



American actor Ben Foster on the joys of fatherhood and the scars left by some of his more traumatic roles

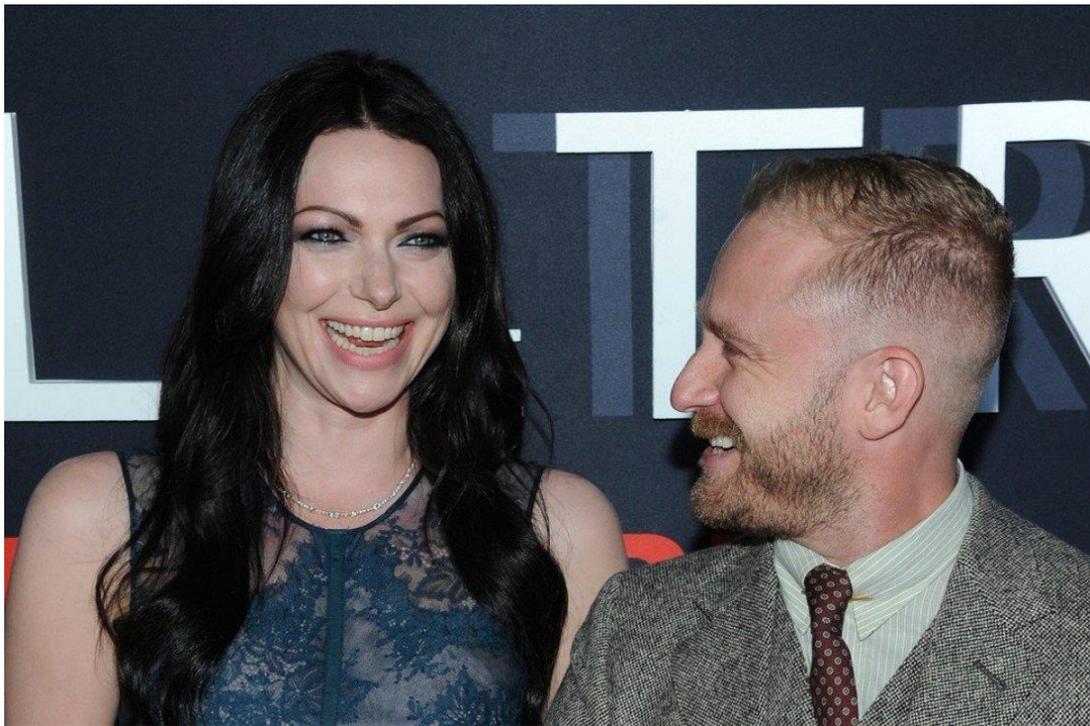
The award-winning star of the 2016 film *Hell or High Water* was in Hong Kong recently to attend The Hub's charity gala



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Foster with his fiancée, Laura Prepon. Picture: Alamy

Ben Foster is worried he's underdressed.

“No one told me to bring black tie!” he grumbles, only half joking, while posing between life-size horse statues ahead of *Ready to Race*; The Hub Charity Gala Ball, at

the Grand Hyatt, in Wan Chai. Wearing a charcoal suit and unbuttoned shirt, he looks more suited to the Cannes red carpet than a charity ball in Hong Kong, but he is far from scruffy.

It is late October and the American actor is in town to lend his celebrity to The Hub, a charity that supports the city's disadvantaged children and runs a centre in Sham Shui Po at which young people can play, eat, exercise and get help with homework.



Foster, at The Hub Charity Gala Ball, in Wan Chai. Picture: Xiaomei Chen

Every year since 2012, the foundation has thrown a grand fundraiser with a guest of honour. Previous balls have seen Carrie Fisher, Claudia Kim and Heather Graham appear; this year, organisers wanted a male star, and new father Foster was keen to be involved.

Before I arrive to meet Foster at the Grand Hyatt, the charity's communications director messages to say, "Best not to ask regarding Harvey Weinstein, hope that's OK."

The communications manager and I meet in the hotel lobby and he repeats the message, whispering, "His management has decided that Ben won't be answering questions about Weinstein."

In the boardroom where the interview is to be conducted, I meet Australian businessman David Boehm, chairman of The Hub. "I'm not sure if you got the

message,” he says. “But Ben won’t be answering questions about Weinstein.” I tell him I understand, but explain that it might seem remiss not to at least touch on the issue that has dominated the news all week, the Hollywood producer having recently been accused of improper sexual conduct.

Then in strides another Hollywood producer, John Penotti, who mines his connections each year to help recruit celebrities for the ball. “Hey,” he smiles. “Ben doesn’t wanna talk about Weinstein, I hope you understand. What more can he say that’s not already been said? It’s not really his world, you see.”



Producers Charles Wessler (left) and John Penotti (right) with actress Carrie Fisher, in Wan Chai, in 2014. Picture: SCMP

Feeling three pairs of anxious eyes burning into me, I draw a line through a third of my questions.

Foster enters, smiling widely through his strawberry blond goatee, and takes a seat while the others shuffle closer. As I turn on my recorder, the room falls silent.

I take a random stab: does the actor like horses? The onlookers chuckle, the tension eases. Foster seems relieved. “I do!” he exclaims. “Very much, I love riding. My lady used to have a ranch, but it’s not so easy to have one where we live in New York.”

The lady in question – he’ll refer to her by name just once during the interview – is Laura Prepon, Foster’s fiancée and fellow former teen star, best known for her role as the street-smart, tattooed inmate Alex Vause in Netflix’s Emmy-winning comedy drama *Orange is the New Black*, which has been hailed as a rare triumph for feminism and diversity in pop culture. In January, while at the Sundance Film Festival promoting *The Hero* (in which Prepon stars as a stand-up comedian who forms a relationship with an ageing Western movie star), the actress joined Salt Lake City’s Women’s March, adding her voice to millions of others throughout the world calling for women’s rights.