

VOGUE

CULTURE

Pamela Hanson's Book of Nineties Photography Will Make You Love That Decade All Over Again

BY MARK HOLGATE
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Photo: Courtesy of Pamela Hanson

Pamela Hanson never intended to do a book of her Nineties photography—it just happened that way. She, like so many of us, couldn't resist the allure of a decade which feels like it has never left us. "What is it about the Nineties which makes us so nostalgic?" Hanson wondered the other day when we spoke. "I had been looking at my archives with the view to doing a book, and the images I loved the most just happened to be from that decade. It was the time, photography-wise, before everything went digital—but also it was a moment of freedom and innocence."

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G A L L E R Y



Ready for their close up: Photographer Pamela Hanson shoots model Chandra North. Photo: Courtesy of Pamela Hanson

And, Hanson might have added, huge, enormous, uninhibited. The pages of Pamela Hanson The 90s (Rizzoli) are full of gorgeous images of equally gorgeous women—Christy Turlington, Veronica Webb, Yasmeen Ghauri, Naomi Campbell, Cordula Reyes, Nikki Taylor, Nadja Auermann, Claudia Schiffer, Chandra North, Kirsty Hume, Trish Goff, Kristen McMenamy, and Milla Jovovich, who graces the cover—in the throes of living their best lives joyfully and un-self-consciously in front of her camera.

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Hanson's images crackle with the realness of life, like this shot of model Kristen McMenamy in Paris. Photo: Courtesy of Pamela Hanson

If, in the same era, the late British photographer Corinne Day captured the awkward, nascent beauty of the waifs of the forgotten hinterlands of London—primarily, and most famously, Kate Moss—then the Paris-based Hanson had the brilliant ability to capture aspects of the women who posed for her that fashion often forgot. Her work is a celebration of their individual personalities, not as avatars of the hauteur of Eighties having-it-all power dressing: Reyes rising out of the water; McMenamy running down the street, tossing her hat in the air; Taylor and Hume riotously playing pool in cocktail dresses; Auermann chowing down on dim sum; and, perhaps my favorite image in the whole book, a shot of Ghauri shielding herself with a newspaper amidst a humid Caribbean downpour. Hanson's camera only ever invites them to bring themselves.

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Smokin': It's the iconic Yasmine Ghauri which lights up this image, not her lit cigarette. Photo: Courtesy of Pamela Hanson

"I just love life, and capturing life, and seeing it play out on the streets," Hanson said. "I mean, I love women, and I love style, and I wanted to make that palpable." She recalled that once a photographer had asked a makeup artist she often worked with when Hanson would do another image in a cafe. "And she said to him, 'Whenever Pamela feels like a cup of coffee,'" Hanson recalled, laughing. There are a lot of espressos in Pamela Hanson The 90s. And wine glasses. And certainly an awful lot of cigarettes; I counted twenty, enough to make me feel like I had a case of secondary inhalation. Perhaps it was living in Paris that brought out that side in Hanson, the London-born daughter of American parents, who spent much of her life traipsing around Europe before arriving in Paris to work.

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The early years of Hanson's career in the city, before she married and relocated to New York, are hilariously and touchingly recalled in the witty introduction by former model and now LA icon Lisa Love, her friend from childhood. "[Pamela] was my wing person—we carried each other through the pictures, the stories, and so many dangers," Love writes. "I had a questionable Polaroid collection, and when my boyfriend found them, she pretended they were hers. In Paris, I watched as she worked harder than anyone. As I returned home at 6 am, she was often at the table, making calls to photo editors. She was a pit bull hanging on until they realized she wasn't giving up, and then they learned how talented and passionate she was. I left Paris reassured she could make it on her own."



Haute couture, but make it street: model Veronica Webb in Paris.
Pamela Hanson

Photo: Courtesy of

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"There weren't many women photographers [in Paris], so there was a certain amount of freedom," recalled Hanson. "Obviously there were the likes of Sarah Moon and Deborah Turbeville, very talented photographers, but their style was more contrived. I fell into fashion because all my friends were models, so I photographed them every day, getting dressed, hanging out." That art of documentation was what informed her aesthetic. Recently, she was chatting to her friend the stylist Brana Wolf, who she worked with for many years, and it was Wolf who told Hanson, "Fashion was never your thing. Your thing was the girls, and their energy, and their lifestyle."

That Hanson so could faithfully and conspiratorially convey that in her naturalistic, uncontrived images came from a place of friendship. "I never had a type to shoot," she said. "It was really dependent on their personality. I had to have a rapport to tell their story. I would spend a lot of time just hanging out with them, asking questions: What are you doing, where are you going, who are you seeing? Everyone was more open then."

It was, she says, a moment when she'd be in the legendary Paris hangout Davé (a favorite of Helmut Newton's) with Love, or Helmut Lang, or John Galiano; a small, intimate world where work morphed into life and then back again. It was an era when you and a stylist and model were packed off with a suitcase of clothes, and asked to come back with great pictures. And there are plenty of those in this terrific book—yet another opportunity to marvel at the decade that's gone, but sonot forgotten.

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Claudia Schiffer looking the epitome of the Riot Girl '90s, albeit elevated: punkish mohair and plenty of attitude. Photo: Courtesy of Pamela Hanson

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The book cover. Courtesy of Rizzoli