

Terry O'Neill

The photographer on starlets, the Stones and Sinatra

June 6, 2013 4:24 p.m. ET

ONE OF THE ORIGINAL SNAPPERS of the beautiful, rich and famous, Terry O'Neill was an accidental photographer. "I fell into it," the 74-year-old says. In 1959, he photographed a pinstriped gent asleep among a bevy of African chieftains at Heathrow Airport. The gent turned out to be Rab Butler, the U.K. home secretary. Mr. O'Neill's knack for capturing the candid was to mark him out as one of the leading portrait photographers of his time.



Terry O'Neill THOM ATKINSON/CORBIS OUTLINE

The Londoner went on to snap the proverbial "anyone who was anyone"—all documented in a new self-titled book (ACC Editions, £55). His intimate chronicling of the Swinging Sixties, thanks to friendships with the Beatles and Rolling Stones, made him a household name.

Perhaps his most famous shot is the result of another relationship, with actress Faye Dunaway. It yielded a son and the iconic image of Ms. Dunaway lounging by the pool at the Beverly Hills Hotel in 1977, with her best actress Oscar from the night before standing, almost incidentally, on the breakfast table.

"I wanted a picture that told the story of receiving an Oscar, not the typical one of someone gushing on the podium," says Mr. O'Neill.

If I told any of the beautiful women I have photographed that they were beautiful, they would have laughed me out of the room. Elizabeth Taylor, Michelle Pfeiffer and Ava Gardner were all modest. Ava used to say to me, "I'm just a kid from Texas."

Once, when I was photographing a group of Paramount's biggest stars for their 70th anniversary, I noticed Elizabeth was missing. I found her hiding in a corridor. "I'm frightened of all of these people. I don't know any of them," she said. I introduced her to Robert De Niro and Harrison Ford—of course they loved her. It taught me a lesson: Even the biggest star in the world couldn't deal with other people.

TERRY O'NEILL'S CANDID CAMERA



TERRY O'NEILL

British photographer Terry O'Neill snapped the proverbial "anyone who was anyone," from Ava Gardner to Margaret Thatcher, Elton John to Nelson Mandela.

fantastic looking guy in the flesh.

You could not take a bad picture of Audrey Hepburn. She's someone women love much more than men. Sex doesn't really come into it with Audrey; she was quite asexual, very skinny, but incredibly expressive, totally professional and very, very nice. She created the famous dove picture herself. We were chatting and the dove flew down and sat on her shoulder. She kept very still, looked down and I snapped. It was a moment in time.

The three best-looking men ever were Cary Grant, Paul Newman and Elvis Presley. I shot both Grant and Newman, but you never see a good picture of Elvis because all that were issued were his film stills. But he was a

Angelina Jolie is good looking but I still think that Ava Gardner was the most beautiful woman I have ever seen. That period during the '50s was fantastic, because all of the women looked entirely different. These days, all the girls look the same and I can't tell one from another.

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It was awful being married to a film star. I swore I would never marry an actress. I don't want that life. I don't want to be pointed at and talked about in restaurants. I like anonymity.

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Rock 'n' roll is accepted now, so it's not really rock 'n' roll.

I used to go to a club called the Avenue in the '60s with the Stones...and we all used to joke and say "Can you imagine Mick dancing on stage at 40?" Well, look at him now; he's still prancing about.

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Somebody said: "There's this group down at Abbey Road doing a song called 'Please Please Me;' could you go and take some pictures for the paper?" It was probably the first picture of a pop group to appear in a newspaper. Ringo is holding the cymbals—it's so amateurish!

We used to sit around and ask "What are we going to do when all of this comes to an end?" Ringo wanted to own a chain of hairdressers and George wanted to work in a bank... At that time, the West End was run by toffs. Because we didn't come from privilege, we thought there was no way our success would continue.

We didn't do drugs in those days. Later, when the Beatles and Stones got into them, it was a disaster. Of course it's worse today. But the great secret to success is never do drugs.

I never get involved and I never become the friend of my subjects. Movie stars are different to you and me. Burton and Taylor were fascinating, though. They used to ask for a million each for a picture; she knew they weren't worth it. She actually drank more than he did but she could handle it better. They both used to get very jealous. They were very much in love. She committed her life to being Liz Taylor and lived her life for the public. He fought it. It was a sad, sad story.

I may have taken my last photograph. A few weeks ago, I shot Pelé on the beach outside his home in Brazil with [a] replica of the World Cup. What a moment.

Pelé and Mandela were the greatest men I ever met. Both of them possess incredible humanity and humility. I spent a week with Mr. Mandela during his 90th birthday week in London. He had incredible energy and a different conversation with everyone he met. People from all over the world came to see him, including Bill Clinton and [David Cameron](#). I knew I was in the presence of a great man. At the end of the week, as he was leaving, he gave me a wave from his car. I nearly burst into tears.

The only person I'm still interested in photographing that I haven't is Brad Pitt. But even then, it wouldn't be like working with Sinatra. When I worked with him, I'd issue pictures at the end of the day to every newspaper and he was never bothered by the paparazzi.

I hate my industry now, because it's a hassle. PRs want to control everything. In the old days, if I photographed Paul Newman, for example, I didn't even have to show him the pictures. [Movie stars] just trusted you.

Standards have fallen where photography is concerned. Now when you go to a film premier, the photographers look at their pictures as they take them and when they have "the shot," they just stop shooting. Photography is all about shooting and capturing a moment spontaneously, not worrying about what picture you have already taken.

I have always tried to give people dignity in my pictures. That is what it's all about for me.

Two photographers I admire are Sebastião Salgado and Steven Meisel.

My one regret is not working harder. I should have taken more pictures. You just don't realize how important these people will become and for how long they will endure.

—Edited from an interview with Tina Gaudoin