

TOM CRUISE and NICOLE KIDMAN, Vanity Fair Oscar party, Mortons, West Hollywood, 2000.

"They were *the* hot couple. At that moment, she seemed at her most narcissistic, and even Tom is in the shadows." ►

all that glitters

From the Kennedys to Courtney Love, for 30 years Jonathan Becker has had unrestricted access to the glitterati, capturing them at home and at play. Here, the long-time *Vanity Fair* contributor reveals to Anne Fullerton the personal stories behind some of his most iconic photographs

JONATHAN BECKER





Left: **ANDY WARHOL**,
The Factory,
New York, 1986.

"This was his last Factory. Andy had been shot in the stomach in 1968 and he had to wear these corsets – I think to keep his organs in order. Brigid Polk, Andy's right-hand everything, dyed his corsets so they would be more amusing. She was proud of them, so she wanted me to come over and take pictures. It was more for her than for him."

Above right:
PENÉLOPE CRUZ
and **JAMES BLUNT**,
Vanity Fair Oscar
party, Mortons, West
Hollywood, 2007.

"That's just a great, fun moment at the Oscar party, a real snapshot. Generally, it's the composition that first strikes me; sometimes I don't even recognise the subjects. There are lots of famous people; there are not lots of great pictures."

Right: **HILARY SWANK** and **SEAN PENN**,
Vanity Fair Oscar
party, Sunset
Tower Hotel, West
Hollywood, 2010.

"She is doing everything to draw attention to her chest and Penn hasn't noticed – while she's actually studying his chest. Starkly funny. An absurd moment." ▶



JONATHAN BECKER



Choreographer **MARTHA GRAHAM** (centre), with **MADONNA** and **CALVIN KLEIN**, after Graham's final onstage bow, New York, 1990.

"Martha was my godmother. This would be her last appearance and the last time I saw her. There were a gazillion photographers, but the whole time she didn't take her eyes off my camera. It was a sad moment, a bittersweet moment in a way. All the other people become ancillary, but, of course, they made the picture better. Magic."



COURTNEY LOVE, Vanity Fair Oscar party, Mortons, West Hollywood, 2001.

"This is at the entrance to the party. It's a great moment for anyone who glories in extra attention, like Courtney. She seems in utter narcissistic bliss. There are dozens of photographers taking her picture. Bliss."

Below: **MATT DAMON** (left) and **BEN AFFLECK**, Culver City, California, 1998.

"This was at a charity benefit. It was one year after *Good Will Hunting*, so they were the hot ticket at that point. These two got famous real quick together. They're really good pals, so it was an easy snap."

DIANA VREELAND, at home in New York, styled by **André Leon Talley**, 1979.

"This is at her famous apartment on Park Avenue at 62nd Street. She called that room her 'garden in hell' and that sofa was sort of her favourite place. I first met Diana Vreeland when I was driving a taxicab in New York and she hailed me down. Six months later, I got an assignment to photograph her for *W* magazine. We became quite good friends after that."



JONATHAN BECKER



Right: **UMA THURMAN** (left) and **DIANE VON FURSTENBERG**, Vanity Fair Cannes Film Festival party, Hôtel du Cap-Eden-Roc, Cap d'Antibes, France, 2004.

"I was probably wandering around after dinner when people are relaxed and chatting. This looks like it was taken at one or two in the morning. I know Diane fairly well, so she's relaxed. When I first photographed her for *New York Magazine* in 1978, she took all her clothes off in front of me when changing clothes ... She's a beautiful free spirit, and I've never been so embarrassed in my life." ▶





Left: **CHRISTIAN LACROIX**, haute couture show, Le Grand Hotel, Paris, 1998.

“The models are going onto the runway, so it’s the last moment to put a final touch on them. It’s a moment of intensity, a pure fashion/theatrical moment; the place to be when taking pictures, the place where everything is most intense.”

Right: **WAYNE BOECK** (left) and **GORDON LOCKSLEY**, at home in Palm Springs, California, 1999.

“Gordon Locksley was quite a well-known art collector, and he and Wayne were a prominent social couple in Palm Springs [California]. They were living in a fantastic house [designed by architect A. Quincy Jones], and they may have been a tad timid about being shown as a couple. Still in 1999, people were conservative. In that day, you just didn’t see men holding hands seriously in a major national magazine. It was a brave gesture.”



Left: Socialite **JOCELYN WILDENSTEIN**, at home in New York, 1998.

“She has a sort of charming madness about her. There’s a sense of high drama and high humour, which is so appealing. She’s obsessed with animals, and I think she likes to look a bit like a cat. Her dogs love her so much; they’re always on top of her. She was a great subject and I got along with her very well. Few words were spoken, but the mutual understanding about image-making made for a wonderful collaboration.” ▶





DUSTIN HOFFMAN,
Beverly Hills Hotel, 2004.

"It was very hard for me to get permission to close the hotel pool and photograph there. And then Dustin's dog did something in the pool and they had to drain the whole thing. Luckily, Anita, the head of housekeeping, forgave me. They got a damn good picture out of it; it was worth draining the pool."



Jonathan Becker takes a self-portrait while on assignment in Paris in 1998.

Celebrities come and go, but one man has been there to capture the big arrivals and stolen moments. As photographic contributor to

Vanity Fair for the past three decades, Jonathan Becker has had privileged access to some of the most illustrious public figures in the world, including at the legendary *Vanity Fair* parties. Whether he's on assignment photographing members of the Yanomami tribe in the Amazon, or documenting Hollywood's elite at their most intimate and unguarded, his portraits offer a captivating glimpse into the private worlds of others.

"A great picture is really a portrait of the unexpected," he says, when pressed on what it is he aims to capture in his work. "So many people get so stuck in what they're wanting to see that they end up seeing nothing."

A far cry from the paparazzi-driven celebrity photography of today, Becker says that for him, the subject may come second to the shot. "My first impression is graphic and intuitive. I'm not very good when I go to a party and they say, 'Get all the famous people,' because I'm more interested in taking great pictures. But if you put me with only famous people, it's hard for me to go wrong." ■

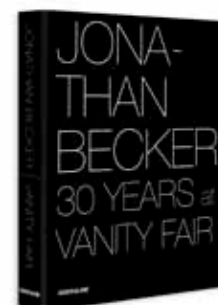
VALENTINO, off the coast of St Tropez, France, 2004.

"We spent the day on his yacht in St Tropez and we went for lunch at Cinquante Cinq, a very fashionable restaurant on the beach. He's supremely vain, but, of course, that is what makes for such a great picture. And he has a wonderful, wry sense of humour and a very subtle smile. Pure charm. I could probably do a whole book of Valentino, I've got so many pictures of him."



JOHN F KENNEDY JR and CAROLYN BESSETTE KENNEDY, *Vanity Fair* White House Correspondents' Dinner party, 1999.

"They died together two and a half months later. When I'm at these events, I'm looking for portraits, and they were sitting there like a perfectly glamorous portrait. It's probably the last portrait taken of them. He was still editor-in-chief of *George*, a politics and lifestyle magazine. They were talking with Sean Penn."



Jonathan Becker: 30 Years At *Vanity Fair* (www.assouline.com, approximately \$150) is out now.