

Chad Smith- At Home With Chad Smith

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Lounging beside his Piano-shaped pool in the hills overlooking Hollywood, Chad Smith throws back his head and cracks up. "I've done so many interviews over years, it's hard not to sound like a baseball player repeating the same old clichés." He mugs for the tape recorder: "I'm just taking it one song at a time!" Funny but true. Though not the first drummer with the Red Hot Chili Peppers, Smith became the band's most recognized after joining in 1989, driving the Pepper's string of hit albums, while appearing nude on the cover of *Rolling Stone* and wearing an illuminated light bulb helmet at Woodstock II. Stunts like those earned him a bad-boy reputation, but watching Smith cradle his newborn daughter Ava, it's easy to see how his public persona defies reality.

"I'm really just a regular guy," he admits. By Hollywood standards, he's right. Living in a house once owned by Cary Grant, Smith manages to live well in peaceful simplicity. The furnishings are cozy and plush, while framed black & white photos, mainly of musicians complete the décor. "I started getting into photography four or five years ago," says Smith, who doesn't even own a camera. "There's a starkness to black & white that I like. I like the shadows." Classic shots of Jimi Hendrix, Max Roach, Elvin Jones, and Art Blakey line the hallways. Smith points to his prized photo, one of the few objects in the living room besides facing couches. Smith hunches over the piano bench to play a couple arpeggios. To his back, a xylophone sits on the balcony overlooking the Hollywood sign. Two worm mallets rest on the keys.



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Taunting, Muhammad Ali hovers over a sprawled Sonny Liston in a photo next to the table upstairs in the poolroom. The corners of the room disappear in shadow; a single light bathes the felt tabletop in a muted glow. Smith rolls a ball across the surface. He learned to play pool as a child in Detroit. "My father was quite a good player," he remembers. "I could never beat him." The game provided an early lesson. "I admired my dad dedication to what he loved and what he was really good at," Smith says. "I think I got that from him." Competition is in Smith's blood. Onstage it explodes in his thunderous drumming. Offstage, Smith channels it through his love of sports. The lanky drummer has played basketball since his teens, and continue to shoot hoops in the San Fernando Valley. "It's a good run", he says. "We're a bunch of out-of-work actors and musicians. Afterwards we tell each other how great

we were. I enjoy the camaraderie part of it."

Smith winces, gingerly touching a swollen ankle, recently sprained while playing basketball. He broke a few bones playing "beer drinkers" all. a practice frowned upon by Smith's and mates. "They get really upset," he clarifies. "We had to cancel a tour one time because of a softball injury. I broke my wrist."

Back downstairs, the television room opens onto the swimming pool. This is where Smith follows his favorite teams; particularly the Lakers. (He's a loyal season ticket holder.) A stack of framed photos awaits hanging, leaning against a wall next to the wide-screen TV. On top is a Neil Zlozower print of a young Keith Moon.

"Chad had a motorcycle injury, too," growls photographer Zlozower, who arrived at Smith's house to shoot photos for this article. Zloz knows, since he and Smith are old pals, and both share a love for motorcycles. Why? "They're dangerous," Smith grins. "I just like riding. I took my bike to the studio for the first time in four months. It was great. You're on your bike. You've got the wind in your face. You aren't close up. You see and feel different things than you do if you were in car."

But Smith loves car too, particularly cool, old ones. His father worked for Ford Motor Company, and Smith has a '65 Mustang in the garage, which he bought after recording *Mother's Milk*. "The Mustang is just a cool car," he says. "It's a car I always wanted as a kid."

Something is strangely missing from Smith's house. You don't see drums. His kits lie down the hill in the band's studio, where the Chili Peppers were working on material for the new album when we spoke to him. He keeps his family and privacy up here, among photos of his heroes.

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