



Gregory Heisler: 50 Portraits: Stories and Techniques from a Photographer's Photographer

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In this first-ever showcase of his work, Gregory Heisler, one of professional photography's most respected practitioners, shares 50 iconic portraits of celebrities, athletes, and world leaders, along with fascinating, thoughtful, often humorous stories about how the images were made. From his famously controversial portrait of President George H.W. Bush (which led to the revocation of Heisler's White House clearance) to his evocative post-9/11 *Time* magazine cover of Rudolph Giuliani, to stunning portraits of Julia Roberts, Denzel Washington, Hillary Clinton, Michael Phelps, Muhammad Ali, and many more, Heisler reveals the creative and technical processes that led to each frame. For Heisler's fans and all lovers of photography, *Gregory Heisler: 50 Portraits* offers not only a gorgeous collection of both black-and-white and color portraits, but an engrossing look at the rarely seen art of a master photographer at work. With a foreword by New York City mayor Michael R. Bloomberg.

Gregory Heisler: 50 Portraits: Stories and Techniques from a Photographer's Photographer Details

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Vikas Sud says

I bought this book after I saw it being recommended on many of the forums and websites that deal with photography. Many of which had hailed this as a masterpiece. When I received the book, I was a little disappointed as it wasn't a breakdown of the technical details of the photographs. This immediately led me to believe that it was not meant for a single session reading. So I took my time with it and read about one photograph per day. This was the key that led me to unlock the message of this book for me. I saw that Mr. Heisler dealt with the more intricate art of how he crafted the photograph, paving out his thought process usually highlighting one or two techniques/approaches in the process. It allowed me to have a directors cut of the photos. Not only did I enjoy the images in the book, I feel as if I have learnt a lot in the process. I can definitely recommend this book! However. My advice would be to go through it slowly and take your time with it.

Vince Hemingson says

Gregory Heisler 50 Portraits, is a book I can't recommend highly enough. It offers incredibly generous portions of photographic 'meat and potatoes' to the aspiring portrait photographer. I purchased this book last Fall, and have read it through, cover to cover, twice.

50 Portraits is an incredibly useful resource because it takes fifty of Heisler's iconic images and deconstructs every one. Each portrait is a chapter in the book, where Heisler details his assignment, what the editor or art director was looking for, and how Heisler approached the shoot in terms of camera and lighting technique, his pre-shoot preparation and his set-up on location. Heisler then goes into a prodigious amount of detail about his interaction with his subject and how he tried to bring his personal style to the shot.

What jumps out at you is how much a photographer of Heisler's stature struggles and grapples with the difficulty of creating an image that serves his client, the subject, is original and yet has his signature look. If real estate is all about location, then for Heisler, a portrait shoot is all about preparation. It's not much of an exaggeration to say that for every minute that Heisler has a subject in front of his camera lens, he has spent an hour of preparation. And on location, anything can happen.

Particularly useful, and emotionally powerful, are the moments when Heisler recounts his personal interaction with his portrait subjects. Their interplay, and his attempts to pull out of them the image he is after makes for riveting reading. Equally fascinating is Heisler's post-game analysis of how the shoot went. Why he chose the shots he did, and the moments when his game plan wasn't working and he had to scramble and improvise on the spot. What really stands out is Heisler's intelligence, his relentless on-the-spot thinking of what will get him his next best shot and his single-minded tenacity in achieving that goal.

If you're a portrait photographer, you don't just want this book, you need it.

<http://strobist.blogspot.ca/2013/10/a...>

Christopher May says

This has to be one of the most interesting and important photography books I've had the pleasure of reading. The technical information about color and light alone would be worth the read but the stories that accompany the text outlining how each photo was imagined, refined and finally executed truly invaluable. Needless to say, the 50 portraits themselves are extraordinary and timeless. This book has changed how I think about my photography. Very, very highly recommended!

Nicholas says

The story behind many famous commercial portraits. Interesting anecdotes and artistic information, strangely I find some of these portraits seem very dated in style (and the methods for making them are certainly dated at this point). A valuable history lesson.

Sebastian Szyszka says

Great insight into what's important

Gregory does a fantastic job of relegating the technical aspects of his art to the appendix. The focus is where it should be, on the vision and thought that goes into each image. The technical data is there, and it's useful, but the meat is in the thinking behind each image. That's where it all comes together, and seeing that exposed is priceless.

Albert Yee says

An astounding collection of iconic photographs from Heisler's long career. He goes though and tells the stories surrounding the single images we normally see in publications. Heisler takes us into his thought process before, during and after shoots occur giving us plebes an incredible look into the world of very high end editorial and commercial photography.

Ryan Watkins says

I will start with the disclaimer that I know Gregory Heisler personally. Heisler was one of my professors at Hallmark Institute of Photography. This book is part coffee table book, part photography how-to, and part autobiography. Heisler tells the stories behind some of his famous portraits of subjects including Bill Clinton, George W Bush, Newt Gingrich, Denzel Washington, Danny DeVito, Bruce Springsteen, Julia Roberts, Bono, Bill Gates, and many other politicians and celebrities. Examples of the most memorable, and humorous, stories are when he was banned from the White House and when Bill Gates stole one of his sweaters. The techniques discussed are geared more towards professionals and those with photographic experience, but even those with little knowledge of photography will find the stories engaging even if the technical jargon is over their head. There is some inconsistency in Heisler's thinking and his left leaning political views definitely show thru but overall this is an amazing book and I would highly recommend it.

Richard says

"50 Portraits" is a wonderfully constructed book which shows, in fifty examples, the thought processes of what David Hobby calls the greatest living portraitist. Hobby's endorsement on his Strobist blog is what brought this book to my attention, and also no doubt thousands of his other followers. The fifty showcased portraits represent subjects from the publicly unknown to some of the political and celebrity movers and shakers of this world. Gregory Heisler is still creating super portraits; many of the pictures in this book are what may be called his classics. Many were therefore produced in the 1980's and 90's. Besides the showcased portraits, each more than powerful enough to head its own of fifty mini chapters, there is at least another photo taken in the same session, to demonstrate the process the author is highlighting in that chapter. There are also several other large portraits printed in the opening pages and the endpapers.

All of the featured portraits are beautifully printed on heavy, high quality paper. Many were photographed with large cameras, including 11 X 14 and 8 X 10 formats. This book is a testament to the unparalleled level of detail that large format film cameras can deliver. Not that Heisler is against digital photography. Some of the work in this book was produced with a Hasselbad medium-format digital camera. Heisler emphasizes how the most creative work results from applying whatever works best in a given situation. He mentions several times how he sets up photo shoots by having a variety of cameras and equipment available in order to produce an image that best fits what he envisioned.

The portraits that Heisler delivers through his camera and darkroom/post processing show a high degree of technical excellence. Depending on the person portrayed, and what Heisler is after during his photographic sessions, a variety of portrait styles may be tried, from straight-on eye-to-camera lens pose to jumping off a diving board.

Although Heisler freely shares his equipment list and techniques, his intention was not to produce a how-to book. Indeed, this is a very personal record of some of the best work which made Heisler famous. He acknowledges how much his career owes to the teaching and examples of famous photographers like Richard Avedon and Heisler's great mentor, Arnold Newman, and he holds back nothing in this book about the way in which he approached each photo assignment and worked with the photo setups and the subjects of his photographs in order to produce something uniquely descriptive each time.

Reading the book deliberately, taking the time to get a personal impression of each image and to get immersed in the building of each portrait through the straight-forward Thoughts on Technique leave no doubt this is an opportunity to observe the workings of genius. Heisler has a great way with words and always leaves the reader wanting to see and learn more. You can get a lot out of a run-through of this book but it is also something that will pay dividends through return visits.

Paul Deveaux says

Heisler is easily one of the best portrait photographers working today. In this book he lets the reader inside his process for 50 incredible portraits. This is not a book about f-stops, shutter speeds, or lighting recipes. Heisler gives you insight into his conceptual process and what happens on location. This is the true work of the photographer. I highly recommend this book to anyone hoping to make photographs of people. It is one of those books that I will revisit from time to time. This is all in addition to the photographs being drop dead gorgeous. Excellent book.

Trey Piepmeier says

The photos are good, but the stories and techniques are even better. It's fascinating to hear about how someone who works with such high profile folks does their job. I especially enjoyed his frequent mentioning of using large format cameras. It makes me want to finally try that out. Thanks, Mom and Dad, for the Christmas gift!

Yulin Zhuang says

My first and biggest take-away from this book was that to make beautiful, impactful images, I need to use an 8x10 viewfinder camera.

Okay, that's a bit of an oversimplification, but a quick scan of the picture references in the back doesn't reveal any pictures taken with any size less than medium format, and most with 4x5 or higher. For a DSLR photographer, that's quite a bit out of reach, and a little discouraging, to be honest. Then again, it might just be gear envy biting me hard.

Still, it was a fascinating book, filled with little insights and anecdotes. I enjoyed the blend of technical and personal information. There's no lighting diagrams in the book, and often there's nothing more detailed than "so I used a quartz light" or "that's when I pulled out the beauty dish".

The most useful parts, for me, were bits about how to interact with the subject, to make things feel more interesting and natural for them. Things like hanging a black velvet backdrop behind the camera, to keep the subject from getting distracted by what's going on outside.

Others were things like how to create a natural, outdoors feel within a studio environment, like replicating strong noonday sun. A lot of the strobist advice for shooting people involve NEVER using point light sources, but a lot of the portraits in here did, in a very interesting way.

Brian Page says

Like the work of Yousuf Karsh, Gregory Heisler's portraits appear deceptively simple, very deceptively. If you think producing images like this is easy, just try it. Better yet, read the book. Heisler combines stories for each image plus a big bonus for photographers: a technical background discussion for each. So there's something for everyone in this magnificently printed book. If your interest is the artful portraits of celebrities, then the stories add context & substance; and if you're a photographer, then every word adds to the immortal images. Heisler is our generation's Karsh.

Ken says

This is a fantastic book.

Usually with a photo book I will look at all the pictures, and maybe read some of the words around them. Maybe. This one, I looked at all the pictures, and then started from the front, looking AND reading. Going through each picture I felt obligated, almost, to make sure I understood both the picture before me, and the words written about it. Great care was taken in the crafting of both pieces.

I learned a lot. Or, at least I think I did. The author unlocks new ways of thinking about things. I think the vast majority of the little pieces of advice, or anecdotes that are present in this were either new to me, or were a new perspective for me, or brought something I was struggling to wrap my head around a bit a closer.

There were one or two moments, he spoke of things I already knew or felt. In one of the writeups he explains that he does not take a camera everywhere, that experiencing life interferes with picture making and vice-versa. I feel the exact same way. The sprinkles like this through the book of things I already "knew", made the parts I really didn't stand out to me even better.

I haven't said anything about the pictures yet. It is hard to discuss pictures. Its why they are ... pictures. 1000 words yada yada yada. They are ... well, 50 really great portraits. Go look at them. The ones I can pull up in my head right now are Billy Graham, Lee Iacocca, a monk whose name eludes me at the moment... but all of them are beautiful, and *seem* so simple. The writeups dispelled the notion that beautiful-simplicity is easily accomplished.

Any photographer who photographs people needs to own this book. Other people at least need to see the pictures, then I guess they can decide if they want it permanently on their shelf. I realize "need" is a strong word, but I mean it.

Nghia says

Inspiring stories and techniques. Need time to appreciate and probably will read again :)

Kathleen Messmer says

If I were a portrait photographer, I would be totally inspired by this book. However, since I am a fine art photographer, I am completely smitten by the creative force that is Gregory Heisler. He makes me want to become a portrait photographer. His images, while not only of celebrities, have a quality to them that makes me want to look at them forever. My favorites are his image of Harry Belafonte and Ed Bell (a real live Sheriff from Grants, New Mexico). Grants? Really? But it makes me want to stop there on my next journey west on I40.

Heisler tells stories about his assignments and the techniques he uses, as well as how he conceives each assignment. It is at once engaging, humorous and educational.

You gotta see/read this book!
