

Who, me? a star?

BY SHERYL KAHN

Look at this face." David Schwimmer is thinking out loud, trying to understand exactly what has taken him from sitcom star to sex symbol in less than a year. With his boyish features and stubborn cowlicks, he's hardly hunk material. And compared with his *Friends* costars Matt LeBlanc and Matthew Perry, he readily admits that he'd be "the least likely candidate for a cologne ad."

Yet there's no denying his appeal. *Playgirl* voted him one of 1995's 10 Sexiest Men, and an on-line fan club spends hours waxing poetic over his puppy-dog eyes.

"Brad Pitt, David Schwimmer. Go figure," the 29-year-old laughs. "I guess I'll never understand it—I'm so boy-next-door."

Which is precisely his charm—Schwimmer seems to be the kind of guy any woman would happily bring home to Mother. Female fans equate him with his *Friends* character, Ross Geller, a lovable pa-

David Schwimmer's one of the hottest young actors in Hollywood. But the **Friends** star and self-professed former nerd can't understand what all the fuss is about.

Fame, fortune and friends



With his old friends from the Chicago theater.



On the show *Monty* in 1994.



After hours: hosting *Saturday Night Live*.

TOP: EDIE BASKIN/ONYX; BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT, COURTESY OF THE LOOKINGGLASS THEATER COMPANY; CHARLES BUSH/FOX; AL LEVINE/NBC

■ CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

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leontologist who has a history of being luckless in the romance department. "Ross's wife ran off with another woman," he says. "Then there's the Rachel thing." He's referring, of course, to the two-season-long tease between his character and Jennifer Aniston's. "It was the question on every American's mind," he jokes. "When would Ross and Rachel get together?" Amour finally blossomed in February—at the American Museum of Natural History. But it was a long, rocky road to romance.

Fortunately, Schwimmer says, his own love life isn't such a comedy of errors—but he's reluctant to go into a whole lot of detail. "You can pick up a tabloid and read all about it if you want," he chuckles, but there's a trace of bitterness. The papers have linked him romantically with Aniston because of their characters' liaison.

"I can't hug someone in public without it making headlines," he says ruefully. "I have to be on the defensive all the time."

The tabloids have also reported that Schwimmer's been dating 25-year-old New Orleans lawyer Sarah Trimble for two years—one recently blared, "David Schwimmer Is Rushing to the Altar With His Longtime Love." Trimble, the paper claimed, was jealous over Aniston and gave Schwimmer an ultimatum.

While the actor steadfastly refuses to talk about whom he'll wed, he will share his views on marriage: "I think it will be the biggest decision I make in my entire life—my parents are still happily married, and that proves to me that it can last forever."

Both of Schwimmer's parents are high-powered attorneys (his mom handled Roseanne's first

“The biggest decision of my life? Marriage.”

divorce case), and he grew up in a comfortable Southern California home. "My big sister, Ellie, was the good one," he says. "I was a rebellious kid, always in trouble. I was constantly getting expelled or suspended from school. But unfortunately that's what happens when you're the class clown."

Despite his class-clown status, Schwimmer always saw himself as outside the loop at exclusive Beverly Hills High School, which was the inspiration for the TV series *Beverly Hills, 90210*. "I never felt good enough or good-looking enough there," he says now. "I was chubby and a nerd."

A few positive things did come of the experience, however. "I met my best buddy, Jonathan Silverman [star of *The Single Guy*], in high school," Schwimmer says. "We were in a production of *West Side Story* together. I was a Shark, and he was a Jet. It was then I realized that I wanted to be an actor."

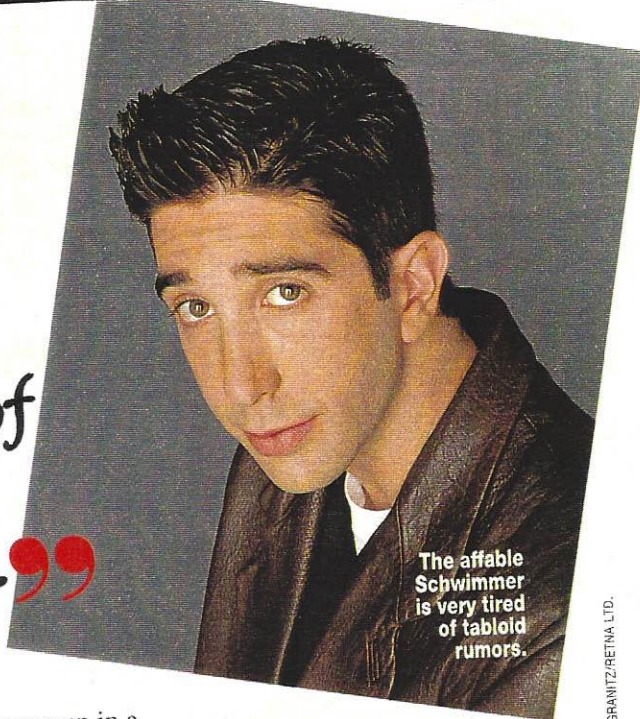
Inspired, he went to Northwestern University Drama Camp as a teenager and later attended the college itself. "Theater will al-

ways be my passion," he says. "More than TV, more than the movies. I love being able to make an audience feel something at a given moment."

After college, using his own savings, he cofounded The Looking-glass Theater Company in Chicago with a group of friends. "Every actor had to pay a membership fee," he says. "That's what kept us rolling—that and waiting tables."

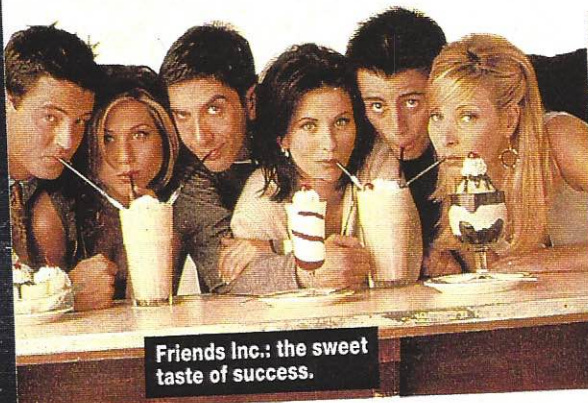
Schwimmer was living with another friend, Joey Slotnick (costar of *The Single Guy*), when he got the casting call for *Friends*. "I had done some bad movies, a couple of small TV parts and a failed series," he says. "So I figured this show was just another temporary thing. I was sleeping on a futon in Joey's living room only two months before I filmed the *Friends* pilot."

The show, however, as everyone now knows, took off, landing a steady spot in the top-five rat-

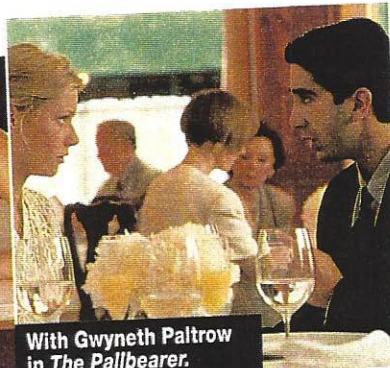


The affable Schwimmer is very tired of tabloid rumors.

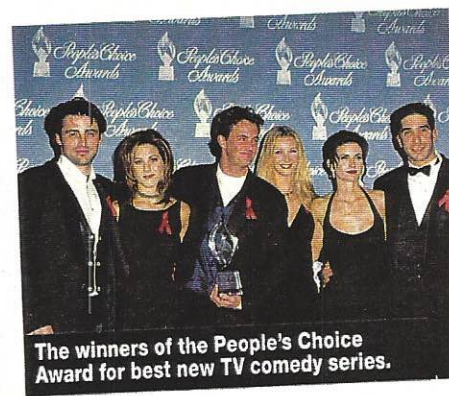
TOP: EDIE BASKIN/ONYX; BOTTOM, LEFT TO RIGHT: GLOBE PHOTOS; COURTESY OF BARRY WETCHER/MIRAMAX FILMS; STEVE GRANITZ/RETNA LTD.



Friends Inc.: the sweet taste of success.



With Gwyneth Paltrow in *The Pallbearer*.



The winners of the People's Choice Award for best new TV comedy series.

CELEBRITY CLOSE-UP

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ings. "I never thought it would be this big," Schwimmer confesses. "In fact, none of us did. But it was instant chemistry."

Schwimmer realizes he's just provided an opening for one of those questions reporters delight in asking. "Wait!" he laughs. "Allow me! 'Are you guys really friends?' I wish I had a nickel for every time I've heard that one."

Not surprisingly, he already has an answer. "The cast is very close but, like

David's best ... buddies

of the show, and we're able to cheer each other on. We don't get jealous or competitive."

While all the *Friends* costars have film deals, Schwimmer has landed the most lucrative one: Miramax Pictures is rumored to be paying him millions to star in and/or direct four movies over the next two years. The first, *The Pallbearer*, is due out this month.

"It's a black comedy," he explains.

the reason he agreed to a studio contract—and neither was the star salary. He had, he says, turned down big offers before.

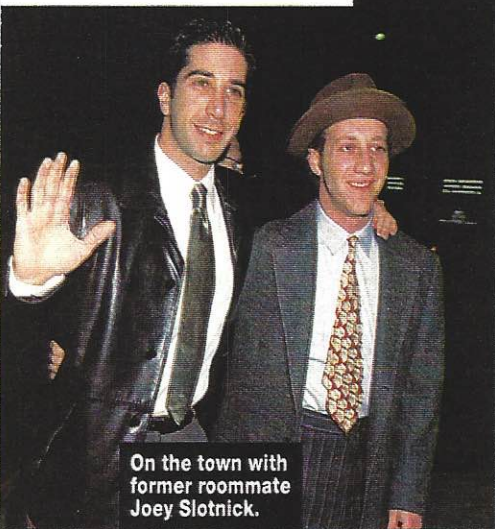
"I said yes to the deal because it gave me a lot of control," Schwimmer says bluntly. "I'm really a control freak, and being able to do my own thing is important to me."

For his first directorial effort (he'll begin preproduction this spring), he was given complete script and casting approval. And proving he is a real-life friend, Schwimmer intends to work with actors plucked from *The Looking-glass Theater Company*, all of them unknowns.

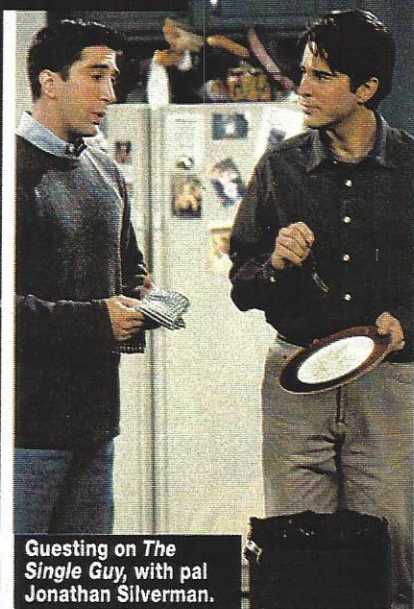
"It's more than a friends thing," he protests. "These are some of the most talented people out there, and I've done my best work with them, which I hope will carry over into film. They deserve attention."

These days, Schwimmer himself would prefer a little less of that particular commodity, but he knows he's unlikely to get his wish, especially when "my face is 7 feet high on a movie screen."

But far be it for him to look a gift horse in the mouth. "I know I can't complain. I'm lucky. Matt LeBlanc said to me, 'You've got to enjoy it while you can, because it won't last forever.' I know that; I'm aware of it every day. That's what keeps me grounded." ■



On the town with former roommate Joey Slotnick.



Guesting on *The Single Guy*, with pal Jonathan Silverman.



Monkeying around with Marcel.

brothers and sisters, we do have our little differences. You can't work that close and not—it's only human. What keeps us together is our ability to communicate. If we have a problem, we work it out collectively. It's like being on a team."

Schwimmer paints a rosy picture, one that's almost too good to be true, and once again, he anticipates the next question: "'Sure, you get along... You really hate each other, don't you?'" he teases. "It sounds hokey, but great things are happening for all of us because

"I play a guy without a girlfriend, without a job, who's still living with his mom." He receives a phone call from a high school classmate's mother (played by Barbara Hershey), asking him to deliver a eulogy at her son's funeral. Just one problem: He has absolutely no recollection of who

“The cast is close, but we have differences.”

the guy is. A hilarious relationship with Hershey, as well as with an old school crush (played by Gwyneth Paltrow), follows.

The movie, Schwimmer says, had one of the best scripts he'd seen in a long time, but that wasn't



CLOCKWISE FROM CENTER: ALICE S. HALL/INBC; EDIE BASKIN/ONYX; PHOTOFEET; LISA ROSE/GLOBE PHOTOS