



ARTHUR ELGORT

MODELMAKER

Arthur Elgort's manual of style

While lesser photographers try to fake a style with faddish technique, then plunge in flames from the fashion firmament, Arthur Elgort just keeps going and going. His career may owe its abiding success to stylistic pragmatism: He does whatever it takes, in aesthetic and technical terms, to create the right feeling for a fashion designer's campaign or a magazine's fashion story. So when we went in search of an instructor for our master class on shooting models, he was

the obvious choice.

Obvious, that is, because he wrote the book on the subject. *Arthur Elgort's Models Manual* (D.A.P.) is a wholly original mix of photos and advice for models and the photographers who shoot them. So popular is the book—and so quickly do the beautiful faces of fashion change—that Elgort is planning an updated edition.

In the meantime, he's chosen two very different photographs for us to meditate on in this special issue. The shots—one strikingly formal, the other calculatedly casual—testify to his visual versatility.

"So much of it depends on the model," Elgort demures. "I like the girls who are really what I call repertory models. They work for three or four clients who love them, so they don't have to rush from job to job. And not everybody takes a good picture of them; it's because *you* especially like a model that you take a good picture of her."

•LESSON ONE: CLAUDIA
Elgort finds such photographer-friendly models more scarce since the advent of the public-relations-driven supermodel.

"When the whole world decides it wants a certain girl, you have to stand in line and take your chances, because she can arrive completely frazzled and exhausted," he says. "You might get two, three days a year with her, and then she makes the rounds to the other 20 guys." In that event, Elgort just changes his strategy. In this 1994 paparazzi-style shot of supermodel Claudia Schiffer, done for Valentino, Elgort makes the most of his model's fame. "I'd been shooting another job in Rome with Claudia, trying to keep a low profile," says

Since the Roman paparazzi wouldn't leave Schiffer alone, Elgort made them part of his shot for Valentino.

“WITH SOME GIRLS, YOU JUST OBSERVE.”



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Elgort. “But word soon spread that she was in town, and everywhere we went there were people screaming to get a look at her and paparazzi pushing and shoving to get a picture. Finally we hired bodyguards—but they turned out to be friends of the paparazzi. So when Valentino called with the assignment, I said, ‘Look, we know the paparazzi are going to come and that all the TV crews will follow us, and I’m getting used to it anyway. So let’s not fight them—let’s join them.’”

Valentino let Elgort do as the Romans do. The photographer shot Schiffer alongside the paparazzi hordes at one of Rome’s most public places, the Trevi Fountain, as his assistant held on to him by the back of his belt. “I would yell to him, ‘Push me in, pull me out,’ when I wanted to take a picture,” says Elgort, who fell a few times nonetheless. “At least I didn’t get trampled!” In keeping with paparazzi custom, Elgort lit Schiffer with on-camera flash, mounting a pocket-size Vivitar 2600 strobe

on his Leicaflex SLR and shooting with a 50mm lens at f/4 on Tri-X. The ham-handed, cellphone-packing men in the frame are Schiffer’s bodyguards.

“Because they’re famous and always on the run, supermodels come with their own style and their own look,” Elgort explains. “You almost have to *observe* them instead of making them *your* model. It’s like, here’s this fabulous model, and our job is to put her into this picture.

“In this case, it was a simple idea, but I liked the chanciness of it,” says Elgort about the shoot. “It was so different from being in the studio.”

•LESSON TWO: JENY

Yet even in the studio Elgort is inclined to improvise. Take this split-toned side view of British model Jeny Howorth. Made for a mid-1980s *Tatler* magazine story on hairdresser Christiaan (who was then “wrapping” his coifs with black fabric), it features spidery background shadows created by aiming a 2,000-watt tungsten movie spotlight through a web of scaffolding. “The scaffolding was part of a set we were building for another job,” says Elgort, who trained a second 1,000-watt spot directly on Howorth, and shot with Tri-X (1/30 second at f/8) in a creaky, handheld 4x5 Graflex. (“Old cameras smell great, they really do,” he says.)

For Elgort, Howorth (who’s no longer modeling but is still a friend whom the photographer looks up when he’s in London) was the quintessential repertory model. “Since she wasn’t an overexposed superstar, her attitude was ‘Now I have to do a Valentino shot; next I have to do a Comme des Garçons shot.’ She could go from one to the other and still look the part. That’s why I did a chapter on her in my book.”

Two different girls, two different settings, two different visual goals, but a single sensibility brings the imagery to life: In these photos, the adaptable Elgort met the stylistic challenge, and prevailed.

—RUSSELL HART