

ALMA

FROM THE NEW YORK POST
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The Best of Everything

ON COVER:
Sahil Laurent sweater,
\$59 at Anthropologie; jeans
and belt, Molo's own

PICTURED:
On this cover: \$146 for \$425
at DeviousNewYork.com;
Crown jeans, \$18 at Devious.com;
"Chlorinated" sunglasses, \$80
at Ray-Ban.com; belt, \$22 at
MichaelKors.com; watch, Molo's own

FAA SICHT!
Goggles, \$69 at
KinrossCashmere.com; \$97-\$224
at Kinross.com; Molo's own

COVER STORY

FATHER FIGURE

'THIS IS US' STAR
MILO VENTIMIGLIA PLAYS
PAPA ON-SCREEN AND OFF

STORY BY ROBERT KORKE
PHOTOS BY SHERYL WIELDS

THIS is the Milo Ventimiglia became a dad — at least on TV. The 39-year-old actor already enjoyed a reputation as a Hollywood heartthrob playing younger parts like those of resilient brooding teen Les Mariano on "Gilmore Girls" and empath Peter Petrillo on "Heroes" but he finally got to act his age for the role of Jack Pearson, a father who struggles to cope with the death of one of his newborn "This Is Us."

"I wanted to play a good man," Ventimiglia tells Alma after our cover shoot, sitting on an outdoor patio in Los Angeles' Benedict Canyon, as wind chimes ring in the background. "It was very simple how he loved his wife, how he loved his kids." That unabashed love helped "This Is Us" become network television's biggest sensation in years. (Its trailer broke streaming records last May, four months before the show premiered.) The series leaps back and forth through time, showing the close-knit, interclass Pearson family at different ages while dangling a sobering fact before its besotted audience: Jack dies and his charming, Rebecca (Mandy Moore), remarries.

Ventimiglia, who has changed from his designer photo-shoot threads into an effortful dad in a button-down and jeans, knew he was playing a dead man when he signed on for the project (even if the particulars of his character's death remain a mystery to viewers). "I didn't worry me at all," Executive Producer Dan Fogel-

man said to me, "Milo, don't worry just because Jack is dead in the present day doesn't mean you're going to be off the show."
Indeed, Ventimiglia remains a pivotal father figure both on-camera and off. "I try to show up every on the days I'm not working," he explains. "I do a lot of photographing behind the scenes. I shoot everything on film [that takes place] in the past and everything on digital [that takes place] in the present. I try to be around, be that Papa Pearson."
His on-star Mandy Moore calls Ventimiglia the show's "team captain." "He really feels like the true patriarch of our little set family," she tells Alma. "He knew every crew member's name by the end of the first week of work and makes sure to say good morning and shake hands every time he walks on set."
Though Ventimiglia has no kids of his own — he's never even been a camp counselor — he displays an innate ten-

derness and ability to connect with the show's child actors as well. "You have to remember that they're kids," he says. "Nature a fun environment for them, but don't let them get away with too much. Show them kindness and love, intelligence and strength — they're going to soak it all in."
Spoken like a man who's ready to become a dad himself! "I'd love to have kids," he says, before quickly adding a caveat. "I think it's more about having that right partner. The older I got, the more I understood that Mom and Dad were going to have to be cool with Mom and Dad together, whether the kids were there or the kids were gone. I think for me the lesson was find a great partner — having kids will be the joy from having a great partnership."
As for finding that partner, the actor has previously been linked with former co-stars Alexa Lelond and Hayden Panettiere. Lately, she's been spotted



On 'This Is Us,' Ventimiglia plays Jack — Benedict in Mandy Moore's character, Rebecca (left), and father of three.



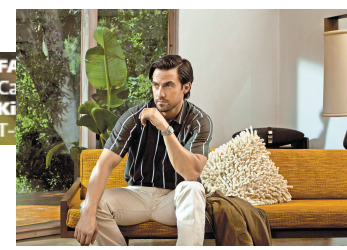
RIGHT: Shirt, \$55 at Anthropologie.com; Made in U.S.A. jeans, \$18 at Devious.com; \$5 E-260 S; Watch, Molo's own

PICTURED: The Koolhaas Sport shirt, \$22 at Anthropologie.com; \$200 Third Ave; Watch, Molo's own



with a new girlfriend. 31-year-old Stella McCartney marketing coordinator Kelly Figarino. But Ventimiglia remains mum on their relationship. "We won't talk about it," he says firmly.
If he sounds remarkably grounded when compared to some of his peers, credit his mother, Clark, and father, Peter — a Vermont vet to whom Ventimiglia turned for inspiration for his character. "I was never a loss for hugs and kisses from my parents and my [two] sisters," the actor reflects. "I think there's this idea that the depth of an actor's performance is built on tough times or horrible events or isolation, but I never found that. I figured that my imagination coupled with the story can get me anywhere."
Growing up in the shadow of Disneyland, in Anaheim, Calif., also had a big influence. His mother worked there and he once tried to get a job "cleaning up trash on Main Street, but I couldn't get hired," he laughs. Instead, he soaked up its creative spirit by visiting as often as possible. "As I got older, it was hard to get in, but if you were of us teenagers to go run around the park. [It cost] 40 bucks to get in, but if you were from Southern California, they would cut you a deal."
Ventimiglia keeps it local to this day, riding around L.A. and Orange County (where his parents still live) on a jet-black Harley Davidson. "Here, I'm around all my contacts. I see my parents. I see my close friends."

He'll also be seeing his "This Is Us" family when they reunite to film Season 2 in July (the show is set to return this fall on Tuesday nights). "I'm excited for all of it," he says. "I know how [Jack died]. I know when, I know who," he says. "I didn't worry me at all. [Executive Producer Dan Fogel-



ABOVE: Shirt, \$22 at DeviousNewYork.com; Trousers, \$192 at PalmiersMod.com
Fashion Editor: Serena French
Stylist: Anzhela Maslova
Groomer: KCFire at The Will Group using Baxter of California and Tom Ford

likely address quickly is the controversial Season 1 finale. Viewers were led to believe they'd finally learn how Jack died — when that revelation failed to come, they lashed out on social media. The outrage frustrated Ventimiglia. "It bothered me that people were so wrapped up in wanting to know [about] Jack's death," he explains. "Whenever someone would say to me, 'I was bummed I didn't find out,' I would say, 'I'm disappointed you didn't focus on his life.' People are disaffected no matter what. If Jack dies: 'Why did you kill him?' If Jack lives: 'Why didn't you show us how he died?' People just need to calm down — and understand that things are going to unfold as they're supposed to unfold."
The show's success also means pressure to dive into the annual fame bath that is the Emmy Awards. Ventimiglia has been submitted for Best Actor in a Drama Series (along with his co-star Sterling K. Brown), but he's not jumping on the campaign trail just yet.
"I've never been driven by the recognition of an award. I do the work because I enjoy the work," Ventimiglia says. "Acting is very sacred. Anyone who stands in front of a crew with the camera recording their emotions is a brave individual. As hating being as it would be to be recognized, I've never needed that. I do the job the same."
The 2017 Emmy nominations will be announced July 11, a few days after Ventimiglia's 39th birthday. He hasn't made special plans for that milestone, except — as always — to keep his focus on family. "People close to me keep trying to plan things, but it makes me so uncomfortable," he says. "I don't like attention. My dad's birthday is a month before mine, so we're all going to be together for that."