

# diddy man

Not only does Sean "Puffy" Combs have a new name, P. Diddy, he also has a new style he calls Urban Elegance, a new career in film, and a new best friend - Naomi Campbell. By Christa D'Souza. Photographed by Mario Testino

**GHETTO FABULOUS:**  
P. Diddy wears cotton boxers, by Sean John, from a selection, at Bloomingdales and Macy's, New York. Sunglasses, £120, at Chanel Boutique. Flawless pear-shaped diamond drop; emerald-cut and pear-shaped diamond necklace; oval diamond line bracelet. All from a selection, at Graff. All other jewellery, P. Diddy's own. Naomi wears crystal-studded knickers, by Skirt, £45, at Diverse. Heart-shaped bracelet-watch with baguette diamonds, at Graff. All other jewellery, Naomi's own. Satin ankle boots, £595, at Gina. Hair and make-up: Curtis Smith and Barry White for P. Diddy; Sam McKnight and Val Garland for Naomi. Nails: Marian Newman for The Country Club. Fashion editor: Lucinda Chambers





There is one thing that Puff Daddy, or P. Diddy as he now likes to be known, would like to get straight. He is not romantically involved with Naomi Campbell. True, she was his date last night at Elton John's White Tie and Tiara party. True, they are to be photographed together this afternoon for the cover of *Vogue*. True, she will be in Paris tomorrow night for the party he is co-hosting with Donatella Versace at Le Cabaret and in the south of France this summer, where he'll be cruising around in the "big stoopid joint" of a yacht he has chartered for the season. But he is not, I repeat *not*, romantically involved with Naomi, or anyone else for that matter. She's just a "beautiful, professional intelligent woman", a "strong black person" like himself whom he has admired over the years – and besides, he's very close to her sometimes boyfriend, sometimes fiancé Flavio Briatore, managing director of Benetton's Formula 1 team.

It is around lunchtime on a hot summer's day, just over three months since Sean "Puffy" Combs was acquitted by a New York jury on charges of illegal gun possession and bribery. We are sitting in the private room of some Covent Garden nightclub where he has just held a press conference – primarily to announce the release of his latest album, *P. Diddy & the Bad Boy Family... The Saga Continues*. But also to field questions about his love life (yes, he did dedicate the track "I Need A Girl" to his ex-lover Jennifer Lopez, and no, he was not offended by her calling him a "nigga" on her last album because in the Bronx, where he comes from, that's an expression of love) and, of course, to talk about the aftermath of his infamous trial. "Hey," he deadpans, "when they read out the verdict, I was ready to run down the street butt-naked!" Oh, and then there is the imminent launch of his men's underwear collection, which, he boasts, has more styles than Calvin's, feels better than Calvin's and "isn't... as tight, you know what I'm saying? They're a little – uh – roomier for the black man."

Having changed out of his smart Sean John (his own label) pinstripe suit and big fat purple tie, Puffy – the correct form of address according to his fearsome publicist, Nathalie – is wandering around the room in an immaculate pair of faded jeans and Converse sneakers. He is not as tall as I imagined, much less muscly, too, and with that unusually high forehead, a lot more baby-faced in the flesh (foetal almost) than he ever appears in photographs. As for jewellery, there's much less "ice" or "bling-bling", as he calls it, than you'd expect – just a large platinum-and-diamond stud in each ear and a chunky diamond college ring on one of his rather slender pinkies. As per his instructions, the room is filled with tuberosc candles by Diptyque, vases of white lilies and silver

buckets scattered everywhere filled with Louis Roederer Cristal, his favourite brand of champagne. Sitting opposite us is Nathalie, talking transportation matters into her mobile. She is trying to figure out how she is going to squeeze in some time for Puffy to buy himself a couple more suits before the shoot (although the one he wore this morning for the press conference fits like a glove, he wants to find something while he's here that an "English gentleman" might wear) and also how she is going to get

of his life in jail or not, and getting so unceremoniously dumped on Valentine's Day by his beloved J-Lo (or Bella, as he nicknames her), that I half expected him to be too stressed out to be civil to journalists. On the other hand, all that adverse publicity hasn't exactly dented his fortunes. His latest single, "Bad Boys 4 Life" (whose slick video features "homies" such as Ben Stiller, Snoop Dogg and the Red Hot Chili Peppers) is hurtling up the US charts; Bad Boy Entertainment is now projecting

## "YOU ALL LOOK VERY SEXY RIGHT NOW, YOU BRITISH PEOPLE," SAYS PUFFY IN HIS SEDUCTIVE YET STRANGELY STERILE TONE, LEANING SO CLOSE I CAN SMELL HIS AFTERSHAVE AND HIS CHAMPAGNE-TINGED BREATH

VIP parking access for the Madonna concert they are all going to tonight. After all, are Puffy and co going to walk through the front doors of Earls Court "just like everybody else?" Next to her is a Sade lookalike called Jodie, who turns out to be the British press liaison for Combs' Bad Boy Entertainment record label. Outside this inner sanctum loll two large security guards dressed from head to toe in black, and then out in the bar area is the rest of "P. Diddy Barnum's circus", as Puffy likes to call the 25-strong entourage he brought over from New York, among them, his spritzer-toting personal groomer and a small film crew, who are in the process of making a documentary about him for MTV.

Politely offering me something to drink, Puffy sits down on a white pouffe thing, beckons me to sit right next to him on another, and compliments me fulsomely on my not-particularly-noteworthy appearance today. "Yeah, you all look very sexy right now, you British people," he says in his seductive yet strangely sterile tone, leaning so close I can smell his aftershave ("Creed, but don't tell nobody") and his sweet, slightly champagne-tinged breath, "like yo' definitely putting yo' fashion thing down, girl, yo' definitely becoming the definition of cool, and right now I'm definitely soaking it all up, but, hey, we're gonna do this in stages, we're gonna spend a lot of time together, me and you, we gonna marinade it, so it's not pressured, so you can feel my flavour. I know y'all hearing about my flavour but now I'm gonna give it to you up close and personal. Baybee. You're my special guest for the day."

Hmm, what a relief. He has been through so much this year, what with not knowing whether he's going to spend the next 15 years

around \$100 million in revenue – its highest figure since 1997; his clothing line, Sean John, which now employs 20 designers, already has a turnover of approximately \$100 million after just two years in existence. Meanwhile, his two restaurants in Atlanta and New York (named Justin's, after his eldest son) are doing so well, he's seriously thinking of starting a chain. As for his personal wealth, *Forbes* magazine estimates it is \$250 million, making him one of the most successful black music moguls around today.

Then there is his burgeoning career as an actor. This autumn he will appear in *Made*, the actor/director Jon Favreau's follow-up to the indie comedy *Swingers*. In it, Puffy plays a "higher-up in the New York underworld" and already the critics are raving about his deft sense of timing and attention to detail. Then there's *Monster's Ball*, starring Heath Ledger and Halle Berry – another low-budget independent film in which he plays a small but pivotal role as a hood. Favreau, for one, is convinced he will be a movie star. "He's very funny," says the director from his home in LA, "and very dry when you get to know him. I was impressed, too, by his integrity. I mean, here's this big celebrity who likes to spend a lot of money and ride around in big limos, but at the same time who is willing to do this low-budget film and to pay his dues – to slip under the radar in order to prove to people that he can act. He's smart, this guy – he makes the right choices. I think he's in it for the long haul and I think soon he's going to be running the town."

But acting is only a tiny part of it. There's producing and directing his own films, there's the unsaturated market of childrenswear, there's fragrance, there's ketchup (yes, after the last cheeseburger he ate here, he is determined

to invent his own), there are football teams to be bought. Indeed, if one goes along with Puffy's infectious trajectory, there's no reason why there can't be a P. Diddy Airways one day. "Hey, Richard Branson? I'm definitely on his ass. I'm definitely comin' for him. I mean I'm young! I'm in my mid-twenties!"

Mid-twenties? I thought he was 31? "Well, OK, I think like I'm in my twenties, but then I don't really like to discuss my age. I like to think of myself more as timeless." In actual fact, Sean Combs was born in 1969, 31 years ago, in Harlem, the son of Janice and Melvin Combs, a cab driver and sometime Board of Education employee. In 1972, when Sean was just three, Melvin was shot dead in Central Park, the victim of a drug shoot-out. Janice, a former model – who to this day looks about the same age as Lil' Kim – decided to move Sean and his sister Keisha to the more racially mixed suburb of Mount Vernon, where her cocky, entrepreneurially minded son quickly found a lucrative paper round and drew admiring glances from all his classmates by shaving quavers and crotchets into his hair.

After enrolling in a business administration degree at Howard University in Washington DC – where he achieved much popularity for throwing hip-hop parties – Combs soon made the decision, against his mother's will, to drop out. He then got himself an internship at the R&B label Uptown Records, where he swiftly scaled the corporate ladder to the position of vice-president. By the time he was 21, he was signing up and producing artists such as Mary J Blige, Lil' Kim and, of course, J-Lo through Bad Boy, the record label he created. And then he found himself having to clear his desk, for

million copies, but Puffy was already a rich man with a house on New York's Park Avenue, a house in the Hollywood hills, an office on Times Square and a Charles Gwathmey mansion on the ultra-white Long Island resort of East Hampton.

There were those who accused him of "popifying" rap and assimilating it too much into the mainstream ("I'll Be Missing You", his tribute to Biggie, was sampled from Sting's "Every Breath You Take"); hip-hoppers who criticised him for cashing in on Biggie's death, for his "bougie" (bourgeois) living – for being, as it were, an Oreo cookie (black on the outside, white on the inside). But jaded New York society was completely mesmerised by his exotic "ghetto fabulous" schtick (the genius expression he coined to describe his ostentatious, Cristal-swilling lifestyle), the way he parodied and yet exemplified black culture, the way he so wittily epitomised the whole American Dream and managed to be such a perfect combination of naivety and bravado ("have I read *The Great Gatsby*? I am the great Gatsby!").

Soon, everyone from Martha Stewart to Donald Trump, the late John F Kennedy Jr and entertainment mogul David Geffen wanted to be his friend. "People would die to get an invitation to one of his Hamptons parties," says one New York designer. "There'd be all these beautiful girls with Victoria's Secret bodies in the pool and everyone would be dancing on the tables. It made white folk think they were really living on the edge. Although, I think the police only turned up once – for the White party he held one Labour Day – because of the noise." "Yeah, a lot of people

the drivers are working out where it is exactly the boss wants to go, Puffy has his state-of-the-art cell phone clamped to his ear and is buried in a photocopied interview he has just given to the *Los Angeles Times*. A girl called Norma, who is carrying a wooden box full of jewellery, proffers her boss a large diamond cross through the car window. "No, baby," says Puffy distractedly. "I need the long shiny one." Then he continues his conversation with the person on the other end of the telephone. "I wanna give a dinner party at Nobu," he mumbles, "and then we gotta figure out what club to go to." Ten minutes on, the convoy has still not moved and Puffy, who is being decidedly less charming than he was an hour ago, suddenly gets antsy. "Hey, let's knock it out – let's go!" he yells over the dull thud of hip-hop from the car stereo, "Yo, yo – it ain't that dramatic," and everyone springs into action.

It is not the most successful shopping trip ever. The driver leading the convoy is confused, and instead of heading for Savile Row stops off somewhere near Leicester Square, further infuriating the already tetchy Puffy. "Excuse me SIR. Get wit' me, OK? I just wanna go to that area with a bunch of shops with suits and ties." Deciding to forget the suit because of the appalling traffic, Puffy then says he wants to look at some diamonds on Bond Street. But by the time he and his entourage (including the MTV film crew) barge past the doorman at Graff, and the bling-bling has been laid out on a velvet cushion for his perusal, all Puffy can think about is lunch. "Are we far from the hotel?" he asks weakly as we all fold back into the cars and head back towards Regent Street. "I need some fuel – like a shake or something..."

When we all crowd into the photo studio for the shoot, Puffy is not a happy bunny at all. The Jamaican food that has been pre-ordered for him is still not here, there is no air con and he does not like the shirt Naomi is wearing. For one horrible moment, it looks like he is going to call the whole thing off. And then his food arrives. A young black man wearing a bow tie, a pair of braces and a big diamond cross around his neck brings the plate of jerk chicken and yams into the dressing room, rather needlessly imploring Puffy to eat it before it gets cold, and then heads for the CD player, where he briskly slaps on some of Puffy's own music. This is "Bentley J Farnsworth", Puffy's personal valet-cum-styling assistant ("Bentley, from the car I like to drive, Farnsworth from that Bill Cosby and Sidney Poitier film [*Let's Do It Again*], and "J" because it kind of rang with elegance. I give all my staff nicknames").

Less than half an hour later, we are ready to roll, with Puffy now sitting in front of the camera in his underpants, his rather skinny >

## "PEOPLE WOULD DIE TO GET AN INVITATION TO ONE OF HIS PARTIES IN THE HAMPTONS," SAYS ONE NEW YORK DESIGNER. "IT MADE WHITE FOLK THINK THAT THEY WERE REALLY LIVING ON THE EDGE"

being just a little bit too pushy. (At one point, he was even checking into hotels as James Brown and Elvis.) But it didn't matter. The then-omnipotent Clive Davis of Arista Records had already spotted his talent and, just months later, the sweet-talking Puffy had forged a deal with Davis that netted him \$10 million and allowed him to turn Bad Boy Entertainment into something much, much bigger.

His 1997 debut album, *No Way Out*, (dedicated to his friend Biggie Smalls, the rap artist who had just been murdered in LA) sold seven

try to scrutinise why I have a house in the Hamptons," shrugs Puffy with typical disingenuousness. "I didn't know it was such a trendy society place when I bought it – I just went there because after Biggie died, OK, I needed a place to go for peace of mind... I only go there about six times a year now, anyway," he goes on. "That whole Hamptons thing, it's kinda played."

We are now sitting in the navy-blue Bentley Puffy always books when he is here in London. Behind, alongside and in front of us are the other cars in the convoy, and while all of

legs entwined with Naomi's, the pair of them comparing each other's arm muscles like two wary kids who have just met each other in the sandpit. "He reminds me of a teenager," explains Jodie affectionately as we all watch from the sidelines, "you know, when they just shut down because all they can think of is their stomachs?"

When the shoot is finished, Bentley rather theatrically leads a round of applause for his boss and Puffy then lopes back into the dressing room for a change of clothes and to make more phone calls. Naomi, who is wandering round in a micromini and a pair of heels looking for someone who has some Nurofen, reiterates to me how she and Puffy are NOT an item. "You must make it clear," she insists. "I have a boyfriend. I'm very happy."

"I met Puff Daddy for the first time at Paisley Park, while Prince was having a private concert," reads a fax from Donatella Versace in response to my question of how they came to be such good friends. "I remember that when I first met him, he was wearing a hat and he had a different look, but I knew he was a big producer. Prince introduced me to him and as soon as we met, I got this immediate feeling that it would be the first of many meetings and that I would know him for a long time. He is a very talented man and he has a great generosity and humanity inside that makes him a special person."

"He is extremely generous," agrees Jon Favreau. "I needed to shoot in some New York nightclubs for *Made*, but that's an expensive project and we didn't really have enough money to do it. I mentioned this to Puffy, and next thing I know a white stretch limo turns up at the production offices to show us around every single New York nightclub, with all the club owners competing with each other to have us film in their clubs FREE!" Puffy's generosity is indeed legendary, plying "the Family" with gifts of diamond jewellery, creating educational programmes for inner-city youth through his charity, Daddy's House, donating \$1 million to his alma mater for its continuing commitment to Afro-American studies and once, after a particularly expensive afternoon's shopping at Gucci, driving up to Harlem and handing out \$100 bills to homeless people.

But just as his generosity is legendary, so is his capacity to "flip out". In 1995, he was charged with harassment with a weapon after brandishing a handgun at a Georgetown University cafeteria worker following an argument. In 1999, he hit a man in the face for talking to Jennifer Lopez in a Manhattan restaurant. Then there was the time, also in 1999, when he went to court for his part in the brutal beating of record industry rival Steve Stoute, after which he was ordered by > 401



PURE PUFF: Naomi wears denim miniskirt, by Fomarina, £55, at House of Fraser. Baguette-diamond bracelet watch, at Graff. Turquoise cuff, £458. Wide diamanté cuff, £98. Gold-weave cuff with diamanté, £98. All at Butler & Wilson. Pendants, Naomi's own. P. Diddy wears wool-worsted suit, from £2,500, at Kilgour French & Stanbury. Shirt, £50. Silk tie, from £35. Both at Austin Reed. Silksquare, from £30, at Polo Ralph Lauren. Sunglasses, £120, at Chanel Boutique. Oval diamond line bracelet; Fancy Yellow radiant-cut diamond cufflinks. All at Graff. Watch, by Franck Muller; from a selection, at Marcus. All other jewellery, P. Diddy's own. For stockists, all pages, see *Vogue Information*

HIS NEW UNDERWEAR COLLECTION, HE BOASTS, HAS MORE STYLES THAN CALVIN'S, FEELS BETTER THAN CALVIN'S AND "ISN'T... AS TIGHT, YOU KNOW WHAT I'M SAYING? THEY'RE A LITTLE - UH - ROOMIER FOR THE BLACK MAN"

a judge to take a one-day anger-management course. As for the way he sometimes treats his staff, according to one former employee who spoke to *Vanity Fair* journalist Steven Daly last year, he can be a total monster. "I've seen Puffy go into rages over the size of his Winnebago," said the source. "He's Satan."

"Hey, there was a time I was real, real hard and rough," allows Puffy, back to his charming self now that we are in his roomy, ice-cold Winnebago, parked outside the studio, "and it wouldn't be such a happy, pleasant motivating environment, but I'm not really like that no more. Sometimes I like to be jovial and joke with people that I'm going back to all that, but that's just me playing with somebody. I mean, I'm definitely a tough boss, I definitely demand perfection, but everything is just a little bit more positive and upbeat these days. I'm in a much more stable, appreciative zone right now. Like, this time around I'm not so caught up in it, in being the 'It-idol' – I'm more in it for the longevity and for being able to savour the moment. I don't want no problems, I don't want no arguments, I just want to count my blessings and love what I'm doing. That's the difference between Puff Daddy and P. Diddy. And I would definitely say that's because of the trial, I definitely wouldn't have a problem with that. I wish I hadn't had to have gone through all of that to get to this point. I wish I could have read the book or seen the movie or something, but God has his reasons and I'm not questioning it, I'm enjoying it."

We are interrupted by a knock at the door with someone bearing the toothbrush and toothpaste that Puffy had requested, and before I can get another question in, his hand has reached inside his pocket for his vibrating mobile. Figuring this is probably the time I am supposed to get up and leave, I switch my tape recorder off and thank Puffy for his valuable time. Unfortunately he does not hear me. He is deep in conversation and admiring his now be-suited reflection (not the Richard James suit he wore for the shoot, but an identical model to the one he wore this morning to the press conference) in the mirror, all ready for making his entrance at the Madonna concert.

A week later, I manage to get him on the phone. The Madonna concert was a huge success (apparently he caught the hat she threw into the crowd and had to throw it back so an ordinary punter could have it), and Paris was an utter triumph. First off was the Versace show, where Puffy sat in the front row with his good friend the Guyanese model Emma Hemmings, Naomi (of course!) and Kevin Spacey. Then there was the party at Le Cabaret, where he DJ-ed for a crowd that included Christina Ricci, Amber Valletta, his *Monster's Ball* co-star Heath Ledger and Chloë Sevigny. "It was so over-the-top," intones Puffy, who is just getting into the bath, "the whole thing was just so, so... DonatellaPuffyish! And then you know I like to party, like I get bored if something only goes on until two or three in the morning [splash, splash], so instead of getting kicked out of the hotel, I did this after-hours party at Les Bains Douches. Well, [splash, splash] if we went to level 10 with Donatella, we went to level twenny at Les Bains Douches."

It all sounds too ghetto fabulous for words, but when I mention this expression Puffy swiftly corrects me. "We don't need to say 'ghetto fabulous' any more, we already did that. We have a lot of terminology to describe certain things... It's called PD-ology. Hey! Yo! Somebody write that down somewhere for me. I need to keep those new words out there! And the terminology I prefer right now to describe my lifestyle is *Urban Elegance*." So what about his obsession with white fur, then – would he describe that as a form of "urban elegance"? "I mean, that's like asking Madonna if she still wears rubber-band bracelets, y'hear me? The only thing I'm consistent about is diamonds. I LOVE diamonds. Put it this way, baybee, I'm constantly evolving [splash, splash] and if you blink your eyelids, you won't even recognise me. I'm always gonna be something that people don't understand because there are times when I really don't understand myself." ■

without due care (their idea of protection was olive oil). But now they discover Kabbala, osteoporosis, hormone patches (Patsy mislays all her hormones) and the menopause. "One major change since 1995 is how obsessed everyone is with being obsessed," says Saunders. "Hypochondria is rampant. I've done my best with it – I tried to write the words 'wheat germ' into the script, but it got so boring." Patsy, of course, is blissfully immune from food allergies, but then she hasn't eaten since 1972.

## 7. THEY GO ORGANIC

Not for health reasons, obviously, but in their approach to writing and filming the series – although *Ab Fab's* scripts and characters have always been a vaguely collaborative effort. "I didn't have a fixed view of Patsy, for instance," says Saunders. "The script was just the start. Then Joanna got hold of her..." "And it just sort of kept growing," adds Lumley. "On the day we shot the first episode, I called my agent and said: 'You've got to get me out of this.' I didn't think I could get Patsy. But then I put on the clothes and it started to come together." "It changes as you go along – you lose a lot of lines," continues Saunders. "I write in new things while we're shooting. It's a relief that people are much more knowing now – you have to explain a lot less."

## 8. EDDY AND PATSY ABSOLUTELY REFUSE TO GROW OLD GRACEFULLY

Saunders parodies society's current obsession with looking younger by making it all hyper-casual – Patsy, for example, travels with Botox. "She carries it around in her handbag and injects herself because she's very good with needles," says Lumley. "She gets it from a nice man at Porton Down." In the last episode of the new series, we see Patsy and Eddy aged 90 – in wheelchairs, incontinent, the lot – still behaving appallingly, with Patsy's candyfloss, Walnut Whip of a hairdo still intact. "I think she tries to avoid looking in the mirror too much," says Lumley. "She just thinks, 'Bollocks – let's party!'"

## 9. JENNIFER SAUNDERS COMES CLEAN ON THE ORIGINAL INSPIRATION FOR EDDY

"I have to say that Eddy was never really based on Lynne Franks," says Saunders. "That was Lynne working the publicity, like the brilliant PR that she is. Ten years ago, no-one knew much about PRs, so you could be vague about what they did and, at the same time, it was the kind of job where you could meet anyone, go anywhere – very Nineties. Are Lynne and I still friends? Er, sort of. I don't actually think I was that friendly with her before I wrote the show. But I like her enormously."

## 10. SAFFY GETS HER ACT TOGETHER – SORT OF

Saffy's dress sense doesn't improve. But she does fulfil her dreams of working with New Labour and the Dome. "You could say that Eddy hasn't been an entirely exemplary mother," understates Saunders impressively. "In fact, Saffy's severely abused – Edina and Patsy tried to sell her into the white-slave trade in Morocco once. But in the new series, the tables are slightly turned. Somewhere along the line, I realised that the house belongs to Saffy. It's never explicitly stated, but it's in Saffy's father's name and that's why Eddy never manages to move Patsy in."

"There's a great deal of resignation about Saffy," she adds. "She realises that she's going to have these two women around her neck for ever. It's terrible, but at the same time she knows that the reason she's able to do all those badly paid jobs is because of Eddy's money. She can't quite shake off the shackles of comfort and she won't do therapy because that would mean Eddy had won." Instead, Saffy writes a play about her relationship with Eddy. Unfortunately for Saffy, everyone thinks it's a comedy and it becomes a huge hit. ■

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