



PLAY IT AGAIN SAM

WORDS
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PHOTOGRAPHY
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WHETHER SURVIVING
THE TROPICS OR THE
TRENCHES, SAM CLAFLIN
IS ON A ROLL



Back in 2014, when we last met Sam Claflin, he was doing promotion for *The Riot Club*, an evisceration of Oxbridge upper-class privilege, with co-stars Max (son of Jeremy) Irons and Freddie (son of Edward) Fox. Frankly, it was like herding cats, or very well-spoken boyband members, but even among such well-connected company, Claflin made an impression. Earnest and enthusiastic, he seemed a little older than the rest, quietly confident rather than cocky; charming rather than charmed.

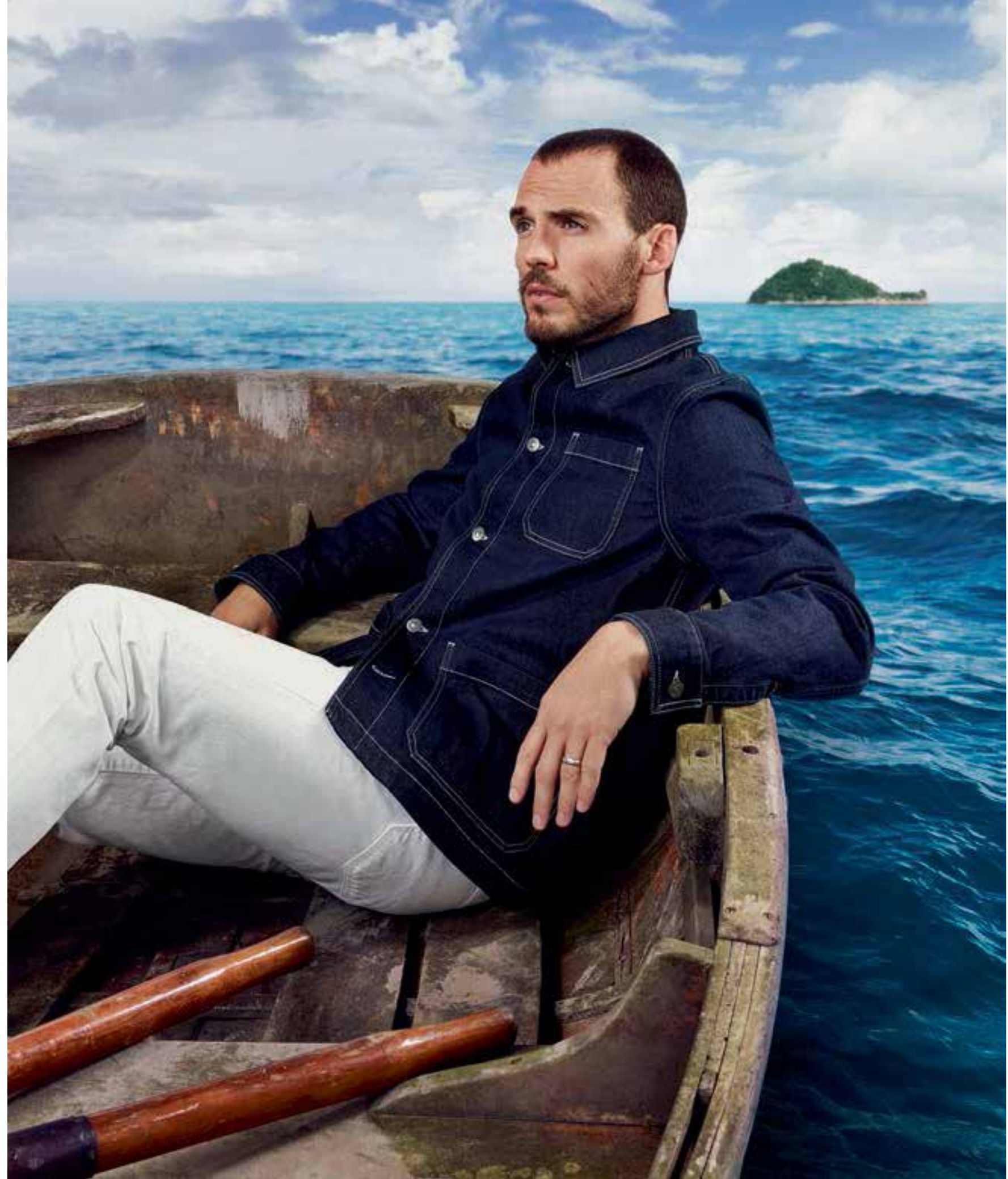
Since then, Claflin's moved away from the blockbuster roles that made his name – the dashing Philip Swift in *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*; the dashing Finnick Odair in *The Hunger Games* – to play more complex, conflicted (but still quite dashing) men. In the 2017 Daphne du Maurier adaptation *My Cousin Rachel*, he held his own against Rachel Weisz's scheming widow. In WWI trenches drama *Journey's End*, he brought a weary dignity to the battle-shattered Captain Stanhope. Unlike those characters, things have been going swimmingly for Claflin, albeit with the odd touch of seasickness.

His latest film, *Drift*, is the true story of a woman (Shailene Woodley) forced to sail

a boat alone through a hurricane when her fiancé (Claflin) is grievously injured. “We shot in Fiji, which was horrible. Horrific,” laughs Claflin when we sit down to chat in a quiet corner of the studio. Only, some of it really was. “It’s a beautiful place and we were surrounded by beautiful landscapes and beautiful people, but then we shot about 85 per cent of it out on the open ocean where we couldn’t see land,” he says. “On day one we all set out with smiles on our faces, thinking, ‘This isn’t work!’” But Mother Nature had other ideas. “We all returned home at the end of the day having been sick – holding each other’s hair back – it was a brilliant introduction. There’s nothing that breaks the ice like watching the rest of your colleagues throwing up.”

Despite only ever having been on boats as “a customer, non-paying”, Claflin soon found himself at the tiller. “I remember the first day they left me in charge of the boat,” he says, “They’re like, ‘So what you gonna do is drive the boat into the port, your bum’s gonna touch the pier, then you’re going to get off.’ And I’m like, ‘I’m sorry, your entrusting a \$100,000+ boat to a person who has never even set foot on it before?’ And they’re like, ‘Yep, and we’re gonna go: action!’ Honestly, it was s**t scary, but I really enjoyed it. I’m not afraid of getting stuck in, and I like a challenge, and they definitely challenged me.” >

“I’M NOT AFRAID OF GETTING STUCK IN, AND I LIKE A CHALLENGE”



Previous spread:
suit by **Prada**
at **Matches**.
Top and shoes
by **Lanvin**.
This page:
jacket by **Hugo**
Boss. Trousers
by **Ralph Lauren**



Jumper by Stella McCartney.
Trousers by APC
at Matches.

Taking the lead role in *Journey's End*, an update of RC Sherriff's 1928 play, offered a different set of challenges – not least that Clafin (now 31) was ten years older than his character. "In the public-school sector, they got sent to war straight from school," he explains. "You do your time at school then you get sent out at 18, straight to the frontline. That was how it was in WWI, and *Journey's End* tells that exact story: a young man, winning and eager as ever, arriving on the frontline and seeing the panic and destruction and immediately being damaged for life. It's a harrowing story that we still see today, the difference is I think people now choose to go war, but back then they were sent."

To prepare for the role, Clafin and his co-stars (including Asa Butterfield and Paul Bettany) met combat veterans suffering from PTSD (post-traumatic stress disorder). "We had an old chap who fought in the Falklands, so he literally remembered stabbing someone in the face; then a guy who'd fought in Belfast during the IRA bombings, he said that his PTSD means he can't help but look up, he always feels that if there's an open window there's a sniper there; and another guy who had lost his leg in Afghanistan. I remember him saying that this [indicates leg] wasn't the problem, the problem's up here [indicates

"SPEAKING HAMLET IN A NORFOLK ACCENT ISN'T QUITE THE SAME"



Above: Clafin with co-star Shailene Woodley in *Adrift*. Below: *Journey's End*

head]. The problem is that people can't see the problem." It's psychological insights like these that keep the film so grimly relevant, 100 years after the fact. After all, a stiff upper lip may be the Great British defence mechanism of choice, but it won't do much good against enemy gunfire.

Growing up in rural Norfolk, Clafin says he "genuinely considered going into the army", before other, less lethal, paths presented themselves. "I went to a pretty rough school you could say, but for us there were only three options. Very few people leave with GCSEs and therefore you go, OK, manual labour, the army or sport. That's it." Clafin chose sport – football to be precise – before a broken ankle forced an abrupt rethink. He started acting, went to drama school, and landed the *Pirates* role two years after graduating. "I didn't know the acting thing was going to be this good," he admits. "I thought, I enjoy doing theatre. I like the struggle. I'm used to having no money, I'm up for it!" So what happened to his accent, which is more Bafta than Norfolk Broads? "My mum and dad still talk with the thickest Norfolk accents," he says. "Even before I went to drama school, I assumed that having a rural accent meant that you wouldn't be taken seriously; speaking Hamlet in a Norfolk accent didn't have the same effect, so I've just learned to adapt to survive."

Clafin has, it's fair to say, done more than survive. Next up, amid a packed schedule, is a villainous role in *The Nightingale*, a tough, *Proposition*-style, 1880s-set revenge drama from Australian director Jennifer Kent, who made 2014's still-terrifying *The Babadook*. "It was the first script I'd read after we'd given birth to my son," says Clafin. "I think by about page 20 you know what sort of person you are. You go, if I read on, I'm slightly >

messed up in the head, but I felt compelled to, and I did." He lobbied hard to get the part – for which Kent considered him “too young and too nice” – and soon found himself shooting a bleaker-than-bleak film on the other side of the world from his family in the cheerless Tasmanian winter. Maybe Kent was right, we venture. “There were some scenes where, in between takes, I would have to go off and cry, it was really difficult,” he allows. “She just kept on explaining, it’s because it’s not you.”

He’ll be stepping out of his comfort zone once again, with a role in forthcoming London gangster flick *The Corrupted* which required him to shave his head – explaining today’s close-cropped look. “I’m playing a bit of a hard guy which is, again, against type,” he says. “I’ve never been in a fight in my entire life and I’m playing a boxer.”

Clafin, the actor, may be hell-bent on showing his dark side; but it’s Clafin, the charmer, who shines through today. When he talks about his failed football career, he adds, “I’d always had a fall-back – I loved working with kids – so if I didn’t become a footballer, I’d be a coach.” And despite the talk of PTSD and sea-sickness, the subject he keeps returning to is his family: his wife, the actor Laura Haddock, their young son and baby daughter. “Just before I came here I was cleaning my daughter’s nappy, and it was very messy, but that’s what life is,” he says. “For me, if you’d

Styling
Stevie Westgarth
Grooming
Lee Machin
Prop stylist
Lisa Engel
Retouching
Steve Warner



“I’VE NEVER BEEN IN A FIGHT IN MY ENTIRE LIFE AND I’M PLAYING A BOXER”

asked me when I was really young what I wanted to be when I was older, I would have said a dad. If I had to give up acting to be a full-time dad, I would do it.”

What do his kids make of his career? Not, it seems, very much. “I remember *Pirates of the Caribbean*, the one I was in, was on telly in the background, and I saw myself and said to my son, ‘Who’s that?’ And he said, ‘Daddy?’ But I don’t think he knows what’s going on.” Well it is a confusing film. He laughs. “It is. Very confusing. But his mum’s in a *Transformers* movie, you know [2017’s *The Last Knight*]. That to me is brilliant.” So she wins hands down? “For sure,” he says. “I’m desperate to do something that epic now.”

Which gives us a thought. Clafin’s young, handsome and British. He can do a posh accent and he scrubs up pretty well. He’s not afraid to play violent – as long as he can cry between takes. What would he say if they asked him to be the next James Bond? “One thing’s for certain, I’ve never been talked about, and I do keep tabs on the polls because I’m a big fan.” Diplomatic. Would he do it? “What man – or woman – in their right mind, English or otherwise... Who wouldn’t?” Let’s just see where we are in another four years. ■ *Adrift* is out in cinemas now

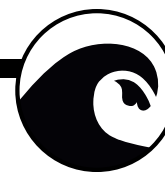
Watch *Journey’s End* onboard now



Left: top by Christopher Raeburn. Jacket by Universal Works. Trousers by APC at Matches.

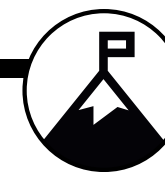
Based on a true story

Adrift continues the Hollywood trend for real-life tales of against-the-odds survival. See also



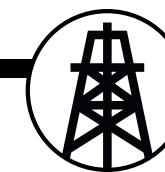
The Impossible

JA Bayona’s pulverising drama is based on the experiences of the Belón family during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami.



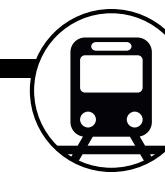
Everest

Adrift director Baltasar Kormákur’s breakthrough follows a 1996 expedition that goes catastrophically wrong.



Deepwater Horizon

A 2010 explosion aboard the eponymous oil rig provides the backdrop for Peter Berg’s class, combustible thriller.



The 15:17 to Paris

Clint Eastwood’s ode to heroism focuses on the three US soldiers who fought back during the 2015 Thalys train attack.