

THE MAN BEHIND THE LENS

How Testino changed fashion

One fashion photographer takes centre stage in the recent documentary film about American Vogue magazine, *The September Issue: Mario Testino*. Charged with the task of transforming a "toothy" Sienna Miller, in the words of the magazine's steely editor Anna Wintour, into "fashion's feistiest icon" and cover star, he grapples with a Roman backdrop of multicoloured mopeds and Vatican monks to create a shot worthy of the world's most famous glossy.

Mario – one name suffices, such is his celebrity – was the only man for the job. Not only does he possess movie star magnetism, and look as good in front of the camera as he does behind it, with his Latin-American wide-smile charm, but his ineffable knack for making the mundane look majestic makes him the photographer of choice for fashion editors, designers and marketing managers alike. Whether shooting a Burberry campaign that features a suddenly-sexy Emma Watson, or converting a gaggle of Camden punks into the essence of desirable London cool for the latest edition of British Vogue, Testino's lens manages to turn hard lines soft, transform nervous subjects into new best friends, and create a world we'd all quite like to be a part of.

In doing so he can claim to have changed the face of fashion. Where Cecil Beaton portrayed the world of style in an untouchable, artistic light in the 1930s, 1940s and 1950s, David Bailey chose to expose its exoticism and decadence in the loose-living 1960s, and Helmut Newton favoured a stark eroticism in the 1980s, Testino became, in the 1990s, the photographer who captured women as women, rather than otherworldly objects. A decade on he remains the antidote to the

cerebral conceptualism of contemporaries such as Nick Knight and Tim Walker.

It was in 2002, when the Royal Academy staged an exhibition of Testino portraits, that those beyond the fashion industry really began to understand his charm. The celebrities and models on show looked better, happier and more approachable than they'd ever looked before. As the Brazilian supermodel Gisele Bündchen puts it, in her essay for Testino's latest book, *Mario de Janeiro* (Taschen): "We understand each other. You know what I mean? I understand what he wants and I think he understands what I want. He is very respectful of my boundaries, and yet at the same time no one pushes them like him."

Nicola Copping is the FT's deputy style editor



Sexy Emma Watson ©Burberry/Testino