

Peter Gowland was taking bit parts in Hollywood movies when his mother gave him a Rolleiflex. "I started to sneak the camera into the studios in a paper bag, like my lunch," says the 85-year-old photographer, who went on to double for Ronald Reagan in the future president's first World War II movie. "Then I'd take these beautiful girls who were working as extras or dancers around back of the set and shoot pictures of them." One thing led to another, and Gowland often talked his nubile subjects

into the nearby Pacific Ocean, where they splashed in the surf for his camera. "We had the beaches, we had the girls, and I'd learned a little bit about lighting on the movie sets," says Gowland. "That's how it all came together."

What came together was a 60-year career photographing the female form (mainly its most wholesome incarnation, the California Girl, right) during which Gowland helped define glamour photography. Gowland's work graced over 1,000 magazine covers, from *Popular Photography* to *Playboy*, which ran nine of his nudes as centerfolds. He established himself as America's foremost authority on posing, reducing that task to an orderly numerical system in manuals co-authored with Alice Gowland, his wife of 60 years. For a taste of these out-of-print classics, get the Gowlands' recent *Classic Nude Photography: Techniques and Images* (Amherst Media, \$30).

As late as the 1950s, many publishers were still demanding large-format quality. So Gowland started looking for a way to combine the handholdability of his Rolleiflex with a bigger piece of film. In 1957 he built himself a 4x5 twin-lens-reflex from scratch. He called it the Gowlandflex and later manufactured hundreds for other photographers, including the great Philippe Halsman. Gowland's camera business became a major sideline to his glamour photography (see sidebar).

How does Gowland view the explicitness of modern glamour photography? "Nudes are more interesting when you don't show everything," he says. He thinks today's nudes are too heavily lit—a telling criticism from a man who learned his lighting in old Hollywood. "Most of my nudes are in shadow," says Gowland. "The sexiest picture I ever took was of a girl wearing one of my old shirts, open in the front."—RUSSELL HART

Right: Some of Gowland's two-dozen how-to books.



Peter Gowland's unique large-format camera line is predicated on light weight. "All my cameras are built like airplanes," says the photographer, who learned his machining techniques during a wartime stint as an aviation industry photographer. So it's not surprising that at 4½ pounds, Gowland's latest monorail model is just what its name says it is—the **World's Lightest 8x10 View** (\$1,550). "I built it for a backpacker who wanted to shoot 8x10 in the mountains," says Gowland. Yet the camera has a 24-inch bellows and full movements. Visit petergowland.com.



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