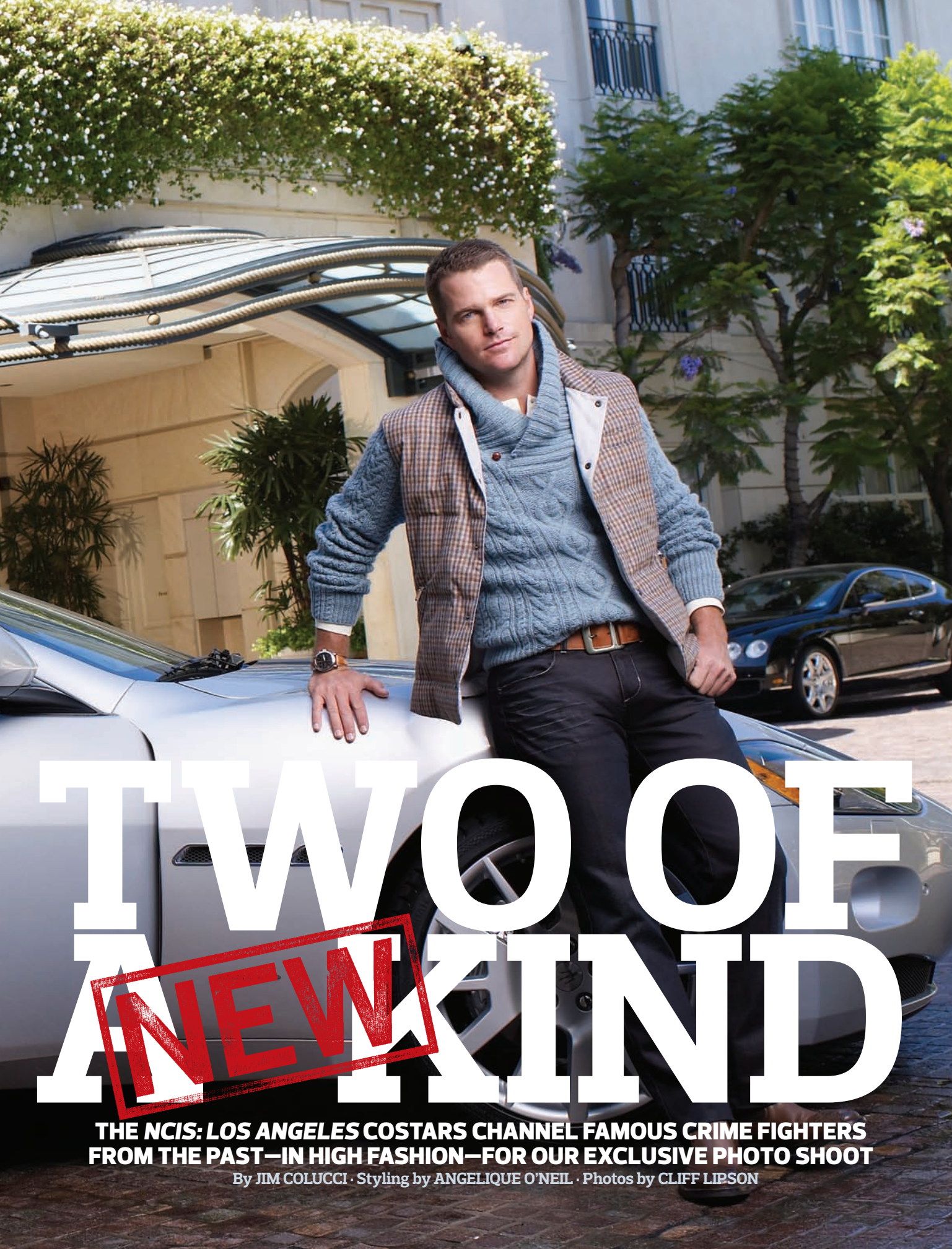




**THE INSPIRATION: STARKY & HUTCH.** Starring two sexy, streetwise detectives in sportswear—and one sweet sports car.

On LL COOL J: sweater by John Varvatos, [johnvarvatos.com](http://johnvarvatos.com); denim by LL COOL J, [sears.com](http://sears.com); henley by American Apparel, [americanapparel.net](http://americanapparel.net); belt and boots by Gucci, [gucci.com](http://gucci.com); Gotham Onyx Krome limited-edition watch by Tourneau Timepieces, 800-348-3332 or [tourneau.com](http://tourneau.com).

On Chris O'Donnell: sweater and belt by Polo Ralph Lauren, [polo.com](http://polo.com); denim by Z Zegna, [www.zzegna.com](http://www.zzegna.com); henley by Hickey Freeman, [hickeyfreeman.com](http://hickeyfreeman.com); vest and boots by Brunello Cucinelli, [brunellocucinelli.com](http://brunellocucinelli.com); Gotham Sonoma duograph watch by Tourneau Timepieces. Maserati GranTurismo courtesy of Maserati North America, [maserati.com](http://maserati.com).



# TWO OF A KIND

**NEW**

**THE NCIS: LOS ANGELES COSTARS CHANNEL FAMOUS CRIME FIGHTERS FROM THE PAST—IN HIGH FASHION—FOR OUR EXCLUSIVE PHOTO SHOOT**

By JIM COLUCCI · Styling by ANGELIQUE O'NEIL · Photos by CLIFF LIPSON

**IT'S** a warm summer morning in Beverly Hills, where an impeccably dressed, impossibly handsome man stands in the private semicircular driveway of the ultra-chic Peninsula hotel. He watches excitedly as a brand-new \$117,000 silver Maserati Gran Turismo roars into place beside him. "Yikes!" exclaims the performer, entrepreneur and all-around Renaissance man born James Todd Smith, but known better to the world as LL COOL J. "This car is *hot!*"

As one of the two leads, with movie heavyweight Chris O'Donnell, of this fall's new action-packed spy hour *NCIS: LOS ANGELES*, the rap pioneer turned actor is about to become accustomed to playing with such expensive toys.

When the two men first appeared together in two episodes of *NCIS* last May, "the chemistry just popped. There was a warmth to them that just came through the screen," says series executive producer Shane Brennan. Now, as stars of their own *NCIS* spinoff, O'Donnell and LL COOL J are ready to join the ranks of TV's most beloved duos. Their respective characters, Callen and Sam, both undercover agents within the Naval Criminal Investigative Service's Office of Special Projects, are poised—if the longevity of the *NCIS* flagship show is any indication—to spend season after season joined at the hip and watching each other's back.

#### **'TEAMWORK MAKES THE DREAM WORK'**

As the actors strike poses alongside the handcrafted Italian sports car, they are consciously channeling crime-fighting (and style) icons Crockett and Tubbs, of the 1980s series *Miami Vice*. Before the "table read" of the script for their first *NCIS* episode last spring, the new costars had never met. But they immediately discovered a mutual love for another great duo from their childhoods, the renegade title characters of CBS' *The Dukes of Hazzard*.

But sartorially and otherwise, the actors aim to inject a touch more realism to *NCIS: LOS ANGELES*. "As a kid, I never really realized it was strange that they never changed those outfits," O'Donnell remembers with a laugh. "It was just normal that, well, one guy wears the yellow shirt and the other wears the blue shirt."

The two also have come to realize that it may actually be the differences in their backgrounds that enrich their onscreen buddy vibe.

"Chris is obviously a fantastic actor, and he's a great guy to work with," says LL COOL J. "Like me, he has a family. He's stable, he's settled, he's calm. But we really come from different places—me from urban New York, and him from a more Mid-western [background]. So we really complement each other in a lot of ways. And I think we bring different people and different audiences, and combine those audiences to hopefully create a show that touches everyone."

"He's a super-positive guy, so much bigger than life, both physically and in his personality," O'Donnell says in assessment of his costar, adding that he has even signed up to follow the former rapper's snappy daily affirmations on Twitter. "'Choose your thoughts carefully.' 'You are a masterpiece of your life.' He just rattles them off, and I'm like, 'Where are you getting this stuff?!' I love it."



**THE INSPIRATION: STEVE MCQUEEN.** The turtleneck shot to No. 1 with a *Bullitt*, thanks to the actor's wardrobe in the film.

Sweater by Hickey Freeman; trousers by Brunello Cucinelli; belt by Façonnable, [faconnable.com](http://faconnable.com); Gotham Aurora Krome watch by Tourneau Timepieces.







**THE INSPIRATION: ELIOT NESS.** The three-piece pinstriped suit is dapper and utterly *Untouchable*.

Suit by Jared M. Custom Clothing, jaredm.com; shirt by Luxe; tie by Façonnable; hat by Arnold Hatters Inc.; open-faced skeleton back pocket watch with fob by Tourneau Timepieces.

“He always teases me about my quotes,” LL COOL J responds with a laugh. But right now, as the two together headline the competitive 9 p.m. hour on Tuesdays for CBS, “I have one we both agree is the most important: ‘Teamwork makes the dream work.’”

### A BIG STAR ON THE SMALL SCREEN

Later, as he prepares to pose on the Peninsula’s verdant back patio in a white turtleneck sweater deliberately reminiscent of action hero Steve McQueen, O’Donnell discusses his decision to try on a TV role in *NCIS: LOS ANGELES*. Already a fan of the original *NCIS*, the actor says that like so many people he meets, he has become more and more enamored with the now 7-year-old-show in its later seasons.

Having already dabbled on the small screen with a guest arc on *Grey’s Anatomy* and a regular role on the short-lived 2005 Fox legal dramedy *Head Cases*, O’Donnell finds he likes the pace and timing of working in TV, where he might hear feedback from fans within weeks rather than years. True, he admits, the hours can be long for a lead on an hourlong drama; and with Callen just beginning to spring to life—or more accurately, *back* to life, after being shot in O’Donnell’s second *NCIS* episode in May—he fully expects some grueling days ahead. But unlike films, TV offers the married father of five the chance to stay in one city. “So I get to kiss my kids at night,” he emphasizes.

O’Donnell had already been near the top of show creator Brennan’s wish list when he was casting Callen. And then came the actor’s new look. The famously clean-cut star had sported some floppy, schoolboy hair in early films like *Scent of a Woman*, but late last year turned up newly shorn in an ad for Gap. “I saw the photos, with his hair buzzed, and he had rough stubble,” Brennan remembers. “I was looking for someone outside the box, someone who was going to be able to bring an intensity to the role. And I thought, ‘This is a new Chris O’Donnell. It’s a Chris O’Donnell that a lot of people haven’t seen.’”

For the always young-looking O’Donnell, who turns 40 next summer, the more mature coif has become perhaps symbolic of a new chapter in his career. The enigmatic Callen is a character different from any he has ever played—and could not be more dissimilar to the actor himself. As the youngest of seven siblings and now a dedicated dad who enjoys taking the kids to Walmart, O’Donnell has always been a family man; Callen grew up a foster child and became a loner filled with suspicion and wanderlust.

“Ultimately, I think the people [Callen] works with are his family,” the actor says of his new alter ego. Not that he completely understands the man yet. “That’s the mystery and excitement of television, that I’m learning things about him every week when the script comes out. ‘Wow, that’s kind of a major thing that happened in my life. OK. I know about that now.’ It’s like discovering





**THE INSPIRATION: CROCKETT & TUBBS.** Two of Miami's most stylish detectives stayed crisp in lightweight suits and blazers.

On LL COOL J: suit by Luxe; T-shirt by American Apparel; loafers by Prada, [prada.com](http://prada.com); belt by Gucci; Bechet sunglasses by Oliver Peoples, [oliverpeoples.com](http://oliverpeoples.com).

On O'Donnell: Jacket and belt by Façonnable; shirt by Hickey Freeman; denim by Brunello Cucinelli; loafers by Bontoni, [bontoni.com](http://bontoni.com); Deacon sunglasses by Oliver Peoples.



old photo albums that you never knew existed.”

## CALLEN AND SAM

At its core, Brennan explains, *NCIS: LOS ANGELES* is Callen’s story. “The series is about finding out who Callen is,” he says, and the relationship that will prove most illuminating will be his friendship with his partner, Sam Hanna. As Brennan envisioned him from the start, Sam is part co-worker, part protector, part buddy, “a former Navy SEAL who is gentle, warm, charming, and physically powerful.”

At the suggestion of CBS Entertainment President Nina Tassler, Brennan sat down early in the casting process with LL COOL J—and before a half-hour had passed, realized he had found his man. “He has a cleverness that he brings to the character that was just what I was looking for. Just talking to LL COOL J, the character sprang to life.”

Now, as he stands on top of a conference table in a boardroom at the Peninsula, looking ready to bust a criminal gang à la *The Untouchables’* Eliot Ness, LL COOL J displays that same vitality. As the camera’s shutter clicks, the man whose career started with and has been inspired by music smiles broadly and requests some Frank Sinatra tunes.

The actor, who in person goes by “Todd,” had had a previous run on television as the star of the 1990s WB sitcom *In the House*, but expects TV drama to be a novel challenge. “It’s really exciting for me to finally be doing something where I’m new,” he says, where at age 41, “I’m not like the elder statesman of hip-hop walking into the room. As a human being, it gives me a chance to grow.”

## STRENGTH AND PASSION

He means that quite literally, too; for LL COOL J, the author of a book for attaining his famously fit physique, a big part of the character’s appeal was that, with Sam’s military background and athletic prowess, “I can work out and get a little bigger, and it’s OK because it makes sense for the character.”

Not that that’s all there is to Sam. “At the same time, I like that he has a little bit of techie in him. So he’s not all brawn and brute strength.”

Shortly after they met, LL COOL J and O’Donnell trained at a gun range, and were briefed about life in the *NCIS* by some of Callen and Sam’s real-life counterparts. Then LL COOL J took things one step further. For prior roles, as in the movie *S.W.A.T.*, he had learned police procedures like running with a gun and clearing a room. Now, for *NCIS: LOS ANGELES*, he visited the U.S. Marine Corps base at Camp Pendleton in California to authenticate some more military-style techniques. “I want to look like a SEAL, not like something else,” the actor explains. “I have to find that balance. It’s not just about muscles—it’s about coming off natural in the role.”

The research is just an example, O’Donnell says admiringly, of the passion and intensity LL COOL J brings to everything he

**THE INSPIRATION: THE EQUALIZER.** The proper British do-gooder knew how to wear a classic suit—and an overcoat.

Suit, shirt and overcoat by Brunello Cucinelli; tie by Hickey Freeman; shoes by Bontoni.

does. His newest venture, boomdizzle.com, is an online incubator for emerging musical talent, already boasting a membership of more than 14,000 young and

upcoming artists. A married father of two kids in college and another two at home, the actor/impresario credits his drive to his Barbados-born grandfather, who instilled in him a respect for hard work. But in the end, he explains, “the common denominator in all these things is just that I love them.”

## DON'T STOP BELIEVIN'

As the actors prepare for their final photos of the day, each says he’s looking forward to the many days on set that will stretch on even longer than this. It’s hard to predict just how exhausting the workload will be, O’Donnell says, so he’s not sure whether the summer of 2010 will find him shooting a movie, or just spending his hiatus hanging with the family at a favorite retreat, his in-laws’ house in Maine.

During a photo break, LL COOL J does an on-camera interview where a fan writing in with a question wants to know: Will *NCIS: LOS ANGELES* take him away from his music career?

For the time being: Yes, he admits. “I’m focused only on the show.” That’s not to say, he hastens to add, that he might not sneak in “a concert here and there once I get in the flow of the show and know how things roll. My pen is still sharp.”

LL COOL J released his first album, *Radio*, in 1985, meaning he has literally grown up in the music business, where image is a huge part of the overall package. And so whereas O’Donnell says he would prefer to be hanging out on the golf course right now or in a T-shirt and jeans—ironic, considering he started his young career as a model for the Sears catalog in the suburbs of Chicago—the former rapper relishes the chance to dress up. Suits, jeans, cashmere sweaters, aviator shades, oversized belt buckles and crisp tennis shoes—LL COOL J loves it all.

But Sam’s look, he explains, will always have to be toned down just a bit. Although the actor tends to favor caps, Sam will sport a smooth, shaved head. The 4-carat diamond studs he currently wears in each ear will be gone, too; “Sam can’t afford them on his pay grade,” he jokes. And the actor’s distinctive right-arm tattoo, of a microphone and the words “Mr. Smith,” will be covered up.

But nothing will cover the actors’ enthusiasm for *NCIS: LOS ANGELES*, or silence the music. In fact, LL COOL J recently released a new song, “NCIS: No Crew Is Superior,” which is available on iTunes and will be used in show promotions.

O’Donnell also remembers how, at an earlier photo shoot when the show had just been announced, his new TV partner had requested a particular song by Journey, and sang along with every word. Today, LL COOL J does it again, getting playfully close to the camera as he lip synchs the words: Don’t stop believin’.

And as both men reflect excitedly on the chance to inhabit their new characters for years and years to come, one thing is clear: They won’t. **U**