

# RIO GRANDE

MARIO TESTINO WAS BORN IN PERU, BUT HE LOST HIS HEART TO Brazil's Rio de Janeiro during his first trip there at age 14. His many visits since have resulted in an extensive collection of personal images, some of which the photographer is now releasing in a Taschen book titled "MaRIO DE JANEIRO Testino."

"I've always admired Bruce Weber's 'O Rio de Janeiro' book, so I was like, 'What do I do?'" says Testino of the tome, his ninth. "Then, all of a sudden, we realized that my name married the city and I felt like that was an allowance to just go."

The 15 years' worth of photos include images of Rio landmarks such as Copacabana Beach, the statue of Christ the Redeemer and Sugarloaf mountain, as well as local models Isabeli Fontana, Fernanda Lima and a bikini-clad Gisele Bündchen, who also contributed a foreword.

"It's hard to say no to Mario," she wrote, and she's not alone — most of the mannequins are captured cavorting in their birthday suits.

"I went to a more intimate side of Rio," explains Testino. "A side that they only give me because they know me."

Here, he talks to WWD about the beaches, the people and the emerging fashion scene in Rio.

— **Elisa Lipsky-Karasz**

**WWD:** Why do you feel so at home in Rio?

**Mario Testino.:** I'm totally Peruvian, 100 percent. I just have these affinities for cities that excite me, and Rio is one of them. I've always been amazed by the energy and the fun. It feels like they are always having a better time than we are, you know?

**WWD:** What is it about Rio that inspires so many photographers?

**M.T.:** Wherever you go at any time, you are constantly facing the sea, the beach, the sun, the beautiful people walking everywhere in their bathing suits. There is a lot of beauty.

**WWD:** You said you wanted to show a more intimate side of Rio. What photos in the book do you think really illustrate that?

**M.T.:** All of the photos of the girls and boys together — you know, a couple lying in a bed. There's a picture of four guys together, two in black tie and two in bathing suits, and to me that's so Rio de Janeiro. You can go to an evening out and everybody wears their bathing suits underneath. You have to be sure that at any moment you can take your clothes off and jump into a pool or the sea.

**WWD:** What do you think people don't realize about Rio?

**M.T.:** People are kind and generous and soft — they are friendly. I mean, yes we have violence, greed and drug consumption, but as a rule, the majority of the people are just nice. I'm not saying the French are not nice, but sometimes you take a taxi in Paris and you have to be so careful how you say what you want to ask because they might turn around and yell at you. In Rio, you don't get that.

**WWD:** Rio just hosted Fashion Rocks. What do you think of the fashion scene there?

**M.T.:** It's getting more of a profile because they are making more efforts. There is something going on in South America — I guess the world is having a crisis, but there is more money than ever [there]. For so long, South America has suffered recessions and inflation, and it's so nice to see it finally getting a chance.

