

**C**an you get past the first floor of the White House? For photographer Harry Benson the question is more than a matter of national security; it's a measure of success. "The second floor is what I'm looking for," he says. "The private part."

Due out in spring, *First Families: An Intimate Portrait from the Kennedys to the Clintons* (Bulfinch Press, \$29.95) attests to the success Benson has had getting upstairs for magazines like *Life*, *Vanity Fair*, and *People*. "The problem is that many photographers go in overawed," says Benson. "I'm in awe too, but I keep it in my camera bag."

Because he's been behind the scenes during so many White House occupancies, Benson has a unique perspective on the various tenants. "The Nixon White House was the most presidential," Benson remembers. "It was the most concerned with protocol." The Clintons, he says, are the most casual, at least when they first moved in. "Since Whitewater it's as if someone's gone in and tightened up all the bolts," says Benson. His vote for the most open White House, photographically speaking, goes to the Reagans. "You'd think Nancy would have been controlling," he says. "Not the least bit."

Benson's famous photos of the Reagans dancing and kissing are good examples of how he disarms his subjects, whether first families or ordinary folk. "The main thing is to keep them moving," he says. "Motion is everything. It keeps freedom in the pictures."

—RUSSELL HART

# HARRY BENSON



HARRY BENSON

The Clintons in Arkansas, 1992.

