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DON LEMON

CNN NEWS
HOST **DON**
LEMON
CRAFTS
A SWEET
RETREAT
IN SAG
HARBOR
WITH
A LITTLE
HELP
FROM HIS
FRIENDS.

BY JEAN NAYAR
PHOTOGRAPHED BY RETO STERCHI
STYLED BY MIMI FISHER

On Don: Reform polo, \$85, by AllSaints at Bloomingdale's, Wait Whitman Shops; Bowery jeans in Aurora, \$228, by Citizens of Humanity at Nordstrom, Roosevelt Field. On Tim: Barstow Western shirt, \$70, at Levi's, Gallery at Westbury Plaza; Bowery jeans in Vega, \$248, by Citizens of Humanity at Nordstrom, Roosevelt Field.



COMFORT



ZONE

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"THAT HOUSE IN SAG HARBOR CHANGED MY LIFE. THE PEOPLE I'VE MET, THE EXPERIENCES I'VE HAD, THE RETREAT THAT IT IS... I CAN'T EVEN PUT A PRICE ON IT."

here's no such thing as an average day in the life of television news anchor Don Lemon. For starters, he goes to work about the same time most people leave. "I usually get to the studio by 6PM," says the host of *CNN Tonight With Don Lemon*. "I'm the last man in and the last man out," he adds. And depending on what else is happening with every day's fresh cycle of news after the show ends, he might not be homeward bound until 3 in the morning.

Due to his unusual and often unpredictable schedule, Lemon may or may not rise early enough to catch the 9AM networkwide call, though he usually tunes in to a regular 10:30AM call with his producer to hash out the topics and personalities for that evening's program. "Every day brings a wonder; every day I sit at a desk in the center of New York City, at the center of the media universe, and my team brings me the most influential people to speak to," he says. "Can you imagine how lucky I am?"

Lemon's workdays are not only long, they're also often stressful—though you wouldn't know it by looking at the 53-year-old media man, who invariably appears cool, collected and considerably younger than his age. So it's hardly surprising that he decompresses at his comfortable home in Sag Harbor every chance he gets. "It's my sanctuary," he says.

Why Sag Harbor? "I think Sag Harbor chose me," Lemon explains. "When I saw it, I knew I wanted to live there—it was like I was always supposed to be there." After searching with a real estate professional for a while and not finding what he wanted, they headed back to the city. Along the way, however, Lemon spied a white neoclassical clapboard house, pointed to it and asked, "What about that one?" It just so happened to be a property the agent had been affiliated with, so he checked into it, gained access and showed it to Lemon on the spot. "The rest is history," says Lemon, who closed on the 2,750-square-foot four-bedroom house the following spring and opted to live in it for a while before renovating and furnishing it to make it his own.

By the time he was ready to start on the interiors, Lemon and his fiancé, Tim Malone, a native of Water Mill and real estate agent with Corcoran, had met their neighbors, Bill Cummings and Bernt Heiberg, interior designers who live across the street. "I love their work; they're so quirky and amazing," says Lemon. So it wasn't long before he tapped them to gut the house and redesign it, with felicitous results. "I just wanted it to be comfortable... not overdone and not cluttered," says Lemon. "I wanted it to be a home—and that's what it is... it's warm and comfortable and masculine."

The designers started from scratch by reconstructing the interiors to suit the

way Lemon and Malone live—along with their part-poodle pups, Boomer and Barkley. Their first steps were to knock out part of the wall separating the dining area from the kitchen, to open it to view through a paned window wall, and then redo the kitchen completely. They also commandeered some space from an extra bedroom on the main floor to convert into a mudroom, transformed the basement into a cozy man cave and added three new fireplaces to warm the whole house in winter. "People think I'm nuts, but I love coming here in the winter and hunkering down," says Lemon, who enjoys baking and did a lot of just that on Christmas last year when his mother and sister came to visit.

To come up with an appropriate interiors scheme, the designers started by presenting Lemon with concept images. "He'd say, 'I like this and I like that,' and in the process we connected to an aesthetic and honed the palette, and once we nailed down the concept, he loosened the reins and let us go," says Cummings, who worked with Heiberg and designer Katie White to pull the interiors together. Rather than focusing on any particular style or point of view, they crafted an eclectic mix—antiques, midcentury furnishings and modern pieces—with a black-and-white color scheme that keeps the atmosphere livable and relaxing.

The designers also injected notes of personality with elements of Lemon's own collections of objects, including vintage cake stands, old Sunbeam blenders and 35 mm film strips he's acquired along the way. "I just like the shapes of the cake plates and mixers," Lemon says, "and I like to put out my old slide projector at parties." Pieces from his collection of art add more dimension. "I'm not above collecting street art, and a lot of the African American paintings in my home come from street artists in New Orleans," he says. Another piece, an image of Little Richard by British artist Mark Leckey, came straight off the wall of Red Rooster, where Lemon was lunching one day not far from his city residence in Harlem. After an introduction by the restaurant's owner to Gavin Brown, the art dealer who represented the artist and who happened to be lunching there, too, Lemon purchased the artwork then and there.

Since settling into his Hamptons home, Lemon says he and Malone relish every minute they spend there. "I love to meet interesting, successful people because I learn from them, and being out in the Hamptons has really changed my life in that way," he says. "I've met some great people who inspire me to do better things." Among them is Ron Perelman. "He's very generous, just a beautiful person, and I go to his home and meet the most amazing people," Lemon says. "I may be sitting at a dinner table with Spike Lee, Colin Powell or Tony Blair—it's fascinating for me, having been this little kid who grew up in Louisiana and the Deep South."

The relaxed attitude that comes so easily to the award-winning broadcast journalist today wasn't always a given, though. In fact, just after he published his memoir, *Transparent*, in 2011, when he went public not only about the abuse he endured as a boy growing up in Baton Rouge but also about being gay, he deeply questioned his fate. "When I wrote that book, I thought I was going to lose my career, that that was a real possibility," he admits. Eight years later, however, it's clear that the rewards have been worth the risk. "You might as well live with dignity and you might as well be bold," he says. "Through that book, I was able to become a bigger and better and more confident version of myself in life and on the air."

He particularly appreciates what that freedom brings to the life he shares with Malone in the Hamptons. "One of the smartest things I've ever done is buy that house in Sag Harbor," says Lemon, who is quick to add that the best thing he's ever done was choose Malone as soulmate. "That house in Sag Harbor changed my life. The people I've met, the experiences I've had, the Zen that it brings me and the joy... I can't even put a price on it." ■

Redondo shirt, \$100, by AllSaints
at Bloomingdale's, Walt Whitman
Shops; Bowery jeans in Aurora,
\$228, by Citizens of Humanity at
Nordstrom, Roosevelt Field.





Figure T-shirt, \$60, by AllSaints at Bloomingdale's, Walt Whitman Shops; Bowery jeans in Aurora, \$228, by Citizens of Humanity at Nordstrom, Roosevelt Field.
Opposite page, on Tim: Short-sleeved shirt, \$60, at Levi's, Gallery at Westbury Plaza; Bowery jeans in Vega, \$248, by Citizens of Humanity at Nordstrom, Roosevelt Field.
On Don: Shield shirt, \$130, by AllSaints at Bloomingdale's, Walt Whitman Shops; Bowery jeans, \$228, by Citizens of Humanity at Nordstrom, Roosevelt Field.
Grooming by Anneliese Tieck at Judy Casey

