

FAMILY



Don Emilio Barzini (Richard Conte) oversees the cessation of hostilities between Don Philip Tattaglia (Victor Rendina) and Don Vito Corleone (Marlon Brando) in *The Godfather*.

# The Godfather

Steve Schapiro reveals what happened behind the scenes on Francis Ford Coppola's mafia masterpiece in a new, limited-edition book

BY JESSICA PILOT

## When

"As a photographer, sometimes you just need to be a fly on the wall."

photographer Steve Schapiro first arrived on the New York City set of *The Godfather*, he had already heard the rumors that Marlon Brando was in poor health. "The streets and surrounding tenements were teeming with onlookers," Schapiro recalls. "Even the fire escapes were crammed with children and their grandmothers. Everyone, it seemed, wanted to catch a glimpse of the man who had been chosen to play Don Vito Corleone."

Schapiro himself was not immune to the Oscar winner's lure and vividly recalls his first sighting. "I noticed a sallow-faced, elderly man, wearing a worn coat and hat and talking in a low, frail voice to an assistant director. I suddenly realized that I was looking at Brando. My heart sank... Then Brando suddenly turned away, facing the many spectators, and the electricity of a young man's eyes shot out into the crowd... It was not until the farewell party, after production was finished, that I saw the real Marlon Brando—a smiling, handsome man in his 40s who had just accomplished one of the greatest tour-de-force performances in the world of acting."

Schapiro, whose work has graced the covers of *Time*, *Life* and *Paris Match*, had the privilege of documenting film history in the making when he was invited to go behind the scenes on all three *Godfather* movies. Now, diehard *Godfather* fans are getting the chance to look through Schapiro's lens with *The Godfather Family Album*, from Taschen Books ([www.taschen.com](http://www.taschen.com)).

*The Godfather Family Album* is a lavish photo collection featuring more than 400 images shot during Schapiro's time with the close-knit family (many of them never-before-seen). "The set was filled with humor, from practical jokes to the famous mooning episodes," recalls Schapiro. "The Coppola family worked like the Corleone family, and everyone melded together."

But like any family, this one had its occasional differences. "During the filming itself, there were days when I saw Coppola unable to capture the respect—or even, it seemed, the attention—of some of his own assistant directors," recalls Schapiro.

Reigning in a crew is one thing, but Schapiro faced his own challenges. "Al Pacino is not exactly the sort of person who likes to sit still in a chair for very long," he says. "I would click open the camera shutter, the strobe light would go off—and so would Al. Before we could say anything, he was standing up, in a completely different position. He was double-exposed on the entire first roll of film I took."

But there are also times when a photographer has license to shoot at will, looking for those one-of-a-kind candid moments. One such moment resulted in one of Schapiro's most famous photos: Brando holding the cat. Schapiro explains that Coppola had found a stray cat running around the Filmways Studio and pushed it onto Brando's lap, without comment, to let Brando develop it into what would become an epiphany for Don Corleone's character. Eventually, it also became the movie poster.

*The Godfather Family Album* is limited to 1,000 copies, each numbered and signed by Schapiro. It's a major splurge at \$700, but at press time the first run was almost sold out—with a second printing scheduled for early 2009. **MM**

