





STOLICHNAYA CAMPAIGN: ALL TRUE CONNOISSEURS OF VODKA KNOW THAT IT IS BEST SERVED CHILLED. THIS CAMPAIGN FOR STOLICHNAYA TOOK THAT SIMPLE INSIGHT AND DEPICTED JUST HOW DEVOTED STOLI DRINKERS ARE TO THEIR VODKA—EVEN IF IT MEANS FREEZING THEIR BUTTS OFF TO ENJOY IT.

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### DOG IS LOVE

During the course of our first conversation, Weiner (pronounced like “whiner,” a fact that no doubt has invited snickers from childish observers since the toddler Clay Weiner first spoke it to a stranger) excused himself to take his beloved, 12-year-old paraplegic black Lab mix named Mona for a “walk.” This was accomplished by gently lifting Mona’s stricken hindquarters, enabling her to convey herself to the apartment’s bathroom under the ebbing power of her operable front legs. Once there, he helped the dog conclude her business by gently applying pressure in the area of her paralyzed bladder or colon, thus releasing her urine or excrement. This has been routine for Weiner for three years; for Comey, the act has been routine since a car struck Mona in 2000.

The scene fascinated me. And made me uncomfortable, even a little sad. It was the essence of a man in a moment. In a business of selfishness, in a megalopolis of narcissists, in a nation of materialists, in a world of egoists, I realized in watching Weiner “walk” Mona, I had met a young man of compassion and depth. If you want to know a man’s soul, ask his dog.

### MAN IN MOTION

“Boredom,” Weiner once told *Creativity* magazine, “has never been something I understood.” Or experienced. He is a man in motion, painting, designing, writing articles and ads, art directing film, or designing the prints for Comey’s collection. For better or for worse, he fits no mold. He’s a man with interests as varied as his talents, with varying degrees of success in each.

Fortunate to look years younger than his age, 29, Weiner has been moving in the streets of New York for a dozen years. In fact, he was not born here; he just arrived early, a feat he keeps repeat-

ing. A precocious child of caring, supportive (but ultimately divorced) parents, Weiner spent his youth in Shaker Heights, a leafy Cleveland suburb renowned for its tile-roofed homes, prosperous contentment, homogeneous peacefulness, Teutonic cleanliness, bourgeois gracefulness, and, evidenced by the city’s website, numbingly chirpy Midwestern-ness.

For those reasons and others, young Clay wanted out of Shaker Heights. With his parent’s tacit permission, he decided not to spend his high school junior-year summer tossing the morning paper on neighborhood stoops or languidly drinking malts with Sally on sunny Chagrin Boulevard. Instead, Weiner elected to do something *waaaaay* different.

With a singer-songwriter roommate who looked like Jesus but was addicted to heroin, he subleased an apartment from a close friend’s older sister in the East Village. That summer, while most New Yorkers with time to kill consider more relaxed pursuits and cooler climes, “Local Clay” of Shaker Heights chose to earn his living as a bike messenger. Imagine

the tales he told classmates upon his return to Shaker Heights High School in September.

Upon high school graduation, Weiner left to study film at USC in Los Angeles, but New York’s appeal lured him back. He returned, entering Columbia University to study philosophy. These first years in New York were never easy but always interesting. He lived in a cheap apartment in Williamsburg, Brooklyn, hanging out at local dives such as The Bar and Enid’s Bar, where, he recalls, “you basically knew everyone, could explore everything, and had plenty of time to fuck around—too much time, actually.” Intelligent and tireless, Weiner was also easily distracted by the city’s numerous less savory temptations, including drugs. “Williamsburg seemed a great place to never grow up,” he said, so he left and moved back to the more responsible community of the Lower East Side.

In 1994, while still at Columbia, Weiner answered a university posting for a part-time job in the set design department of *Late Night With Conan O’Brien* at NBC. There, Weiner found himself drawn to the writer class, especially their world view and discontent. After that, he decided to take time off from college and pursue writing full time, taking a job as a comedy writer with the



MEAN POPULAR GIRL, MTV: "WE DISCOVERED THROUGH DEMOGRAPHIC RESEARCH THAT 90 PERCENT OF THE MTV2 AUDIENCE ARE ADOLESCENT BOYS, SO I THOUGHT IT WISE TO PEPPER THE CHANNEL WITH A REALLY OBNOXIOUS MEAN POPULAR GIRL—THE KIND OF GIRL WHO CAN MAKE YOU FEEL LIKE A TOTAL LOSER AT THE DROP OF HER CELL PHONE," WEINER EXPLAINS.



INTRO GUY CAMPAIGN FOR MTV: "THIS IS A CHARACTER I CREATED WITH MY FRIEND LENA BEUG," WEINER SAYS. "HE'S A REALLY SPECIAL BOY WITH SPECIAL TALENTS. HE HAS A ZEST AND EXUBERANCE FOR MUSIC AND A PURE IMAGINATION. WE WANTED TO GET AT THE CORE OF WHAT MTV STOOD FOR. I DON'T KNOW IF WE DID THAT, BUT I CAN SAY I HAVE A FAN CLUB OF MILLIONS OF TEENAGERS."

“My pop always encouraged me to find something that makes

*Dana Carvey Show* where he met and worked with writer Robert Smigel, creator of Triumph the Insult Comic Dog of *Late Night With Conan O'Brien* and the longest-serving writer still at *SNL*. After *Dana Carvey*, Weiner returned his focus to design and personal artwork. A few talented acquaintances in advertising encouraged him to try their business.

“I was trying to find a creative role in which you could have both control of the words and their delivery. In comedy writing, I’d tear my hair out coming up with a good insight only to later see it botched or tossed away. With advertising, I was finally able to massage and shape ideas long enough so that their true worth was revealed,” Weiner says.

His breakthrough in advertising came when he wrote, directed, and appeared in his first major campaign for MTV. The odd-ball spots were an immediate popular success, garnering Weiner a teenage fan club and top honors at the One Show. The spots show Weiner at his deadpan, dancing-fool best—a sort of hipster-weirdo similar to Napoleon Dynamite, which begs the question: Which came first, Napoleon’s chicken egg-gathering job or Weiner’s droll chicken dance?

Eventually, Weiner joined the agency world full time, first and briefly with Cliff Freeman and Partners, and now with Publicis/N.Y. His appearance inside Publicis’ big, pastel, eerily quiet offices seemed incongruous after our earlier encounter in the apartment with Mona. But his relationship with the agency affords him new opportunities to spread his wings and apply bigger, bolder ideas through collaborations with art director/creative partner Alan Vladusic (first from Bosnia, and lately of Germany). *Boards Magazine* named the duo “Best International Creative Team Under 30.”

Currently, Weiner is hard at work holding down his day job and directing a series of animated commercials that will break during this year’s MTV Video Music Awards and are the genesis of a forthcoming MTV show about puberty.

me happy, then find a way to make a living doing it,” says Weiner.

“Having my own show has been a goal of mine since I was little. I grew up loving Chuck Berris, who was doing reality TV before reality TV. I love the tube, but it is sad what passes for TV these days. I’d love to resurrect the unique set of values that Berris pioneered, but which reality programming today totally butchers.”

It is at this stage in his career, as a Big Agency Man, that I met Clay Weiner, man in motion, mold breaker. But where does he go from here? In a sense, this is a story without an ending. Even the middle chapters are incomplete. Will Weiner become one of New York’s leading advertising writers and creative directors? Will he focus solely on fashion design and marketing to propel the Rachel

Comey brand? Be an award-winning comedy writer? A journalist? Filmmaker? Forty-year-old has-been?

If you ask Weiner, he has no sure answers to these questions. Who can blame him? His career trajectory looks more like Coney Island’s Cyclone and is probably just as fun. “Career? I haven’t stuck around long enough to have a career,” he says, without irony or regret. “Anyhow, the thought of having a career sounds inherently lifeless. My pop always encouraged me to find something that makes me happy, then find a way to make a living doing it. The only problem is I enjoy doing too many things.”

The supreme advantage: youth. The priceless treasure: limber bodies and agile minds. Why choose a career when you can have a life? Why put all your talents in one discipline when you have the potential to be excellent in many?

Adult decisions can be postponed until the time comes to grow up. But until then you can dance, you can act, you can paint, you can write, direct, design, live, love, and “walk” your devoted dog until they call you in from play.

Or not—if you’re really lucky or really good. Like Clay. ■