

MIAMI LIVING

STEVE HOWEY



THIS IS 40

With four decades, three kids, and two wildly-addictive shows under his belt, Steve Howey is not only wiser, he's sexier than ever

Steve Howey is hot. I know, I'm stating the obvious. But I'm not talking about his looks, yet. Still overheated from his trip to the gym, after Steve's third comment on schvitzing, I finally ask: Do you need a cabana person? I scan the restaurant for backup. "That would be amazing," he replies. Not one is in sight—could be because we're nowhere near a pool—so, I pick up my menu and fan him. "Oh, you're heaven. And you smell good. That would be awful if you didn't smell good and you were fanning me."

Words by Vanessa Pascale
Photographer: Rowan Daly
Grooming: Madison Blue
Clothing: Parke & Ronen

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A revolving rotation of people are pouring in and out of The London NYC hotel as I pass through the lobby—an influx likely ascribed to the bridal event in-house and Comic-Con's arrival. Fortunately, the hotel restaurant where I am meeting Steve is fairly quiet this early-October afternoon. I am still at the hostess stand when Steve walks in. Unlike Kevin Ball, his *Shameless* character, Steve's wardrobe (a black t-shirt emblazoned with a skull donning a wolf headdress and fitted black jeans) clings to his 6'4" 230-pound build (numbers he offers up when talking about typecasting)—showing off his muscular physique.

"People tell me, your body has changed over the course of *Shameless*, and I was like, 'Yeah, I had all these kids to lift [his own three with his wife, actress Sarah Shahi: Wolf, 8; two-and-a-half-year-old twins, Violet and Knox; and his onscreen twin daughters]. Before, I had long hair, riding motorcycles, and I was being *that guy*.'" Ready for a positive change, Steve swapped partying for the gym. "I became a better dad, became more involved. Also, it helps with energy and hanging out with them, 'cause they need you physically, not just emotionally, spiritually. Especially my kids, they're just like WWE in my house." Now that the actor is in professional-fighter-shape, everyone is asking him to disrobe. "I'm naked in everything I do now. Just being exploited left and right," he quips with a grin.

On the previous season of *Shameless*, Kev wrangled a bartending job at the Fairy Tale by slipping on gold lamé shorts (yes, that's all he had on) and bringing all the boys to the yard when he hosed off his very-chiseled chest and six-pack with a soda fountain gun. And this was the tame version. Originally, they wanted one of the guys to drink the water flowing off of Kev's gold-wrapped package. "I was like, 'No! That's disgusting!'" Steve exclaims all wide-eyed and animatedly. A little uncomfortable with all the male attention he garnered from onlookers ("I would adjust just to have it look good, right? And they were like, 'Uh huh, ahhh! What the fuck is going on? Why are you watching me?')", his biggest challenge was saying Kelis' famous lyric without sounding like a caricature of a gay man. "I was doing it, not even conscious of it. I'd whip around, go, 'My milkshake brings all the boys to yard,'" he says flamboyantly. "Wow, I can't *not* do it. The director is like, 'It's great.' I'm like, 'No, no, no. Let's do it again.' I wanted to say it like, 'This is true,'" he says seriously. "I had to really believe that I'm bringing joy to people."

Since *Shameless*' 2011 premiere, I—along with legions of fans—have tuned in each week to watch the charismatic ensemble cast, which includes Emmy Rossum and William H. Macy, push the boundaries. Then Netflix picked up the show, and their fan base really blew up. "People binge-watched it and they were like, 'What the fuck is this?' The writers are really good." *Shameless* has covered every dysfunctional arena—no salacious rock has gone unturned—from taboo relationships and drug/alcohol addiction to illegal occupations and absolutely-no-holds-barred sex. As you'd expect, Season 8, which returned to Showtime on November 5th, is chockfull of "the same old, good, sordid debauchery as other seasons." Kev is still bartending at the Fairy Tale. "He starts off there and for extra money he gets fondled up by a patron and he finds a lump [in his breast]. They

find out it's benign but he's freaked out, so Kev tells Veronica that he needs to know if it runs in the family...." So, they go to Kentucky, the Confederate flag wavin' part, to reconnect with his long-lost family. Here, they run into the Ku Klux Klan. "As the actors, Shanola [Hampton] and I were like, 'What are we doing? This is just out of nowhere.' But it lives up to the show's name, it's pretty shameless. They're pushing the envelope pretty hard. Frank goes sober for a while. Fiona now owns an apartment building. There's some new characters. Lip goes on this sober bend. Ian becomes this gay Jesus. Carl's dealing with this psycho new girlfriend. Debbie still has Franny. She becomes a welder... There's a lot going on."

A fan of all his cast mates, Steve continuously finds himself impressed with their performances. "I think the most improved, the one I'm super impressed with, is Cameron [Monaghan, who plays Ian]. I've seen him grow in the last eight years from this boy to this man." Recently, Emmy threw Emma Kenney (who plays Debbie) an 18th birthday party, where the cast went around the table telling stories. "When Emma auditioned, she was 9. 9! A little girl. And I remember her as a little girl, and that's all I remember her as. Next day she shows up and she's a woman... It's unreal. And I tell them that. *This* is not normal, that a show goes this long. Doesn't exist. I remember being told that on my other show, I was on a sitcom called *Reba*." By Chris Rich? I ask. JoAnna Garcia Swisher (our former cover star who played Steve's wife, Cheyenne, on *Reba*) told me that Chris would tell you all not to take this for granted because it doesn't happen very often. "Yep. Did JoAnna tell you that story?" Steve marvels at the idea of being among the few actors from multiple shows with 100+ episodes, like Lee Majors (Steve was named after Lee's character Steve Austin), who was recently honored for this at an award show Steve attended. *Reba* went for 125 episodes and *Shameless* reached 96 with the eighth season. Now that *Shameless* has been renewed for a ninth season—news that had not been released at the time of our interview—those bragging rights will soon be his.

Our server appears. "Do you want to order some food?" Steve asks me. If you eat, I'll have something small, I reply. "Let's nosh." He orders the chopped salad with salmon, while I order dessert: Coconut Panna Cotta. "Oh, you're awesome, Vanessa. Next level." On the subject of *Reba*, Steve tells me that playing Van Montgomery was an amazing experience. "It was my first thing. I did some guest stars and a commercial and that was it. I was really nervous. I was 20, 21... I didn't have any expectations. I just went off how *Reba* [McEntire] went. She was first to set, last to leave, cool as shit. I really respected her and I learned a lot from her professionalism." During the six seasons they all worked together, Steve mentions that he's the only one who got *Reba* fired up. "I gave shit to the director, Will Mackenzie, and he's just a sweetheart of a man. I don't know what the hell was wrong with me, but I became a dick. Mackenzie said something and I said, 'Don't give me a line read!' And *Reba* just went, 'You don't talk to him that way. You respect him!' Everybody backed away and pointed at me and was like, 'Get him. Get him, *Reba*. He's bad! You made *Reba* mad, you fucking asshole,'" he says in an exaggerated manner reminiscent of Van. "I took it on the chin and said, 'You know what, *Reba*? You're right. I apologize. Will, I

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Fan Love

“Chicago has a lot of love, and I love Chicago [*Shameless* is set in the South Side]. We stay downtown. Very friendly fans. I’ve been offered sexual things. I’ve been proposed to. It’s all normal, not for me, it’s for the idea. A cute one was a mom and daughter. She was like, ‘That’s Kev from *Shameless*,’ and I heard them say it. They were like, ‘Are you Steve Howey?’ And I’m like, ‘Yeah, how are you?’ And she’s like, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t know you. Oh my God, are you Van?’ So they both were excited about two different shows. She didn’t really know *Reba* and the other one didn’t know *Shameless*, but they both were fans and I thought that was pretty cool.”

Why do you think *Shameless* is such a success?

“I think it’s refreshing to see an unapologetic view on how fucked up life is. It either makes you feel good about yourself, because you don’t have a life like that or makes you feel better because you did have a life like that. And it’s just fun to watch because so much is going on. It’s an ensemble and I don’t think there’s any weak points. When you cut to a different scene, it’s like a new movie,” says Steve.

apologize. And then she went, ‘Good. Let’s do it again.’ And that was it. I’ve seen Reba mad, yelling. It was awesome. I take pride that it was me that did it. She’s a rock star.” Cutting his teeth on what would become a hit TV show, and coming out relatively unscathed is no small feat. “I was in my 20s. I had a little bit of fame. Some money in my pocket. Single. It coulda gotten bad, but I made it through. I wasn’t that guy who had my shit figured out, but it was a good time.”

After *Reba* ended in 2007 (TV Land and Freeform continue to air reruns of the popular sitcom), Steve appeared in a string of TV series, including *Sons of Anarchy*, and rom-coms in which he played Kate Hudson’s love interest: *Bride Wars* and *Something Borrowed*. How did that happen? “I dunno. I dunno. We played well together. The first movie [*Bride Wars*], she produced. I was pretty intimidated because she was producing and she’s a strong alpha female. And then *Something Borrowed*, I just got cast and she happened to be with me.” Last year, author Emily Giffin told me in an interview that they had a wonderful, funny script for *Something Blue* (the follow-up to *Something Borrowed*) and plan to be in production soon. Will you reprise your role as Marcus? “I don’t know what’s going on with that. We’ll cross that bridge when we come to it.”

This July, Steve turned 40, and as his *Reba* character, Van, prophesied —“So that’s what’s considered good-looking?” he says about James Denton, who portrayed Reba’s love interest. “Wait till I’m 60!” —, his looks only improve with age. The clean-cut, boy-next-door look definitely worked for Steve in the past, but this overpowering-build paired with his goatee and mustache sitch trumps the former any day —if you ask me. Which begs the question: Why hasn’t Hollywood tapped this ruggedly handsome, hulking man for their action flicks? This is the question on everyone’s mind, including Steve’s and his peers’. “These are the pros and cons of being on a show. You are not available for things you’re right for and sometimes you’re available for things you don’t really want to do.” Not only is he built for this genre, he’s ready for it. Action-comedies —think *48 HRS.*, *Lethal Weapon*, *Die Hard*—are the goal.

Happy to follow in Arnold Schwarzenegger and Sylvester Stallone’s footsteps, Steve praises their underrated ability to take lines that could easily be considered cheesy and own them. “Those things that Schwarzenegger did, when he threw a knife through a guy’s chest and it stuck. ‘Stick around.’ That shit’s hard to do and not make it look completely corny. He sold it. If you see another guy do it, you’re like, ‘Oh God, that’s so awkward. What are you doing with your nostrils, peeking around the corner?’” he exclaims in mock horror. With the current action-film landscape favoring Aussies and Brits, namely Tom Hardy, Steve points out, “You need a red, white, and blue, true American... I think that I could do some physical stuff and also have the ba-dum-bump.” He flashes a disarming smile. “Some directors don’t even look at actors who are on TV shows, because the scheduling is too hard —unless you’re Dwayne [Johnson]. Dwayne can do anything. Some of the stuff he’s done, I would like to do, but I just feel like I’m so

much funnier. I mean, he's great in it and all... I would like to have some moments of real, heartfelt emotion and some moments of slapstick."

Though Steve has been acting for eighteen years, he feels like his career is just getting started. "There's a saying, and unfortunately, it's a little bit true, 'That a man's career is a marathon and women's is a sprint as an actor.' And I feel like, 'cause I'm 40 now, I have just started to figure out what's going on in this life. 'Cause I had no idea in my 20s. Lost in my 30s. And now I'm just starting to go, 'Whoa. Interesting.' Now, I want to play a character where it's like: What if those guys [Van and Kev] grew up? What if that character were a little bit more introspective, a little bit more reserved? Same elements, 'cause it's me, obviously, but what if it's the adult version? *That's* exciting to me." There have been times Steve felt a bit like he was doing a disservice to his career by playing characters the way he plays them. "Like with Van, he plays the dumb jock, right? That's the quick *TV Guide* description. I was like, Oh God, what the fuck? I'm playing a dumb jock. Typecast myself as the fucking dumb guy. Then with *Shameless*, it was like, 'Oh yeah, that's what Steve does.' Then I thought to myself, I don't think that's true, because there's a lot of different elements. I think it was my own insecurity of my lack of knowledge in certain things, I guess. Not being smart enough 'cause there's a lot of smart people in this industry that come from amazing schools or they've done theater or they're writers..." he ruminates.

Our food is delivered to the table. A few minutes after digging into his salad, Steve goes on a comical tirade about the croutons. "These are the worst croutons in the history of croutons. They almost want me not to have teeth..." Like cracked ice, our conversation splinters into myriad directions, taking us well beyond superficial chitchat. His off-the-cuff recollections feature sidesplitting impersonations and thoughtful musings. And he is not averse to speaking openly about his position on certain situations or about what worries him. The vulnerability he exhibits is a little unexpected, until he shares that Jackie Gleason's vulnerable nature is what he specifically admired about the actor, who comes up when I ask Steve if his personality comes out in the characters he portrays. "Jackie Gleason, from *The Honeymooners*, would do things that I see myself doing. He would do goofy stuff, then he would be angry, then he would be sweet, then he would have to apologize to his wife. He believed it, which made him so vulnerable, made him super likable. 'Oh my God, I want to do that.' You cannot not put your personality [into the characters you play] — that's impossible." Growing up, Steve appreciated actors that weren't afraid of looking like a fool, like the John Ritters and Jim Carrey's of the world. "I like looking for those vulnerable moments. The definition of vulnerable that I like is when you can affect and be affected." It's in these introspective moments that you realize Steve's profound depth.

A magnetic storyteller, I am in awe of the passion and energy he pumps into the topics we dive into. Steve punctuates our conversation with adages, questions, and theatrical verses — "Let it goooo!" and "Tale as old as time..." — from movies his children watch. He prefers French Press coffee ("You sons of..." he jokes

with our server, when he finds out that they don't serve it), and lets out an enthusiastic, "Yes!" when he finds that they have Splenda. My cheeks literally ache from all the laughing he elicits from me in our two hours together. Given his natural knack for entertaining, it comes as a shock that acting was at the tail end of his list of professions he wished to pursue as a kid.

Born in Texas and raised in Southern California, while in junior high Steve thought he would become an orthopedic surgeon. After performing a mock surgery on a foam arm at camp, he thought: This is what I want to do! "I don't have a fear or gag reflex when it comes to blood, tissue, muscle when it's opened up, so I knew that I could handle that." But it was the idea of specifically healing bones that appealed to him, he tells me. Then, he thought he'd be a stand-up comedian, which makes sense as his comedic timing is excellent — all it takes is a look or the nuanced way he delivers a line for Steve to provoke laughter. "Then I start playing basketball, and I'm like, I'm going to be a basketball player." Determined to get a basketball scholarship, he moved to Denver, Colorado, and obtained one from a junior college. "After playing two years of that, I was like, I don't want to play basketball. It was too hard." He launches into this hyperbolic story about this "Adonis" on his basketball team. "Just a fucking god, right? Had a 10-pack, huge cock, just had a line of girls ready to fuck him. And I was like, 'I can't compete with that.' He would never workout. Just eat Twizzlers, watch ESPN, rebound the ball, dunk on everybody, shoot 3s. And there's me, just drinking protein shakes, running, lifting weights, shooting a thousand shots in the morning, a thousand shots at night and I couldn't even get near him." Steve admits that he became a great basketball player, and could've went further with it, but his interests changed. After taking a few acting classes ("A lot of it came natural."), he was hooked.

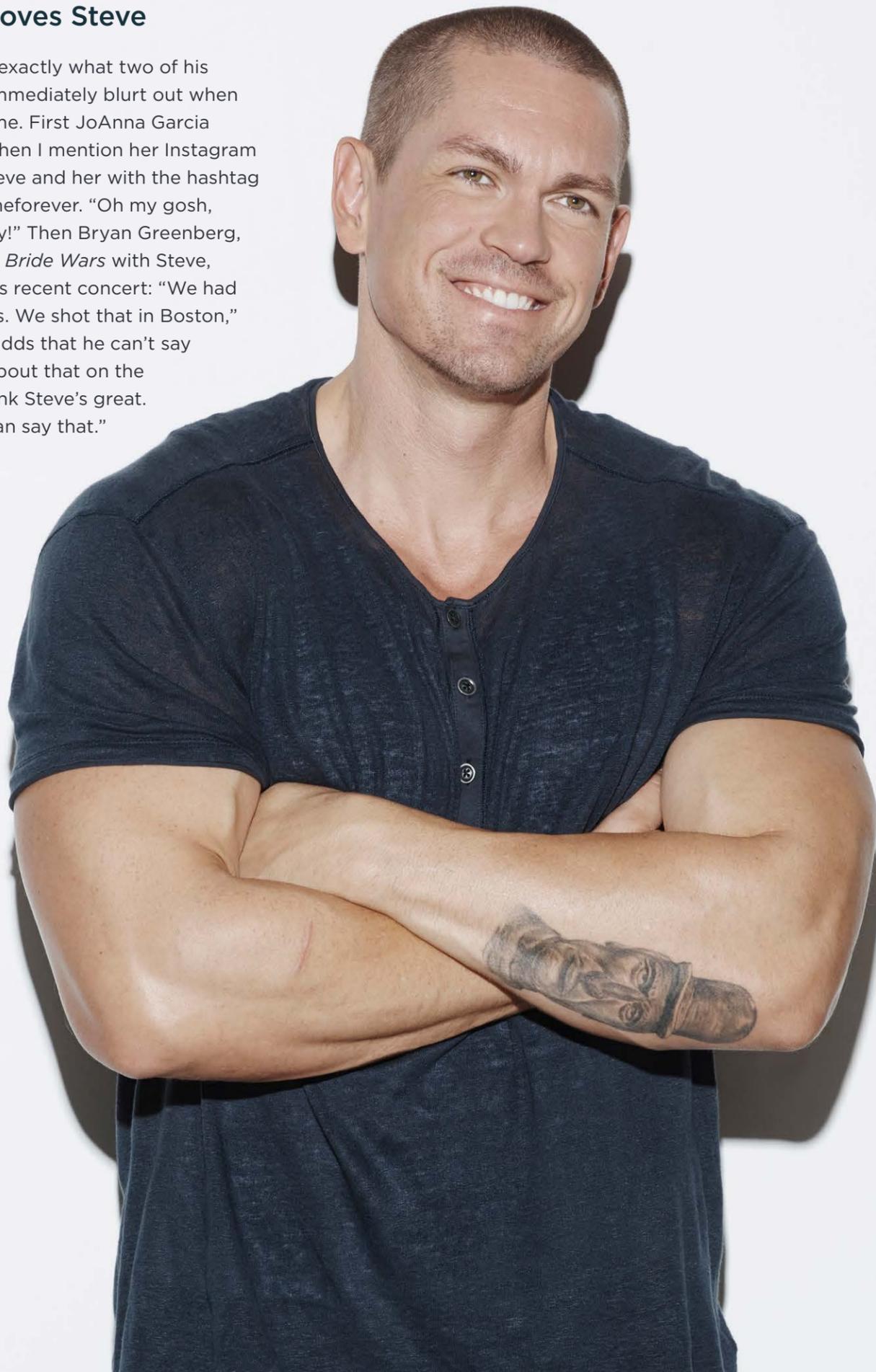
With his heart now set on becoming an actor, Steve moved back to Southern California to live with his brother, and sent his resume to several Hollywood agents. "I had this headshot with my cover letter, a bunch of things on my resume that I just made up. I was like, *Blue Dog River*, Lead!" You did not. I laugh. "Oh yeah. Absolutely. Just made up tons of shit that I've done. And the cover letter was like: 'I'm going to be a huge star. I'm a diamond in the rough. I'm going to make tons of money. If you want to make money...' It was just a very ballsy letter." He landed an agent, and ended up booking his very first audition: a Coca-Cola commercial. His agent warned him that this triumph would only create unrealistic expectations, and he soon realized what she meant. "100 auditions later, I didn't book any. It takes a lot. You have to have rhino skin 'cause you hear no so many times. It starts to pick away at your soul, where you don't think you're good enough. There's so many actors that go through that. They're just like, 'You're not pretty enough. You have this wrong...' And the ones that don't listen are the ones that succeed."

Recently, Steve has been able to show off his scope of talent and portray characters outside of the Kev-Van box. In the comedy, *Unleashed*, which Steve stars in alongside Kate Micucci and Justin Chatwin, he plays a dog-turned-human. "It was a lot of fun. Naked



Everyone Loves Steve

"I love Steve!" is exactly what two of his former costars immediately blurt out when I mention his name. First JoAnna Garcia Swisher said it when I mention her Instagram photo post of Steve and her with the hashtag #vanandcheyenneforever. "Oh my gosh, love Steve Howey!" Then Bryan Greenberg, who appeared in *Bride Wars* with Steve, told me this at his recent concert: "We had some good times. We shot that in Boston," he laughs, then adds that he can't say anything more about that on the record. "But I think Steve's great. I love Steve —I can say that."



a lot of it." He also appeared in two forthcoming films: *Making Babies* with Eliza Coupe and Ed Begley Jr. ("It was fun to play this guy, because I didn't play silly or stupid, so that was interesting.") and Netflix's *Game Over, Man!* with Adam Devine, Anders Holm, and Blake Anderson. "I play a homosexual bad guy. It's the *Workaholics* guys and they have some cool people in it." The bad guys take over the hotel, and as Steve and his partner are clearing a room, they indulge in an intimate moment. "They look at each other, full-on kiss —me and this guy Mac Brandt, who is this big, redheaded guy. I'm like, 'Real quick!'" he says about the kissing scene. "And he's like, 'Yeah.' I take my shirt off. He rips open his shirt and I grab him and I throw him and we get on the bed. The other guys are hiding and going, 'What the fuck is going on?' It's going to be really weird, but really funny. I really like that role 'cause he's so different from Kev, and that's the fun of it." Getting to perform his own stunts in the film was a definite highpoint for the future action star. "I got to fly out of a window, had a harness on. Pulled my shoulder. It was great. Fucking awesome. Got hit by a bed," he says excitedly.

Always on the lookout for his next project, when Steve is on hiatus, he's either reading scripts or busy writing —which doesn't leave him with much free time. "I'm a working dad with fucking kids, trying to stay sane. This is why people drive into a lake with their kids. 'Oh, why are the kids wet?' 'I drowned them.' Might sound morbid, but this is my way of not doing that to them, 'cause I just joke about it. Any parent would agree. People that don't have kids are just like, 'Oh my God, that's awful. That's horrible to say. That's your child. Why would you say that?'" he says in a voice that sounds exactly like Stuart's mother on *MADtv*. "It's because they're demons." He rips open a Splenda. "And they don't realize they're just trying to divorce their parents. Do you guys want us to stay together? 'Cause I'll get another family," he deadpans. "It's just crying for no reason, just bloody-murder crying. What! You're fed. You have everything you need. Why? OK. Just go. Here. *Frozen*. Let it goooo. Let it gooo!" he breaks into song. "Story of my life. Over and over and over again."

Jokes aside, as a father, Steve is as caring as he is protective of his children, especially when they're all out in public. "I don't have problems being harassed because I dare you. I get weird with my kids. I'm not going to leave my kid to take a picture with you. I have to say a lot, 'I'm with my kids, I'm sorry.' I make it respectful. You have a responsibility by giving that person a good story or a bad story for the rest of their life basically... Anonymity, it's precious when you don't have it. Everybody is chill. I like this level —that's why I really want to do more directing, producing, investing."

Will Wolf, Violet, and Knox be following in mom and dad's footsteps? "We're not going to let him. I mean, I'm not. I don't know what his mom thinks." He's talking about Wolf, who is at the age where he knows what his parents do and has been to set and called "cut." "We haven't really talked about it. I mean, the only way he's going to get into the business is if I'm right there, so if I have time to do it, yes. If I don't — because I'm not having some producer or some shithead talk to my kid the

way that they talk to these kids. It's cruel and it's fucking child abuse," he says vehemently.

Innately protective, Steve has had to step in to protect the children on set a few times, making him even more aware of what his kids would endure should they pursue a career in show business. "There was supposed to be this scene where I'm supposed to hit this keg to threaten this Russian guy, I'm like, 'Get the fuck out!' Boom. Hit the keg with this bat. I'm like, 'This is going to be really loud.' And she's holding the kid. I went, 'No. I'm not doing this.' I told the director, 'This is going to hurt our ears. We're putting this kid that has little baby eardrums...'" And they're like, Uh? I'm like, 'I don't give a fuck, man. I'm not going to put this kid in danger.'" And when the dialogue is overtly sexual, he asks that the kids be removed from the room. "There's some bad people in this industry. Kids are vulnerable and they can be taken advantage of. And I'm not even talking about the gross shit. I'll kill somebody...I don't even want to talk about it anymore. But that's the thing about being a dad, you think about that shit. And being in this industry and having him become an actor. I don't trust people that are good, let alone the ones I don't even know," he says ardently. Then there's the constant rejection actors experience, and the Herculean effort it takes to not feel damaged or take things personally, he tells me. "But your flaws are what make you so special. Also, it's one of those things like, especially for actors, your problems are like an imaginary friend. No one knows that you have one, and no one cares. No one can hear your thoughts, so keep them inside."

Steve has a few of his own projects in the works. "It's a little premature 'cause we don't even have a company name. I'll be starring in it, directing it, producing it," he says about the project he and his partner are in the midst of writing. Originally intended for a YouTube channel, once it's complete, it will be pitched around. "The pendulum for a lot of the stuff out there swings from mediocre to just fucking terrible, so you gotta be careful. This is like the same thing but different," he teases. Recently, Steve made his first foray into the tech world by investing in Opkix, described on their website as "the smallest, most powerful little camera that is smartphone friendly," before it goes public. "Some major tech companies are interested in it, but we're not doing that yet. We're not going to sell it that fast. I have an influencer agreement. There's a couple of things that need to happen in the tech world first. That's a whole other industry I know nothing about. Getting into that opened up things and I just thought: I could do this. I like this idea." Rest assured that Steve is not walking away from acting yet. "I love acting. I love the process. I'm also good at teaching it. We're all individuals and we're all very special. Whatever you've experienced in your life, put that in your acting... Comedy is drama with an attitude. It's harder than drama. Comedy is a finesse." Heed his advice, this is a guy who has mastered the art. **ML**

Keep up with Steve on Instagram and Twitter: @SteveHowey and Snapchat: @SteveHowey13. And don't miss *Shameless* on Showtime Sundays at 9 pm ET.