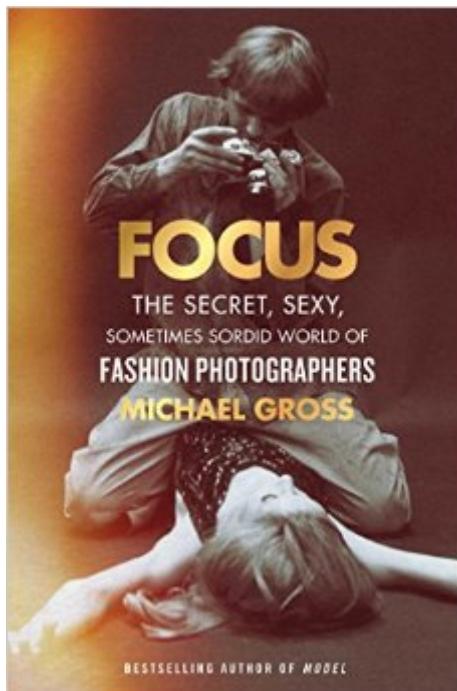


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# Focus: The Secret, Sexy, Sometimes Sordid World Of Fashion Photographers



## 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

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## Customer Reviews

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 was in England when Focus came out and was thrilled to find the American edition on UK and ordered it to read on my flight back to the USA. I couldn't put it down so it's lucky it was a long flight. It's an amazing, detailed history with enough sex and sizzle to keep the pages turning fast. Michael Gross always delivers, and Focus is no exception. The book uses the rivalries between Vogue, Harper's Bazaar, Elle, and later magazines like I-D and Dazed & Confused as well as advertisers like Blackglama, Revlon, Calvin Klein and Versace as its narrative spine and models and photographers embellish each chapter like glittering ornaments in a Christmas tree. I felt like a child unwrapping gifts: the lives of Richard Avedon, Irving Penn, Bert Stern, Bill King, Guy Bourdin, Gilles Bensimon, Arthur Elgort, Steven Meisel, Bruce Weber, and many other photographers, as well as fascinating magazine world characters like Diana Vreeland, Anna Wintour, Grace Mirabella, Carmel Snow, Fabien Baron and the two great dueling art directors Alexey Brodovitch and Alexander Liberman, who were the Machiavellian geniuses pulling the strings of models, photographer and editors for decades when fashion photography was coming into its own. I loved reading about all of

them, as well and the models from Suzy Parker to Kelly Bensimon, who appear in the pictures. The press about the book makes it sound like a lot of gossip but it's not gossip at all. Every assertion is credited to multiple sources, only a few are anonymous, and the footnotes, which are sadly on Gross' website and not in the book (was his publisher too cheap?) are voluminous. The text feels and is definitive. Both the research and the writing are mind bogglingly impressive. Forget fashion reality TV shows. This is the reality you need to know.

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?

This book is absolutely spectacular. ANYONE who has even the remotest interest in fashion and/or photography MUST READ Focus immediately! It is practically impossible to put down - beautifully written, easy to read, and filled with page after page of riveting stories. You will feel transported to the various photo shoots - which in some cases is a bit creepy, but nonetheless exciting! Please, someone produce as a major motion picture!!!

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.

an insider's all-access, combined with his superior literary ability to deftly and most entertainingly narrate an extraordinary level of research, michael gross--with every one of his books--continues to hit it out of the park.i HIGHLY recommend reading "focus", as well as compiling a library of all of gross' published achievements.michael gross is a genius talent, and "focus" his latest testimony to that fact.hear, hear and bravo!barbara camp

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