



STARLIGHT

Capturing stars with **FRANÇOIS BERTHIER**

By: **MIKE BRANNON**

Photography: **FRANÇOIS BERTHIER**



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rilliant celebrity photographer and film director François Berthier started taking pictures at 17 with a gifted Pentax K-1. After studying law, in 2002, he became a rock journalist. At 28, he was named editor-in-chief of his rock magazine. In December 2008, after six years interviewing famous rock stars, he decided to return to his first love: shooting women. He started a career as a fashion photographer, and seven months later, he was shooting Lady Gaga.

Among the luminaries Berthier has shot is a “who’s who” of contemporary film and music, including Scarlett Johansson, Jessica Chastain, Rosamund Pike, Sophie Turner, Sigourney Weaver, Lady Gaga, John Legend, Jimmy Page, Ronnie Wood, Adam Driver, David Lynch, Matt Damon, Marion Cotillard, Daniel Radcliffe, Robert Pattinson, Eva Herzigová, Luma Grothe, Julia Roberts, Anna Kendrick and Juliette Lewis.







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Berthier has been published in numerous prestigious magazines, including Cosmopolitan, Rolling Stone, Vanity Fair Italy, Glamour, Elle France, Elle Ukraine, Elle Russia, GQ France, Marie Claire, Flare, IO Donna, Madame Figaro, L'Express Style, Grazia France, Paris Match and Biba.

71: What got you into photography? Do you have an art background, did you study formally/ apprentice or are you self-taught?

FB: When I was a teenage boy, I was in love with top model pictures in magazines. I was also lazy at school, so I figured photography would be a nice way to earn money. Later, I got myself into a press company. I started retouching car photos for an auto magazine, and then I became a journalist at a music magazine. All of this was a way to my goal: being a photographer.

I started shooting bands with my magazine and models in my free time. I bought all the fashion and art magazines I could to make my eye better. I never really studied photography itself. Recently, I looked at my first “fashion” pictures and realized how bad I was. I realized how far I’ve come and all the hard work I’ve put into my photography.

71: How did you develop your eye and sense of light?

FB: I have always been fascinated with cinema, so my first step was watching a lot of movies. Then I tried to do the same light in my photographs. Of course, I was poor, so it was hard. My first photos were really dark because I was shooting rock stars. In 2008, I quit my job as a chief editor to focus on photography, but I started to feel I needed softer light. It took me some time to make my light softer with a big soft box.

71: Do you feel you have a philosophy of art and photography?

FB: I would say I focus on people more than on my camera. I feel that a trusty person will be better looking in a picture. Ninety percent of my work is psychology. Especially when I shoot celebrities, I have to analyze the model's personality in 15 seconds.

Most of the time, after I say “hello,” I ask a simple question to see how the model will react. Sometimes I play the fool. Sometimes I play the guy who doesn’t know what he’s doing. Sometimes I have to be the father, the friend, the lover...

That's what I like: Every person I shoot is different, so I have to be someone different every time to make my model comfortable. Sometimes I have to make him or her uncomfortable. I'm not here to be their friend. I need to make a photo that will make a difference.

71: Who and/or what have been your influences?

FB: My first influence was definitively Anton Corbijn. When I saw his pictures in Metallica's *Load* and *Re-load*, I wanted to do that. Then, after I started, I became a big Terry Richardson fan. I copied his flash/ white wall images. I loved the trashy sex stuff. It was another era... But I discovered Juergen Teller and Helmut Newton, who were more sophisticated (and more crazy). After that, I studied more classic photographers such as Demarchelier and Greg Kadel, but when I rediscovered Peter Lindbergh, I must say I fell in love.

71: Can you talk about your most intriguing and most challenging projects and how you dealt with them?

FB: I must say, the bigger the project, the better I am. I love pressure. I'm good under pressure. I feel alive. I like big projects with a lot of people involved. I'm not a fan, so I don't feel the pressure. I can shoot Di-Caprio or Mr. Nobody; it's the same for me. Yesterday I shot Neymar Jr. and Mbappé, the biggest football players from PSG on Earth. Everyone was stressed, but I was excited.









71: What got you into the fashion and art aspects of photography?

FB: I like the girls; I like the clothes. Some people think I prefer naked women, but that's false. I prefer naked women to bad clothes, that's all... I don't dress fashionably because I need to be comfortable to shoot. I'm not interested in the politics game. I won't kiss ass to make it. That's the part I don't like. And in this business, they don't like it when you don't play by their rules.

71: Do you think and/or prepare differently for editorial versus art/fashion shoots?

FB: I have to admit that I have a very cool approach to shooting. I don't prepare too much. I don't overthink. I have an eye and a brain, so I let them do the job. I often come without any preparation, scouting or location spotting. I like my eye to be fresh and to let my brain do the math. So I would say both are the same to me.

That's also what people don't like about me, I guess. Some big magazines and big brands may think I'm lazy, but I'm not. I always know what I'm doing, and I've never fucked up a shoot or let down an art director who trusted me enough to give me a big project.

71: What gear (cameras, lenses, studio lighting, drones) do you use?

FB: I have a Canon 5D Mark IV and a 24-105, but I mostly use a 50mm F1.4. It's not really about the camera anyway. The only things I hate are mirror-less cameras and when people shoot without aiming in the eye of the camera... This isn't photography anymore.

71: What would you want to pass on to photographers and creators new to the arts?

FB: I want to share my love for people. You can't be a good photographer if you don't like people. I mean, you *can*, but you shouldn't.

71: What are your current and future projects?

FB: A nude book, and to shoot all the celebrities I dream of.

See more from François Berthier on Instagram.





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