

Season's Best

From Hollywood to the cosmos, in pictures

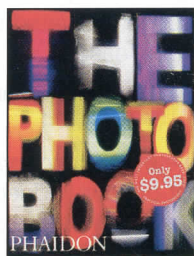
If you're looking for proof of the quicksilver nature of celebrity, you'll find it in **HotHouse** (Regan-Books, \$30), *Rolling Stone* magazine's latest collection of pop-culture hotties in various states of undress. Mark Seliger, David LaChapelle, Albert Watson, Isabel Snyder, and their colleagues manage to combine dazzling photographic technique with an incandescent sexuality. (This is celebrity journalism for the MTV set, after all.) It's interesting to note how the all-star lineup in this book differs from the celebrities featured in *Crazy Sexy Cool*, an equally steamy 1996 volume from *Us* (*Rolling Stone's* sister magazine)—for instance, Luke

Perry (then) versus Eminem (now). *Rolling Stone's* photographers know how to catch stars shining their brightest.

Vanity Fair's Hollywood (Viking Studio, \$60) is all about that august magazine's abiding access to tinseltown, from Edward Steichen's cool 1920s glamour to Annie Leibovitz's tight 1990s chic. The mostly unstudied quality of the book's older photographs stands in stark contrast to the highly produced, totally controlled images that are the stock-in-trade of today's celebrity portraiture. Text includes a terrific selection of *Vanity Fair* stories by everyone from Walter Winchell to Dominick Dunne, but our favorite thing is Christopher Hitchens' witty captions, which are full of self-conscious wordplay on movie titles. They capture the magazine's arch spirit.

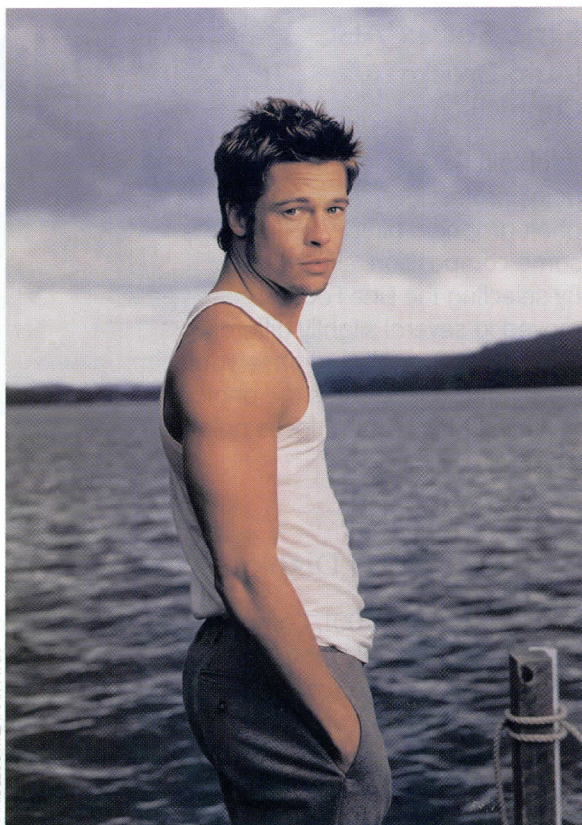
Steve McQueen (Arena Editions, \$60) is a more focused look at fame. Photographer William Claxton, best known for his atmospheric portraits of jazz musicians, was McQueen's constant companion when the late actor's career took off in the early 1960s. A counterpoint to McQueen's public remoteness, Claxton's warm and emotional black-and-white pictures show him both on set and off, driving fast cars, clowning with kids, showing off his new L.A. mansion. Some of the most touching images include contact sheets of an extended P.R. kiss with Natalie Wood for the film *Love with the Proper Stranger* (McQueen got Claxton to shoot promotional stills) and scenes of the cast and crew of *Baby, the Rain Must Fall* gathered in shock around a car as they listen to

With 500 photographs—some familiar, some rarely seen—Phaidon's **The Photography Book** spans the history of the medium. Yet this miniature edition is small enough to fit into a Christmas stocking, and at \$10, priced for that purpose. Another price-is-right item from Phaidon is a \$13 assortment of 50

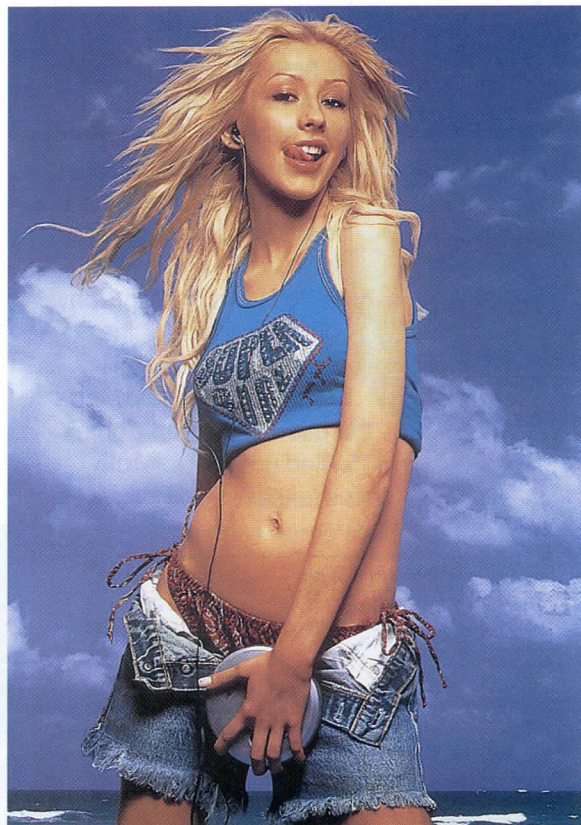


postcards featuring images by Magnum photographers. The cards range from Martin Parr's whimsically garish English close-ups to photojournalist James Nachtwey's austere black-and-whites. They come in a cute little tin that's worth saving.





ANNIE LEBOVITZ/VANITY FAIR



MARK SELIGER

They can catch stars shining their brightest.

radio reports of President John F. Kennedy's assassination.

Fame is a high-concept thing in **Sugimoto Portraits** (Abrams, \$60). Imagine that you were a celebrity photographer long before the camera was a reality and you'll sense the eeriness of fine-art photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto's portraits of wax museum figures. Shot in crisp black-and-white with dramatic light against a black backdrop, his subjects range from Henry VIII (and several of his wives) to Ben Franklin, Diana, and beyond. The pre-photographic subjects make the most oddly compelling images, though, because the wax figures are modeled after paintings—and in photographing them, Sugimoto reinstates their two-dimensional identity.

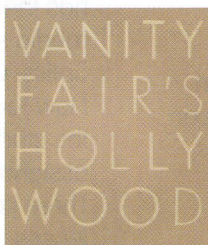
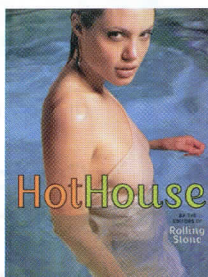
Wisconsin Death Trip (University of New Mexico Press, \$30), first published in 1973, is as much about its own time as about the final years of the 19th century in Jackson County, Wisconsin. Michael Lesy's reissued cult classic mixes social photographs by a local camera-

man with newspaper accounts of daily life. As epidemics and economic woes wracked the area, those documents changed from banal to bizarre, chronicling an outbreak of arson, murder, suicide, infanticide, incest, and insanity. There had never been anything quite like it—the book, that is.

Chris Verene (Twin Palms, \$60) proves that love and irony can coexist. The photographer's wonderful color pictures of his extended family and friends, shot mainly in shabby Galesburg, Illinois, feel a bit like Nick Waplington's take on his English Council Flats origins, full of the disordered trappings of lower-class life, only American style—shag carpets, omnipresent Ritz crackers, and decorative arrays of hubcaps. But they're better, because Verene knows instinctively that this sort of detail grabs the well-bred reader, and that only then will he or she discover the sorrows and sweetness of the pictures' occupants, from his beloved grandma Eleanor to his lonely grandpa Bill.

In **Jock Sturges: New Work 1996-2000** (Scalo, \$70), beauty is skin deep. Sturges' pictures are mostly of nude young women, and sure to be as controversial as ever. Yet they aren't the slightest bit prurient—indeed, they're innocent compared to the pop iconography with which our culture sexualizes girls at an ever-earlier age. Posed but never artificial, the pictures are beautifully printed studies of women coming of age and managing to feel comfortable in their unidealized bodies.

We think of Peter Turnley as a war photographer, but in



Above left: Brad Pitt by Annie Leibovitz, in *Vanity Fair's Hollywood*. Right: Christina Aguilera by Mark Seliger, from *HotHouse*.



© FRANS LANTING

More than mere natural-history photographs.

Parisians (Abbeville, \$50), he trains his sharp eye on his adoptive home. These are the pictures he takes on his time off from magazine assignments, of daily life around the city of lights. Though they lack the patina of age that makes the work of Doisneau and Brassai so atmospheric, Turnley's pictures have a quiet vitality that is as irresistible as Paris itself.

In **Places of Power: The Aesthetics of Technology** (Ventana Editions, \$60), John Sexton turns his signature style to subject matter very different than what he ordinarily shoots. At first it's strange to see power plants, Hoover Dam, and the Space Shuttle in its hangar (Sexton was granted rare access) infused with the luminous tones and compositional precision Sexton usually brings to nature scenes. But on second look, his ordering eye seems to find a home in these rectilinear places, perhaps because they themselves are the height of humanity's attempts to impose order on nature.

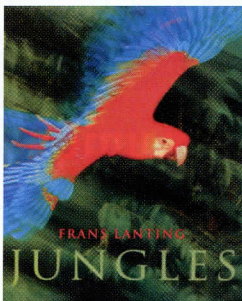
In **Jungles** (Taschen, \$40), Frans Lanting explores his usual terrain, but he outdoes himself. Though culled from 20 years of rainforest forays, his new book's images achieve a degree of sensuous abstraction that raises them above mere natural history photographs. In one stunning image of macaws in flight, Lanting's precipitously high angle (he was perched on a scaffold

100 feet up) places the birds against the golden brown of a muddy river below. The tour de force photograph evokes the quality of an Asian scroll.

An even higher point of view elevates the landscapes in Adriel Heisey's **Under the Sun: A Sonoran Desert Odyssey** (Rio Nuevo Publishers, \$40). Shooting down from his self-piloted ultralight plane, Heisey has an eye for rich, defining light and the ability to find just the right distance on his subjects, so that the images are neither too abstract nor too literal.

Hubble Space Telescope: New Views of the Universe (Abrams, \$20) looks up, not down. The once-myopic orbiting telescope has since captured what might just be the most important photographs ever made—images of nascent stars, massive nebulas, and other intergalactic wonders that are answering some of our most cosmic questions. But if science needs faith, there is **Faces of Christianity: A Photographic Journey** (Abrams, \$60), part of Magnum

photographer Abbas's continuing study of the relationship between religious passion and fanaticism. In images that touch on everything from the violence in Northern Ireland to the relationship between church and state in Cuba, he paints a fascinating picture of what it means to be Christian at the beginning of the third millennium. ■



Frans Lanting shot macaws in flight from a 100-foot-high scaffold. The image is in his new book, *Jungles*.