

closeup



Wanting Kwanten

After seven years playing heart-throb Jason Stackhouse on smash hit HBO show *True Blood*, Ryan Kwanten has left his alter ego well and truly behind. **Paul Ewart** speaks to the homegrown success story.



AS A JOURNALIST who has spent umpteen hours over the years interviewing an A to Z of Hollywood's finest, encountering a celebrity who is able to remember individual interviewers from the whirlwind of media they participate in on a yearly basis is definitely something of a rarity. In fact, it's nigh on unheard of. So, it was with some surprise that when I caught up with Ryan Kwanten for our interview, the actor promptly looked me up and down and casually said, "I wondered when our paths would cross again". Who would have thought that our brief 10-minute chat almost five years earlier (in Sydney Airport after a red-eye flight from LA, no less) was so memorable? But, as I come to learn, it's this thoughtfulness, consideration and outright niceness that make Sydney-born Ryan stand out. Despite the fact that his star has risen higher than he could ever have imagined, he remains a grounded Aussie bloke.

"[American essayist] Emerson said that 'one of the greatest achievements in this world is to maintain who you are in a world that's constantly trying to change you'. And I think the older that

I get, the more I realise the true sort of value of that quote. For the most part, I'm a professional pretender, so it's important for me to maintain my integrity outside of that. When I'm spending my life on camera deceiving people, I want to make sure that Ryan Kwanten remains real."

Tanned, toned and with a glint in his eyes that definitely errs on the side of cheeky, his boyish good looks belie his 38 years. An accomplished athlete, Ryan takes fitness very seriously. He's a qualified yoga instructor, skilled surfer and regular biathlon winner. Indeed, his buff physique is undoubtedly a big part of his sex symbol status, also helped by copious amounts of nude screen time as the seductive Jason Stackhouse in *True Blood*.

During its first season in 2008, the series (also starring New Zealander Anna Paquin) overtook *The Sopranos*, becoming HBO's most successful show, notching up an Emmy and a Golden Globe and turning Ryan into a bona fide celebrity. After seven seasons as part of this small screen behemoth, the final episode aired in August last year. ▶



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“It was one of those rare working experiences where I was given this enormous amount of creative play and surrounded by such an eclectic bunch of actors and crew,” says Ryan. “I just felt like it was an incredible mix that turned into a beautiful, mad show.”

And he confesses that he’s going to miss the character of Jason. “As much as I felt like Jason had finally evolved into a man, I felt that there was a part of me [when the series ended] that died with him too.”

While Jason Stackhouse thrust him onto the worldwide stage, it was as lifeguard Vinnie Patterson on *Home and Away* that Ryan got his first taste of fame. After five years on the show, he trod the well-worn path to LA, settling there in 2001. And while he may have well and truly left Summer Bay behind him, the actor has no qualms about being recognised from the show that kickstarted his path to stardom. “It’s the show that started it all and the fans are the ones that made me. So I couldn’t be more grateful, believe me,” he says.

With two roles in long-running TV success stories under his belt, Ryan is turning his attention to the big screen. Though he’s already dabbled in several indie flicks, the prospect of having more freedom, now that he’s no longer tied to a long-running series, is appealing. “It’s a pretty clean slate ... I really get the opportunity to pick and choose the kind of projects that inspire me now,” he says.

And he’s wasted no time in getting started. The actor is already set to hit screens across the world in several releases this year, including *Kidnapping Freddy Heineken*, alongside cinematic legend Sir Anthony Hopkins.

“You can’t help but feel the level of excitement on the days prior to Anthony working on set,”



says a clearly starstruck Ryan. “You hope that your heroes and the industry icons are going to live up to your expectations, and quite often they don’t. But in his case, they did – and then some.”

From working with big international names to local actors, this year Ryan is leading a cast of Aussie national treasures – including Barry Humphries and Toni Collette – in the big screen reboot of iconic cartoon Blinky Bill.

“I must admit I was a little nervous at first when the offer [to voice Blinky Bill] came through,” he admits. “But then I read the script and it’s utterly hilarious. And then as more and more of these huge Australian actors started signing on, I started sort of thinking, well, this is going to be kind of sensational. I don’t think I’m as excited for any film to come out this year as I am for that one.”

After being based in Los Angeles for almost 15 years, Ryan is relishing the opportunity to be back on home soil. He’s clearly very proud of his roots, and there’s no doubt that he still calls Australia home even though the nature of his work means spending a lot of time in the US.

“Obviously my immediate future is in the film business and a lot of the things I want to do are based in the US,” he says. “Having said that, I’ve always made a point of returning to Australia and trying to give back to the industry that started my career. And I’ll continue to do that.” **[O]**

Above: Ryan in his compelling role as Jason Stackhouse in *True Blood*.

Season 7 of **True Blood** is available on DVD and Blu-Ray now. **Blinky Bill** will be released nationally in cinemas later this year.



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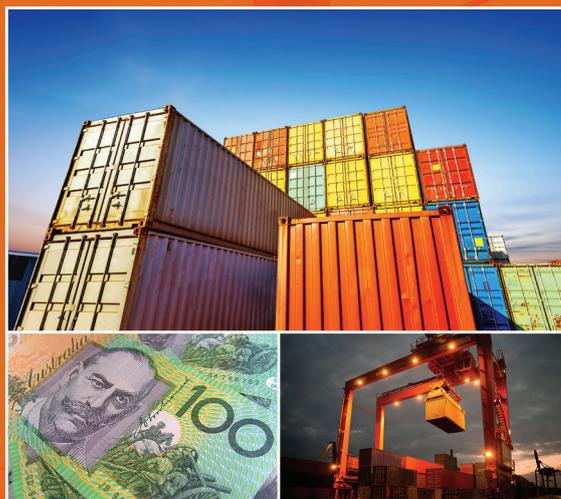
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INVESTMENT	RETURN*	NO. OF YEARS
Shipping Containers	26%	20
Value-priced stocks	14.62%	33
Growth stocks	11.96%	33
Stocks (S&P 500)	8.97%	136
Corporate bills	8.00%	150
Commodities (CRB index)	5.53%	93
Treasury bills	5.10%	172
Municipal bonds	4.24%	150

Source: Global Financial Data, 2012

Average annual return over the stated time period

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