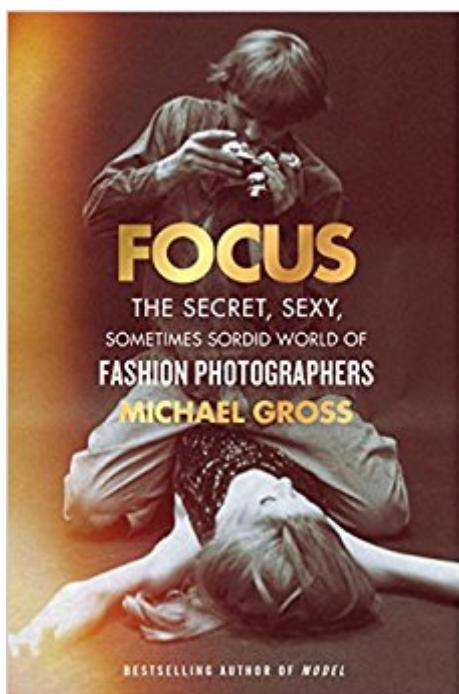


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# Focus: The Secret, Sexy, Sometimes Sordid World Of Fashion Photographers



## Synopsis

In this rollicking account of fashion photography's golden age, the New York Times bestselling author of *Model* and *House of Outrageous Fortune*, Michael Gross, brings to life the wild genius, ego, passion, and antics of the men (and a few women) behind the camera. Before Instagram was an art form, fashion photographers and the models they made famous were pop culture royalty. From the postwar covers of *Vogue* to the triumph of the digital image, the fashion photographer sold not only clothes but ideals of beauty and visions of perfect lives. Even when they succumbed to temptation and excess—“and did they ever?”—the very few photographers who rose to the top were artists, above all. *Focus* probes the lives, hang-ups, and artistic triumphs of more than a dozen of fashion photography's greatest visionaries: Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Melvin Sokolsky, Bert Stern, David Bailey, Bill King, Deborah Turbeville, Helmut Newton, Gilles Bensimon, Bruce Weber, Steven Meisel, Corinne Day, Bob and Terry Richardson, and more. From Avedon's haute couture fantasies and telling portraits to Weber's sensual, intimate, and heroic slices of life, and from Bob Richardson's provocations to his son Terry's transgressions, *Focus* takes readers behind the scenes to reveal the revolutionary creative processes and fraught private passions of these visionary magicians. Tracing the highs and lows of fashion photography from the late 1940s to today, Gross vividly chronicles the fierce rivalries between photographers, fashion editors, and publishers like Condé Nast and Hearst, weaving together candid interviews, never-before-told insider anecdotes and insights born of his three decades of front-row and backstage reporting on modern fashion. An unprecedented look at an eccentric and seductive profession and the men and women who practice it on the treacherous shifting sands of pop and fashion culture, *Focus* depicts—“perhaps most importantly”—the rewards and cost, both terribly high, of translating an artist's vision of beauty for an often cold and cruel commercial reality.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 416 pages

Publisher: Atria Books (July 5, 2016)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 1476763461

ISBN-13: 978-1476763460

Product Dimensions: 6.1 x 1.3 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 1.4 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.2 out of 5 stars 28 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #676,528 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #42 in Books > Arts & Photography > Fashion > Models #324 in Books > Arts & Photography > Fashion > Fashion Photography #535 in Books > Arts & Photography > Fashion > History

## Customer Reviews

âœDoes not skimp on the gossipy goods. There are descents into madness, prolific drug use, orgies, blackmail photos and suicide attempts. But this book is also smart, well-researched and written with an insider's eye. Engaging and on point. • (Kim France New York Times Book Review)"I thought I knew practically everything about the fashion industry, but Michael Gross has corrected me. His thoroughly absorbing narrative dazzles with the most profound investigation and research. Focus is an enthralling and riveting read!" (Tim Gunn)"FOCUS is the House of Cards of fashion." (Nino Cerruti)âœMichael Gross's FOCUS is that rare thing: an equally delicious and deeply informative book, a news-breaking romp through the world of fashion photography, from its beginnings early in the last century to the recent controversial exploits of super bad boy Terry Richardson. Richard Avedon, Bert Stern, Deborah Turbeville, Helmut Newton, Steven Meisel: these and so many others whose work I've enjoyed in VOGUE and BAZAAR are given context and smart analysis, and magazine editors and owners appear, too, revealing an industry of art and commerce. An outstanding work of cultural history. • (Sheila Weller, author of GIRLS LIKE US and THE NEWS SORORITY)"Michael Gross takes us on a compelling journey through a hugely desirable cultureâœa culture which sometimes destroyed its most brilliant children and which is now slipping as irretrievably into the past as Versailles or the Swinging '60s." (Anthony Haden-Guest, author of Bad Dreams, True Colors, and The Last Party)"Amazing... a phantasmagoria of gossip, history, fabulous times, terrible times; the men (and a couple of women) who turned their creative lenses onto runways, clothes, models and (as in the case of Richard Avedon) onto America itself... If you love fashion and/or the art of photography, this book is for you. Focus gives us page after page of down and delicious dish... Gross captures the bizarre hot-house intensity of an industry that is both ever-changing but eternally the same... This is a big, intelligent, exhaustively researched, lovingly written book... Focus finds the fire beneath the ice of glossy magazine pages, and does it without burning down the house." (Liz Smith New York Social Diary)âœI loved reading all the juicy details that Michael uncovered in this fast-pacedâœand clearly insiderâœlook at the rarefied, sexy world of fashion photography. • (Lauren Weisberger, author of The Devil Wears Prada and The Singles Game)âœA gossipy exposÃ© of the talented, arrogant, philandering, combative, self-aggrandizing photographers whose work appeared in, and defined, such iconic fashion

magazines as Harper's Bazaar, Vogue, Glamour, and Elle from 1947 to 1997. Not a pretty picture of sex, drugs, beautiful women, and raw ambition." (Kirkus) "Tales of famous shoots and industry backstories during the "glory days" of the genre | of the sexual promiscuity and recreational drug use of these (mostly male) photographers | The subject matter will be historically significant to those who are concerned with the photo artist's role in the golden age of modern fashion photography. VERDICT Recommended for enthusiasts of fashion and fashion photography. • (Library Journal) "This is the best book on the real world of top photographers in the fashion industry ever. Having hired and worked with many of them covered in Michael's book I can tell you the back stories are mind blowing. Anyone remotely connected to fashion should read his book! • (Barry Kieselstein-Cord, designer) "A deep-diving exposé into the world of iconic fashion photographers | groundbreaking. • (DuJour Magazine) "A sizzling, gossipy read...Relentless reporting." (Hamptons Magazine) "Hot dish." (New York Daily News) A "don't miss . . . must-read." (The Daily Summer) "A juicy history of the scandalous lives of fashion photographers. He is nearly encyclopedic in his approach, covering a dizzying number of photographers . . . anyone interested in fashion and/or photography will find Gross' full immersion fascinating." (Booklist) "An often-shocking tale rife with bed-hopping hotties, rampant drug use and cut-throat antics. Gross knows his stuff, delving deep into the fascinating rivalries and wicked manipulations that take place behind the cameras." (The Daily News) A "bombshell tell-all. . . Shocking. • (The Daily Mail) "Laying bare friendships, breakups, rivalries, and liaisons among fashion photographers over the past six decades, ...interweaving anecdotes, interviews, and images by renowned photographers like Helmut Newton, Irving Penn, and Corinne Day, Focus delves into the stories behind their cameras, exposing both their unparalleled talents and private affairs." (New York Magazine) "Gross has deftly woven an intricate web of fashion, photography, and magazine publishing that is simply unrivaled... Focus is a sensation... [It] brilliantly blends the wild histories of seemingly disparate lives... Gross is a modern-day Vasari, giving us The Lives of the Artists in no small measure." (craveonline) "In an astonishing and unprecedented look at the top-tier of photographers, Gross exposes the egos and private passions of these manipulative artists. • (The Daily Mail) "An exciting read, full of anecdotes and whispers of a fashion era long gone, a must for photography enthusiasts, magazine historians, fashionistas, and lovers of haute couture gossip." (MUSEE) "Wine, women and song. Boys too, if required. Not to mention drugs. Cool dudes, flashy cars, psycho-tempers, and sex everywhere to choose from. Work junkets all over the world and surrounded by beautiful people looking up at them rather than vice versa, The photographers were the real story. • (David Patrick Columbia New York Social Diary) "A cultural

history of how photography shaped the rest of the fashion industry... a survey of men behaving badly...Gross captures so well the century-long rivalry between Vogue and Harperâ™s Bazaar... Important." (National Post)"A delicious read. Sweeping...thoughtful..." (The Daily Beast)

Michael Gross is the author of the New York Times bestsellers House of Outrageous Fortune, 740 Park, and Model: The Ugly Business of Beautiful Women, as well as Roguesâ™ Gallery, and Unreal Estate. A contributing editor of Departures, he created the blog Gripepad and has written for The New York Times, New York, Vanity Fair, Esquire, GQ, The Daily Beast/Newsweek, and many other publications. Official hashtag: #focusyourselfie Facebook: MichaelGrossAuthor Instagram: @FocusYourSelfie Twitter: MGrossGripepad

This is required reading for anyone with a serious interest in the history of fashion photography, though at times it seemed to lean way too much towards gossip. For example, I don't know why Gilles Bensimon's penis is so prominent in this book. I'd have enjoyed more information on how these photographers worked and did business than their sex lives. Mr. Gross should have just put a list up front of the photographers that cheated on their wives (basically all of them except Helmut Newton), which would have left more space for 'real' information. But I still liked this book quite a bit, because what it gets right, it gets really right. In particular, I enjoyed the sections on Irving Penn. Mr. Penn was the King of Kings for 50 years, but there is very little information on him in the public sphere. Also, I liked reading about the business gamesmanship among photographers, magazine editors, and advertisers. But my biggest qualm with this book was the structure. At times, it felt more like a series of stories about individual photographers than a series history of fashion photography. It wasn't as cohesive as Model. But it's still worth buying if you're interested in the history of fashion photography, because it packs an awful lot of detail in about some of history's greatest photographers, including Richard Avedon, Bert Stern, Bruce Weber, and plenty of others.

I thoroughly enjoyed reading this book. When I lived in New York in the early 1970s, I met and befriended a couple of the photographers featured in Mr. Gross' story, so I had some previous knowledge regarding this less-than-glamorous side of the fashion world. I especially liked reading about Avedon; his larger-than-life ego and his insecurities. I actually admire him and his work even more after reading this book. What I like about Mr. Gross and his writing is that it is well-researched, and I consider his work "historical"---many of the names in this story are all but forgotten today---trendsetting artists such as Bill King and Chris von Waggenheim, to mention just two---I

recommend this book to anyone who wonders just what went on at some of the fashion studios of the most well-known and innovative photographers, and how some of the most iconic fashion images of our time came to be.

I threw this book into my travel kit before boarding a plane to Milan. I intended to snooze during the flight but started reading "FOCUS". I didn't sleep the whole trip. This is such an interesting book for me. I spent my career as a photojournalist and knew fashion photographers only by reputation. This book is filled with loads of information for any student of photography. There is information about how different photographers worked. I now know to credit Avedon's assistant, Gideon Lewin, for "light on a stick". Even more interesting are the behind the scenes rivalries of photographers and art directors. Michael Gross mentioned an Alexey Brodovitch Workshop Session that was taught by Irving Penn and Richard Avedon together. I never knew such a thing existed. Two masters going toe to toe. I just printed the 54 page transcript from the Penn archive at MOMA. What a treasure! This book is filled with many more gems. I'm rereading it now as a photo history book.

As always Michael Gross has done it again. He captures so well the world of the fashion photographer. It is these very photographers that he writes about and their amazing work that led me to pursue fashion photography as a career. As the books points out...each generation of photographers saw the next crop lacking in the true art of the medium. Time moves on and things change. What's for sure is that pre 2001, the enormous amount of creativity and even budgets that were around were truly addicting. Nothing could beat the rush of going to the photo lab and getting your contact sheets or waiting each month for a magazine to drop. Kudos Michael...what's next?

Although I've lived and worked in a tier distinctly below the arena of fashion photography annotated here by Michael Gross I believe I'm reasonable in observing this book is fascinating and intensely accurate. Gross takes considerable time tracing the world of fashion publishing from both the advertising and editorial side and does it with savage focus, so to speak. His details on branding, merchandising and the whims of consumer buying-abandon at times supersede his character development of the world's top photographers from the period covered. He also deftly sums up the current climate as digital slam dunks film into oblivion. And the cover features a capture from my ever-fave flick *Blow Up*!

A thoroughly immersive study of fashion photographers from the late 1940s through to the present,

Focus is difficult to put down. This highly readable and painstakingly researched book tells the larger story of the world of fashion through intimate portraits of several of its troubled and complicated practitioners.

This was packed with details and was fascinating to realize how small the world of fashion photography is and how often the talent moves between the companies who use their skills. Probably not all will enjoy this unless you have a real interest in the topic. It was a revelation how the creative mindset of the photographer controlled the shoot and how clothes really took a backseat to the photo shoot.

A well-researched spot on account of life in that funny, flawed world during that long ago and very special time. Intimate and beautifully crafted. Try to stop reading it. Bravo, Mr. gross.

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