

PETE WENTZ



DON'T CALL IT A COMEBACK

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Meteorologists (and metaphor enthusiasts) will tell you that lightning doesn't strike twice. Yet Notion is spending the afternoon in a sunny courtyard with a man that's never been in this much demand since... Well, since he was really in demand a decade (!) ago.

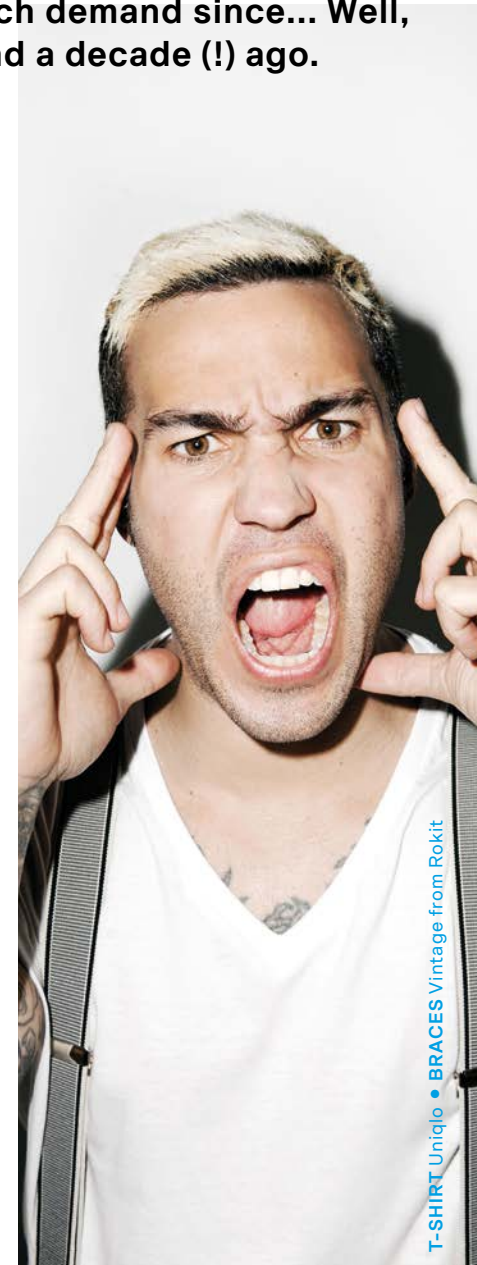
We're tucked away in a garden around the side of a London hotel that is the definition of 'nail-painting emoji'. Pete Wentz, he of pop-punk posterboys Fall Out Boy, is enjoying an iced coffee and is tinkering with his new Apple Watch. The whole thing is very 2015.

If, like me, you spent your moody, misunderstood years sweeping an angular haircut out your face and listening to Fall Out Boy, then the story of their success – and the subsequent second wave of their invasion – feels rewarding.

DANCE DANCE DANCE
After laying their early noughties roots in Chicago, the four boys – Patrick Stump, Joe Trohman, Andy Hurley and of course, Mr Wentz – blew up across the globe with 2005's *From Under The Cork Tree*, a giddy, raucous album studded with underdog anthems like *Sugar*, *We're Going Down*, *Dance Dance* and *A Little Less Sixteen Candles*, *A Little More Touch Me*. There was a Grammy nomination, regular appearances on Total Request Live and an arena tour performing to 10,000 fans a night.

They grew bigger and bigger in every way. Pete became a tabloid fixture due to his relationship with *Pieces Of Me* hitmaker Ashlee Simpson. Their next record, *Infinity On High*, began with a brief cameo from none other than Jay-Z, and a high-profile Thriller cover sent the band far from the parameters of the emo scene they were initially associated with.

The high school rejects who did their promo via Myspace were now a new generation's heartthrobs goofing off on the cover of *Kerrang!*, replacing N*Sync as glossy poster fodder. They were an embodiment of the state of music in 2005: broken hearts worn proudly on their sleeves.



And yet. And yet! While many bands blow up overnight and have their moment in the sun, Fall Out Boy have bottled their success, shaken it vigorously and popped the cork yet again. After a hiatus, they came back in 2013 for what is effectively Phase Two.

Pete has just been at Radio One, recording a Call Or Delete segment with Nick 'Grimmy' Grimshaw. The prank involved ringing up Mike from 5SOS and

telling him that his band was so bad it made Pete not want to play music any more. Pete is thinking of buying Mike some custom Nikes as a way of apology, or he might take him out for a load of drinks.

Given that they have to compete with the 5SOS's of the world, who didn't exist back in 2005, were Fall Out Boy tempted to just whack out a greatest hits album? Get the twentysomethings out of their hipster guises and back into their Etnies, that sort of thing?

"We weren't seeking a life of comfort here," he explains, giving his coffee a lazy stir and setting the ice cubes clanking about. "There's no archetype for the things that we wanted to do. Sometimes you can look to people who have done something before you. But we wanted it to be about new music, and that was a scary proposition."

It's not like Fall Out Boy's hits have dated or anything – bands are still making the same kind of playful pop – but even after a handful of years away from 'the biz' a lot can change.

"If you put out the wrong music, you can seriously damage your legacy. And there's all these people that believe in us. You don't want to destroy that," Pete says.

The result is Fall Out Boy, but dialled all the way up: a bigger, brassier, louder band. It's no coincidence 2014's single *Centuries*, with its frantic clapping, rousing chants and not-so-subtle sampling of Suzanne Vega's banger *Tom's Diner* – was used by ESPN to soundtrack their sports coverage. That's the kind of band Fall Out Boy are now: massive in every possible sense.

"The new stuff is definitely different," admits Pete, "When we were recording the new album my friends would say 'Oh you should do something like Dance Dance' or 'Is it going to sound like [From Under The] Cork Tree?' and I was like 'No! We can't do that'. What's the point making something that sounds like something we've already done, we can just go and perform that song, or

...Now we're like Fall Out Men

that album, if we want. But at the same time... you want to remind people of the spirit of your music, not do something that was a direct replication of that. So it was kind of terrifying, it's like..." he pauses for a few moments, thinking. "When you go against the grain you can end up with a handful of splinters."

He laughs at his turn of phrase, but it's apt. While being creative, innovating and pushing themselves was all well and good last time, sometimes it felt like the band's desire to escape the emo-brand was part of their creative burn-out before the hiatus. Sticking to what had worked would, admittedly, not be the worst idea in the world.

The fact that emo has all but been smeared off pop's complex spectrum can only be a good thing, because it's helped the band grow into something else without any sense of artistic compromise. They're still the same band, but the eyeliner, the hairstyles and the fashion has all changed with the times (having met in the afternoon, after his shoot for these very pages, Pete is sporting a short but impressively messy blonde 'do. "I just fuck around a lot," he admits, with a shrug).

Being catapulted into the dizzying heights of fame must, I say, have been a bit of a headache for Pete, who was only 27 when the band parted ways.

"So much of it was a hazy experience, so much of it happened too fast!" he says. "You don't realise that the ups would end, or that the downs would end, too. That perspective has been really helpful the second time around. When we were younger we splashed out. I used to always have a Christmas ham on the rider, because I could. It was kind of insane, but I wanted a ham, you know. But later, after a show, we were in the club, and I saw a few women were in our seating area, eating the cold ham. It was so gross and greasy. We ended up removing the ham after that."

He pauses again, taking a slurp of his coffee.

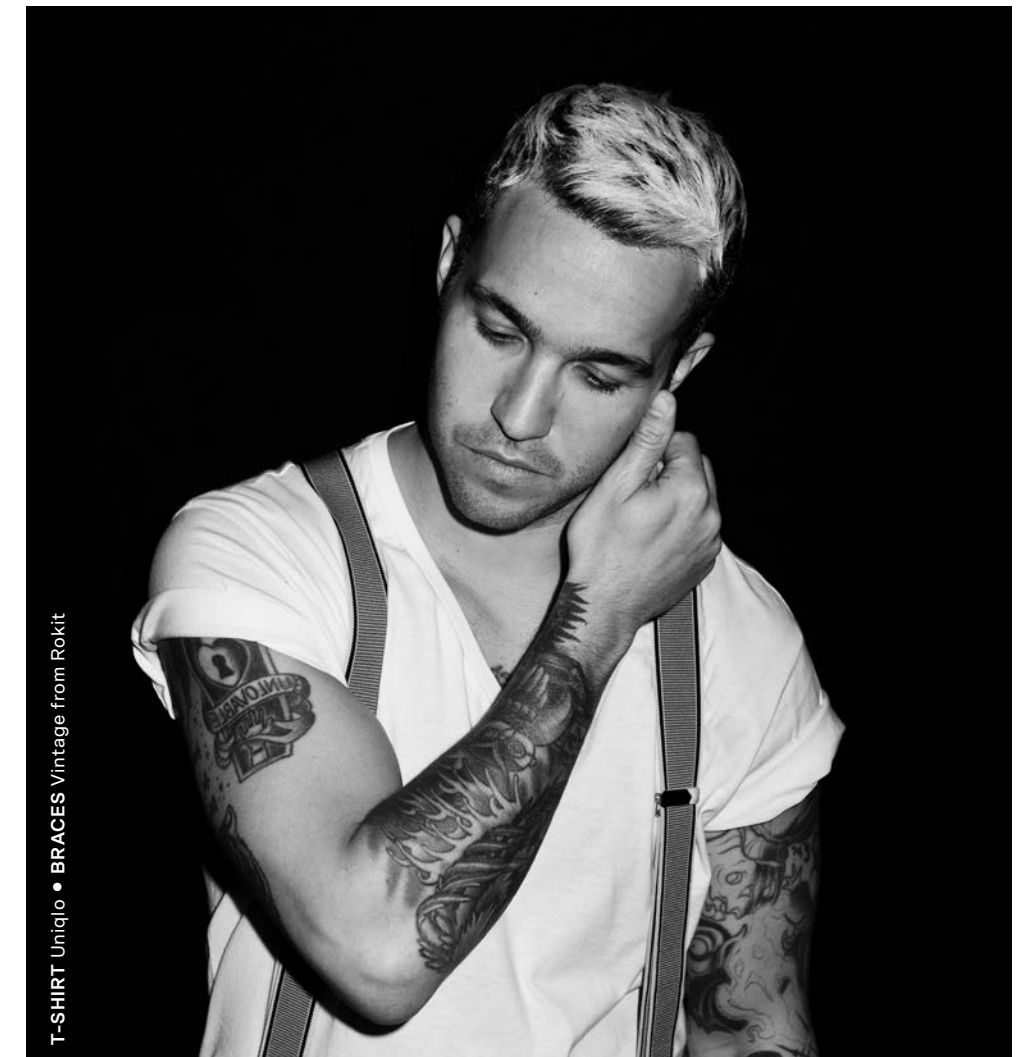
"...Now we're like Fall Out *Men*. That would be the tagline. I think we've realised that there are people that we want in our lives, and people that we perhaps don't. We have such a better handle on it now."

A renewed sense of street smart is always helpful, but as any pop star from yesteryear will attest, taste moves at a remarkable speed. Fast forward to 2015, with streaming and the internet letting consumers dip their toe here, there and everywhere, and it's not uncommon to have fans who enjoy twerking to Miley's 2013 opus *#Bangerz*, reeling off

the lyrics to Kendrick's *King Kunta* and dropping Fetty Wap's *Trap Queen* at a house party all in the same night.

"We've always been interested in hip hop," Pete says. "Jay Z intro'd on *Thriller*, we had Kanye do a remix of *This Ain't A Scene*. 2 Chainz was on a remix of *Light Em Up*. I mean, I signed Tyga to my label ages ago, you know? Hip hop is so pervasive now. How can you not be influenced by it when hip hop is such a dominant force in pop culture now? You'd have to hide under a rock to not be affected by it. It's everywhere!"

Case in point: the guys are currently embarking on a co-headlining tour with



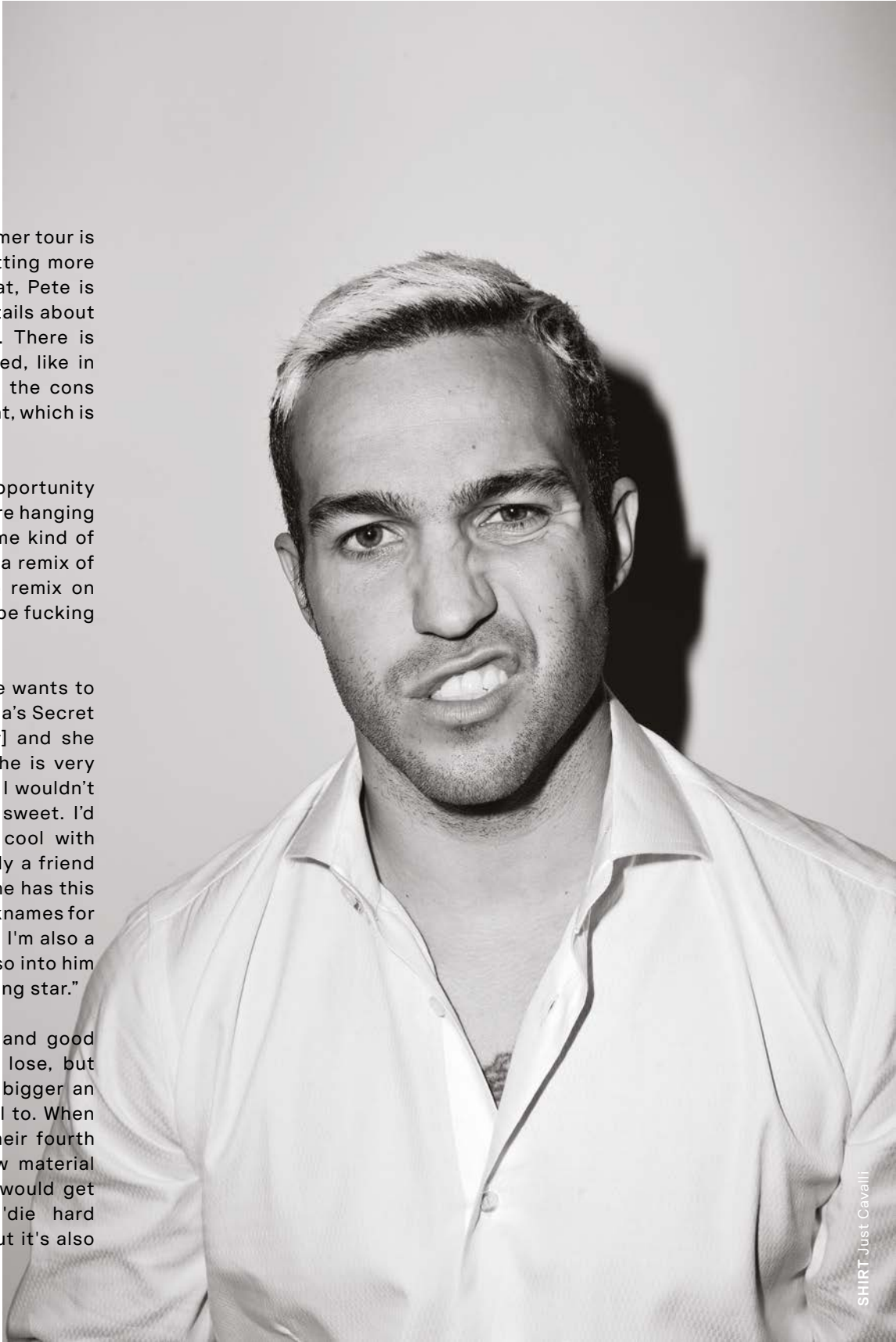
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Wiz Khalifa. The Boys Of Summer tour is a mix of both their styles, hitting more than 40 US cities. As we chat, Pete is still finalising some of the details about the sets and video content. There is talk of getting a tank involved, like in the Uma Thurman video, but the cons outweigh the pros at this point, which is probably for the best.

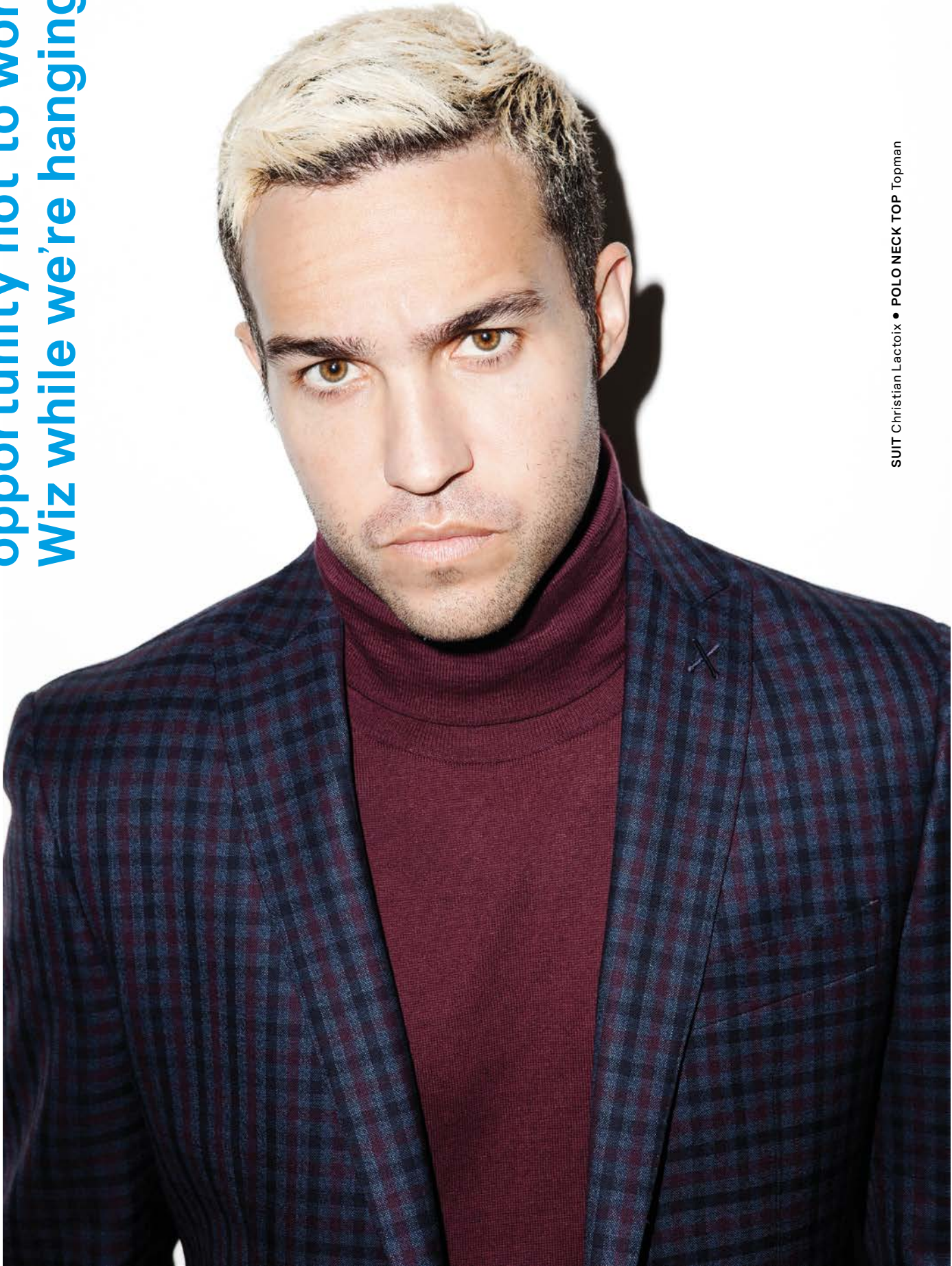
“It would be a missed opportunity not to work with Wiz while we’re hanging out,” Pete says. “We’ll do some kind of collaboration; we had him on a remix of Uma Thurman, so I’d love to remix on one of his songs. That would be fucking great!”

He’s not the only one Pete wants to work with. “We did this Victoria’s Secret show with Taylor [Swift, obv] and she sang *Light Em Up* with us. She is very in demand though, isn’t she? I wouldn’t hold my breath. She was so sweet. I’d really like to do something cool with Rihanna. Or Sia! She’s actually a friend of mine. When we hang out she has this quirk where she makes up nicknames for people. She calls me ‘Cookie’. I’m also a really big fan of Stromae, I’m so into him at the moment. He’s a real rising star.”

Experimenting is all well and good when you’ve got nothing to lose, but the bigger a band gets, the bigger an audience they have to appeal to. When Fall Out Boy were touring their fourth album *Folie A Deux*, the new material proved so unpopular that it would get booed by self-proclaimed ‘die hard fans’. Branching out is fun, but it’s also a wobbly move.



It would be a missed opportunity not to work with Wiz while we’re hanging out



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“It’s a little bit of a tightrope act for us,” he admits. “Because if you lean one way you’ll end up losing balance. You can over-indulge yourself, and sometimes I think bands get too much success and it goes to their head, so they end up purposefully alienating their fans. It’s like they somehow feel guilty accumulating that kind of success.”

“Our singles are like a gateway into our world. I remember when we did *This Ain’t A Scene* for *Infinity On High*, and our label heard it and said ‘This might be the end of you guys, sorry’. I shit you not!”

Fall Out Boy’s manifesto for the rest of 2015, then, is pretty clear, in that it’s not very clear at all.

“We’ve never been content with being comfortable,” Pete says assertively. “We’re still underdogs, even now. So we’re just gonna pull the pin on the grenade, throw it, and hope it goes off.”

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