

THE **ESSENTIAL** MAGAZINE FOR PROFESSIONAL PHOTOGRAPHERS

PROFESSIONAL Photographer

Dresses, themes and schemes
BOB DYLAN

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100+ secrets to success

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PLUS: EVERYTHING YOU NEED AND NEED TO KNOW IN THE STUDIO!

Girl Power

Indira Cesarine was a photographic child protege and a succesful model, she has shot over 1000 model tests and seen her commissioned work published over more than 5000 editorial pages. She knows the industry inside and out, so we thought that it was time that we caught up with her to find out just what makes her tick.

Professional Photographer: There's no doubting that you were something of a photographic child protégé, discovering photography aged 15 and then exhibiting your work in four one woman shows in New York by the time you were 18! How?

Indira Cesarine: Actually the exhibits were at the Paul Mellon Art Centre, in Connecticut. I had been studying painting and drawing since I was a child and started studying at the Parson's School of Design Summer Programme in New York from the age of 15.

I took my first photography course there in the summer of 1987 and I fell in love with how spontaneous and exciting it was to work with photographic techniques.

I took my camera absolutely everywhere with me, including to nightclubs that I probably shouldn't have been going to! When I returned to campus in the Autumn, I showed my work to the head of the photography department, who created an independent study programme for me in the photographic arts. They provided me with my own darkroom and photo studio, which was brilliant. They were extremely supportive of my work, and as part of the independent study I created an exhibit each term at the Paul Mellon Arts Centre.

When you are passionate about something, it is a pleasure to work hard at it. With photography I have always been extremely dedicated. I used to develop my own film, and up until recently, print all my own black and white and colour prints. Hours could pass by in the darkroom and I wouldn't notice the time. I recently

digitally archived the work from my early shows, and it is really interesting to see how my work has changed over the years.

Then, despite your early photographic success, you left New York to continue your University studies in Paris, but you continued shooting?

I was accepted at the Columbia College of Columbia University in 1989, so I moved to New York to continue my studies. I studied painting while I was there, but in order to continue shooting I found the best option was to start working for the modelling agencies.

In 89' I was introduced to the New Faces division of Elite Model Management and began my career as a fashion photographer. They paid me to photograph new faces for their portfolios, and shortly after I started shooting for other agencies in New York, such as Ford and Wilhelmina. I was very dedicated in creating a fashion photography portfolio with professional models, so on weekends during school term and during summer break I focused on shooting as much as possible. In my junior year at college I did a year abroad programme in Paris studying and while I was there I started shooting for several top French agencies. I collaborated with an amazing black and white printer in Paris, who really brought my portfolio to the next level.

In Paris you started shooting models for some pretty exclusive model agencies, such as Elite and Ford. Again, how did that come about?

As I had already been shooting for several

years in New York with the agencies there, it was pretty easy to work in Paris. I made an appointment to show my portfolio and they booked me straight away to test their models. I was also friends with a lot of models at the time, so whenever possible I would put together shoots for my portfolio.

You must have been incredibly focused and ambitious at this time.

It never seemed like work to me, as taking pictures was something I loved to do. I was having a great time putting together shoots with the girls, and became friends with a lot of them along the way. I was having a brilliant time!

You then went to London to concentrate on your photography. What were you hoping to learn?

I already had a pretty comprehensive portfolio of test shoots by the time I graduated and at the time the Brit scene in London was booming with cool publications such as the Face, ID and Dazed and Confused. It seemed to make the most sense to pursue photography there, where the work was more cutting edge. In New York it was almost impossible to get work with a test portfolio, but in London the magazines were really into using new photographers.

What kind of work were you doing at this time?

When I first moved to London I was modelling, as it was so hard to get

Right: Lush Magazine "Risen" Featuring model Natalia Piro.

INDIRA CESARINE



"I find fashion is a great way to express yourself, and I can't resist occasionally succumbing to the pleasures of being glamorous!"

Indira Cesarine

“I love to portray women in a strong and sensual way, I don't shy away from a woman looking intelligent and sexy ”

Indira Cesarine

assisting or commissioned work as a photographer beyond testing for agencies. To learn more about the business I decided to go in front of the camera... which was a very revealing experience to say the least!

I continued testing for agencies in London and in between castings showed my portfolio to various editors. After about 6 months in London I started getting commissions as a photographer, so I phased out the modelling. I think having had that experience was extremely valuable to my work though, as I learned a lot about how to give direction on set. It was also interesting to see the styles of how different photographers worked, and how important it is to have your own style.

Within a short time you became the Editor at Large of the magazine 'Don't Tell It' and you started to shoot for the magazine, things seem to fall into place for you. Are you lucky or do you work really hard at making things happen?

In 1993, right before moving to London, I photographed a series of 1920's inspired images of 5 friends of mine, all of who were top models at the time.

One of the girls, Stephanie Roberts, had recently been on the cover of American Vogue.

After I moved to London that Autumn, I showed the series to the Editor in Chief of "Don't Tell It", and he offered to publish 10 pages of the images in the launch issue of the magazine. I continued to contribute to *Don't Tell It* as a photographer while I was in London, and the following year when I moved back to New York. Every issue I produced and photographed a fashion and celebrity portraiture series, as well as covering the New York shows on behalf of the magazine as a journalist. It was an amazing opportunity and within a very short time I had a full portfolio of published work.

Was it at this time that you decided to concentrate on fashion?

I was always into fashion imagery, even as a

young girl. By the age of 11, I was buying Vogue and all the top fashion magazines. I covered the walls of my room with magazine covers and fashion editorials. Before I got into photography I used a lot of the magazine fashion images as painting inspiration... it was an obvious eventual direction for me as a photographer to go into fashion and beauty photography.

Did you find it difficult getting commissioned in a traditionally male orientated profession?

Interestingly enough I find it a lot harder in the US to be taken seriously as a photographer, and to get good advertising commissions.

Editorially it isn't such an issue. I find in Europe I never had an issue with commissions as a woman. I started shooting major advertising campaigns for top clients like Christian Dior, Kenzo, Cerrutti 1 by the age of 27 in the UK and France.

In the US so far I have found clients a lot more difficult to crack when it comes to this sort of work... and the lingerie market seems entirely male dominated. I think women bring a natural sensuality to images of other women, but I think most American clients are still caught up in the old fashion idea that men make women sexier.

In many ways being a woman was an advantage when I first started, as I was one of the few in the business. It definitely opened doors as far as getting appointments, as I think a lot of people were curious to check out the work of a young American female photographer. When I first moved to London, I remember meeting with the editors of British Vogue with my test portfolio, and they were all very nice and encouraging. It definitely is harder as a woman, without a doubt, but if you love the work, you just keep doing it. I think these days those boundaries are changing a lot, more and more women are getting into the business and concepts of beauty are constantly

evolving.

What do you think that you can bring to shoot that a male photographer couldn't?

I think as a female photographer I bring an interesting sensitivity to my work and the way I portray women.

I think a lot of models are more relaxed working with women, as they are less self-conscious.

I love to portray women in a strong and sensual way – I don't shy away from a woman looking intelligent and sexy at the same time, which I think is a foreign concept for a lot of men. The casting process has always been an extremely important part of my work... I really take my time to meet with models and book the right girl for the job. It is important to me that I am inspired by who I photograph. I think having a connection with who you photographing is essential to create powerful imagery.

Do you have a personal love of fashion and beauty outside of their photographic context?

I do love fashion and beauty; although to be honest when I'm working I am generally very relaxed with my attire. I find fashion is a great way to express yourself, and I can't resist occasionally succumbing to the pleasures of being glamorous!

Can you just outline for me how you approach a shoot from initial concept to the completion of post-production?

Generally when a client comes to me with a commission I like to be involved in all aspects of the production. Quite often I will contribute to the main concept of the campaign or editorial concept. I like to brainstorm ideas of how to make the direction more original or inspiring, as I

Right top: Lush Magazine - Modern Marrakech Featuring model Ava Smith/Stylist Lisa Von Weise

Right bottom: Emmanuelle at Marilyn Paris/ Minnesota untangles two angst-ridden.



BOTH IMAGES: INDIRA CESARINE

“I think that the future of the industry is moving more and more into a multi-media based direction” Indira Cesarine

think these days it is really important to promote original ideas.

I also usually contribute to the direction of hair and make-up as having worked as an editor since 1994, I'm always up to date with the shows and trends. I usually cover fashion week in at least 2 cities every season, in Paris, New York or London.

The casting is also something I think it is essential to be a part of; it makes a huge difference to be on the same page with the choice of model, and make sure that we can achieve the desired direction of the imagery with our casting choice.

On set I am usually very hands on. I am extremely lighting driven, whether in studio or on location, even if that means choosing ambient light! I always light my own sets, and with my team of assistants try to maintain an even keeled shoot so we can actually enjoy the process. I think having a very clear idea of what we need to achieve before getting started also makes the shoot a lot smoother.

So many shoots have things go wrong, models not turning up, bad weather conditions, having to shoot despite a major fever as it is impossible to reschedule... etc etc... You get used to being able to deal with anything calmly.

Once the shoot is wrapped I like to be involved with the edit whenever possible, and also generally oversee retouching. Since the digital revolution I think the post-production side of things has become even more important.

The look of retouching really is key to a photographer's style these days. I like to keep it polished yet as real as possible.

Does your approach to shooting celebrities vary great from your fashion work, especially when you are shooting characters such as Amy Winehouse, Colin Farrell and Alicia Keys?

Shooting celebrities is usually a lot more intense. Most of the time you have a very short window to achieve a lot of shots, as often, top entertainers are only available for a few hours, or sometimes even minutes.

When I photographed Macy Gray, I had

30 minutes to achieve 6 pages! Of course sometimes you have a full day, but quite often celebrities have such a busy schedule, you have to work with what time they give you. In general I find you also have to be a bit more sensitive to their personal look, as for the most part they like to be portrayed in a way that complements their own style.

A lot of times they also have their own hair and make up or stylists, which limits how creatively involved you can really get with those elements in the images. I think when shooting celebrities it is better to focus the image on who they are rather than what they are wearing, so most of my work of this type tends to be more portrait oriented.

If it's a fashion story with a celebrity I quite often try to bring out a character for them to play with.

Your working on some interesting new concepts and projects including launching your own online magazine 'XXXX Magazine' and a documentary, book and installation project titled 'The Goddess Manifesto' and you're the Fashion Editor at Large for 'Lush' magazine. How do you find the time?

At the moment I'm completely overwhelmed!

The "Goddess Manifesto" is a project I am working on that will hopefully come to fruition at some point next year. It is in pre pre-production at the moment. A lot of the imagery is from my archives, photographs of models when I first started. The documentary side of the project isn't scheduled to start shooting for several more months, so that leaves me with time to work on my favourite project, XXXX Magazine.

XXXX Magazine is a multimedia based online publication that I am creative directing and curating. It is a collaborative project with several other photographers, directors, contemporary artists, and musicians. Hopefully it will be launching by July of 2009. The launch issue showcases 15 original stories, many of them short conceptual films, conceptual

Right top: Right top: Stitch Magazine "Versace" Collection Story featuring model Michelle Alves/Fashion Editor Kithe Brewster.

Right bottom: Alicia Keys - Singer/Songwriter

documentaries and multimedia conceptual fashion stories. I personally directed a few of the films you will see in the launch, as well as shot quite a bit of the photography. Lately I have been working non-stop with my team of assistants to wrap up the launch issue.

Do you feel that it's important to be involved in all these projects to fully realize your creativity?

I think the future of the industry is moving more and more into a multi media based direction. With the focus these days on not only print campaigns and commercials but also online campaigns.

Creative individuals have to be able to cross over between photography, film and web design in order to stay competitive in the market.

I also find in the creative exploration working on these different projects keeps me in touch with my artistic identity, which has always been multi-faceted. For as long as I can remember my inspiration has come from the arts and film influences, so it only makes sense to progress in those directions. One needs to creatively grow as an artist in order to reach your full potential.

I will always maintain a strong connection with the photographic side of my work, although I have been finding it really exciting pursuing new directions. ■ GS

ONLINE

IF YOU WANT TO SEE MORE OF INDIRA'S WORK AND HEAR HER SPEAK FURTHER ABOUT HER CAREER VISIT www.professionalphotographer.co.uk AND SEE HER VISUAL PODCAST



BOTH IMAGES: INDIRA CESARINE