François Arnaud Is Hollywood's Quiet Chameleon

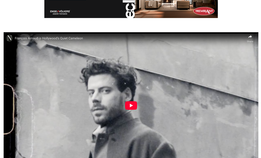
With every role, the Montreal-born actor peels back a new layer—quietly becoming one of his generation's most intriguing talents.

Writer **Alex Mac Donald**
Creative Director **Sandra Zakaem**
Photo Director **Jessica Lamont**
Styling **Frederique Gaudins**

François Arnaud isn't entirely sure where he lives nowadays—or more precisely, where he belongs. The **Montreal** born actor is holed up in the Laurentians, in a house he built with a friend during the pandemic, surrounded by whispering pines and the occasional deer wandering by his window. It's where he often retreats to recharge after performing emotionally demanding roles—most recently, in Gaston Lavaudan Étienne Brodeur-no-Cavendish's upcoming drama Someone's Daughter, where he plays a man kidnapped along with the criminal lawyer who once defended his mother's killer. "I'm a little bit of a hermit," he admits, his voice carrying the kind of quiet exhaustion he's rightfully earned. He says the scenes near remaking the room with mother-empty. "I'm glad I have my place in the woods here, but I also don't want to live in the middle of nowhere by myself. Maybe one day, but the quiet is loud."

Arnaud has spent recent years in Los Angeles, yet with his rights now set in New York and a heart that still tugs into toward Quebec, "home" is a slippery notion. "It's a weird time in my life, because I feel like I've gotten to some place where I can actually choose what I want to do," he says, leaning into the kind of calm that comes from hard-earned artistic rigor. "I've always enjoyed being everything everything, all at once. But I'm looking for things that make me feel more grounded and to live in a place that mirrors how I feel about the world. And that's become increasingly difficult."

Luke Taylor Suit



That tension between routine and stillness mirrors his career. Since breaking out as Quebec filmmaker Xavier Dolan's muse in Tom at the Farm, Arnaud has built a career on roles that demand he hold contradiction in tension—from his scheming Renaissance courtesan of the Showtime drama The Borgias to the eerie stoicism of the SF supernatural thriller Midnight, Texas, and now, the uneasy locker room of Grace's pay-before romance blurred drearly. Grace has angry, he's never comfortably settled into our corner of the industry, a confirmation that echoes his nomadic streak.

As a young actor, Arnaud felt the pull from south of the border, drawn to something bigger, louder, sooner than the polite restraint of Canadian life. "In the U.S., especially the big cities, there's something about the extremes that's appealing and can feel sensitive. It's a lot of things, but it's not boring. It's gotten it's edges. It's more punk." But having sort turned 30, he admits the thrill has dulled.

Prada Suit.

Increasingly uncomfortable with the political violence in the United States, Arnaud has a newfound appreciation for Canadian culture.

> "As I get older, the things that I found a bit beige about Canada, I'm like, you know what? Maybe kindness and niceness are underrated." *—François Arnaud*

He now inhabits a liminal space, geographically and professionally, where uncertainty feels less like a threat and more like an invitation. With a slate of daring indies and subversive dramas ahead, and the sort of wandering and magazine profiles are made of, he's letting instinct, not expectation, chart his next chapter. "I don't have a straight answer," he says, shrugging. Instead, he flows are all the questions pinpointing my brain. I'm trying to embrace this momentary indecisiveness."

For now, that open-endedness is drawing him back to Canada for work. This past spring, Arnaud was in Toronto filming Mount Hendy, Jacob Tierney's series about a secret same sex romance. Based on Canadian author Rachel Beck's Gone Changes book series, the drama casts Arnaud as Scott Hunter, a hockey star who falls for a male barista. Through a supporting role, the third episode belongs solely to him. "I was reading the script, and I called my agent. I'm like, 'Are you reading this? I don't know that I can do this. This feels like poetry,'" Arnaud says, laughing.

Versace Look, Hermès, and Bottega Veneta Shirt, Hermès Suit, Bottega Veneta Shoes.

"And then Jacob turns it on its head and it becomes super beautiful without being cheesy. And it's just sincere." That joy is rare and refreshing in queer storytelling, and part of what drew him to the project. Arnaud, who came out publicly in his mid-20s, says he felt the weight of representation early, fielding questions about his sexuality on talk shows. "There's almost AIDS lurking, or the main character has to die, or whatever. There's like a pressure and a heaviness to it," he says. "Mount Hendy is charged, but it's not shallow. It's escapism in the best possible way. I didn't do a lot of darker shit, so it's time to do something happier."

Off screen, Arnaud's learned to live with that same unapologetic fondness. When he announced he was bisexual in his Canadian Screen Awards speech, he didn't anticipate the backlash. "I'm like, I'm just being myself," he says. He already moved past it in his private life, and I wanted my public life to reflect that." While he wasn't looking to invite conversation about his private life, he wanted to feel aligned with who he really was. "I didn't feel ashamed about it, but for me, lying about it felt like a shameful act. I wanted to be in line with my values. This is what I believe in, and it's more important than whatever effect it has on my career.

That same refusal to live out of sync with himself guides his professional choices too. He opts for roles that challenge or fulfill him rather than ones that just look shiny on his IMDb page. "I had a moment recently where people were telling me to take work around for the next big thing. I've always up for bigger things, but the industry has already," he says.

Luke Taylor Suit. **Longchamp** Wool Polar Cardigan Jacket.

"If someone sends me a script for a cool indie that I love, and there's a great role in it, I can't say, 'Oh no, I'm going to work at home because this or that might happen.'" And so, Fuchsia, the absurdist debut feature from Bilbao director Mariano Biondi, landed on his desk. Arnaud plays Ignacio, a Spanish-speaking Canadian who's lost his girlfriend's positive, Arnaud plays one of her clients—a professional, possibly sociopathic DJ. "I like complicated parts," Arnaud says. "They force me to have empathy for people for whom I wouldn't have to read life."

That appetite for complexity grows way back. Arnaud accompanied his mother to plays as kinds as Cyrano de Bergerac when he was as young as eight. "I wanted to do grown-up stuff—even if I didn't understand it." He found that curiosity in amateur theatre and eventually the Conservatoire d'art dramatique de Montréal, where he first crossed paths with Dolan. The young director, then just 17, approached Arnaud after one of his plays. According to Arnaud, Dolan handed him a script and said, "Read this. We're going to go to Cannes with this."

Dior Suit.

Turns out Dolan was right. *I'm at me mets, the Cinéfest* coming of age drama he directed and stars in, marked him as a major new voice in cinema. Meanwhile, Arnaud's charming, magnetic performance as Antonin—the emotionally grounded boyfriend to Dolan's temperamental teen protagonist—immediately drew attention. Major auditions started falling into his lap. He recalls doing screen tests for a role in the Promo of the Caribbean series with Johnny Depp, sitting in waiting rooms with Jake Gyllenhaal and Ryan Reynolds for a Bourne film, and multiple meetings for a Spiderman movie. He didn't land any of those roles, but the sheer volume of opportunities felt like a sign he was cut out for Oscar bait's role in the sequel trilogy. "They kept bringing me back, and they never gave me a part."

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He now plays the Hollywood game with clearer eyes. He still shows up for the big auditions—"I'm notoriously throwing my hat in the ring," he says—but his heart lies elsewhere. His career feels less like a rising star and more like a steady, sustainable craft he's cultivated on his own terms. He's been nominated for a Canadian Screen Award 1000 than nominees. Also about Francis's Alice Guy-Blaché, the world's first female filmmaker. He also stars in Be Transit, Jacline Bertuzzi's slow-burning indie about a barmaid who forms an unexpected connection with a patron in the realm of an existential crisis. And he's just finished another hockey project. "It's a very straight-ice hockey film," he says, laughing, "where I play a certiteam character."

Boss x **Steiff** coat.

He admits he'd love to land a role in a series that lasts several years—a home base, for once—but he's not rushing it. In an era of AI disruption, studio reshuffling, and looming film tariffs, uncertainty is the only constant. Fortunately, he's built for it. With his range and quiet adaptability, he can weather the storm. The industry—hell, the world—may keep shifting underfoot, but he's the kind of actor who never loses balance.

Arnaud may not know where he's going, but right now, he's exactly where he needs to be: in the present, doing the work, and enjoying the ride. "I just try to be humble and grateful for the work that I get, and I try to enjoy every moment, every minute of the process. And I think it's made me a better actor."

École de Pensée coat, tank, and trousers; **Louis Vuitton** shoes; **Parts of Four** earring; socks stylist's own.

Grooming Steven Turpin using Oribe and Nars. **Assistant Photographer** Mitchell Wright. **Assistant Stylist** Laurie Babin. **Digitech** Aljosa Alijagic. **Post-production** Marius Burlan. **Videographer** Ariane Tara. **Photographed** at Studio Kiff in Montreal.

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