

CRAZY SEXY COOL

THE HOLLYWOOD ESTHETIC, VISUALLY CATALOGUED BY THE PHOTOGRAPHERS OF US MAGAZINE

The introduction, written by David Wild, proposes a different focus for this publication. According to Wild, this book is more of a portrait of our times; a reflection of us and our desires. During his long rambling rave Wild ponders the nature of celebrity, the 'crazy sexy cool' of the title, and where US magazine and this book fit into the grand scheme of things. If you believe everything he says then you probably also think that Entertainment Tonight is the most incisive hard news show on television.

The key phrase for me is the one in which Wild claims that US magazine has presented "many of the decade's most compelling and ultimately telling images." Perhaps it has, but I don't remember seeing them, and they certainly aren't included in *CrazySexyCool*. While the entertainment industry has great value (take a look at the number of people employed in creation, distribution and publicity) it is not the be all and end all of existence that it is portrayed as being here. Not even in 90s North America.

Wild claims that US MAGAZINE has presented "many of the decade's most compelling - and - ULTIMATELY TELLING images."

While this attitude casts a large shadow over the introduction, it is by no means the sole objectionable part.

He writes as if you and he were just having a chat about those crazy kids in the industry who he's interviewed and you want to hear about. This comes across as both condescending and insulting. After all, the majority of people pictured are over 30, kids by no stretch of the imagination. Unless it's Hollywood imagination where youth is eternal until you finally can't hide it anymore, somewhere around Jack Palace's age.

Then there's his use of the word 'we.' He uses it to put us at ease. You and he are pals, just shootin' the breeze. But a lot of the time it seems that he's really using we to refer to him and the rest of his colleagues at US magazine, for example "focusing on the individuals who we ... talk about, think about, argue about and even dream about." The individuals are the folks that the general public would know nothing about were it not for editorial decisions made by those nice folks at US, People, Entertainment Weekly and Premiere.

And finally, there's his use of the classic "A thing of beauty is a joy forever." In the movie industry? The industry where an actor's beauty only matters until their movies bomb a couple too many times, or they piss off the editors of magazines and producers of tv. If this was really true, you would have found pictures of Julia Roberts or perhaps either Kurt Cobain or River Phoenix. Phoenix and Cobain are certainly crazy, sexy and cool. They're also dead. If they could have got the rights to the Nirvana picture where Cobain holds a rifle to his mouth *CrazySexyCool* would have had a truly compelling picture. But this is a book of fantasy, where all are young and available; death has no place here.

CrazySexyCool is a collection of photos of some rich and shameless pop-culture-tarts who, in the words of David Wild, "offer a vision of nowness." In a vain attempt to make this more than my first coffee table book, a lengthy introduction from Wild is also included as well as quotes from many of the models on the nature of showbusiness. The portraits are a joy to look at. Large, good quality and quite varied - perhaps more so by location than anything else. The standouts? Facial close-ups of Whoopi Goldberg, Johnny Depp and Winona Ryder, a shot of Charlie Sheen, taken through a fly screen, Liz Phair in a stunning silver dress and 12 miniatures of Gary Oldman performing in different hats still linger in my mind.

Probably the best thing about the book is the effort that went into ordering the pictures. Some of the combinations are priceless (actually \$39.99 + tax).

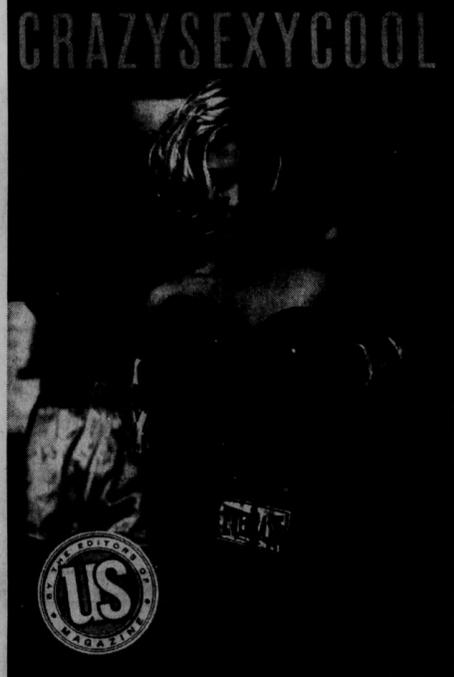
Take the spread featuring pictures of Kato Kaelin and Tom Hanks: on the left page, Kaelin is in a swimming pool with only his head above the water, making his body look larger than life. On the right page, Tom Hanks leans off a pier with his hand over his mouth, seemingly unable to hold back the vomit caused by something to the left of him.

Then there's the rear view of Gwyneth Paltrow which not only attracts the gaze of Christian Slater on the facing page, but also those of Stephen Dorff and Samuel L. Jackson on the following spread. Other than that matches are made on pose, attire and relationships (personal or professional, past or present).

As a compendium of portraits of pop culture stars, this book comes close to standing on its own merits. It has the movie business fairly well covered, with portraits of most of the people who pull down the big bucks. The majority of 22 tv people are from NBC sitcoms, with FOX holding down second place courtesy of 90210 and the X-Files. Most of these actors have also appeared on film. The music section is eclectic, quite a contrast from the conservatism of the previous two categories, ranging from Tom Jones to Coolio by way of Dwight Yoakam and Björk. Again, several of these people have appeared on the big screen, though usually in cameo roles.

NOTE • ABSENT FRIENDS • Seinfeld and Friends have all but one of their major actors included. Absent: Jason Alexander & Jennifer Aniston. **EURO-SCEPTICS** • Despite a recent influx of European actors, only 8 British & Irish stars make it in, along with Icelandic singer Björk. **BLACK & WHITE** • Of the 115 pictured, only 13 are not caucasian

CrazySexyCool makes a much better reflection of the movie industry than anything else. Just as the big studios want to halve the number of movies they produce and concentrate on "event movies" (where the budgets are so large, the odd \$5million doesn't really matter), *CrazySexyCool* is US magazine's "event publication." It's bigger, glossier and much more expensive than the magazine. Meanwhile US's costs are cut by halving the creative team - those writers were too damn temperamental, anyway. Not only that, look at the make up of the cast! First of all, you have the big stars to sell the product on name recognition. But as they won't let us print lots of their skin, let's throw in a few lesser lights to take care of that side. Throw in a couple of really lesser names to give it some integrity (at even less cost). Et voila. A perfect reflection of nowness in the movie industry. The final shot in the book is of a bustling street. Brad Pitt leaps above the crowd, sticking his tongue out and spreading his arms. Just in front of him someone looks back at the photographer with his face forming a question. "Why are you doing this?"



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