

GO WITH
THE GRAIN
Irresistible risottos
by Diana Henry

**THE FACELIFT
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under the knife

**'MOTHERS OF
GIRLS ARE ALL
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woman who doesn't
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**MAD ABOUT THE GIRL
WHY HOLLYWOOD CAN'T
RESIST JANUARY JONES**

stella

KEEPING UP WITH JONES

Worshipped for her role as the serenely beautiful Betty Draper in the television series 'Mad Men', January Jones has hit the big time, confounding her ex-boyfriend Ashton Kutcher's prediction that she would never make it as an actress. So why isn't she enjoying her success more, asks **Helena de Bertodano**

I am sitting in the bar of the Loews Hotel in New Orleans waiting for January Jones, the actress who plays the immaculate Betty Draper in the hit television series *Mad Men*, set in a New York advertising agency in the early 1960s. I am scanning the room for someone tall and blonde, who resembles

Grace Kelly. Suddenly there is a slight, bespectacled woman standing in front of me holding out her hand. I had not even noticed her come into the room. 'Hi,' she says. She looks like a teenager and it crosses my mind that maybe this is someone come to tell me that January is running late. Seeing my confusion she smiles: 'I'm January.'

For the first few minutes, as she talks, I scrutinise her face for any signs of Betty Draper, who, as the bored housewife of the handsome philandering Don, has

Photograph by Nicolas Wagner

Corbis Outline

become one of the main draws of the Emmy award-winning show about to begin its third season on BBC Four. Jones has shoulder-length blonde hair that falls softly to her shoulders, nothing like the stiff coiffure of Betty. And behind her glasses, which she wears to combat an astigmatism, she has intense blue eyes. She wears no make-up but still looks pretty, although you do not really see it until she smiles. And it isn't until she raises her eyebrows in a slightly quizzical expression that I see Betty.

'Hot chocolate, please,' she tells the waiter, who looks flummoxed. It is early evening and Frank Sinatra is crooning on the sound system, while everyone around sips cocktails. But Jones is adamant and the waiter says he'll see if he can get it from the restaurant. It is as if Jones is determined to be the opposite of Betty, who usually has a glass of red wine or Scotch in her hand. She is wearing a baggy multicoloured cardigan from Topshop – 'my favourite store' – over a royal-blue long-sleeved T-shirt and tight black jeans with brown knee-high boots. As she talks she keeps yanking the sleeves of the T-shirt down to cover her hands or twisting a yellow hair-band round and round her finger. Although friendly, she is reserved – at least at first.

Jones, who recently received her second nomination for a Golden Globe, is in New Orleans shooting *The Hungry Rabbit Jumps*, a thriller in which she stars as Nicolas Cage's wife. The day after we meet she is flying to Berlin, where she will play Liam Neeson's wife in another thriller, *Unknown White Male*. 'I keep being cast as a wife – I think I've aged myself [playing Betty]. But these wives are very different. I say no to all the sad roles I'm offered. I'm sad for five months out of the year when I play Betty; I don't want to be sad at any other time.'

M*ad Men*, which focuses on the secretive, complicated lives of the employees of a glamorous advertising agency, predates the drastic social changes of the 1960s and documents a time when sexism and racism were still blatant. The combination of the



'IT MAY BE CALLED "MAD MEN", BUT I THINK THE STORYLINES FOR THE WOMEN ARE ALMOST MORE INTERESTING THAN THE ONES FOR MEN'



FROM TOP JONES WITH JOHN HAMM IN SERIES THREE OF 'MAD MEN'; IN 'LOVE ACTUALLY' (2003)

three main female characters in *Mad Men* – Betty Draper, Joan Holloway, the curvaceous office manager and flirt, and Peggy Olson, the bright young copywriter struggling to get a foothold in a man's world – are profound reflections on the female condition, not just in the 1960s but with considerable relevance today. Matthew Weiner, the writer-producer behind *Mad Men*, seems to have an extraordinary understanding of women lacking in most other television drama.

'I think it's the best writing for women on television,' says Jones. 'It may be called *Mad Men*, but I think the storylines for the women are almost more interesting than the ones for men.'

The three main women characters rolled into one would be something like the modern woman.'

Jones – who has appeared in films including *Love Actually*, *Anger Management* and *American Wedding* (all 2003) – first auditioned for the role of Peggy. Indeed, there was no Betty Draper in the original script. 'I auditioned twice for Peggy, but Matt said I was lacking a naivety in my eyes.'

He asked Jones back to audition as Draper's wife. 'I was like, "Oh, consolation prize." But I wanted to be in the show, even if it was just as window-dressing. Betty turned out to be something much more.'

Weiner wrote a couple of scenes for her. 'It was one of the most remarkable auditions I've ever seen,' he said recently. 'If you saw that audition, you'd be like, "Oh my God, that's the show." She was that person, Betty Draper. She was restrained. She was a bit childlike – the childishness of Betty Draper, that's from her. I didn't write that.'

Jones, now sipping her hot chocolate, agrees. 'I am very childish. No one ever told me to grow up. I still sleep with my baby blanket. I have two younger sisters and we're all that way. We were just home [in Iowa] for Christmas with my parents and it was like being little kids again. I live in LA now, but I love going back to the Midwest and wearing my pyjamas and glasses every day. Even though I'm thirty-whatever now.' She pauses to think. 'I'm 32 – my birthday was a couple of days ago.'

I ask her how she celebrated. 'I bought some jewellery in the French Quarter and had a massage. I don't really know anyone here – except Bryan Batt [who plays the closeted gay art director, Sal, in *Mad Men*]. I spent New Year's with him.'

Jones – who was named January after a character in a Jacqueline Susann novel – grew up in a tiny town in South Dakota, where her father worked as an exercise physiologist and her mother managed a sporting goods shop. 'It was a very free childhood. We'd come home when it was dark, ride horses, never wear shoes in the summer. I was pretty rebellious as

a teenager and I didn't like school – I've never liked people telling me what to do.'

At 18 she took a bus to New York where she began working as a model, though at 5ft 7in she was not tall enough to establish herself properly. So she moved to Los Angeles to try acting. 'I sat in on some acting classes when I first got to LA but it wasn't for me,' she says, her soft voice still carrying a strong trace of the Midwest. 'I would look at the teacher and think, "What makes you the expert?"'

This flintiness is also apparent when she talks about how she dresses. 'I've never had a stylist. I don't need to pay someone a bunch of money. I know what I look good in.' These days she is courted endlessly by designers. 'That's one of my favourite perks.' The comparison to Grace Kelly is, she says, 'very flattering'. 'But I could never live up to that. I think Betty wants to look like Grace Kelly, though – it pleases her very much when people say she resembles her.'

Despite the rampant sexism portrayed in *Mad Men*, there is a pang of nostalgia about the show so acute at times that one almost wishes to turn back the clock. 'It's a nostalgia that even I feel,' says Jones, 'and I didn't live then. Women have so many more choices now, but I think maybe the world was a nicer place then – happier and simpler. Now women feel they have to juggle and do everything: have a career, be a mother, be a wife.'

Not to mention the freedom people had to smoke and drink in those days. *Mad Men* seems to be shot in a haze of smoke, with alcohol being knocked back in almost every scene, regardless of the time of day. 'It's fun to be in a pregnancy belly and smoking a cigarette,' she says. 'And although I'm not condoning it, all these people' – she sweeps an arm around the packed bar – 'are children of that time: they turned out all right.'

On set the red wine is cranberry-grape juice, the Scotch is iced tea and the cigarettes herbal. 'But the beers with the pop-tops are real, which is fun: I drink a lot of beer.' She also smokes, going out into the rain to have a cigarette during

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JONES WITH 'MAD MEN' CO-STARS ELISABETH MOSS AND CHRISTINA HENDRICKS AT THE EMMYS

our meeting. 'I quit for a long time, but a lot of us picked it back up on *Mad Men*.'

At the end of season two the long-suffering Betty finally cheats on her husband. 'So many men came up to me afterward, irate: "How could Betty do that?" I was like "Have you not watched the last two seasons? Don's been cheating in every episode and that's OK, but the minute Betty does it, it's awful?" I went to DC a few months ago to lobby for the sharks bill [Jones is working on a campaign to protect sharks] and I met John McCain. He's a huge fan, and the minute I walked into his office he was like, "How could you!" I was like "You're weird, John McCain. I am not Betty."

Women on the other hand were cheering her on. 'They love that Betty's taken a stand. They were like, "Yes! Betty finally gets laid."

At the moment Jones is single. 'I'm not dating anyone. It's sad. Me and my dog are dating. He's a three-year-old Yorkie poodle called Max and he goes everywhere with me.' For three years she dated Ashton Kutcher, who told her she would not make it as an actress. 'Actually, that helped me,' she jokes today. 'I like a challenge.' She also dated the singer Josh

Groban and was recently linked to an Oregon lawyer. 'He came with me to the Emmys, but he's an old friend. Every time I make a plan for my life it gets ruined, so I don't make plans anymore. But maybe I should as I'm getting older and I really want to have a family one day.'

I ask Jones if she likes Betty. 'I love playing her. I don't know if I understand her very well. She's complicated. Maybe I am, too. She's a horrible mother. Once they put together a blooper reel with a whole section of cuts of Betty yelling at the kids: "Go bang your head against the wall," "Go watch TV." You don't realise how much crappy s— she says to the kids until you see it all together.'

At first she says she could not understand why Betty stayed in the marriage. 'When I got each episode I was like, "Why is she still with this guy?" It had to be explained to me that she couldn't leave. She had nowhere to go.'

She says John Hamm, who plays Don Draper, has become a good friend: 'We actually have a lot of fun on set. Even when Don and me are in the middle of a huge fight, after they say, "Cut," we're joking around.'

Despite everything, Jones says she does not feel secure in her profession. 'I feel now more than ever that I need to try to one-up myself. When I was nominated for a Golden Globe last year I freaked out. I was like, "Oh, great, that means I have to be, like, amazing all the time." I'm just waiting for someone to call me out and tell me I don't belong here.'

She does not want to give away too much about season three, but says that life looks better for Don and Betty, at least at the beginning. But this is *Mad Men*, and Betty's story arc is more compelling than ever as she finally stands up to Don.

In April shooting will commence on the fourth season. 'It may be the last one,' says Jones. 'I'm a firm believer in quitting while it's hot. Besides,' she adds, 'it can't go on for ever: I don't want to see Betty in Spandex in the 1980s.' ●

The new series of 'Mad Men' starts at 10pm on Wednesday on BBC Four