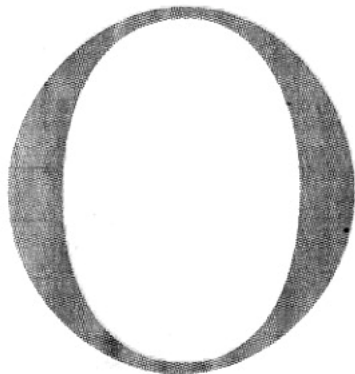


ART

His back pages

Every year, Benedikt Taschen sells 15 million books full of taboos, whimsy and Americana. Some tomes from the enigmatic German go for a few dollars, others go for thousands. Who is he, and how is L.A. changing him?

By SCOTT TIMBERG
Times Staff Writer



NE night this fall, Benedikt Taschen was planning a modest dinner with the editor in charge of his Los Angeles office. Something in Koreatown, he figured, or maybe Tom Bergin's, perhaps a drink later at an old Hollywood haunt like the Formosa Cafe. Although he runs an international empire and favors expensive suits, the German publisher makes it a point of pride to eat only at restaurants with a B or C

health rating.

But Taschen, it turned out, had scored invitations to a fashion show at Armani, and soon he and editor Jim Heimann were standing in frustration behind a roadblock on Rodeo Drive. Beverly Hills looked poised for an invasion, its streets patrolled by young people wearing sleek black clothes and headsets.

Taschen and Heimann have become, over the last two decades, innovators in a new kind of publishing, one that brings the humor of pop culture to high art and some of high art's seriousness to kitsch. It was Taschen, a friend of fetish photographer Helmut Newton, who published Newton's collected works in a \$1,500 coffee-table book that came with its own coffee table.

None of this, though, helped with the burly guards on Rodeo. Clearly not used to being detained, the publisher stood seething until a shapely blond Englishwoman apologetically escorted him and Heimann to the Armani store's entrance, terming the scene outside "very uncivilized."

"Yes, it is," Taschen intoned.

[See Taschen, Page E48]