

PHOTOGRAPHER PROFILE:  
DAVID BAILEY

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David Bailey was born January 2, 1938 in the East End of London, “on the street next to Alfred Hitchcock’s”<sup>1</sup> At the age of ten or eleven, he started using his mother’s Brownie box camera, and developed photographs in his cellar. “[It] was mainly a technical thing: I loved mixing up chemicals.”<sup>2</sup> He struggled in school, due to his undiagnosed dyslexia, and left on his fifteenth birthday<sup>3</sup> In 1956, he was conscripted into the Royal Air Force, and served in Singapore for two years. There, he got a camera “practically for free.”<sup>4</sup>

After finishing his service, he wrote to “every photographer in London”<sup>5</sup> and ended up working as an assistant for David Olins, a photographer for *Queen*. After six months there, he got a job as second assistant to John French, who did work for British *Vogue* and *Harper’s*. By 1960, he was photographing for the *Daily Express* and mass-circulation women’s magazines. *Vogue* offered him a contract in February of 1960, but he turned them down, as he was already earning more than they were offering.<sup>6</sup>

By July of 1960, *Vogue* had convinced him to become a staff photographer. About accepting the job, he later said, "If someone offers you the chance to take pictures of pretty girls in frocks all day there are only so many times you can say no. But I always knew what I was there for at *Vogue* and those fashion magazines—it was to sell frocks. And I never wanted to be a fashion photographer. I was always more interested in people."<sup>7</sup>

Bailey has photographed for British, American, Italian, and French *Vogue* from 1959 onwards. He started directing television commercials in 1966, and has gone on to direct television

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<sup>1</sup> Gandee, Charles. “David Bailey: Interview.” *Photo District News*, 2000.

<http://www.pdngallery.com/legends/bailey/interview01.shtml> (accessed October 20, 2012)

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> “Q & A: David Bailey.” *CNN: Travel*, November 3, 2006.

<http://edition.cnn.com/2006/TRAVEL/11/02/london.qa/> (accessed October 20, 2012)

<sup>4</sup> Gandee.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Heaf, Jonathan. “Icon: David Bailey.” *British GQ*, January 20, 2012. <http://www.gq-magazine.co.uk/entertainment/articles/2012-01/20/david-bailey-interview/viewall> (accessed October 20, 2012)

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

and film. He has been the subject of numerous exhibitions, and has received multiple awards for his photography and advertising work.<sup>8</sup> Bailey has also published dozens of books, starting with *David Bailey's Box of Pin-Ups* in 1964.<sup>9</sup>

### “Young Idea Goes West”

In January of 1962, *Vogue* sent Bailey to New York City with model (and girlfriend) Jean Shrimpton in order to photograph the feature “New York: Young Idea Goes West,” which would appear in the April 1962 issue.<sup>10</sup> This feature is significant because of its raw, unpolished look, which contrasted with the stiff, polished, and conventionally glamorous fashion photography appearing in the magazine at the time. Bailey described his vision for the shoot as, “I wanted to make Jean look like Jean—real and not a model. I didn’t even want her to be glamorous, just natural... This was going to be a rough-on-the-streets shoot.”<sup>11</sup> When asked what Shrimpton’s appeal was, he said, “What attracted me to her was that she genuinely didn’t care how she looked. She honestly never understood what all the fuss was about.”<sup>12</sup> He also described her appeal as “democratic” and “not scary beautiful.”<sup>13</sup>

The weather was freezing cold, and they lacked support staff—no assistant, no makeup artist, so Shrimpton did her own hair and makeup. In a 2007 interview with *The Guardian*, Bailey described the atmosphere “It was so cold, the cameras stuck to your fingers... [fashion editor] Clare Rendlesham was crying all the time and Jean was very, very cold. Physically shivering and her eyes

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<sup>8</sup> “David Bailey: Bio” <http://www.david-bailey.co.uk/Bio.html> (Accessed October 20, 2012)

<sup>9</sup> “David Bailey: Books” <http://www.david-bailey.co.uk/Books.html> (Accessed October 20, 2012)

<sup>10</sup> Bailey, David and Martin Harrison. *NY JS DB 62*. Göttingen: Steidl, 2007. 1.

<sup>11</sup> Conti, Samantha. “Eye Catching: David Bailey’s new photo book captures Sixties fashion.” *WWDscoop*, March 2007. 51.

<sup>12</sup> Bumpus, Jessica. “News: The Shrimpton Story.” *British Vogue*, March 3, 2010. <http://www.vogue.co.uk/news/2010/03/03/david-bailey-on-jean-shrimpton> (accessed October 20, 2012)

<sup>13</sup> Conti, 51.

watering. The clothes were dreadful. I didn't think *Vogue* would like what Jean and I were doing. They didn't like much of what I did anyway. I didn't care. I just did what I did. But it worked."<sup>14</sup>

In this photograph [figure 2], taken on a New York City rooftop, with a hazy view of the Empire state building in the background, Shrimpton leans on a chain link fence. In the foreground, a teddy bear that had been given to Shrimpton “on the plane ride over,”<sup>15</sup> peers at the camera.

In this photograph, Shrimpton is wearing a boxy, collarless camel-colored wool jacket with brass buttons, a matching straight, knee-length skirt with some shirring at the waist, a green silk blouse with a demure ruffled collar, and a matching scarf in her hair.

One of the most striking things about the actual clothing in this photograph is how perfectly ordinary and downright conservative it is. It would not look out of place on Jackie Kennedy. Shrimpton is not modeling the miniskirts and babydoll clothes which would appear on the scene in the following years. The “young idea” seems to be completely embodied in the youth of the model (complete with her trusty teddy bear), the youthful styling, and the snapshot-like qualities of the photo.

The influence of this spread in *Vogue* was later described by former *Vogue* Young Idea editor Marit Allen, “Jean and Bailey in New York broke the ground for fashion as it was from then on. They turned the world upside down. Fashion was no longer static and stiff, posed in the studio: it became something relevant, current—suddenly there was a place where young people could live and exist.”<sup>16</sup> Of course Allen’s declaration lacks historical perspective. Dynamic location fashion photography had existed for decades prior to 1962, even in *Vogue*.

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<sup>14</sup> Muir, Robin. “Two Take Manhattan.” *The Guardian*, March 16, 2007.

<http://www.guardian.co.uk/theguardian/2007/mar/17/weekend7.weekend1> (accessed October 20, 2012)

<sup>15</sup> Conti, Samantha. “Eye Catching: David Bailey’s new photo book captures Sixties fashion.” *WWDscoop*, March 2007. 51.

<sup>16</sup> Bailey, David and Martin Harrison. *NYJS DB 62*. Göttingen: Steidl, 2007. 2.

## Contribution

Not all of Bailey's photographs have the relaxed, raw, documentary feel of his "Young Idea Goes West" photographs. As his first *Vogue* cover in February of 1961 [figure3] illustrates, he was perfectly capable of taking conventional, glamorous fashion photographs.

However, his contribution to the world of fashion photography is apparent in the relaxed look that much of 1960s fashion photography is known for. Many of his photographs are also very sexy, as seen in this photograph of Jane Holzer [figure 4] from the April 1, 1965 issue of *American Vogue*.

Even when he wasn't romantically involved with his subjects, there was a relationship between the model and Bailey's camera. As he said in a 2006 interview with CNN, "When I photograph somebody I fall in love with them for that hour or so, because you have to give everything to them. It's just about them and your small relationship with them. You see if you can find something in them that's peculiar to them because everybody's got something about them. There's nobody that's not interesting."<sup>17</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> "Q & A: David Bailey." *CNN: Travel*, November 3, 2006.  
<http://edition.cnn.com/2006/TRAVEL/11/02/london.qa2/> (accessed October 20, 2012)



Figure 1: O'Neill, Terry: *David Bailey photographing Moira Swan, London, Vogue Studio 3. 1965*



Figure 2: Bailey, David. *Jean Shrimpton on New York City Rooftop*. *Vogue* (UK), April 1962. Fashion Editor: Lady Clare Rendlesham.



Figure 3: Bailey, David: Cover, *Vogue* (UK), February 1961. Editor: Alisa Garland





Figure 4: Bailey, David: *Jane Holzer in Bias-Cut Crepe by John Cavanagh. Vogue (US), April 1, 1965. 146. Editor: Diana Vreeland*