

WOMAN

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TRISTAN WILDS

A BORN CHAMELEON, THE YOUNG ACTOR FROM STATEN ISLAND PROVES HE'S AS COMFORTABLE IN THE PALATIAL MANSIONS OF THE NEW 90210 AS HE WAS ON THE MEAN STREETS OF *THE WIRE*

"It's pretty dope to be the first black guy on *90210*," says Tristan Wilds by phone from Manhattan Beach, where he's filming the latest spin-off of the classic teen TV series. It's a long way from his Staten Island home, and a big departure from the work he has pursued in his brief career so far. The youngest boy in a working-class family of six kids, Wilds (who is actually half black and half Dominican) didn't choose to become a professional actor until high school, but success came quickly. He landed his first major part on the 2005 miniseries *Miracle's Boys*, about teenage orphans in Harlem, then nabbed a supporting role in the acclaimed Ryan Gosling vehicle *Half Nelson* the next year. But his big break came when he was asked to audition for the gritty Baltimore police drama *The Wire*—his favorite show. "I've got to kill this," he remembers telling himself.

After countless callbacks, the show's creators told him they thought he was too mature for the part. Instead, they wanted him to try out for the more complex character of Michael Lee, a young loner who gets caught up in the gang life. "From there, it was just magic," he says. "It seemed like they wrote the part for me." On set, he swapped stories with hip-hop great Method Man, his castmate and a fellow Staten Island native, who used to frequent Wilds's father's barbershop. Of course, he had to make sacrifices too. "I barely made it to senior prom," he recalls. "I couldn't get my hair cut, because the next day I was working, so I had to wear a hat."

But his thoughtful, self-contained performance on *The Wire* has made him an in-demand young star. Jay-Z cast Wilds as his nephew in his latest video, and Wilds also appears as Dakota Fanning's teenage love interest in *The Secret Life of Bees*, a coming-of-age tearjerker set in segregated 1960s South Carolina. Then there's *90210*, which seems destined to turn him into a teen idol. It's a diverse body of work for an actor who's still just 19, but Wilds says that's a reflection of his personality. "I like to switch and change. People ask my friends all the time, 'What kind of style does Tristan have? What does Tristan like?' They're like, 'We can't even tell you.' And they've been around me all my life." **JESSE ASHLOCK**

TRISTAN WILDS IN LOS ANGELES, AUGUST 2008

PHOTOGRAPHY ADAM WHITEHEAD

STYLING JESSICA DE RUITER

SHIRT DIESEL JEANS REISS

TIE BAND OF OUTSIDERS

BELT VINTAGE FROM DENIM REVIVAL

GROOMING JASON MURILLO (FRANK REPS)

SPECIAL THANKS DEWITT CANON (ALCHEMY VANLINES)

DIGITAL TECHNICIAN AND RETOUCHING SIMON PERRY

90210 IS SHOWING NOW ON THE CW. *THE SECRET LIFE OF BEES*

IS OUT NOW FROM FOX SEARCHLIGHT PICTURES