

In Pamela Hanson's New Book, Supermodels Abound

How did Pamela Hanson become the photographer of choice for so many women?

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Cathy McNew and Tara Yodit Abate photographed by Pamela Hanson for Lei in 1987. Pamela Hanson, via Rizzoli

By **Jacob Bernstein**

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Perhaps the strangest thing about the fashion photographer Pamela Hanson's retrospective book "The 90s" is how much smiling goes on inside it.

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Naomi Campbell wears a blond wig and flashes her pearly whites on a plush sofa at the Waldorf Astoria in New York. Charlotte Rampling smiles while smoking a cigarette in the dressing room of a Jil Sander boutique in Paris. Carré Otis grins beside a dark Porsche outside an old house Ms. Hanson rented in Sag Harbor, N.Y.

Remember Ms. Otis?

She is the model, actress and onetime tabloid curiosity who appeared with her former husband, Mickey Rourke, in “Wild Orchid,” an erotic thriller known mainly for excising a very gratuitous scene in order to avoid an X rating. (The film ultimately wound up with a number of Razzie nominations.)

Anyway, the point is: Ms. Hanson’s book is the opposite of near nude and drenched in black eyeliner.



Michaela Bercu in French Vogue, 1988. Pamela Hanson, via Rizzoli

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Ms. Hanson, one of the few women shooting for major fashion magazines during the 1990s, said she always saw the models less as objects and more as “co-conspirators,” people with whom she was basically capturing a lifelong parade of glamour and fun.

“I was really inspired by film,” Ms. Hanson said on a recent morning as she ambled around the Chelsea townhouse where the ground floor is her studio and the upper floors are the home she shares with her husband, the art adviser Jaime Frankfurt. “I wasn’t really a fashion person.”

She spent part of her childhood in Geneva, where her father was a commodities trader. Her mother stayed at home and “did a lot of needlepoint,” Ms. Hanson said, sitting on a stool in the studio. She was wearing a denim shirt from the Japanese retailer 45R and a pair of Maria Cornejo jeans.

She studied painting at the University of Colorado Boulder, only to realize that perhaps she was not good enough to become a painter. It began to dawn on her that she might be a good enough photographer to make that work.

After graduation, she got herself an interview with Arthur Elgort, a photographer at Vogue whose joyous images of women bounding through the streets served as an antidote to the cool, brooding energy that Helmut Newton and Richard Avedon brought to the magazine.

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Gail Elliott, Natane Boudreau and Annie Morton in a Halston ad, 1996. Pamela Hanson, via Rizzoli



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Kristen McMenamy in Lei, 1985. Pamela Hanson, via Rizzoli

Karen Alexander in The New York Times Sunday Magazine, 1986. Pamela Hanson, via Rizzoli

Mr. Elgort told Ms. Hanson that he did not need an assistant in New York but that if she moved to Paris, he would let her assist him when he was there. Ms. Hanson's college roommate was already living in Paris. So she said yes.

By the early 1980s, she had graduated from assisting established photographers to doing her own shoots. Work at European fashion magazines like Lei and Italian Vogue led to assignments at middle market American magazines such as Glamour and Marie Claire.

Those got her to American Vogue around 1993.

During those years and afterward, Ms. Hanson shot a veritable who's who of supermodels: Amber Valletta and Kate Moss in Paris, Kristen McMenamy and Bridget Hall in the Hamptons, Helena Christensen in Morocco, Claudia Schiffer and Ms. Campbell in New York.

No one occupies more space in the book than Christy Turlington. In a phone interview, she called Ms. Hanson "a dear friend," the photographer she knows personally better than any other she has worked with. She attributed their closeness partly to Ms. Hanson's charm and her ability to make people feel at ease.



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Christy Turlington in Elle, 1990. Pamela Hanson, via Rizzoli

“There’s a comfort and a sense of trust that’s present in her photos,” Ms. Turlington said. “There was a style to them that was much more reportage-y than other photographers. You would arrive and the camera would already be on her neck from the time she says hello. She’s not living behind the lens, she’s very much an active participant. And with that comes a freedom. You let down your guard very quickly.”

In recent years, Ms. Hanson has continued to shoot for legacy titles like *W* and *Harper’s Bazaar* while also doing photographs of celebrities for their social media and for Hollywood studios for their movie campaigns.

She photographs movie posters for friends like Sofia Coppola. And backstage photographs of Beyoncé, who is, of course, one of the world’s most famous and most private women.

In East Hampton, N.Y., where Ms. Hanson and Mr. Frankfurt own a home, Mr. Frankfurt is one of Jay-Z’s frequent companions on morning walks around the neighborhood. “We kind of know each other socially,” Ms. Hanson said.



Ms. Hanson, one of the few women shooting for major fashion magazines in the 1990s, saw models less as objects than as “co-conspirators,” she said. via Rizzoli

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Last year, she did a “Cowboy Carter”-themed shoot for W. It was the first time in a long time that Beyoncé had been photographed for a major magazine.

“We’d been wanting to do it for years,” Ms. Hanson said, before realizing that the best way to keep shooting for Beyoncé was to say nothing further.

Also, those pictures were not in the book she was promoting.

[Jacob Bernstein](#) reports on power and privilege for the Style section.

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