

STAN THE MAN

HE'S BEST KNOWN FOR ACTING, AND WITH TWO BLOCKBUSTER MOVIES THIS SPRING, HIS FILM CAREER SHOWS NO SIGNS OF SLOWING DOWN, BUT STANLEY TUCCI ALSO EXCELS AS A DIRECTOR, IN THE KITCHEN, AND AS A FATHER, TOO, FINDS ELAINE LIPWORTH

PHOTOGRAPHY BY DAVID ELLIS
GROOMING CATHERINE SCOBLE



TAKING ON DIFFERENT ROLES: Stanley Tucci is known for his parts in *The Devil Wears Prada* and *The Lovely Bones*, but the actor's talents extend far beyond acting: he's as competent cooking family dinners in his kitchen in *Bonhoeffer* as he is playing a varied array of characters on the big screen.





PAUSING FOR THOUGHT: Tucci is careful to carve out time to spend with his wife and four children in addition to managing his studio and pursuing other interests and hobbies.

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IT'S NOON on Monday morning and Stanley Tucci needs a coffee. Actually, make that a scotch. The consummate actor didn't get much sleep — one-and-a-half hours to be precise — and could do with something a little stronger than caffeine. Tucci and his second wife, literary agent Felicity Blunt (the sister of actress Emily Blunt), were up until dawn with their two-year-old son, who couldn't settle.

That meant Tucci spent most of Sunday night “lying wide awake on the floor” comforting his little boy, until he finally fell asleep. “I got to my own bed at 7 a.m.,” he says, commenting that, as any parent will testify, there are challenges that run parallel to the joys of family life: notably sleep deprivation. “I’m delirious. I don’t know where I am,” Tucci laughs, accepting the offer of a large, restorative tumbler of Balblair — “with a dash of water.”

Tucci, 56, and Blunt, 36, live in Barnes with their toddler and the actor’s three teenagers, from his marriage to social worker Kate Tucci, who lost her battle with breast cancer in 2009. It’s a short taxi ride from the family home to **square mile’s** studio in Clapham and the actor arrives looking dapper as always, dressed in a dark blue cashmere jumper and jeans. If he’s feeling worse for wear, you’d never know it.

Settling down to chat in our bright white, pristine photographic studio, Tucci — whose films include *The Devil Wears Prada* (2006), *Spideight* (2015), *The Lovely Bones* (2009) for which he received an Oscar nomination, and the new big-screen version of *Beauty and the Beast* (more on which soon) — is on fine form. Cracking jokes, he puts everyone on the set at ease. And revved by his lunchtime pick-me-up, Tucci gamely gets suited and booted for our cover shoot. He is particularly enthusiastic about a striped, lightweight cotton, Thom Sweeney suit from the brand’s SS17 collection.

Fashion, or at least high-quality clothing, has always been of interest to Tucci. It’s the Italian in him. The oldest of three children, both his parents — Jean a writer and Stanley senior an art teacher — have roots in Calabria, the toe of Italy’s boot-shaped peninsula.

Growing up in Katonah, in Westchester County, New York, “I was brought up to dress well,” says Tucci. “When we came home from school, we had to change our clothes and put on what my parents called ‘play clothes.’ You wore your nicer clothes to school. Because we lived in the country on a cul-de-sac, there was a lot of playing outside in the woods, so it made sense.” Tucci’s sartorial sensibilities are in his DNA. “My dad was always nicely dressed. He went to school every day in a jacket and tie.” His current style? “I dress classically: a dark suit, a jacket, a white shirt

and a tie for the most part, or a pair of jeans, nothing elaborate.” When it comes to his favourite labels, he explains, “I have been wearing Hugo Boss for a long time. I really love their stuff. Also Isala (the Neapolitan menswear label) make beautiful suits.”

As we chat, Tucci notices the gleaming, state-of-the-art test kitchen. He crosses the studio and gets behind the stove, checking out the equipment. He is passionate about food and cooking — again the result of his heritage. “I grew up in a family that loved food; it was integral to who we were and the way we lived,” he says. “Thanks to my mum and my grandparents on both sides, there was always amazing food. It was the centre of life. One grandfather would make his own sausages and wine,” says Tucci, reminiscing about his childhood. “Food has become a kind of obsession with me, but it is more than that: It is another limb or organ; it is part of who I am.” So much so, he published a collection of beloved family recipes in *The Tucci Cookbook* (2012). “Part of the reason for doing that was selfish, because I wanted those recipes written down for myself, and so my kids could have them. I cook all the time — I like to sit down for a proper dinner — often just really simple stuff like a marinara, a light tomato pasta sauce with peas; it is great, incredibly comforting and really easy to make. I make dinner for the kids every night when I’m at home.”

He is also the author of *The Tucci Table*, published two years ago, and written together with his wife, an equally keen cook. They met at the 2010 wedding of Emily Blunt, Tucci’s co-star in *The Devil Wears Prada* and actor John Krasinski, appropriately enough in Italy, at George Clooney’s Lake Como estate. The couple’s favourite London restaurants include Quo Vadis and Duck Soup. Locally, they like Riva in Barnes, and are also fans of the Venetian restaurant, Fischer’s. “They have great sausages, bratwurst and all that type of stuff,” Tucci and Blunt are particularly fond of *The Ledbury* in Notting Hill — and with good reason. When they were dating, Blunt was living in a flat above the restaurant. Dinner there one Friday night led to an unusually grisly bonding experience. “We went to the kitchen and we were asking the chef some questions and he said, ‘I have these pheasants,’ and he gave them to us and told us how to cook them. So we put them in the fridge and the next morning, we were watching *Saturday Kitchen*, which is appropriate I think, while plucking pheasants. I know it’s ridiculous,” he laughs, “so romantic!” Is Felicity Blunt intimidated by her husband’s culinary skills? “Not at all, she is a

“I cook a lot, as does my wife. I had no idea what a real British roast potato was until I met her

great cook. In fact in a lot of ways she is better than I am because she is much more patient,” says the actor, who is enamoured with Blunt’s classic British staples. “Her beef Wellington is great. I had no idea what a real British roast potato was until I met her,” he says dreamily. “She does great roasts and an incredible pork belly.” Cooking is creative, says Tucci, “taking what’s in front of you and making something else.” In fact he combined his love of food and filmmaking when he directed and starred in the excellent 1996 movie *Big Night*, about the running of an Italian restaurant. It is widely considered as the benchmark for films about food. The film has become a classic. I say, “I know. It is crazy, we were just trying to tell a story about two brothers, with food at its centre, but it did turn into this classic after the fact. It cracks me up,” says the self-effacing actor, who also starred in Nora Ephron’s 2009 film, *Julie & Julia*, with Meryl Streep playing American cooking legend Julia Child. Tucci played her husband, Paul.

He is planning a third cookbook, but currently has a full-on film schedule. Channeling his roots again, Tucci plays “an Italian maestro who is married to a singer,” in the extravagant new Disney retelling of *Beauty and the Beast*, directed by Bill Condon. Emma Watson stars as Belle and Dan Stevens plays the Beast. “When the spell is cast, all of the characters become animated objects,” he says. “I become a harpsichord and my wife becomes a wardrobe. Emma Thompson (who plays Mrs Potts) becomes a teapot. Ewan McGregor plays the candleabra.” The appeal of the movie is obvious. “It is so much fun to put on mad makeup and a costume and then see this animated version of yourself and do the voiceover.” It is also an added bonus, he says, “to make movies that your kids can see.”

The film was shot at Shepperton Studios in Surrey. “I try to consolidate my work as much as possible so that I don’t have to be away from the family,” he says. The remake is a musical, but Tucci points out that the doesn’t sing a note. “Oh god NO,” he exclaims, “sickly for everyone?” He told Condon, “I would love to do this film, but ▶





► If I have to sing, then I really can't do it."
 "The thing is I absolutely love music," he continues. "Especially the classic American Songbook, all those songs from the 1930s and 1940s, like Cole Porter. I know the lyrics and I would sing them to my kids until they realized I wasn't a good singer. But luckily they can sing."

With the photoshoot over, Tucci goes home to the family, and we continue our conversation a few days later. It's been another hectic morning. "I got up a little before 5am to drive my son to school. They were taking a bus to Paris for a rugby tournament. And then I came back home and got back into bed!" The actor has just made himself lunch: Italian tuna fish with a bit of cheese and a coffee, sealed that I grabbed standing up. "Over sorry, we return to his career. He recently filmed director Richard Eyre's *The Children Act*, based on Ian McEwan's novel about a judge (Emma Thompson) tasked with ruling on the case of a boy with leukemia who is refusing a life-saving blood transfusion. Tucci plays Thompson's husband. Later this year he stars as Hollywood mogul Jack Warner in a hotly anticipated TV mini series, *Feud*, directed by Ryan Murphy (*American Crime Story/Glee*) about the battle between screen legends Joan Crawford (Jessica Lange) and Bette Davis (Susan Sarandon) during the making of the 1960s film *Whatever Happened to Baby Jane?* "Warner was a really horrible person by all accounts, who kept adding fuel to the fire between these two women," says Tucci.

Last month, Tucci attended the Berlin Film Festival for the premiere of *Fatal Portrait*, an engrossing biopic about the life of Swiss sculptor and painter Alberto Giacometti. Starting Geoffrey Rush as the artist, it follows Giacometti as he paints a portrait of his friend, the American writer James Lord Armie Hammer) over a protracted series of sittings. Based on Lord's book *A Giacometti Portrait*, Tucci directed the film. "I hadn't directed for ten years, so since *Blind Date*, and I really loved doing it, I missed it."

He has been working on the project for years. "I love art and I fell in love with Giacometti a long time ago. Because my dad taught art, I spent a lot time going to museums with him. We'd even in Florence for a year, so art was a huge part of my life growing up." What does Tucci collect himself? Giacometti prints are still kind of affordable, he says. "I bought a number of Robert Motherwell prints years ago. I really love him. I love (Robert) Rauschenberg (the American painter), and then, whatever strikes my fancy. I like quite graphic things. I have a really nice Richard Serra (American artist) oil print. I love that is



sort of black and beautiful. The era I like is the 1930s and 1940s up until the 1960s."

Inspired across the board by his parents, "they are still around and doing great, thank god," performing was also an early interest for Tucci. "I acted in elementary school and high school. I felt very comfortable on stage," he smiles. "I actually felt more comfortable on stage than I did in real life."

As well as acclaimed stage performances, in 2010, Tucci directed a Broadway revival of the Ken Ludwig play *Lord Me a Fear*. Enthusiastically versatile, he has starred in Broadwayers such as *The Hunger Games* and *Transformers*, as well as small independents such as *A Little Chaos* (2015). Alan Hickman's last film, in which he delivered a terrific performance as Louis XIV's flamboyant brother, Philippe d'Orleans, Tucci has never been typecast and along with the Oscar nod, there have been numerous accolades including a Golden Globe and an Emmy Award for his TV roles in *Wired* (1988).

another Globe for his turn as Adolf Eichmann in *Conspiracy* (2001) and an Emmy for his 2007 guest acting appearance in *Worn*.
 "I'm not a classic leading man," he says. "I am a character actor, although I've always thought in some ways, character actor was a redundant phrase." He pauses and collects his thoughts. "To me an actor is someone who takes on different personalities and you become them, and when it's over you get rid of them and you become somebody else. I don't want to go through my life just as myself. It is much more interesting to pretend to be other people for a little while."

It sounds like his career is fulfilling. "Sometimes it is just a job, you think 'I have to do this show because I have to make money,'" he says candidly. I look surprised. After all, Tucci is a Hollywood mainstay. "Well, I make really good money, but it's not like a Wall Street guy making X amount of money," he says. "Actors making that same amount are losing 25%-30% to taxes, then another 25% is going to the people who represent you, because without those people you are never

going to get the jobs. Now some of that of course is tax deductible but it is a huge amount that you are paying and people forget that. You know, you have the school bills to pay, and all the blah blah blah, and you think, 'Should we go on this vacation?' or 'No, we can't afford to go on that vacation.'"

Tucci's financial goals are entirely reliable. "I have my lovely narrow house in Barnes and I look forward to paying the mortgage off someday." He's not complaining, though. "You know, life is good," he says. "I am very, very lucky. I love what I do. And there are some things that are incredibly satisfying. Directing movies is fun. Directing a play on Broadway was great fun." Tucci's career highlights so far? "*The Lovely Bones* was a very interesting experience but the subject matter was so difficult [he played a chilling serial killer] - that was probably the hardest thing I have ever done. *Julie & Julia* and *The Devil Wears Prada* were amazing experiences, too."

Tucci is equally enthusiastic about fatherhood, raising a toddler in his 50s. "It's great. You know where to put your energy now, whereas when you were younger you didn't. So now I am much calmer. It is a little rougher when bending down to pick him up," he laughs. "You're like 'oh fuck!' That was quite different 17 years ago!" The actor describes his wife "F" as "an amazing, extraordinary person. I got very lucky. It is hard to meet someone that you love and trust, particularly after a loss like I had, when you have children, because you want someone to share your life, but if the person is not right for your children then you can't have that - and you shouldn't have that. There is, in a way, survivor guilt that you feel when you have lost somebody you love and when they have suffered for a long time and died way too young."

He says his wife is "an extraordinary step mother. She cares for the kids like they are her own, and it is a very tough role being a stepparent." Was it challenging moving to London with his three children? "No, I really love it here," says Tucci, "and for teenagers, it is great. There is much more flexibility for them to get around. We were living in Westchester, where it is hard to get from point A to point B, says the actor, who proceeds to rave about the Tube - yes, he uses public transport on a regular basis. "The mass transit here is fantastic. I had a meeting the other day at the Old Vic and then I took the train to Soho; it is just the easiest way to get around."

Tucci is also a big supporter of the NHS. "Does it have problems? Yes, but if you were to get rid of it that would be an absolute fucking disaster! I mean, look at America. Look at what

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RAISING RATS While he's not a fan of the American-born actor is still very much engaged with the US, Morfitt is vocal in his opposition of Trump's presidency.

“I’m glad I live in the UK, but it doesn’t matter where you are, you still love your home country”

a disaster that is on the healthcare front - tens of millions of people without health insurance? It doesn't make any sense at all. I mean the healthier a society is the more productive it is. It really isn't that complicated."

The conversation inevitably leads us to American politics, and the Trump presidency. He is a fierce critic, along with the vast majority of his Hollywood colleagues. Is he grateful to be living in the UK just now, with a measure of detachment? "I am glad I'm here, although it doesn't matter where you are, because you still love your country," he reflects. "You still feel nauseated by the whole process and the result of that process last year's presidential election. The people I am most concerned about are young women, poor women, single mothers who will be most affected by his policies - anybody who isn't a rich, white guy. It is very disconcerting when you see the profound racial divide [in America] and that intense misogyny. It is horrifying."

Before our interview ends, and Tucci returns home on a more positive note. I ask about time off (if indeed that exists with a toddler and three teenagers). "I love to exercise. It keeps me fit and it keeps me sane," says Tucci. "I love to go to museums. I draw and paint and cook. When I am working, I try to be at home in the afternoon and put the baby to bed, then we all have dinner together, so we eat quite late but it is worth it because I would rather sit with the teenagers than have a hectic half-assed dinner."

As for future career plans: "I don't know where my next job is coming from," he remarks cheerfully. "There is an adaptation of a book I have done called *City Of Women*, (written by David H Gillman) which takes place in Berlin during the second world war, that I would like to do as a six-part television series." He sighs. "There are still a million things that I want to accomplish." Does he have a motto for life? "Well, I had this wonderful acting teacher once called George Morfitts, who always used to say, 'go beyond what's comfortable.' And I think that's a good one." ■

Beauty and the Beast is cinema now. *Transformers: The Last Knight* is out in June.

