

EXCLUSIVE

# In the Driver

Words Vanessa Pascale · Photos Miranda Penn Turin

# 's Seat

From Vince Chase's driver to the *Think Like A Man* franchise, four thriving sandwich shops, and now this summer's most anticipated film, *Entourage* — Jerry Ferrara is riding high

"Yes. Very. Very. Very. You are looking at one of the luckiest people, in that department, walking on the face of the earth for sure," Jerry Ferrara knocks on the table, his words soaked in that familiar New York accent we became acquainted with during his eight-season tenure as Turtle on *Entourage*. "And I know it. I'm very aware," he says humbly. This is his response when I comment that it seems he's had a pretty lucky break. The HBO series, that seduced viewers with its voyeuristic peek into the high life of entertainment's hot shots, and induced envy in those pining for friendships, or should I say bromances?, as tight-knit as these guys personified, changed Jerry's life. It's been four years since the last episode aired, in late 2011, and loyal *Entourage* enthusiasts and newly acquired binge-watching-fans, thanks to platforms like HBO GO, are beyond elated for Turtle, Vince, E, Drama, and Ari's silver screen debut June 3<sup>rd</sup>.

## EXCLUSIVE

For early May, it is unusually chilly in Los Angeles. Thankfully, the heat lamp overhead is switched on and keeping us toasty during our alfresco rendezvous at a Beverly Hills coffee shop. Dressed in an army-green jacket, t-shirt depicting two boxers, jeans, Nikes, and earbuds hanging from his neck, the New Yorker-turned-Angeleno conveys a guy-next-door vibe spiked with just the right amount of edge. He's definitely cute, as Turtle has described himself, with his disarming, kind, brown eyes, and unshaven scruff. And like most Italian men I know from the boroughs, the Brooklyn native (born and bred) exudes affable charm illuminated by his effortless, unassuming banter. It's all definitely working for this ladies' man, who, again like Turtle, dated Jamie-Lynn Sigler in real-life, and is presently dating actress, Breanne (who he refers to as Bree on their podcast) Racano.

At the time of our interview, the *Entourage* movie was three weeks out and the buzz was mounting. "It was a long time coming. It took a lot to get this movie made," Jerry tells me. "We really cared about every single detail of this movie. It's kinda like a throwback in a way for some of the hardcore fans to the earlier seasons where the guys were all together and not off on their own storylines. Everything's bigger. Everything's faster. Everything is magnified in the movie... Did I sell it well?" He smiles. "I have to say it a thousand times in the next two weeks, so I wanna make sure I got that right."

So what's it feel like to be on the cusp of releasing this summer's biggest blockbuster? "I'm not trying to take what women go through lightly, but I imagine this is what it feels like to be pregnant, because we finished it May of last year, and then you

screen it and you have to do the little pick up shots... The movie is good, and it's been ready since like November. We're all now, *Let's do this already! Let's put it out there!* We're proud of it."

The movie trailer shows Turtle chasing down UFC fighter Ronda Rousey in his car. When he finally catches up with her he asks, "You remember me?" She looks at him skeptically. "Didn't you used to be really fat?" she asks, which brings the laughter. Turtle is not chubby anymore. Jerry started losing weight after Season Six. "If you look back at the show, in the final season I was 10 pounds lighter than I am now. I've gained some good weight back... I was 204 pounds and I smoked a pack and a half of cigarettes a day, weed, whatever you want to say about weed. I was really unhealthy. It was not about, 'Oh, I want to look a certain way.' This was it,



this is how I look. You like it, great, if you don't, then don't look."

During a requisite physical actors take before beginning new projects, the doctor pointed out that it'd be easier for him to get in shape at 29 while he's on his own than at 39, and tied down with a family. "I'm a guy, if you make sense, I'll do it. You can't just tell me to do something. It has to click, and that clicked. I literally woke up the next day and was like, let's try this out. I had an egg white omelet, oatmeal. I think I lasted two days and I fell off," he recalls. "There's no secret. It's gonna suck. It's going to be hard work. You're going to want to eat your own fingers sometimes, but even if you fall off the rails, don't do it two days in a row. Have your bad day, accept it and then get back to whatever it is you were doing."

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Now in shape and looking pretty, damn good, Jerry wasn't too excited when Doug Ellin, *Entourage's* creator-producer-writer-director, asked him to pack on forty pounds for the movie. "I don't know if he was serious, 'cause we're also good friends. I know there's a part of him that's happier that I'm healthier, but I know there's a part of him that misses the kind of lovable-schlubby-loser-sidekick-guy. Not saying that I'm not still that, but I think it's a lot easier to see it physically." Jerry conceded, but had one stipulation: the extra weight would cost Doug \$100,000 per pound. "It's like expensive meat," Jerry jokes. "You go to the butcher to buy expensive meat... He [Doug] had to go and write some new jokes. There was no more fat, but he still worked a reverse fat joke in, which annoyed me, but it is one of the bigger laughs in the trailer. Now, there's a few manorexic jokes."

Since wrapping up the series, Jerry has been a part of several films including, *Think Like A Man*, *Think Like A Man Too*, *Last Vegas*, *Empire State*, *Battleship*, and *Lone Survivor*. And to think, acting is something Jerry serendipitously fell into. While attending community college in Staten Island, Jerry enrolled in an acting class simply because it was known as an easy A—all he supposedly had to do was show up. "I had to show my mother that I was actually doing well," he explains. To his surprise, he ended up liking the class, and actually participated. What was an even bigger surprise was the grade he received: F. Annoyed and confused, he asked the professor for an explanation. "And he said, 'Well, everyone kinda came in and went through the motions. You actually really applied yourself. You really tried hard. You're not a good actor yet, so I gave you the grade you deserved 'cause I want you to come back. Take the class again and I will guarantee you an A.'"

Jerry took the class again, received his A, did another semester, and while performing onstage was scouted by an agent and manager who told him that if he moved to Los Angeles, they'd get him auditions. Within a few months, he landed a guest spot on *The King of Queens* (September 2000), which got him his SAG card. "I wouldn't say I was off to the races, 'cause

there were a lot of dark times, a lot of restaurants being worked in." Jerry would volley back and forth between acting jobs and working in restaurants. "Back then you made \$3-\$4,000, which was a lot of money to me back then. I'd quit the restaurant job, live off that and when that would run out, I'd go ask for my job back. They'd usually give it to me." Two years later, *Entourage* surfaced, and put an end to this pattern.

However, Jerry *has* maintained a presence in the food industry. He and his friends from New York, Sal and Josh, co-founded the successful sandwich shop, Fat Sal's Deli. "Basically, anything you can think of is perfectly assembled on these sandwiches. Most of the sandwiches have French fries on them. It's very decadent, very indulgent." It was a rough start, but the outrageous sandwiches eventually became a favorite of UCLA students, then nearby medical staffers discovered them, and now Fat Sal's has four locations: three in California (Westwood, Hollywood, San Diego) and one in Texas (Austin). "In the old days, I'd be there four times a week. I can't do that at 35-years-old anymore, but I am there once a week. I usually split one bad sandwich with my girlfriend. And there are healthy options. There's salads, wraps—it's not all bad, but that's not why you go," says Jerry.

The "Fat Jerry," a testament to his affinity for steak and eggs, is comprised of eggs, Philly cheesesteak, bacon, chicken fingers, mozzarella sticks, French fries and other rich toppings expertly constructed. "Of course, sandwiches are all about the bread, too. The bread is phenomenal." If you want your name attached to a Fat sandwich, you have to win the food challenge. "We have a sandwich called the Big Fat Fatty. It is pounds of food... If you finish it in, I believe its 30 minutes or less, you get to design your own sandwich and it's on the menu with your name." Only two professional food eaters have conquered this beast of a sandwich stuffed with cheeseburgers, cheesesteak, jalapeño poppers, chicken fingers, pastrami, and mozzarella sticks. So, if you're up for the challenge. I sadly didn't have a chance to try one, but I have a friend who frequently eats Fat Sal's sandwiches and



# JERRY UNFILTERED

## What do you think fans would be surprised to find out about you?

"I think they might be surprised just how in my own head about things I am. I am a thinker and a plotter... I'm an overthinker, and I'm sensitive. I was raised by a single mom. I was raised around a lot of women. I'm probably more comfortable around women at times than men. People who watch *Entourage* would probably be horrified by that. They wouldn't believe that."

## Do you get out to Miami?

"My grandparents, who are no longer here, but years ago, they retired down to Boca, and my brother moved down there. I would go visit them, and then my brother and I would go into Miami. We shot some of the *Entourage* movie there, at the beginning of last year. We have this sequence where we're supposed to be in the South of France, or somewhere on the yacht in the middle of beautiful ocean, so we kinda cheated it in Miami. I love it. I am a big sports fan. I get why a lot of players either take maybe less money or will do whatever they can to get traded to a Miami sports franchise 'cause it's a great place to live."

## Favorite TV show?

"Of all time or like now?"

## Both.

He lets out a long whistle. "Of all time, drama-wise, *Sopranos*, to me that's the greatest hour of television that I've ever seen. I don't know if anything will ever beat that for me. I'm really loving now, *The Last Man on Earth*—right now, that's my favorite. Growing up, *Saved by the Bell*," he says enthusiastically, "not even close, like, I compete in *Saved by the Bell* trivia. I own every episode. I was obsessed with Kelly Kapowski, what can I say?"

## Have you met her [Tiffani Thiessen]?

"When I was working at Stanley's Restaurant, she came in and I almost had a heart attack. They were training me to be a waiter so I was hosting, and I walked her and a gentleman to the table. I pulled her chair out for her, and I almost pulled it out too far, 'cause I've never really done that before. It took every ounce of my soul to not nerd out on her." He slams his hands down on the table animatedly. "'Cause she's probably heard that 30 million times in her life. And, I did once do an episode, I sound like Johnny Drama right now, of *NYPD Blue*, before *Entourage*, when Mark-Paul Gosselaar was on the show. He arrested me. I was getting the cuffs slapped on me by Zack Morris! The whole time I was like, *This is awesome!* It was so long ago, it was like 2001. There's no photos of it. I gotta find the episode and screen shot it or something. That should be on my Instagram somewhere... That's why I am an actor. Yes, I do love the art of it and the expression of it, for sure, but not getting too actory, which makes me roll my eyes sometimes, I just love TV and movies. I could've easily been an editor, or a grip, I just wanted to be a part of it, and this is just kinda what I fell into."

## Do you get stopped often?

"Early on in the show [*Entourage*], a lot of the interactions on the street they just wanted to talk about the show, but not in a way like they *know* I'm an actor on the show, in a way of like *this* is the life I live. Like, 'Yo, where's Vince?' 'Arnold, the dog, is not with you?' I'm like, 'Arnold the dog's name is Rocky, and he's got an animal trainer who he lives with. You know I'm not going to the Playboy Mansion tonight, right?' And sometimes you play along with them. They all want to smoke weed with me 'cause of my character, and I don't smoke anymore, so they get very disappointed. By the way, I wouldn't smoke their strange weed. The male fans all want to bro out, slap you on the back and sometimes you're like—I'm not a big guy— Don't be so aggressive!" His eyes widen, and I laugh. "Sometimes women will come up, which is nice 'cause I like that women watch the show... There was a moment with the show where it was at its height and then obviously the show went away. Then I was a part of a movie franchise, *Think Like A Man*, and people started coming up to me, and I'd expect the *Entourage* thing, but it was actually for *Think Like A Man*. I was like, 'Wow, it's starting to reset, this wheel.'"

raves about them. Hopefully, the trio will open their next deli in New York. "Ya know, I might one day say, 'Acting's been great, but you know where I really did well? Sandwiches.' Like that might be my line," he muses.

The driven actor has a few irons in the fire. He is starring in the indie film, *Club Life*, which premieres in select theaters June 5, about "how club promoters start off on the bottom rung and work their way up the pyramid to one day becoming the owner." There's another movie on the horizon, but he wasn't comfortable commenting on it just yet—since so many things get pulled. And keep your eyes open for him on Starz's summer series, *Power* as Joe Proctor.

Jerry is currently in the midst of writing a couple of movie scripts, including one in which he'd play his favorite boxer, Arturo Gatti. And there's *Bad 4 Business*, the podcast that Jerry hosts and produces with his girlfriend Bree. "She's the producer, 'cause she's way smarter than me and knows how to actually work equipment and produce a show... Hence the title, like, is it bad to work with your significant other? I dunno. What do you think?" he asks me. So far, so good. They've been doing the about-1-hour-long variety show for a year now. "Every week, for the last four weeks we've had an *Entourage* guest on. I just had Kevin Connolly on... We talk sports. I prank call my mom once a month..." A natural on the mic, Jerry is at ease on the podcast as he jokes with his guests and gets the scoop.

With it being the day before Mother's Day, and since I was aware I had stolen Jerry away from mother-son quality time for this interview (apologies, Mom), I ask him about their plans. "We're going to do a whole bunch of stuff while they're [Bree and her mom included] here. It's going to be a family week. I've got to find times to hide though, 'cause I'm lazy. I like to do nothing." He flew her out to Los Angeles first-class as a part of her Mother's Day gift. After our interview, they plan to head over to Target to pick up essentials for a BBQ. The subject of his mother makes him nostalgic, and inspires him to share a few childhood anecdotes.

Jerry's face lights up as he recounts the days his mom worked as a crossing guard at the Catholic school across from his school and would hand him bags of chips "around the back" as she'd cross him to his after-school Catholic school class. "That woman gave up a lot so that we would not feel the full brunt of the tragedy we had to go through. [Jerry told me earlier in our conversation that his father passed away when he was a child, his father was in his late 30s.] She's a remarkable woman," he says thoughtfully. "And like any mother and son combo, I'm sure we could drive each other nuts at certain times. I've been away now for 15 years, ya know? But it was only because of how strong she is. A lot of those Brooklyn-Italian moms don't want their sons at 19-years-old to go across the country. They won't have it. So, I owe her everything. I'm not trying to sound like a goody-two-shoes, I swear to God. Just, when I think about what she did," he says expressively. "I don't know if I could do it. She was alone with an 8-year-old and 5-year-old, with not a lot of money." It's a good thing Mom let her son make that move and roll the dice, because he has done a fine job at steering his career in the right direction. Full speed ahead! **ML**