

watch!

LOVE BITES

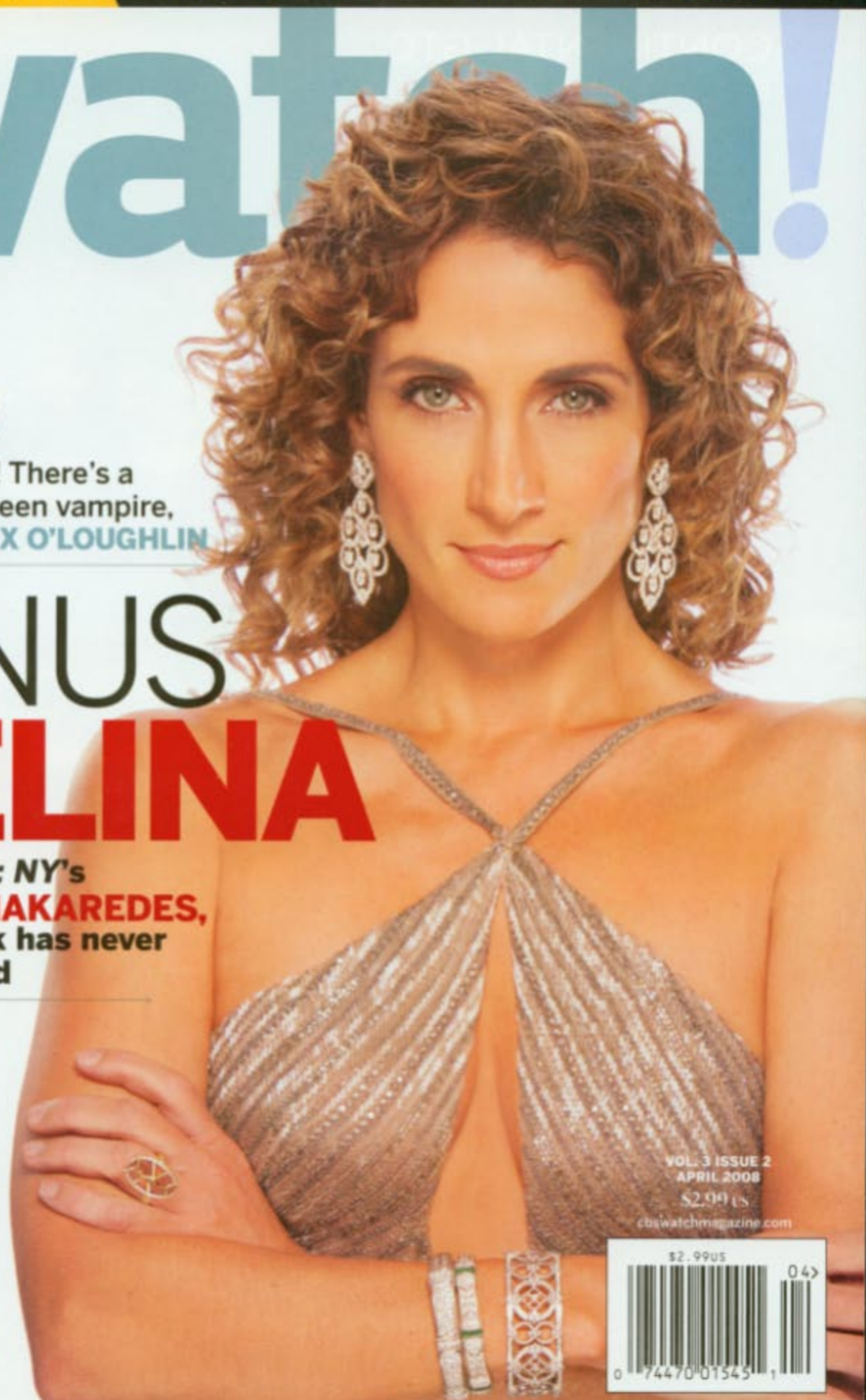
Look out, ladies! There's a HOT, new on-screen vampire, *Moonlight's* **ALEX O'LOUGHLIN**

VENUS MELINA

Thanks to *CSI: NY's* **MELINA KANAKAREDES**, detective work has never looked so good

Star Style!

From LASHES to LIPSTICK, makeup pros share their secrets



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contributors



Cliff Lipson

As senior staff photographer at CBS Television, Cliff Lipson has captured a host of world-famous faces, from Jon Stewart to Sidney Poitier. For *Watch!* he turns his lens to *CSI: NY*'s Melina Kanakaredes ("A Goddess Among Us").



Michele Shapiro

A contributor to magazines from *Time Out New York* to *Seventeen* and *Self*, Michele Shapiro explores the brave new beauty world of HDTV makeup in this issue of *Watch!* ("Ready for Their Close-Ups").



Shelley Levitt

Los Angeles-based lifestyle writer Shelley Levitt regularly contributes to *Self*, *Los Angeles* magazine and *Women's Health*, among others. In this issue, she tackles every star's worst nightmare ("Red Carpet Beauty Traumas—Solved").



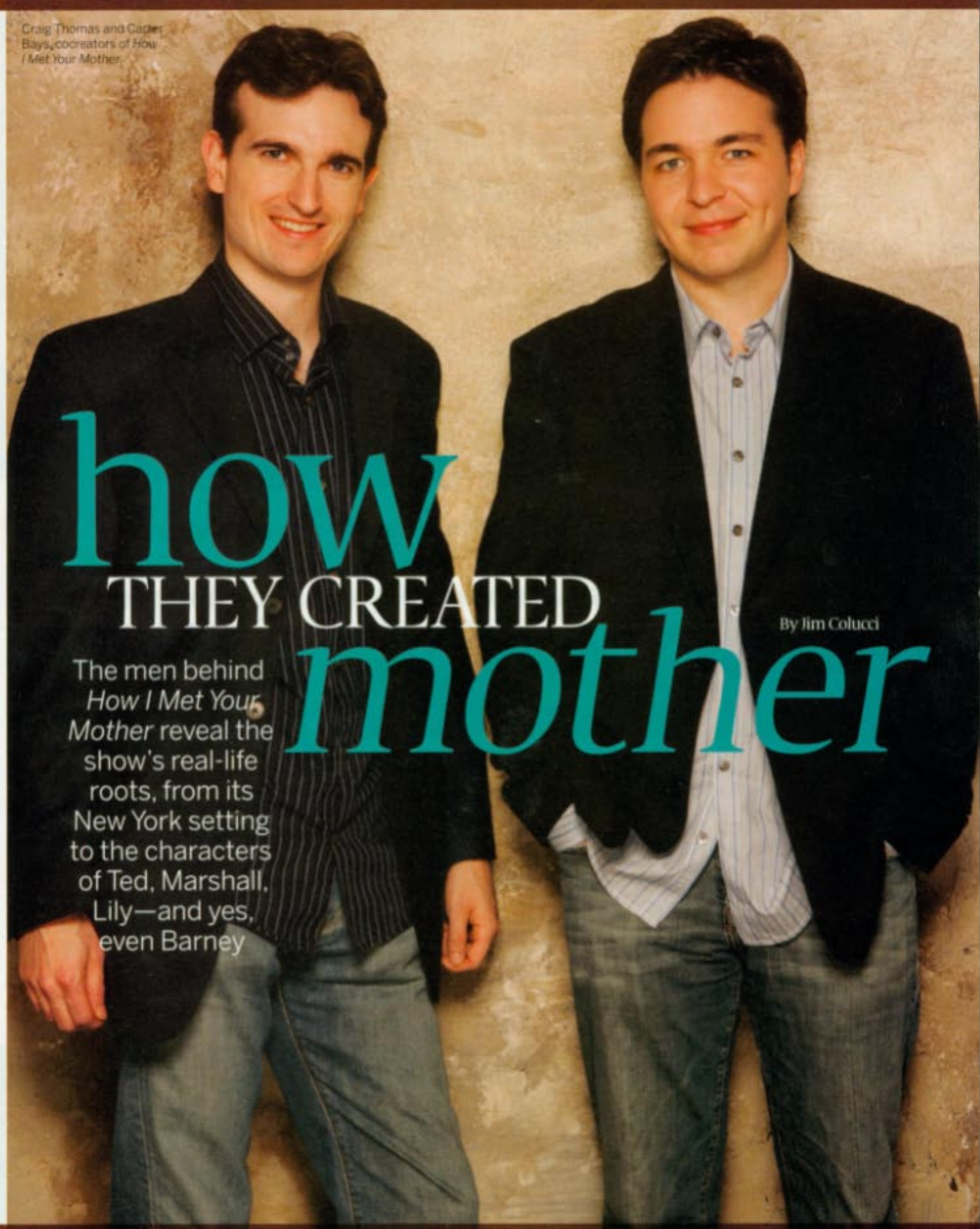
Jim Colucci

Contributing editor Jim Colucci is the author of the TV companion book *Will & Grace: Fabulously Uncensored*. For *Watch!* he goes one-on-one with the co-creators of *How I Met Your Mother* ("How They Created *Mother*").



Rebecca Ascher-Walsh

A former senior writer at *Entertainment Weekly*, Rebecca Ascher-Walsh has contributed to *The Wall Street Journal* and *The Hollywood Reporter*. In this issue of *Watch!*, she chats with novelist Christopher Rice ("All in the Family").



Craig Thomas and Christopher Bays, cocreators of *How I Met Your Mother*.

how THEY CREATED mother

By Jim Colucci

The men behind *How I Met Your Mother* reveal the show's real-life roots, from its New York setting to the characters of Ted, Marshall, Lily—and yes, even Barney

One night last February, Barney Stinson impulsively decided to run the New York Marathon. The notorious cad, who has more experience with the ladies than he does with the treadmill, finished nonetheless—only to be stranded all night on the subway when his legs seized in pain. If this story sounds like something straight from a sitcom, that's because it is. Barney is Neil Patrick Harris' breakout character on *How I Met Your Mother*. But the funniest thing about this story is that it actually happened, to a friend of the creators of the CBS Monday night hit.

"The best way for other writers to get our attention in the writers' room is to say, 'I know this story about this friend of mine,'" says series brainchild Carter Bays, who conceived of the show with writing partner Craig Thomas. "That stuff always ends up working much better on the air." These true stories are often, as the saying goes, stranger than any fiction.

Take breakups for example. Ask for one in the *How I Met Your Mother* writers' room, and 10 hands will immediately shoot up in the air. But it's Thomas' own tale that made it onto the small screen. In 1997, upon graduation from Wesleyan University in Middletown, Conn., he and his girlfriend, Rebecca, decided to spend the summer apart. And then, naturally, between seasons 1 and 2, so did his and Rebecca's small-screen alter egos, Marshall and Lily.

"It was definitely good to be able to mine a crappy chapter of my life for a little bit of comedy," Thomas says. Of course, it helps that Thomas and Rebecca's breakup story—like Marshall and Lily's—had a happy ending: The two were married in 2001 and now have a nearly 1-year-old son, Elliot.

WHEN CRAIG MET CARTER

Thomas had also befriended Bays—you know him as Ted—early on at Wesleyan (which is why whenever we flash back to the trio's college days, one of them is always wearing the university's name on a T-shirt as a nod to the beloved alma mater). When both of them landed the same summer internship at MTV, the roommates became writing partners as well. The MTV job led them to a Hollywood agent, and ultimately, in just their early 20s, to the comedy big time as writers for *The Late Show with David Letterman*.

Roommates still, the two settled into life in New York, in apartments—first, by their description, "just a crappy shoebox" and then, once they realized they would survive in late-night TV, one only slightly nicer, on 75th Street between Broadway and Amsterdam Avenue. With its deliberately peeling paint and 75th Street address, Marshall and Ted's current apartment is modeled after memories of this second place. It's furnished with mismatched, seemingly secondhand pieces, as the creative duo's had been (Bays had driven a truck back from Cleveland filled with possessions from his parents, who divorced late in life, just like Ted's). But Bays and Thomas did have to take some license in re-creating their tiny bachelor pad on TV. Although they didn't



Based on a (relatively) true story: Lily, Marshall (aka Craig Thomas), Ted (aka Carter Bays) and Robin.

"It was definitely good to be able to mine a crappy chapter of my life for a little bit of comedy."

—Craig Thomas, cocreator of *How I Met Your Mother*



From left: Ted (Josh Radnor), Marshall (Jason Segel), Barney (Neil Patrick Harris), Lily (Alyson Hannigan) and Robin (Cobie Smulders).



Barney runs the New York Marathon.

And Barney—well, could there ever really be a Barney in real life? Like Frankenstein's monster—no, make that Frankenstein's awesome monster—Barney was assembled from personality parts taken from several different friends.

want Marshall and Ted to luxuriate in a big New York apartment, there was one practical concern: The space did have to be big enough to maneuver four cameras inside.

IT'S REAL LIFE, ONLY BETTER

After relocating to Los Angeles in 2002, Bays and Thomas ironically set to work documenting their previous lives back East. "In our minds, we had started painting New York in these better, nostalgic colors of whiskey and scotch," Thomas says, and so they captured their romanticized memories in their 2004 pilot script for *How I Met Your Mother*. But noting that shows about showbiz tend to fail, they didn't want their TV counterparts to be writers for the medium. So whereas Marshall does share Thomas' obsessions with UFOs and the Loch Ness Monster, his on-screen alter ego became a lawyer, modeled after a friend currently struggling with the same decision between helping to save the environment or taking the big payday at a large firm.

Lily became a kindergarten teacher, again after a friend, but also a painter, reflecting Rebecca's real-life artistic career as a dancer and choreographer. Rebecca also chose the name Lily and insisted that

she wanted to be played by Alyson Hannigan—little did she know, she would fully get her wish.

Ted was made an architect and Robin a TV news anchor—the only two fully fabricated occupations among the five main characters. "We chose it because we thought Ted is the kind of guy who plans things," Thomas says. "He thinks that, 'If I shape it and design it and give it a form, this is how my future will go,' which is, of course, the complete opposite of how life actually works, but we thought it was a good metaphor for his personality."

And Barney—well, could there ever really be a Barney in real life? Like Frankenstein's monster—no, make that Frankenstein's awesome monster—Barney was assembled from personality parts taken from several different friends. The writers created Barney as a cryptic business type—mostly because, Bays admits, without practical desk job experience themselves, the two writers have no idea how to portray what he actually does for a living.

SETTLE INTO A BOOTH AT MACLAREN'S

Whatever it is Barney does, fans of the show do know that at the end of the day he likes to stay suited up and meet his pals at that certain, camera-ready booth at their favorite bar. Maclaren's doesn't actually exist in Manhattan—the TV watering hole and its bartender are named for Carl, a *Mother* associate producer—but is instead a composite of four real favorite hangouts of Bays, Thomas and friends from the *Letterman* staff. McGee's, a tavern around the corner from *Letterman*'s Ed Sullivan Theater, features the model for Maclaren's WPA-era mural on its back wall. The recently closed McHale's on Eighth Avenue, where Bays and Thomas first started writing jokes during their MTV summer, lent its dark atmosphere. A Greenwich Village speakeasy named Chumley's, where Thomas typed away on the pilot script, inspired some of Maclaren's more rustic touches. And at Fez, a recently shuttered Moroccan-style bar on the Upper West Side, Bays and Thomas befriended the DJ, Josh Mosby, who later gave Ted his surname. Fez gave the writers the idea to put a few round booths at the back of their TV bar.

"I think for us, *How I Met Your Mother* was a way to get supernostalgic for our time in New York, and also to tell stories that felt personal," Bays says. The show's framing device, with future Ted telling all this as a long, drawn-out story to his kids is, Bays says, "a way to make the stories feel more important than just a dating show with cute people in their 20s."

"This is a life story being told," Thomas adds. "And you want to tell the best version of your life story to your kids, to let them know who you were before they existed. We realized that if we could do that, it would appeal to a really wide age range. From twentysomething people going through these dating stories themselves, to parents. After all, parents mistakenly believe their kids want to hear this crap." ■

Harris: Monte Brenton/CBS