

Disarming Celebrities

Jerry Avenaim realizes most celebrities are not truly comfortable in front of the still camera, but they are all performers and overachievers. If they feel sympatico with their photographer, the results can be incredibly rewarding and lasting.

I love celebrity photography, because I have such a great respect for actors and their craft. I love planning it. I love shooting it. And I love the results. But getting there is not always the shortest distance between two points. Every session is unique. Every individual is, indeed, an individual.

There is, of course, a bit of psychologist in all photographers, and never is it more apparent than in the celebrity session. Celebrities are very strong-willed people and can be demanding. Their faces and forms are their fortunes. And if it's not captured, rendered, and reproduced appropriately—read, according to each celeb's personal standards—it registers less than zero.

When it comes to photography, celebrities have the pick of the litter (even in a magazine editorial they can choose any photographer on the planet), and a failure on this level can truly nip a budding career prior to bloom. So I have always shot every session as though it were my first.

Fortunately, I have always gotten along well with



people. And the tools I use become extensions of my being and extensions of my soul. Lens selection, camera angles, and lighting are second only to vision and passion, which is akin to breathing. That's critical because it allows me to dedicate my entire energy to becoming at one with my subject. I am dedicated to making them love

the way they look in my photographs, and they know it.

Shooting glamorous portraits of Halle Berry, Charlize Theron, and Helen Hunt; the likes of Charlton Heston, Rod Steiger, and Robert Blake; or those in the spotlight like "TV's hottest self-help guru" Dr. Phil and Donald Trump can be hugely fulfilling and exas-

peratingly challenging. There are no set standards for timeline and access. It's often a matter of the celebrity's availability, the difficulty and breadth of the project, and the comfort level of the celebrity in front of the camera.

An actor on the set has spent hours preparing for the scene to bring out just the right emotions or to create a specific image for the character. When that same actor is in front of a still camera, there is often only 1/250th of a second to capture a specific look or mood on film. It's a much more exacting science. Maximum creativity at maximum warp speed.

Nothing gives a celebrity a greater feeling of confidence than knowing that he or she is being photographed by an old vet—someone who has been in the trenches—working with and pleasing "the industry" for years. My sessions are catered, and each

and every celeb knows it is about them, not about me. At a recent cover shoot, the editor of *TV Guide* hired a DJ to spin. The best hair and makeup artists and the best stylists in Hollywood make the celebrity's comfort job one. Confident in my abilities, actors ultimately relax.

I engage my subjects, I direct my subjects. I kid with them and try to disarm them, whether by joking, prodding, or anything I have to do to come away with an image that captures the essence of what I perceive that individual to be. If I don't know them already, I spend time studying my subjects long before the session. My greatest desire is to capture an entire career in a single image.

At the end of the day, most celebrities are not truly comfortable in front of the still camera. But they are all performers and overachievers. Given the opportunity to perform, if they feel sympatico with their photographer, the results can be incredibly rewarding and lasting—a bit of Hollywood history. □



JERRY AVENAIM

JERRY AVENAIM (www.avenaim.com) has been shooting glamorous portraits of the famous and infamous for over a decade. He and Rolando Gomez will present "Hollywood Style Glamour & Beauty Photography Plus Post Production," a two-part session, sponsored by Olympus and Dyna-Lite.