

Shoot to thrill

WHEN SAM TAYLOR-WOOD SHOT THE STILLS FOR DANIEL CRAIG'S NEW FILM, SHE GOT TO HANG OUT WITH HER FRIENDS — AND CREATE BROODING PORTRAITS OF THE ACTOR IN THE PROCESS, SHE TELLS **CAMILLA LONG**

Arriving at the Soho hotel, in London, all spools of freshly cut hair — “I’ve just had it done, I feel a bit self-conscious,” she says, twirling a strand — Sam Taylor-Wood immediately strikes you as bouncy, sharp and fun. Just what you would expect from a woman who is best friends with some of the most alluring celebrities, from Elton John to David Beckham and Damien Hirst to Daniel Craig.

Ah, yes, Craig — the subject of her latest work, the kind of eerie, melancholic portraits in which Taylor-Wood specialises. It’s only her work that tells you the real story about the 41-year-old artist — that, besides all the glitz and fun, she has survived a traumatic childhood and two bouts of cancer.

“I’m onwards, onwards, onwards,” she says briskly, ordering a hot chocolate with soya milk. “I find it difficult to sit still. I’m annoying to be around because I keep twitching. You keep trying to be in the now, but you can’t.”

This particular “now” is a film, *Flashbacks of a Fool*, for which she took the on-set stills as a favour to her “dearest, closest, bestest friend in the whole wide world”, the director and photographer Baillie Walsh.

“I came out of the screening room and went to the loo and just sobbed my heart out,” she says. “It took me a good 10 minutes to pull myself together. When a friend makes a film, you think, ‘Please let it be good, please let it be good.’ And it was.” She pauses. “But I’m never, ever doing stills photography again.”

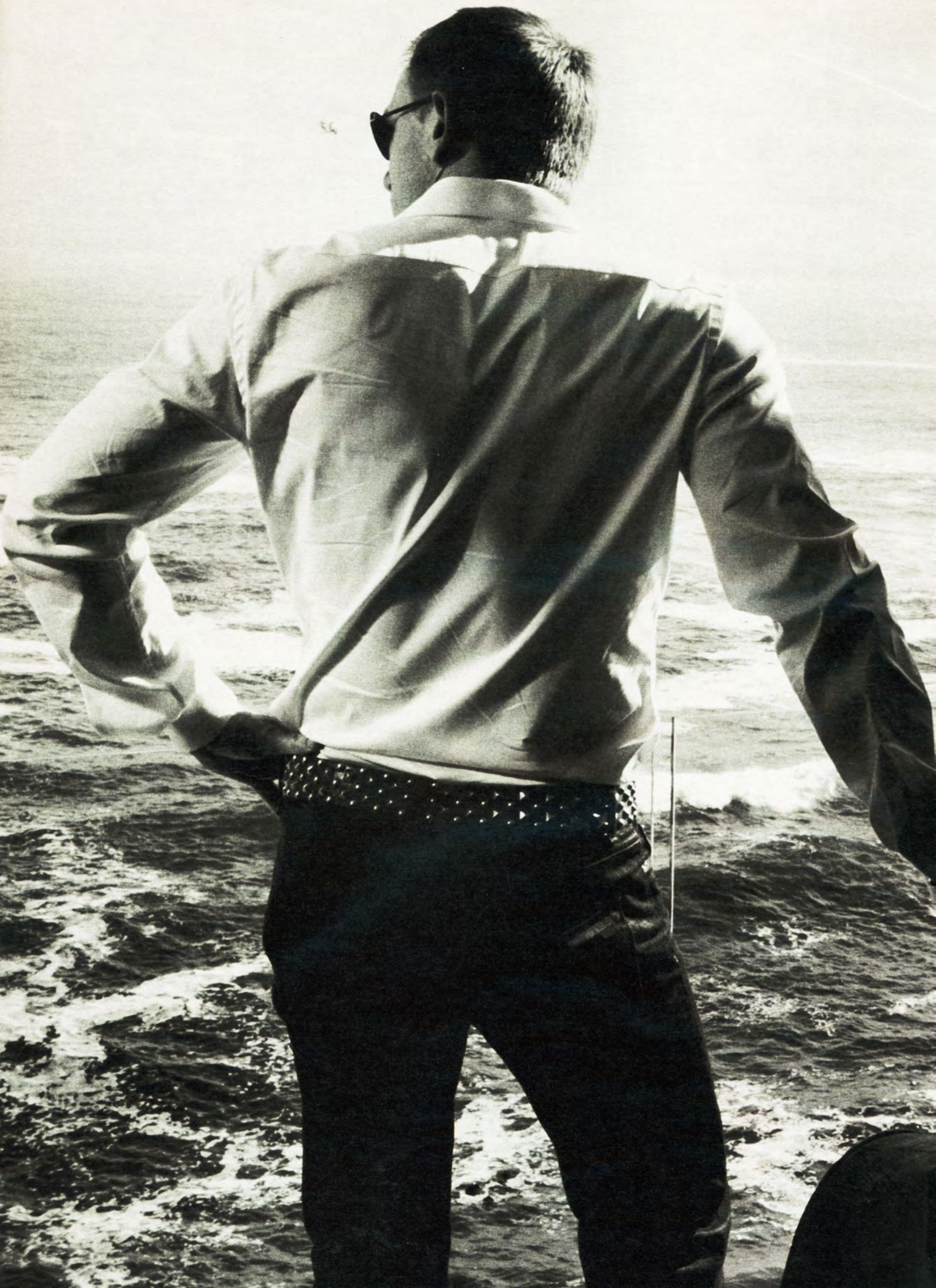
Cringing around a set with her camera, constantly “in everyone’s way”, isn’t quite what Taylor-Wood is used to. “I don’t like being at the bottom of the pecking order. I love being part of the big monster. I also love feeling — I so don’t want to use this word — in control,” she says, laughing. “Might as well get it out there: jodhpurs, give me a whip, that’s me.”

The film stars Craig, who is “great in it”, she says. “I mean, yeah, of course I’m going to say that, but he truly is great.” The actor always promised Walsh he would make his first film with him, even though it was one Craig found “difficult to make”.

“I think it just appealed to him,” Taylor-Wood says. “It was different from something like *Bond*. The great thing about Daniel is that he picks his films very carefully. All the films he has done — apart from *Bond*, obviously — have been quite quiet and independent, and I think that *Flashbacks* is along similar lines.” In it, Craig plays ▶



Taylor-Wood and Craig



► “a washed-up has-been. Basically, a complete tosser, who then has to come to terms with his past, who has to come to see the people that he left behind after he’s gone and blown it in Hollywood. It’s a good role for him to play”.

Taylor-Wood joined the film crew on location in Cape Town, where they were shooting the British beach scene. It must have been like summer camp, everyone being old friends. “Yes, it was,” she says. “Except they were all working and serious, and I wanted to play.”

The last time Taylor-Wood and Craig collaborated was for an interview in the July 2007 issue of the Warhol-created magazine *Interview*. The piece was a disaster: “We got completely plastered and I forgot to turn the tape over.”

Given that a large part of her work is with people she knows (her famous video of Beckham asleep; *Picta*, depicting the artist cradling Robert Downey Jr; and her *Crying Men* series, which features Laurence Fishburne, Jude Law and Dustin Hoffman), she prefers, it seems working with friends.

“It actually doesn’t make too much of a difference. Sometimes, it’s more difficult working with people you know because they don’t want to reveal themselves too much to a wider audience. Certain people I know, if I point a camera at them, they get a bit, well...” Nervous?

“When I was photographing Daniel, he would be very professional, then I’d relax with my camera and he’d start not being the Daniel I know. It’s like, come on!”

In jeans, biker boots and a little Vivienne Westwood jumper, she is trim and toned from yoga — “my religion: it’s the only thing that makes me feel calm” (she often shares classes with Satsuki Mitchell, Craig’s fiancée) — and pounding the park twice a week. As the wife of Jay Jopling, rock-star art dealer and owner of White Cube (Tracey Emin, Damien Hirst, the Chapmans et al), she is as much the hostess as an artist in her own right. She threw open her drawing room for one leg of Kate Moss’s 30th-birthday celebrations, and invited Craig, Elton John, David Walliams and Pet Shop Boys — with whom she shares a studio in Clerkenwell — to the christening of her second daughter. According to one friend, she has “the biggest collection of pictures of Damien Hirst’s willy ever”.

“I’m so structured in my life — having kids, it’s the only way to survive,” Taylor-Wood says. She and Jopling have two daughters, Angelica, nearly 11, and Jessie, 17 months. She had



Angelica at 29, six months after she married Jopling in Tokyo; three months after the birth, she was diagnosed with colon cancer. She beat it, only to get breast cancer at 33 — unrelated. “The worst time of my life,” she says, without hesitation. “Easily. Both times.”

Chemotherapy exhausted her, but Taylor-Wood refused to let it cramp her style: “Drips by day, Prada by night.” She underwent a mastectomy and breast reconstruction (“I came round and he’d made them two sizes bigger. That’s men”), and had to wait a full five years to get the all-clear for her second child. “It’s great, because it means there are two mums,” she says of the age gap.

The family live in an art-stuffed house in Marylebone, a million miles away from her own childhood, growing up in Streatham, south London, with her mother, a yoga teacher, and her father, a biker who, when she was nine, vanished to travel the world. Her mother took up with a fellow yoga teacher and moved the family to Sussex, where they all joined a hippie commune, wore orange robes and took Sanskrit names — all of which she used to hate.

Then, one day, when she was 15, her mother walked out, leaving Taylor-Wood, her sister and her younger half-brother to survive on frozen pizzas. She has described the time, walking down the road a few months later, and seeing her mother drawing the blinds in a house she shared with her new boyfriend, as one of the defining moments of her life. They got

some way towards a reconciliation only after the birth of Angelica, when, Taylor-Wood realised, “it’s not so hard to f*** up”.

She now runs her own domestic setup with a rod of iron. “Don’t compromise” is her tip for a happy marriage, and she’s only half joking. She travels a lot, but feels guilty leaving the children, and they have all just got back from a three-week skiing holiday in America.

For all the swanning around at parties, expensive haircuts and luxury ski holidays — “Yeah, rough old life,” she says at one point — you can’t help admiring her resilience and determination, her proud defence of family life in the face of all the swank. Not to mention the art — she is preparing for a new exhibition at White Cube in October. It must be quite stressful? “Oh, no. I don’t get nervous about things like that,” she says of the upcoming show. And, with that, she’s onto the next. □

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Candid camera
Taylor-Wood took
the on-set stills for
Craig’s latest film,
Flashbacks of a Fool



Flashbacks of a Fool opens on April 18