

ENTRE NOUS

# GEORGE Have a Nespresso with Hollywood's Conscience. CLOONEY

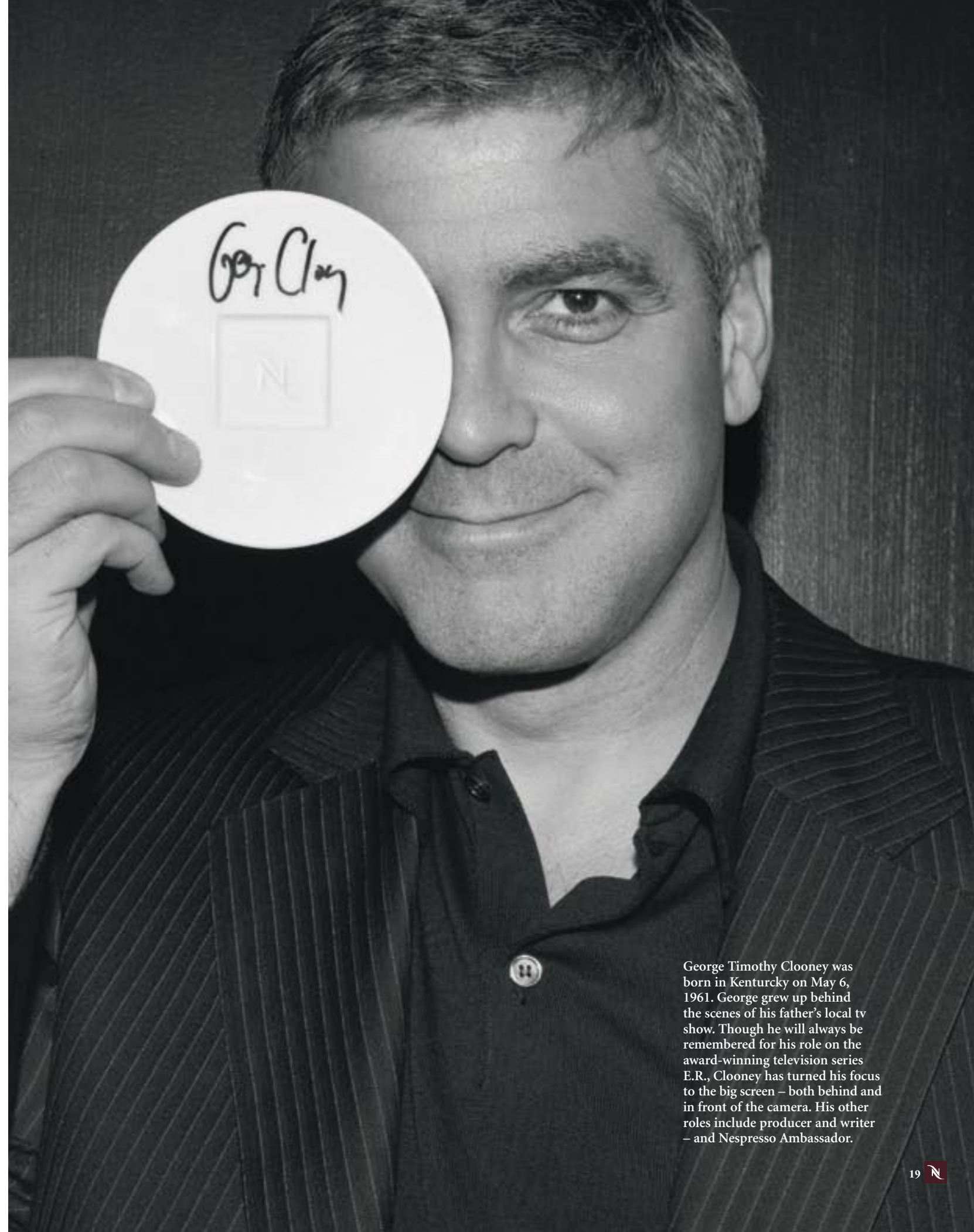
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INTERVIEW: ELISABETH SEREDA/LOS ANGELES

**N:** "Good Night, and Good Luck" is the second film that you have directed. As with your debut film "Confessions of a Dangerous Mind" this film also deals with the television industry: it portrays the true story of broadcast journalist Edward R. Murrow determined public challenge of Senator Joseph McCarthy's witchhunt in the early 1950s. What is it about television that fascinates you? How does it relate to the fact that your father was also a broadcast journalist with his own television show?

**George Clooney:** Television is a big part of my life. My father worked at a tiny TV station in Cincinnati, Ohio, that's how I spent my summers. My mother worked there too. They didn't have any money because a local TV show was making twelve grand a year. So there weren't any babysitters for me and my sister. WKRC was our babysitter. We'd go there from the time I was six years old. And you'd hang out. By the time I was eight or nine I was a cue card boy. And I was operating the teleprompter for my dad by the time I was eleven. I was a floor director, pointing to the camera for which camera. I grew up in that world. All of it was exciting. But the most exciting thing was to sit on the floor and watch my father with all these great reporters sitting around, listening to them pitch what they thought was the lead news story. I sat there for ten years of my life and watched how a news program was born. I was fascinated by that. Growing up as the son of an anchorman who was also a news director — he wrote his own news — my father's battle was always with the general manager of the local station. And the battle was trying not to let entertainment push news off the air. This was in 1968, so it's not something new. It's a constant battle. So that certainly influenced me from an early age.

**N:** You are known for supporting talented young directors in your role as producer with your friend Steven Soderbergh, with whom you founded the production company Section Eight. As an actor you are also open to unconventional scripts and accept significantly lower fees, for example with the film "Syriana". This is unusual for Hollywood. Do you have a mission?

**George Clooney:** I am a fan of particular moments of bravery. And with this film, "Good Night, and Good Luck", I found that there were books written about how McCarthy was the good guy and Murrow was wrong. And I started to worry about history. And I wanted to recalibrate it again and remind people that it wasn't about that people that McCarthy had named ended up being communists. That wasn't ever the issue. The issue was using fear to erode civil liberties. And it is still the issue. There is a responsibility of the government not to panic and use fear to erode civil liberties. If you're a criminal you have the Writ of Habeas Corpus and a right to stand



George Timothy Clooney was born in Kentucky on May 6, 1961. George grew up behind the scenes of his father's local tv show. Though he will always be remembered for his role on the award-winning television series E.R., Clooney has turned his focus to the big screen — both behind and in front of the camera. His other roles include producer and writer — and Nespresso Ambassador.



and face your accuser, a speedy trial and a lawyer. If you're a prisoner of war you have the Geneva Convention rights. The minute you say these guys are just detainees, we start to erode our civil liberty. I found all those parallels between the McCarthy era and now and they were good to bring up. There was a time in this country where Walter Cronkite, the anchorman, was the most trusted man in America. And he went to Vietnam and came back saying, guys, this is a stalemate at best. And Johnson didn't run for president again, because he said, if I don't have Cronkite I've lost the country. Today we don't have a reporter to do that. So it falls on us as people, and on us as film makers. I am in the lucky position to be able to try and push some of those things through, and it'll get us in trouble every now and then and I like that. I don't mind it, even sort of enjoy it. I work within the studio system, so as long as I give them an "Ocean's 12" every once in awhile, I get to make the films I really care for. In my business it's not a given that you get to stay around for a long time, so better make the best of it, and then when they take it all away you can say well, at least we took a couple of swings.

**N:** Civil courage plays an important role in your work. In "Syriana," for which you also received the Oscar for Best Supporting Actor, a CIA agent finds himself entangled in a complex web of political intrigue and corruption in the oil industry. How can and should the average citizen (not just the celluloid hero) practise civil courage?

**George Clooney:** Talk about it. Be informed. Don't buy products that you know support the wrong message. I have an electric car that you wouldn't believe. It's all electric, hundred percent electric. And it's literally the size of this table. But it goes zero to 60 in four seconds. Faster than a Porsche Turbo. So I pull up in this little thing. And some big guy pulls up next to me. And he's laughing at me. Then voooooom! It's very fast. Yeah, alright, see ya later, pal. In the rearview mirror! (laughs) I'm not a big gas guzzler but it's tricky, of course, because then you go and fly on a private jet and you're using up a lot of gas. So there's all these conflicts along the way but you try to walk the walk as much as possible.

**N:** For "Syriana" you gained 30 pounds in 30 days. What particular dishes did you eat to gain so much weight? What dishes did you allow yourself to eat to slim down again?

**George Clooney:** I was at my house at Lake Como so I ate ice cream and pasta. The scary thing was how easy it was to put on the weight. And how did I take it off? It was depressing how long it took to take off. I didn't feel good at all. I did all the usual things: eat healthy and exercise.

**N:** You have a summer residence in Laglio on Lake Como. You embrace the Italian way of life. Is there a hidden European in you and how is he different from the American side of you?

**George Clooney:** I needed a place to get away. It is always good to get away from Hollywood. When I am sitting in the town square watching mothers play with their children and sing and dance with their children, I realize, we don't have that in America. We're missing that. It was scenes like those that gave me back some feeling of what life is really all about. What is really important. America is about work. In Europe people know how to live. And I like being able to go back and forth.

**N:** Is the American in you responsible for the fact that you are co-investor in a Las Vegas gambling complex?

**George Clooney:** I shot two films in Las Vegas, both "Ocean's", and the discussion about our own Casino started with a bunch of friends, mostly Rande Gerber who knows about such things. Hey, I might be losing my shirt on this one! (laughs)

**N:** Especially in Italy the coffee culture is extremely developed. Do you have your own coffee ritual here in the US? Is there a special "coffee time" of the day integrated into your daily routine? Or some thing relating to coffee that you especially enjoy?

**George Clooney:** In Italy I started drinking espresso after a heavy meal – and in Italy meals are usually long and heavy! We celebrate life there and it shows in the way you eat and drink. In America it's never been a habit. So "coffee time" in Italy is always after a meal.



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**N:** You have had a close relationship with director Steven Soderbergh since the film “Out of Sight” and also enjoy a partnership through your joint production company. When was the last time you and Steven had a cup of coffee together?

**George Clooney:** Our production offices are on the Warner Bros. studio lot. It’s a huge backlot with many soundstages and the nice thing is, you have coffee carts on every corner. There’s literally a guy standing there with a rolling coffee machine and he’s asking you – always with a smile – which kind in what size cup with what what kind of milk you’d like to have. Steven and I have stopped there many times. And since we’re always talking about a new project or a new idea, we do it while sipping coffee, too.

**N:** Your work with young talent also includes teaming up with great artists from outside the Hollywood mainstream. For the Nespresso advertising campaign you personally requested the French director Michel Gondry, who is perhaps best known for his unique and inventive commercials and music videos for names such as Björk and the Chemical Brothers. His film “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” with Kate Winslet received rave reviews. Does your work for Nespresso signal the start of a closer collaborative relationship? What do you like about Michel Gondry?

**George Clooney:** I first noticed him through “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” and thought, now here’s a really interesting director. Then someone told me he had done lots of commercials and music videos. So this commercial for Nespresso was a good way to get to know him and, if we find a project that fits, I would definitely work with him again. I tell you something about that shoot: it was on the day the Oscar nominations came out. I had scheduled it that way. Because when you just received five nominations for the biggest film industry award and your director tells you: “George, could you hold the cup a little higher”, you are not in danger of getting a big head! (laughs)

**N:** After your claim that you would neither remarry nor have children, both Nicole Kidmann and Michelle Pfeiffer bet and lost that you would do both by age 40. You returned the money they paid up, but refreshed the bet for double or nothing until you’re 50. What is it besides the cash keeping you single?

**George Clooney:** Here we go. I knew that was coming. I mean, we do a movie about entertainment pushing news out – and then I got to answer that! I will say this out loud now officially: I am not dating Brad Pitt or Matt Damon. I’m not involved. I clearly have learned nothing about relationships. I’ve failed miserably at all of them. I’m saying, it was always me. You can’t really sit around and say “I’ve been a great success. I should be putting out books on relationships. How to Date, by George.” Clearly I should stick to directing. That seems to be what I’ve learned the most.

**N:** In conclusion, a last question: What is definitely not your cup of coffee?

**George Clooney:** A “normal” coffee! (laughs) ☕

