

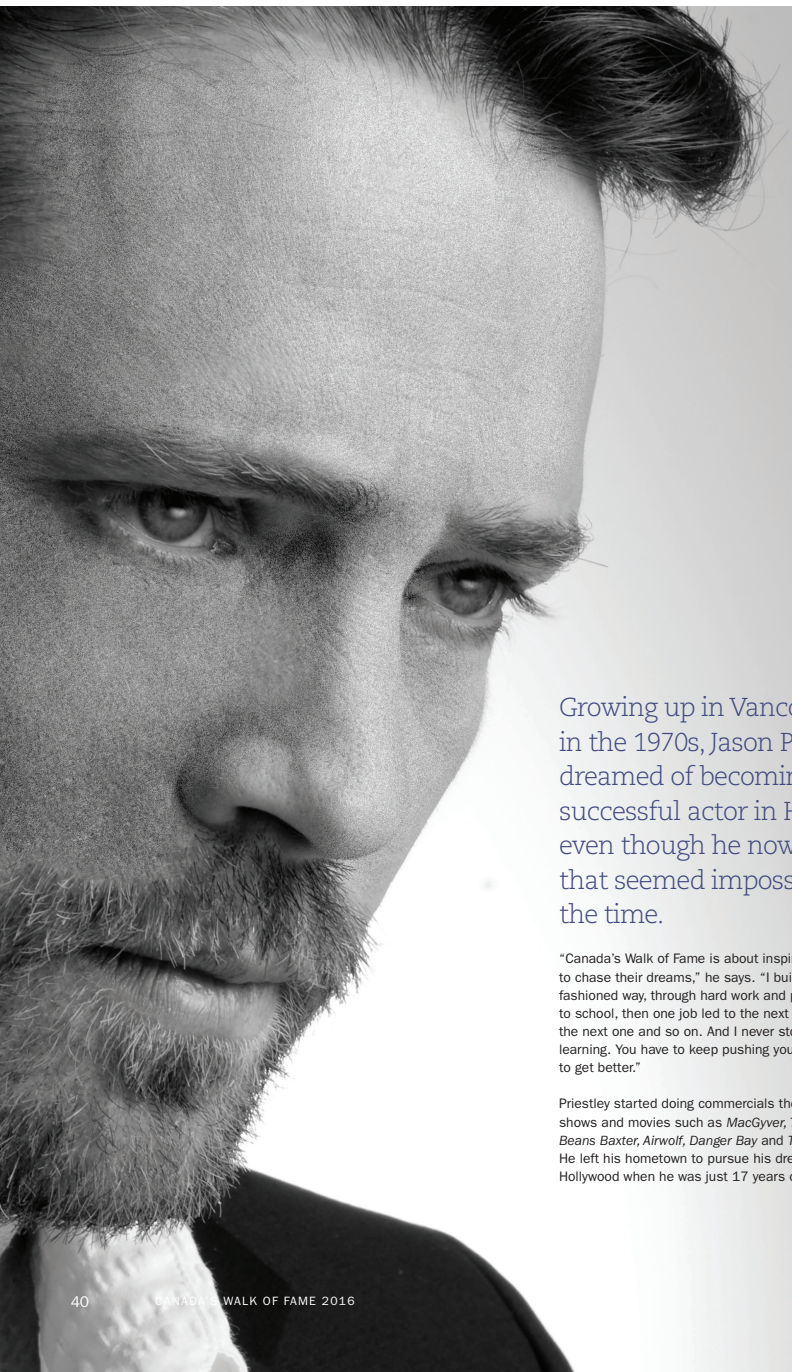


HOLLYWOOD DREAMER

A PROLIFIC VANCOUVER ACTOR, DIRECTOR AND PRODUCER
PERSEVERES TO WORLDWIDE SUCCESS

By Suzanne Alyssa Andrew

Photography by Matt Barnes



Growing up in Vancouver, BC in the 1970s, Jason Priestley dreamed of becoming a successful actor in Hollywood, even though he now admits that seemed impossible at the time.

"Canada's Walk of Fame is about inspiring young people to chase their dreams," he says. "I built my career the old fashioned way, through hard work and perseverance. I went to school, then one job led to the next one, which led to the next one and so on. And I never stopped studying and learning. You have to keep pushing yourself in this business to get better."

Priestley started doing commercials then landing roles on TV shows and movies such as *MacGyver*, *The New Adventures of Beans Baxter*, *Airwolf*, *Danger Bay* and *The Boy Who Could Fly*. He left his hometown to pursue his dream in 1987 and hit Hollywood when he was just 17 years old.

Now, after 30 years in the business, Priestley is still best known for his breakout role as Brandon Walsh on *Beverly Hills, 90210*, which aired from 1990 to 2000 on Fox and also in syndication worldwide. The show chronicled a decade of friendships, relationships and glamorous young characters grappling with the tough socio-economic issues of the time. Priestley directed episodes of the show and was also an executive producer. He was nominated for two Golden Globes for his role.

He's also recognized for playing Richard "Fitz" Fitzpatrick and both directing and producing on the HBO Canada comedy series *Call Me Fitz* (2010 to 2013). The show won multiple Canadian Screen Awards including Best Comedy Series as well as multiple Directors Guild of Canada Awards. It was nominated for 16 Gemini Awards and three Canadian Comedy Awards. Priestley won a Canadian Comedy Award for Best TV Performance for it in 2011. Other TV projects include Priestley's memorable roles on *Tru Calling*, *Masters of Horror*, *Medium* and *My Name is Earl*.

One of his most recent projects is starring as Matt Shade, a former hockey player turned private investigator on the Canadian dramedy *Private Eyes*, which airs on Global TV. The show begins shooting its second season in Toronto this fall.

As a result of working steadily throughout his career, Priestley has starred in more than 30 films with numerous credits in TV. He expanded beyond acting into directing and producing early on, because it's work he enjoys: "they offer different challenges to me than performing in front of the camera," he says.

One of his early directorial projects was *Barenaked in America* (1997), a documentary about the popular Canadian band, The Barenaked Ladies. He went on to direct other made-for-TV movies and feature films including *Cas & Dylan*, which won Best Canadian Film at the Toronto International Film Festival in 2013 as well as film festival awards in 2014 in L.A., Newport Beach, San Diego and Whistler.

Priestley was honoured with the ACTRA National Award of Excellence in 2015 for his contribution to Canada's film and television industry.

He says he's prolific simply because he's a fan: "That's what made me want to get into the industry to begin with and it's what keeps me motivated today."

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Priestley spends most of his time in Los Angeles now, but he's frequently in Canada working on various projects. Though he attained his Hollywood dream, he recognizes heading to Hollywood isn't as crucial as it used to be.

"Things have changed a lot since I was a young actor," he says. "There isn't such a need to rush to Los Angeles anymore. More and more things are cast off self-tapes. And there is so much production in Vancouver and Toronto. I would suggest to young actors that they stay in Vancouver or Toronto and work. Working as an actor is the best thing you can do."

Priestley published a best-selling book, *Jason Priestley: A Memoir* in 2014. He's married to make-up artist Naomi Lowde and is a father to a son and a daughter, Dashiell and Ava. He's an avid hobby racecar driver, dog owner, hockey fan, cook and fine wine enthusiast, and maintains close ties to the Canadian west coast, describing Vancouver as "one of the most beautiful cities I've ever seen." He also enjoys fishing trips to Ucluelet BC, where he owns The Terrance Beach Resort.

Perhaps one of his most Canadian achievements (prior to the Canada's Walk of Fame induction) was in 2013 when Tim Hortons named a donut The Priestley. Of this year's induction, however, Priestley says, "I'm a very proud Canadian, and now to be a permanent part of something like this is incredible."

Suzanne Alyssa Andrew is the author of the novel, *Circle of Stones* (Dundurn Press, 2015) and an editor for Taddle Creek magazine.