

ALEXANDER the GREAT!

THE SMOLDERING SWEDE TALKS ABOUT HIS BAD-BOY ROLES, FROM *TRUE BLOOD* TO *BIG LITTLE LIES*—AND WHY HE HAS NO PROBLEM BEING SHIRTLESS (OR NAKED!) ONSCREEN

Alexander Skarsgård is the first to acknowledge that as a 6'4", disarmingly handsome Scandinavian, he's often typecast as the sexy, brooding bad guy. There was his breakout role, the arrogant vampire Eric Northman in *True Blood*, the icy domestic abuser Perry Wright in 2017's *Big Little Lies* and the mysterious Israeli intelligence officer Gadi Becker in 2018's *The Little Drummer Girl*. Now he's starring as a grieving German widower who falls for a British military wife (Keira Knightley) in the post-World War II drama *The Aftermath*. "A lot of them are quite troubled," the Swedish star, 42, says of his characters. But that's the way he likes it. "I don't enjoy playing a character who is purely a good guy or heroic. If it's a super-dark character, you need to find some humanity. That's what's interesting." Still, Skarsgård says in real life he's nothing like that. "I'm not very intense!" he says with a laugh. "When people meet me, they expect me to be like my characters, someone with weight and heaviness, which I am not at all. I think they can be disap-

pointed. They expect a silent, strong type, and then I'm all [in a high-pitched, goofy voice], 'Hello!'"

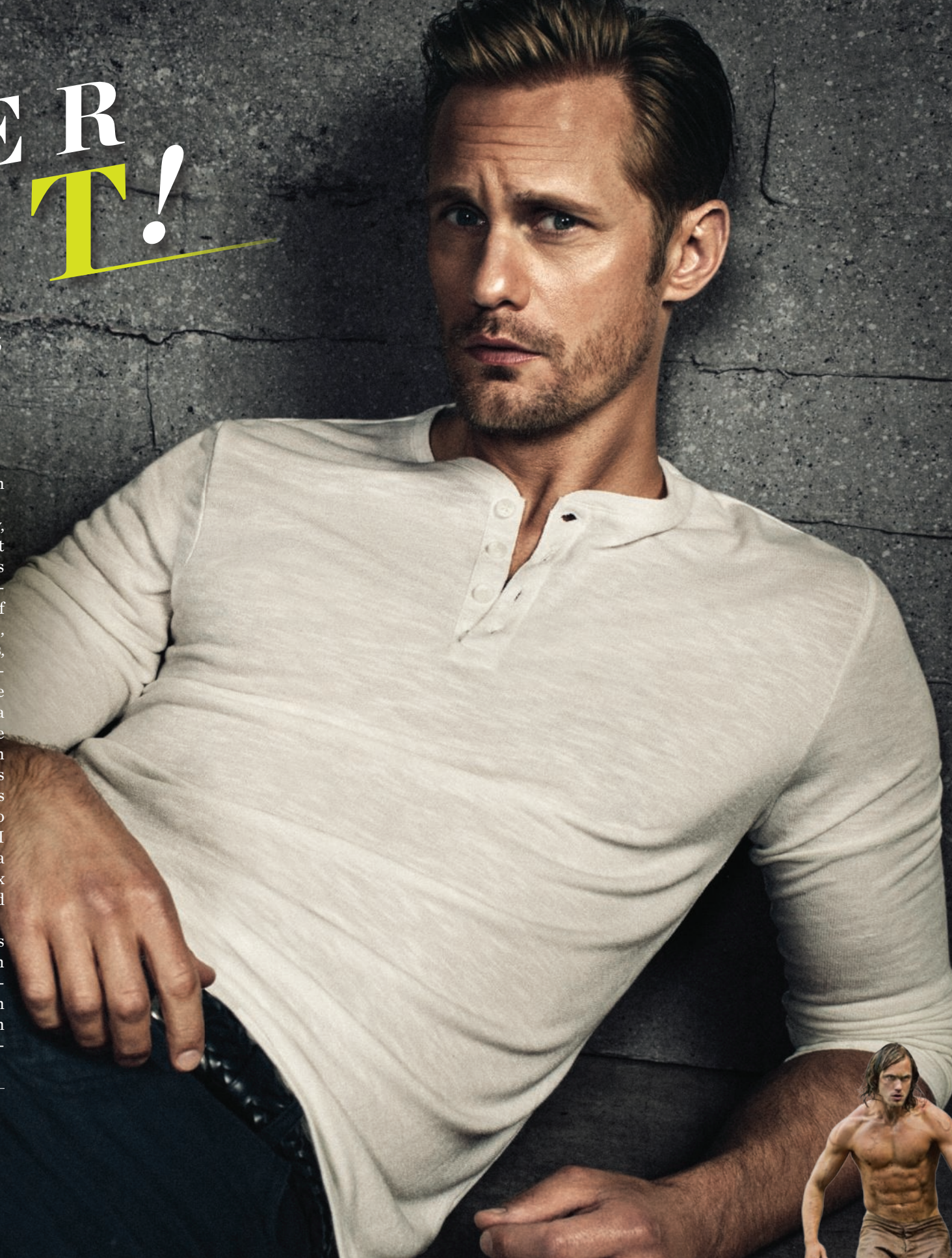
The single actor, who lives in New York City, says he wanted to be an architect before he got serious about acting. But the family business beckoned. His dad is veteran actor Stellan Skarsgård, 67; three of his brothers are actors, Gustaf (*Vikings*), 38, Bill (*It*), 28, and Valter (*Black Lake*), 23, and his sister Eija, 27, is a former model. Plus, "someone told me architecture was all about calculations and math, so that dissuaded me," he says. He was cast in his first recurring role on a Swedish TV show at 23 and landed a part in the 2008 HBO miniseries *Generation Kill*, on which he first appeared shirtless for a U.S. audience. He's since been shirtless or fully naked in most of his roles, which—in typical Swedish style—he has no issue with. "Of course I don't mind," he says. "I spent seven years on *True Blood*, and there was a lot of graphic nudity on that show." The sex scenes? "The crazier the better!" he says. "I loved it. I really embraced it."

One thing he can't embrace: accolades for his smoldering performances. "I'm quite Swedish in that I get uncomfortable talking about accomplishments," he says. When he won a Golden Globe in 2018 for *Big Little Lies*, he didn't even know where to put it: "I was like, 'Ugh, this is awkward and embarrassing. I can't flaunt it!'"

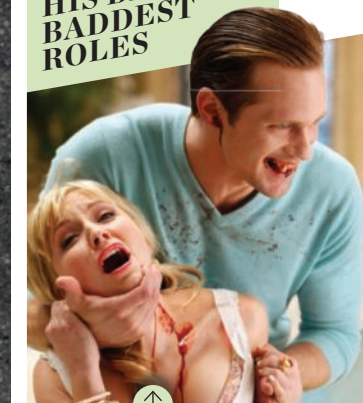
By Gillian Telling with reporting by Monique Jessen

His Famous Family

Skarsgård is the oldest of eight children born to Swedish actor Stellan Skarsgård (with him, far left). Left: Alexander with his actor brothers Gustaf (left) and Bill (middle).



HIS BEST AND BADDEST ROLES



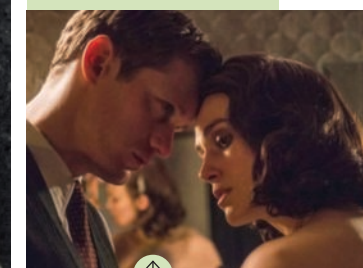
True Blood

"It was a dream job," he says of playing a vampire (with Lindsey Haun) in HBO's cult hit. "I loved him. He's so crazy, so fun, so out there."



Big Little Lies

"I'm not allowed to say anything," Skarsgård (with Nicole Kidman) says of his possible return in season 2, on HBO this June. "You'll soon find out!"



The Aftermath

He gets steamy with Keira Knightley in the new film. "She's phenomenal to work with," he says. "She's very open and funny."

The Legend of Tarzan

He showed his gym-toned torso in the 2016 movie. He also gets a workout outdoors: "I love hikes and sailing trips."

