

# THE NEW YORKER

ON AND OFF MADISON AVE.

## INTERESTING

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The most interesting thing about the man who plays the Most Interesting Man in the World, in those TV ads for Dos Equis beer, is that he is interesting, too, perhaps even superlatively so. His name is Jonathan Goldsmith. He's the one who says, in a Spanish accent, at the end of each spot, "I don't always drink beer, but when I do I prefer Dos



Equis.” What makes his *The Most Interesting Man in the World*

Most Interesting Man

character interesting, besides a preference for spirits, is other traits invented for him by copywriters: *At museums, he’s allowed to touch the art. . . . His blood smells like cologne. . . . Sharks have a week dedicated to him. . . . He once had an awkward moment, just to see how it feels. . . . The police often question him, just because they find him interesting.* These lines are recited gravely by the narrator of “Frontline” over faux-grainy clips of our Man cliff-diving in Acapulco, or splashing down in a space capsule, or lying in a hospital bed stitching up a wound on his own shoulder while surgeons and nurses stand around idly, chuckling at his jokes.

Goldsmith is not this man. Still, he has more in common with him than you do. A montage of highlights from the real life of Jonathan Goldsmith might include (had there been cameras present) footage of him rescuing a stranded climber on Mt. Whitney, saving a drowning girl in Malibu, sailing the high seas with his friend Fernando Lamas (the inspiration for his Interesting persona and, according to Goldsmith, “the greatest swordsman who ever lived in Hollywood”), and starting a successful network marketing business (“I was a hustler, a very good hustler”), which, for a while, anyway, enabled him to flee Hollywood for an estate in the Sierras. Among the outtakes might be glimpses of his stint as a waterless-car-wash entrepreneur. “I love the old philosophers,” he said. “I have a large library. I am not a die-hard sports fan. I love to cut wood.”

Goldsmith, who is seventy-two, related these and other data the other day over an early lunch in midtown. He was accompanied by his wife, Barbara, who, as his agent, five years ago, got him the Dos Equis gig. They'd recently left their spouses and moved in together. They live aboard his sailboat, in Marina del Rey, but had come East to (a) buy a new house in Vermont, to retire to, and (b) spend a week in New York, sussing out what the Most Interesting Man in the World could do for Jonathan Goldsmith.

Goldsmith had on a black polo sweater, a black sports coat, bluejeans, and black tasselled loafers. He had a black-diamond earring that Barbara had given him. They drank Chianti, and Goldsmith told the story of his life and career. The Most Interesting Man in the World, it turns out, is a Jewish guy from the Bronx. His mother was a Conover model, his father a track coach at James Monroe High School. Postcollegiate dissolution (and a session with the famed psychoanalyst Fredric Wertham) led him into an acting class at the Living Theatre and, eventually, into competition with the likes of Dustin Hoffman and Robert Duvall. (Goldsmith recalls a contentious exchange with Hoffman: "I jumped up and said, 'Dustin, the reason you don't like me is because I'm gonna make it and you're not.'") Goldsmith eventually made it—out to Los Angeles, anyway—and embarked on a career as a "that guy," very often the that guy who gets killed, on television shows such as "Bonanza," "Mannix," "Gunsmoke," "Hawaii Five-O," "The Rockford Files," "Barnaby Jones," "Charlie's Angels," "CHiPs," "Dynasty," "T. J.

Hooker,” “Knots Landing,” “Magnum, P.I.,” “MacGyver,” and “Dallas,” to name a few. He had an equally peripatetic career off the lot, the particulars of which he’s saving for a book. He divulged one old surefire tactic: knowing that Warren Beatty kept a penthouse suite at the Beverly Wilshire Hotel, Goldsmith used to wait in the lobby for the young women who’d been summoned there, and he’d intercept them, saying, “Warren sent me down. I’m terribly sorry, but he had to cancel the meeting.”

This might not work today. He can hardly walk half a block without someone asking, “Are you the guy?” (*The* guy being different from *that* guy.) After lunch, the Goldsmiths went to the New York Boat Show, at the Javits Center, where less interesting men whispered as he passed. He strode by the powerboats—“These do nothing for me”—in search of something with a sail. He stopped at the booth of Beneteau, the company that built his boat, a 47.3-foot sloop, and made small talk about the fifty-eight. “We went down to Annapolis to see it,” Goldsmith said. “We decided to buy a house in Vermont instead.”

They stopped at the Ducks Unlimited booth to inquire about a decoy with battery-powered wings, a potential gag gift for a friend. A man there asked, “Are you the Most Interesting Man in the World?” Talk soon turned to dogs. It turned out that Goldsmith was in the market for a German shorthaired pointer, and the man knew a breeder. He called up pointer photographs on a laptop. The men exchanged information. *He goes to a boat show and buys a dog.*

Not far away was a booth called Interesting Items, manned by a heavyset Russian in suspenders. He was selling binoculars, scissors, magnifying glasses, drill sets, and tweezers. “I’m looking for Ben Wa balls,” Goldsmith said. The Russian, not knowing what he meant by this, directed him instead to a display of pocketknives. “I love pocketknives,” Goldsmith said, flipping one open, gang-fight style. “I bought a couple for my grandsons, so they could cut off their seat belts.” ♦

ILLUSTRATION: TOM BACHTELL

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