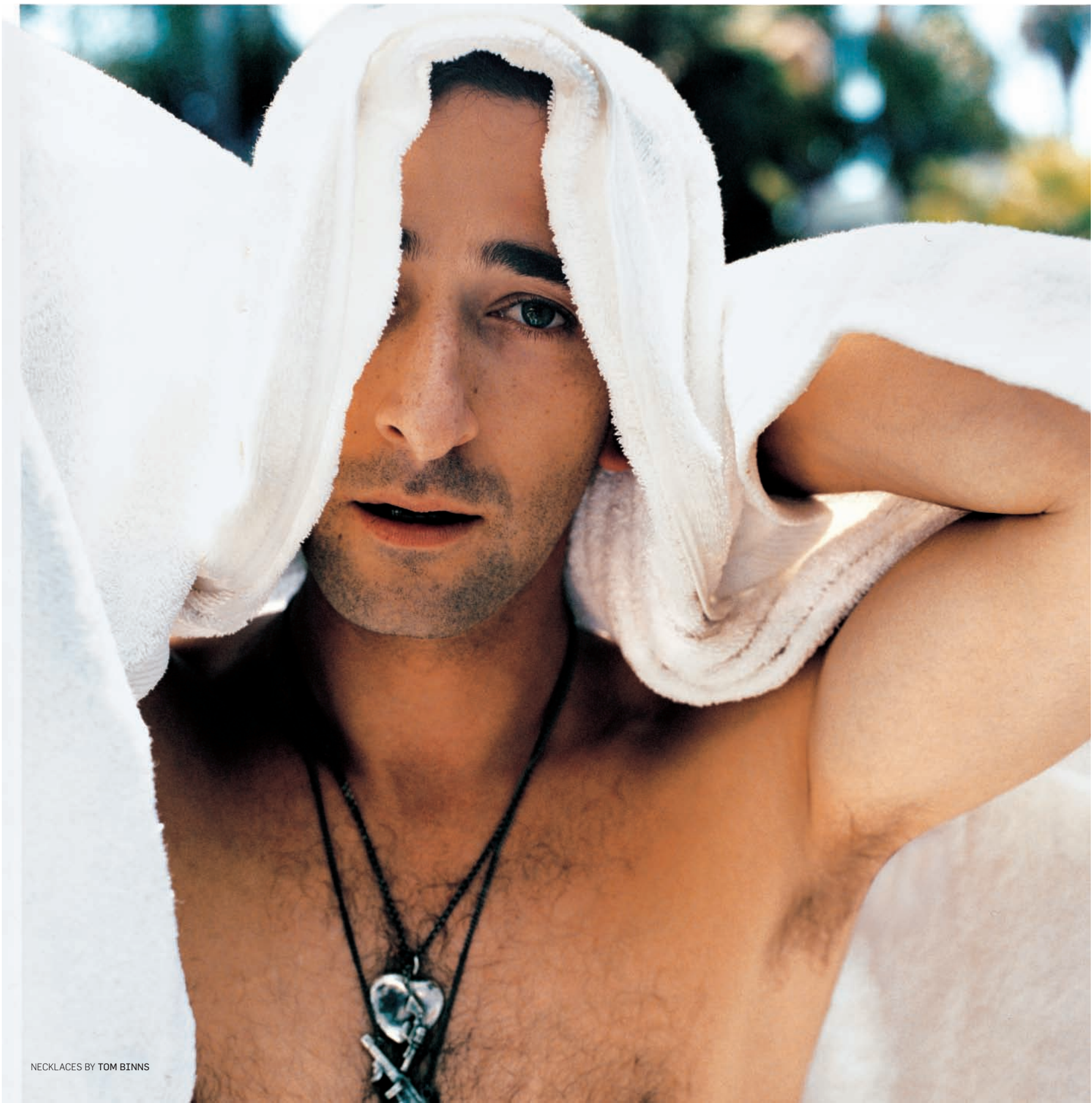
STYLING ELIZABETH SULGER



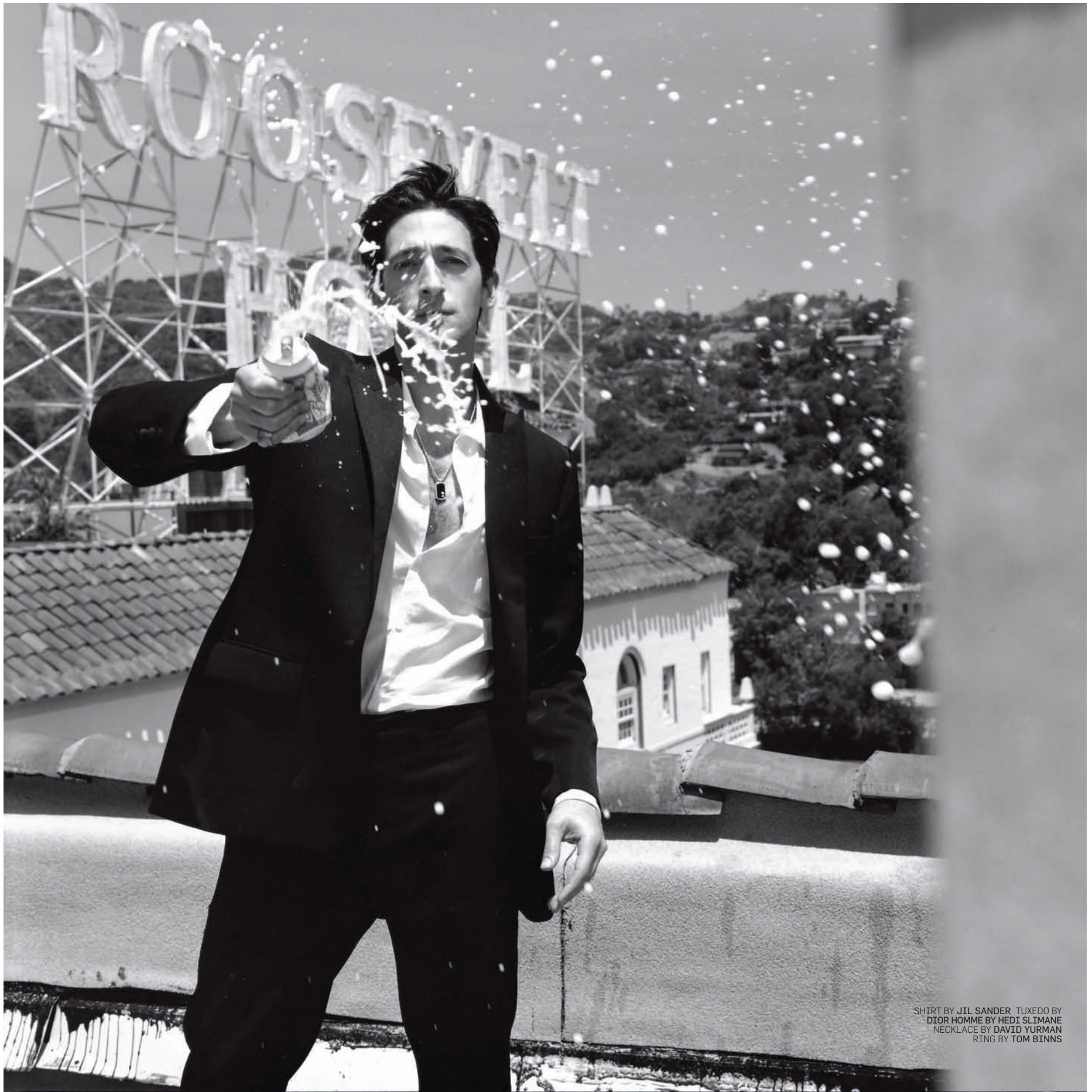
There's an uncanny physical resemblance between Manolete—considered Spain's greatest ever bullfighter—and the actor Adrien Brody, who plays him in the eponymous biopic *Manolete*, arriving in theaters later this year. Study photos of the legendary matador—especially those taken during his last fight, in 1947, when he was 30 years old—and you have to remind yourself that you're actually not looking at pictures of the Oscar-winner. They share the same beanpole physique, the same aquiline nose, the potentially melancholy facial structure.

To be sure, Brody is the more conventionally handsome of the two. And by way of character, the actor would be deemed a tad less austere. Nonetheless, anyone fortunate enough to have seen Manolete perform in the ring would have to look twice at the great torero's apparent reincarnation in this young actor from Queens, New York.

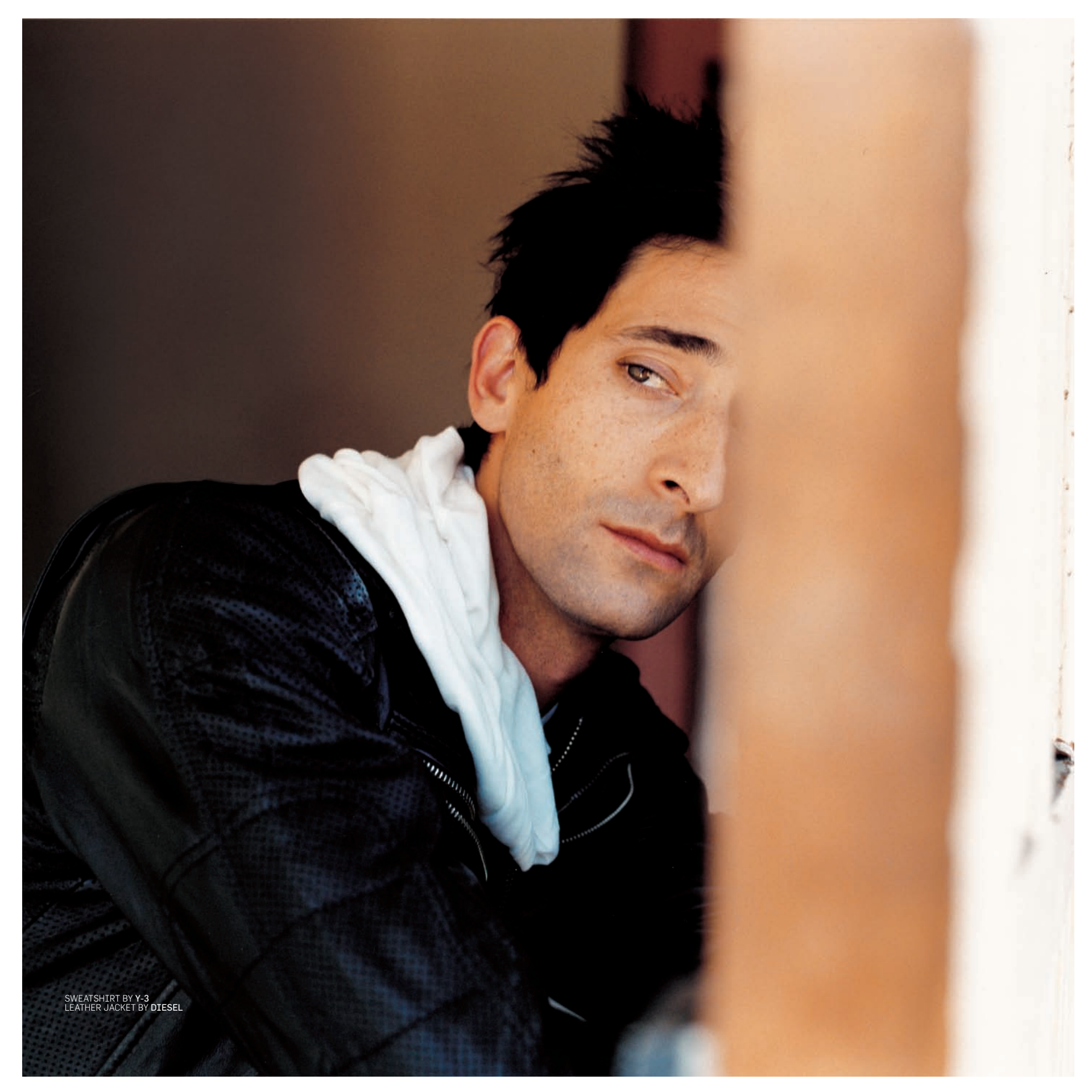
The tale of the great bullfighter's life is an apt choice for Brody. His last film, *Hollywoodland*, was not embraced by critics, and his reticent adventure hero role in *King Kong*, though well-executed, didn't play to his true strengths. Although he is, by dint of his Oscar-winning performance as Wladyslaw Szpilman in Polanski's *The Pianist*, a certified leading man, he is not your typical matinée idol. Of his part in *King Kong* he says, "Most actors don't get a shot at that [type of role]. They go to the big names, the simpler good-looking guys. There are very few leading-man roles like that—those written with an element of depth."



NECKLACES BY TOM BINNS



SHIRT BY JIL SANDER TUXEDO BY
DIOR HOMME BY HEDI SLIMANE
NECKLACE BY DAVID YURMAN
RING BY TOM BINNS



SWEATSHIRT BY Y-3
LEATHER JACKET BY DIESEL



I HAVE COMPLETELY FALLEN APART IN CHARACTERS.



And while he may indeed have brought unexpected depth to the type of role that is normally treated with cartoon-character conventionality by guys with bigger pecs and smaller noses, Brody's true talent lies in his meticulous explorations of complicated, brilliant men with turbulent lives. Introverted himself, there is probably much in these dark souls he empathizes with. "I'm not a really an outgoing person in public," he says. "The common misconception is that actors want to be front and center, 24-7. I'm relatively shy, I roll solo most of the time."

In this, Brody shares common ground with the sober, elegant bullfighter. Manolete—his full name was Manuel Rodríguez Sánchez—was born in 1917, in Córdoba, Spain, the son and grandson of bullfighters who both worked under the same name. He was a novice at his profession at age thirteen, and became a professional bullfighter in 1939. His style was unusual at the time, marked by an extreme economy of movement and classic simplicity.

During the 1940s, Manolete became a folk hero in Spain, and a superstar. He was enormously successful, earning some \$4 million during that decade (an astronomical sum at the time), and performed upwards of 100 times a year. Over the course of his career he was badly gored 11 times, and when in 1947 he announced his intention to retire, he was goaded, predominantly by the brilliant upstart torero Luis Miguel Dominguín, to fight a final season.

In the Andalusian town of Linares, Manolete teamed with his young rival (who courted, among many other women, the Hollywood star Ava Gardner—legend has it that when he left her bed in unseemly haste after the conquest, Gardner asked him where he was going. "To tell everybody," was his response). Dominguín handled the first bull with ease. The second was for Manolete. The bull was named Islero, of the famously aggressive Miura line of fighting bulls, and at the moment of its death at Manolete's sword, the bull gored him deeply in the thigh. Despite the efforts of the bull ring's medical staff, Manolete died an hour later, sending his country into mourning.

Manolete focuses on the late period of the bullfighter's life, and on his romantic involvement with the actress Antoñita "Lupe" Sino, a woman described as "brazen," and a regular consort of bullfighters. Manolete fell hard for her, and Brody depicts him in the throes of a love that was too great to handle. As the torero lies dying in Linares, Sino is denied access to him, for fear of an opportunistic deathbed marriage.

Brody describes his Manolete as "ill, tired, with nowhere to go. We wanted to frame him in an unconventional way, a man exhausted by facing and delivering death every day." He describes trying to understand what it meant to be a legend, still only in his late twenties, who had come from an impoverished background to fabulous wealth, and whose constant performing required rigorous traveling at a time before highways connected all of Spain. Brody says that Manolete was something of an enigma. Fit and athletic, despite a poor diet and bad health habits, he had difficulty with regular associations and relations. He "was comfortable with things we're afraid of, and uncomfortable with the things we find familiar. It takes a lot out of your soul."

Perhaps Brody is not just talking about his character. When a part calls for it, the actor immerses himself profoundly into his role; for *The Pianist* he forced himself onto a severe diet, losing 30 pounds off an already gaunt frame. In the film, he was skeletal and weak. He moved out of his apartment and sold or stored

all his belongings, so he could get closer to understanding the inconceivable privations of the Jews in Warsaw's ghetto during the Shoah. He spent most of the production essentially alone on the set, and the feral, starved, hunted creature we see on screen comes from deep within Brody's soul.

"The major challenge is to not be self-conscious when you're working," he explains. "And if you can let go of that, it's a very powerful thing. It's liberating. There's an excitement to losing a certain level of awareness of yourself and how you feel in the moment and researching, and emotionally tapping into another person's energy. I have completely fallen apart in characters. Not acting as if I do, but actually falling part."

For the part of Manolete, Brody traveled to Spain to work with two of the great modern toreros: Espartaco, now retired, and Cayetano Rivera Ordoñez, a current champion, also from a long line of masters. It was rigorous work—even getting dressed for it in the so-called "suit of lights," the traditional costume of matadors that remains fundamentally unchanged since the 18th century. It consists of a pair of pink stockings (yes, pink) under form-fitting wool knickers, and a shirt and tie over which a very tight vest is worn. Atop all of this is a spectacular waist-length jacket, stiff with layers of fabric and adorned with sequins, beading, embroidery of religious figures in gold and silver thread; and finally the large cape and smaller *muleta*, and the *montera*, the knotted silk hat that takes 40 days to fashion by hand.

"By the time you've got all of this on," Brody says, laughing, "you can hardly move if you want to. The bull's coming at you, it's a million degrees in the ronda, you're sweating bullets, you can't move, and all you've got is this little cape!" Which is just fine with Brody. Soulful looks and puppy eyes notwithstanding, there's a mile-wide streak of Steve McQueen in him.

On vacation in Tobago back in 2000, he dove off the board at a swimming pool and nearly broke his neck, hitting his head on the bottom of the shallow end. He had his most serious motorcycle accident in New York City, getting thrown 30 feet over the hood of a car that emerged from a side street into his path. "It was gnarly, man," he says, describing lying there in the street, badly hurt, waiting for the ambulance to arrive and noticing how his leather and steel motorcycle boot was torn apart by the force of the impact, wondering what his foot looked like underneath. "Totally gnarly!"

But there's a daredevil's glee in his delivery. Now he owns a 900cc Ducati, with the full carbon kit and red accents, as well as a Corvette. And he chooses to live in California, because, he says, "It's the only place I can really be alone when I want to." When he arrived for this profile in Los Angeles, he displayed the extensive bruising all down the side of his ribcage where his quad bike had rolled and landed on top of him in the California desert. At one point during the photo-shoot for this piece, he dangled precariously off the edge of the roof of the hotel, leaving the assembled crew's hearts in their mouths.

While he wasn't actually gored on the set of *Manolete*, he came far closer to it than his producers, agents, and publicists would have wished, and earned the respect of his torero tutors for his willingness to face down the *anovillado* (young and noble) bulls with which he trained. He may have been cast for his looks, but Brody has proven there's a lot more to his portrayal of Manolete than meets the eye.



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MAKEUP MAI QUYNH @ WALL GROUP
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CHRISTOPHER VILLAFUERTE
LOCATION HOLLYWOOD ROOSEVELT HOTEL

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