

The Ingmar Bergman Archives

Edited by Paul Duncan and Bengt Wanselius
Taschen, \$400

IN THE 1950s and '60s, Swedish director Ingmar Bergman could do no wrong. Films such as *Wild Strawberries* and *The Seventh Seal* stood at the pinnacle of what was known as art cinema. They were screened in festivals and public cinemas, and vigorously debated by all who saw them. They rank among the most strikingly photographed films in history, with performances so powerful that they remain deeply etched in our collective memories.

Then the times changed. Bergman's intensely Freudian angst — repressed memories, tortured childhoods and demonic sexuality — moved slightly out of kilter with contemporary tastes. But what threatened his reputation most was a decade of sustained attack by feminists who questioned his fascination with masochistic women and branded his films misogynistic.

However, to label Bergman's reverence for women as misogynist is akin to accusing those in awe of God of being atheists.

All his life, Bergman raged against Puritanism, especially the kind preached by his father, a Lutheran pastor. He also fulminated against what he termed "God's silence" (beautifully explored in *Winter Light*), even if many insist there is a spiritual presence in almost every frame of his films.

Today, a year after his death, Bergman remains a major figure. Almost all his 45 features are available on DVD, countless books on him are in print and his work still figures in lists of the top 10 films of all-time. And now, in perhaps the greatest homage to a filmmaker in publishing history, Taschen has produced the sumptuous and huge *Ingmar Bergman Archives*.

Weighing nearly seven kilograms,



Archives contains 592, exquisitely printed landscape pages of photographs and text that span Bergman's life and career. It is arranged chronologically, from Bergman's birth in 1918 in the university town of Uppsala, home of his beloved grandmother, to his solitary later years on his private island of Faro.

The book devotes a chapter to each of Bergman's films and features, beginning with *Torment*, directed by Alf Sjöberg but for which Bergman wrote the screenplay. Entries have pointed histories, production notes, excerpts from interviews, reviews and script extracts. The text is brought vividly to life by a dazzling array of images, including ravishingly beautiful photographs of scenes from the movies and behind-the-scenes action.

Readers may query why some films receive greater coverage than others. *Shame*, for example, receives 24 pages but its arguably finer predecessor, *Hour of the Wolf*, gets

only six. No matter, editors Paul Duncan and Bengt Wanselius have done an exemplary job in assembling contributions from 102 writers, filmmakers and actors. They range from Bergman's most prolific English-language supporter, Peter Cowie, to fellow directors Vilgot Sjöman and Tom Donner, and actors Liv Ullmann and Erland Josephson, who contributes a

strikingly photographed catalogue of films includes *The Seventh Seal*.

deeply personal and touching foreword. The emotional reserve often attributed to Swedes cannot be found in these pages.

In separate sections called "Chronology", printed on different paper to distinguish them from film entries, there is a fascinating (and also well illustrated) look at Bergman's theatre productions. In his homeland, Bergman's stage and opera career is regarded, the equal, if not superior, to his film work. Before he made his first film at age 27, Bergman had directed 34 plays.

One very minor reservation about this book is the relative absence of the disturbing images that made Bergman such a confronting and controversial director. The famous still of Harriet Andersson's naked dash to the water in *Summer with Monika* is strangely absent, as is the oft-censored erection in *Persoria* and the bloodied shard of glass resting between a woman's legs in *Cries and Whispers*.

All were key moments in Bergman's endless fight against censorship for adults and his sometimes childlike desire to shock. By largely avoiding such images, *Archives* inadvertently paints Bergman as a more restrained and conservative director than he actually was.

The book has an unusual bonus of a DVD of Bergman's home movies and a piece of a 35mm print of *Fanny and Alexander* that "played on Bergman's own film projector". At first, this seems like a gimmick, but the juxtaposition of DVD and filmstrip is actually a poignant reminder that Bergman began in the golden years of cinema and ended in the digital age, his final masterpiece, *Sarabanda*, being shot on high-definition video.

The Ingmar Bergman Archives is a comprehensive and tender homage to the great Swedish director, who died after completing a remarkable body of work and having utilised every ounce of the talent that was gifted to him. Despite the price, it is likely to be the film book of the year.