

12/7/11 at 2:45 PM

Fred Armisen Says the Subway in the Summer Has the 'Worst Smell in Humanity'

By Vanita Salisbury

**Name:** Fred Armisen**Age:** 45 [*Ed note: on December 4. Happy Birthday Fred!*]**Neighborhood:** Upper West Side**Occupation:** Comedian, Actor; Season One of *Portlandia* is out this week on DVD and Blu-Ray.**Who's your favorite New Yorker, living or dead, real or fictional?**

Yoko Ono. She just represents everything that I love about New York: That she was here in the early part of the sixties art scene, and that she grew into becoming an Upper West Sider who brought her art and her sensibility to New York, which then became part of the city.

What's the best meal you've eaten in New York?

There's a place I like called Sushi of Gari. They have this tuna and salmon thing that is just really, really good.

In one sentence, what do you actually do all day in your job?

Write and re-write and perform.

What was your first job in New York?

I was working at Radio City Music Hall as a tour guide, when I was like 17, I think. I went to School of Visual Arts in the city and had to get a job. I gave tours of the inside of the theater and loved it, knowing the history. I'd wear a little suit and meet all the tourists.

What's the last thing you saw on Broadway?

The Pee-Wee Herman Show. I loved it! It was pure entertainment.

Do you give money to panhandlers?

When they play instruments. Not like, every time I see a musician I'll give them money, but usually if I give to panhandlers it'll be if they're playing an instrument. I busked once, in Chicago. I had zero dollars and I had this guitar, but I only did it once or twice. I made \$12.

What's your drink?

Sparkling water. Lime, no lime, I don't care either way.

How often do you prepare your own meals?

Breakfast. Grape-Nuts with rice milk, and a big huge pot of French press coffee, every morning, with my iPad and Howard Stern on in the background.

What's your favorite medication?

Claritin-D. It really affects me, though. I get a little more agitated or anxious, but I need it.

What's hanging above your sofa?

Oh, nothing. I looked right now and it's a white wall. I have things on my walls in the apartment — I'm not against it. Just in the configuration of how this living room is and how the wall is, it looked better like this. [On another wall] is an oil painting by Anna Sea: She's my favorite artist. It's a sort of self-portrait, but it's her body in different states of decomposition, so her head looks alive, but as you go down her body, her feet are skeletal. Her husband is a drummer I know, Craig Rodriguez. It's actually the first thing I ever bought from my job at *Saturday Night Live*. And I still love it so much.

How much is too much to spend on a haircut?

That's a tough one because, for me, it's like, anything. I just get it cut at the show. My hair person Jodi will do it and she knows what I like.

When's bedtime?

Between 2 a.m. and 3 a.m.

Which do you prefer, the old Times Square or the new Times Square?

I have to say old Times Square, but I don't want to sound like anyone who's just all about nostalgia. I don't believe that the past was better, but just how it was, that's how I knew it. I had to go through it to go to work from Penn Station.

What do you think of Donald Trump?

He's part of the cultural landscape. I grew up on Long Island, right, so I was coming in and out of the city all the time. And in that commute it was clear that Donald Trump is just part of New York. And I think that that's a compliment. Along the Van Wyck Expressway, there is a Trump building, that I think was owned by his dad and it hasn't been updated. It still says *Trump*, but it's this really interesting little building, a hidden gem. So you know he goes way back.

What do you hate most about living in New York?

The summer. I've had to be in Portland a lot for the past couple of summers, but in New York, it's just too hot down in the subway. There are times when you'll walk and a smell will waft over you, and you don't know where it's coming from and it's the worst smell in humanity.

Who is your mortal enemy?

I would say the rats on my street. Sometimes, there's garbage piled up and then from the garbage to the building there's this train, this rush hour of rats that are so huge that you're like "what is this?"

When's the last time you drove a car?

Last week in Portland. I love driving. It's the best. Sometimes I'll rent a car [here] if I have a gig somewhere—I can't believe I said "gig"—I'll just load up the car and bring the equipment.

How has the Wall Street crash affected you?

You know, I don't know. I don't understand how economics work at all, so I don't know what caused what. But I will say that sometimes I can't believe it when a business like the Virgin Megastore goes out of business because my experience as a New Yorker is that I walk into these stores and they're packed. But I'm not informed enough to know how the Wall Street crash affected me. What I mean to say is that I'm not an investor, I don't invest in anything. Paintings, if you want to call it that. I barely understand what the stock market even is. I may as well be 6 years old when it comes to this. When I see the stock exchange, it's like, alien, and then people try to explain it to me and I check out

and I'm like, "Ohhh, whatever, this sounds really complicated."

Times, Post, or Daily News?

An iPad app called Flipboard.

Where do you go to be alone?

The subway, I think, is good alone time. I'm not gonna go there to be alone, but when you listen to music, you're sort of on your own.

What makes someone a New Yorker?


I think sometimes it's in the confidence in how they hail a cab. I think tourists are sort of tentative, but there's a way that New Yorkers do it where they just step out and they almost expect a cab to just appear. It's a well-earned entitlement.

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