

The young women assembled on the lawn have come from around the country for this moment, delivered to the Playboy Mansion by mothers and boyfriends, each girl prepared for the day in extravagant states of undress. Standing on stiletto heels, they wear G-strings and micro-bikinis, lingers of lace and silk, while showing off golden tans or blindingly pale skin beneath a warm, cloudless sky. They are here for a *Playboy* casting call, 225 of them ready to be chosen for a new generation of naked girls next door, to land on the glossy pages of an intimate magazine pictorial. By tomorrow another 300 will have arrived, flying in from Boston, New York, Florida, Australia. But today's search has come to a halt as the young women anxiously await the imminent appearance of the man of the house, the esteemed publisher and chief lothario, Hugh M. Hefner, or, simply, "Hef."

The front door opens to a round of girlish cheers when Hefner steps from his castle with a wave, a video crew documenting the boss in his red-satin robe and white captain's hat. He is 84 now and walks with the stiffness of age, but he moves quickly past the stone cherubs in the fountain, past the wishing well where he married his second wife (now divorced), and through this crowd of young admirers. He does not linger.

"Hi, Hef! We love you!" shouts a petite woman with auburn skin and bleached-blond hair, nearly bursting out of her frilly bikini top and panties. Hefner smiles again but keeps leaning forward, walking with an entourage that includes several security men and his new No. 1 girlfriend, Crystal Harris, the magazine's Miss December for 2009, an athletic blonde a fraction of his age, strolling beside him in a little black dress.

In a moment, Hefner is at the tennis court, where temporary photo studios are erected inside white tents, as models wait their turn to disrobe for a quick test in front of a *Playboy* camera. (One asks photographer Arny Freytag if she can fill out an application to be Hef's girlfriend.) Hefner poses for a quick snapshot with a crowd of would-be Playmates, and sits for a brief interview for *Playboy* Radio. It's there that he is presented with a large, jovial portrait of himself, created by an artist who paints exclusively with his penis.

Hefner has hosted scenes like this for more than five decades: all the parties and political events, the nude sunbathing by the pool and roller disco on the tennis court, mingling with actors, athletes, presidential candidates and an endless rotation of young women. It is a life and image he invented for himself, and it continues to define the *Playboy* dream. The man and the brand remain inseparable.

It has been a long run of high style and decadence, a nonstop pajama party at the Mansion, his personal Shangri-la. Hefner rarely leaves the premises, and he will tell you with a satisfied cackle, "Life is tough here, as you can see."

There are the expected "aches and pains," the occasional trouble with the ex-wife and girlfriends, and his hearing is going. He also hosts fewer of the famous house parties now, citing the cost of all that hedonistic fun. More ominous is the health of *Playboy* Enterprises Inc., which he took public during boom times nearly four decades ago, and which now faces the same

declining fortunes and circulation numbers as all print media. *Playboy* magazine's current 1.5 million circulation represents a staggering drop from its 1971 peak of 7 million.

The stock price has been in a steady fall for years. Rumored attempts by the board to sell the company or find new partnerships have

stalled, with Hefner's ongoing role the ultimate complication. He remains majority owner with 70 percent of the stock, and he is not about to sell, or to abandon his role as the living symbol of the empire. That would kill him. This month, Hefner surprised the board and financial analysts with an offer to buy back the company stock he doesn't already own, reasserting himself as the master of the house of *Playboy*, with no intention of leaving the mansion or the life.

The dream that sustains him, as it does his most committed readers, is a small one. It is not movie star Hef. It is not Hef in the White House. Hef on the moon. It is a dream that can fit comfortably inside the mind of any American male: big house, naked girls. This is a dream that can carry you for many years, from adolescence and

turnout of would-be Playmates, as a brown-and-white spaniel named after Charlie Chaplin runs beside them. Once inside, the couple pauses at the bottom of the stairs. Hefner turns to his lady and says quietly, "See you later tonight?" It's a simple, ordinary question, but he says it with such vulnerability, a fragile whisper from an older man still craving romance and affection. It's almost breathtaking to witness.

Of course she will be there, Harris tells him. Then she has to repeat it, shouting loud enough for him to hear.

He enters the mansion library abruptly, a vague sense of impatience about him. Despite the permanent leisure wear, the satin and slippers, Hef keeps to a tight schedule. It's an afternoon in early April, and his 84th birthday is only days away. The signs of time passing are inescapable.

His good friend actor Robert Culp had just died suddenly from a heart attack, another long-time pal and mansion regular to pass away in the last year. "This is a time of reflection. I have some very dear friends in the last handful of years who are gone," Hefner says. "You get to a place where you reflect on the life and look back over the good times. That, in a very real way, makes this as good a time in my life as I've ever had."

What goes on behind that impish grin is unknown to most of us. While he is a dependably charming and intelligent interview, Hefner's not about to bare his soul to another visitor sitting across from his backgammon table. But he is always ready to reexamine the events of his life and career. There is a new documentary, *Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist and Rebel*, directed by his friend Brigitte Berman, who won an Oscar in 1986 for *Artie Shaw: Time Is All You've Got*. And Taschen has released a five-volume, encyclopedic history of the man and the magazine, from his baby pictures and earliest cartoons to *Playboy's* 25th anniversary, at the end of the '70s.

He looks and sounds exceptionally fit for a man of 84, but Hefner is quick to acknowledge that he no longer cuts quite the same image he did during *Playboy's* rise. "Of course not. The image now is the image as it really is," he says. "But I think one of the messages of my life is that age is just a number, and you can define your life in a lot of different ways. What my life has been all about is that there is more than one way to do it, more than one moral way, and a lot of the traditional ways are suspect.

"Retirement is the first step to the grave if you're doing what you enjoy. My work is a pleasure."

Arrayed behind him are framed pictures of his children, his mother, the second wife, and a new one of Hef with Crystal. There is a model of his Big Bunny jet, his stretch DC-9 painted tuxedo black, which he sold back in 1976, and a life-size porcelain bust of Barbi Benton, his girlfriend from the good times of the late '60s and early '70s.

The 30-room *Playboy* Mansion is a home as Hollywood-famous as Pickfair or Neverland, and Hefner's brother Keith predicts that after Hef is gone, the property will become something like Graceland, a shrine. Hefner bought the 6-acre property in 1971 for \$1.1 million, with another \$14 million in capital improvements in the years since, but none of the recent renova-

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tions has altered the flavor and mood of the residence. It looks essentially as it has for decades.

The house is lived in, and an unlikely candidate as a showplace for modern living in *Architectural Digest*. Nothing here can be found in *Dwell*. Hef will receive an iPad for his birthday, but a lot of the fixtures and décor date back to the Nixon administration. Hefner is a man who hates change.

Even the paintings by Picasso, Pollock and Dali — long since sold at auction — have been replaced by reproductions and hang exactly where the originals once did. (The original Matisse drawing with a cigarette burn left by John Lennon remains.) His leather footrest in the screening room is well-worn, and the drapes by the dining room fireplace are stained from ash.

It is the same with his life. Nothing changes except the names of his women, and Hefner keeps to a rigid schedule.

"Mondays, Tuesdays, Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays — they all have to be the same as last week's and the weeks before," says Kendra Wilkinson, his former girlfriend and an original cast member from the hit reality series *The Girls Next Door*. "He has to have the exact drink at the exact time. He has to have his chicken noodle soup at the exact time, and he has to have his movie at a certain time. You can't be late. He's always on a schedule. Always — except for girls."

He also remains deeply involved with the creative and entrepreneurial side of *Playboy*, on the phone with his editorial director in the magazine's Chicago headquarters. Hefner has his reasons for remaining in Los Angeles, in his big house on Charing Cross Road, atop a hill with his zoo and swimming pool

and tennis courts. He spends almost no time in any office other than the one he keeps in the upstairs living quarters. He hates meetings.

Back in the '50s and '60s, there were speedy, all-night Benzedrine binges, enough to keep him going nonstop two or three days at a time. All those hours weren't spent humping bunnies. He was working, bent over text and cartoons and photographs, the makings of *Playboy* scattered on the floor around him, actually editing, a pencil in one hand, a pipe in the other, sometimes spending his nights alone in his infamous round, rotating, vibrating bed. Which doesn't sound very leisurely at all.

"I still pick the covers, still pick the center-folds, still pick the cartoons, the party jokes, edit overall pacing of the book and what goes into it," Hefner says. "I'm probably the oldest working editor of a major magazine in history, I imagine.

"About six months ago I started Twittering," he adds, about to repeat his favorite new joke. "I used to be a jitterbug, now I'm a Twitter-bug."

Last year his estranged wife, Kimberly Conrad, threatened to sue over his selling of her house; Hefner later settled "by giving her more money." His three original live-in girlfriends from *The Girls Next Door* are long gone, and two of their replacements, the Shannon twins, were invited to move elsewhere. With Harris, he is down to a single female companion for the first time since the breakup of his second marriage, in 1998.

Those changes are less traumatic than the existential threats to print media in an era of free online content. Even though *Playboy* was the first magazine to establish an Internet presence, the publication has suffered from an industrywide fall in circulation. "I thought it was the future," Hefner says of the company's early steps online, but blames "the business end of our business" for ignoring the potential and falling behind. He fully expects to survive.

Leading the magazine for him in Chicago is



editorial director Jimmy Jellinek, who came to *Playboy* after a decade of gigs as editor of the exploding *Maxim*, *FHM*, *Stuff* and *Complex*, the kinds of next-gen young men's magazines once expected to eclipse *Playboy*. Jellinek now dismisses each of the surviving lad mags as "really just a pamphlet serving as a marketing vehicle to get Pepsi products advertising."

Jellinek grew up in the northern suburbs of Chicago, and remembers seeing the original *Playboy* tower above the city as he rolled along Lakeshore Drive. "It was the *Playboy* building, man. You're talking about one of the world's most resonant brands, you see the name, you see the bunny — it's imbued with a certain sense of values, and you immediately know what it stands for. When you saw the building, you'd get excited. We'd take our pictures out in front of the building. It was something very much part of the fabric of the city."

The editor is now an aggressive, almost defensive advocate for the historic publication, and has no patience for critics who have questioned the viability of a lifestyle magazine for virile men on the prowl when its symbol is a wrinkled man in his 80s.

"I don't see any prevailing wisdom from anybody else in the magazine world," Jellinek says. "All these analysts have never worked on a magazine. ... These guys just sit and throw rocks without any basis for conversation whatsoever."

He meets with Hef on occasional trips to Los Angeles, but "the bulk of our relationship is on the phone and is through memos." They agree on the ongoing direction of the magazine, changing little from its heyday, still drawing attention for the monthly *Playboy* Interview. (Rocker John Mayer got in as much trouble this year for his racial/sexual wisecracks as Jimmy Carter did while a presidential candidate, with his 1976 admission to "lust" in his heart.) There is high-end fiction, pop culture and investiga-

tive journalism in the classic mode, beneath the notable bylines of Martin Amis, Bill Zehme, Stephen King, Paul Theroux, John Waters and Roger Ebert, even if the general magazine audience has forgotten it's still there amid the nude women.

"Success and popularity by their nature are like a bell-shaped curve. You have the high point and then there's an aging process, etc. The remarkable thing in terms of *Playboy* — certainly in terms of my own personal life — is how this thing has gone on and on," Hef says. "We sell fewer magazines in the old-fashioned way than we did in the '70s and '80s, but we reach a larger

audience now on a global level than any other time in history. ... I must be doing something right."

Hefner does not deny the economic problems facing his magazine. "That's real. We live in the real world. But it's more interesting and newsworthy when it's related to *Playboy*. We're doing better than some, and not as well as others."

It is the running theme of recent news coverage of the *Playboy* empire, with serious implications for Hefner's future. After two decades as CEO, his daughter, Christie Hefner, stepped down, and new corporate leadership

began to make changes, cutting costs through layoffs and consolidation. "It wasn't just business as usual," Hefner says now of the move. "We had to do some dramatic things."

More alarming was discussion of a sale, and the possibility of real changes in Hef's rigid schedule, with outsiders suggesting the *Playboy* Mansion be sold, his legacy dismantled, as if the central figure throughout *Playboy's* history were as interchangeable as the CEO of General Mills.

Then came Hefner's surprise July 12 announcement of his interest in taking *Playboy* Enterprises private, offering to buy out minority shareholders for \$5.50 a share (for a total of \$123 million), which represents a 30 percent leap over the stock's most recent closing price. Within days, a lawsuit was filed in Delaware State Court against Hefner and members of *Playboy's* board of directors by a group of irritated investors, who had watched with horror as stock value plummeted. The share price was at \$15 as recently as 2006.

In the current climate of fading media giants, Hef's offer might seem like a way out of further losses for long-suffering investors, but the suit calls the plan "the product of a flawed process designed to sell ... on terms detrimental" to stockholders. And when a much-rumored sale to clothing corporation Iconix was derailed last year over unresolved questions about Hef's continued role, stockholder David Brown filed another suit in Los Angeles, accusing the founder of maneuvering to preserve his lifestyle at all costs.

"He controls 70 percent of the vote of the company, so the fate of the company is really in Hef's hands and nobody else's," says David Bank, global media and research analyst at RBC Capital Markets.

The most brutal assessment came from analyst David Miller of the investment bank Caris & Company, whose most recent report on *Playboy* Enterprises Inc. predicted good times for stockholders once the old man is gone. "We believe Mr. Hefner's death could result in a material stock-price uptick on the notion the mansion could eventually be sold, which would leave the company net-debt-free," Miller wrote.

There goes Graceland.

Hef is of the old school, more *Mad Men* than *Mad Money*, comparable to George Steinbrenner and other outsize corporate owners whose cults of personality are not incidental to the high profile of their companies. So says Todd Harrison, CEO of Minyanville Media and a former investment banker. "There comes a point where you have to hand the baton to the next generation, but there's a bit of a dichotomy. He's built this franchise and it's his life's work and he should be able to live out the rest of his years in his home."

Hef may also be on to something, ignoring the media gloom and hand-wringing, maybe sensing untapped value in *Playboy*, the brand. The bunny remains one of the most recognizable logos on the planet. It is on women's underwear and energy drinks, on pillowcases and shot glasses, on T-shirts, handbags, cigars and lingerie. There is a *Playboy* maid's costume for your little terrier (\$22), a bobble head of young Hef circa 1953 (\$18) and bunny-logo hardware for your tongue and navel piercings (at Sears for \$18). You can run to a local 7-Eleven for a bottled shot of *Playboy* Passion Enhancer to get your lady friend back in the mood — for a mere \$2.99. All exist for good reason, earning *Playboy* Enterprises \$37 million in licensing revenue alone last year.

Even if all print media, including the centerfolds of *Playboy*, were to disappear, there is reason to believe the bunny brand would survive, with or without Hefner's iconic presence. "He's important to the brand," says Bank, "but I think it outlives him."

Since announcing his intentions to the board, Hefner has stepped back from his usual heavy interview schedule. On the phone just days ahead of his offer this month, Hefner revealed nothing of his plans but sounded upbeat about

the company that began at his kitchen table in 1953: "Things are looking up significantly."

A young woman steps discreetly from a back-room, leaving behind the throw pillows and mirrored walls, the convenient box of tissues and the vintage dimmer switch on the wall. She walks unsteadily in a yellow dress, rust-colored dreadlocks bunched on her head. She makes it past the pool table and across the games room to a man in plaid shorts trying his luck at a *Playboy* pinball machine. "How are you doing?" he asks her.

"Great," she replies, with a flushed, crooked grin. "I just got laid!"

They arrive by the busload and stretch limo, rolling up the driveway past the "Playmates at Play" traffic sign, the men in black suits or resort casual, the women in bras or pasties, stepping out onto the hilltop Shangri-la right beneath Hefner's bedroom window. Girls pose for quick snapshots by the front door and the fountain they've seen on TV before they're sent around to the party in the mansion backyard, with the tents and buffet, the go-go dancers and DJs. It's like a nightclub back there.

Hef is in a cabana with Crystal and some girls, as a huge crowd of guests gathers in front of him, raising cameras and cell phones and just staring at the great man, the center of attention. But this isn't one of his parties. He throws fewer events than he used to but allows outsiders to take over the property for a night, bringing their own guest list and female eye candy, tonight charging \$1,000 a ticket or \$10,000 a cabana, with a portion going to charity.

This night is the annual Kandyland event, another party hosted by the Karma Foundation, an upscale networking and nightlife business. Close to \$50,000 will be raised here for Star Education, an environmental program for children, according to Karma President Marvin Epstein. Parties at the mansion are a hot ticket,

fueled by stories of painted ladies and wet, naked encounters in the grotto. Young women are invited to submit photos and apply for free admission, described on the Karma casting site as an "opportunity for beautiful and classy people to attend the most sensational and breathtaking" of events. And the event, not hero worship, is the point for many.

"We don't come for Hefner, we come to party," says Dayna DeVorre, 24, wearing a bikini made from strings of hard candy.

Guests enter through a glowing portal, greeted by tiny actors dressed up as green-haired Oompa Loompas from *Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory*. Seven guests dressed as cowboys in matching black twirl a woman in bunny ears on the driveway, and she falls partly out of her bikini top.

Back in the games room, Kally Wyatt, 18, sits at the upright piano playing "Moonlight Sonata" and some "retarded" Justin Bieber, along with her own music. Her cheeks are pierced and she is wearing black fishnets. Next to her is friend Laci Kay Somers, an aspiring model in a pink bikini top who is considering trying out for *Playboy*. "I want to," says Somers, "but I can't tell if I really want to."

Both Somers and Wyatt have been running into people having sex all night, out on the grounds and in one of the mirrored cubbies of the games room. "Five minutes ago, I saw them!" says Somers, 18. "They were very loud. I've seen, like, 5 million people having sex so far tonight."

The proximity to Hef and his sexual playground has some of the guests crossing boundaries they might not elsewhere. "This guy, like, grabbed my butt hole! I've never been touched like that at a club," says Wyatt. "He stuck his hand in me and I pushed him. They think they can do whatever they want, just cuz they're here.

they're crazy.

Hef's own sex life has been the subject of great interest since the debut of *Playboy*, his healthy complexion owing much to the baby oil he's slathered over himself and a thousand girlfriends over the decades. That interest only grew after he reemerged as a single man at the end of the '90s, making the rounds with seven blond live-in girlfriends.

"Complicated, yes," he recalls of the arrangement, "though not as complicated sometimes as one wife."

It is a lifestyle perfected decades ago, back at the old *Playboy* Mansion in Chicago, with the fireman's pole, the indoor swimming pool. Age does factor into this. After a decade or more of testing in his second-floor boudoir with a long line of volunteers, *Viagra* remains Hefner's rocket fuel of choice, a brand he can trust.

When Kendra Wilkinson first arrived for a party at the mansion, she was 18, and Hefner immediately asked her to move in as one of his girlfriends, as she recounts in her just-released book, *Sliding Into Home*. She went back home to San Diego instead. Hef kept calling.

This is how it's done: "I called her, and said: 'This may be a little presumptuous. This summer, unless you're otherwise involved in a serious relationship, I thought you might like to spend the summer here as my girlfriend,'" Hefner says today. "I only learned more recently, when she received the call, she was sitting there in bed with her then-current boyfriend. Obviously, it wasn't a very serious relationship because she was here in short order."

By the time she was 20, *The Girls Next Door* had made cable-TV stars of Wilkinson as well as co-stars Bridget Marquardt and Hef's No. 1, Holly Madison. The questions they got from journalists and the curious were often the same, focused on age and sex, and Wilkinson includes in her book moderately graphic scenes of weekly group-sex sessions with Hef. She participated but recalls those nights as a crowd of girls taking turns for a joyless 60-second hop on pop, not romance. She now calls him her "mentor," and one of her closest friends, and was worried about his reaction to the book. Wilkinson says she got an e-mail from Hefner after the book came out, thanking her: "You wrote a really great book."

Wilkinson is unimpressed with young men who openly crave his life, who want to emulate the man. "If they really knew the gentleman, if they really knew the type of man Hugh Hefner really is — the gentleman and the great guy — do they really want to be Hugh Hefner? Really? Come on."

Another side of Hugh M. Hefner is the focus of *Hugh Hefner: Playboy, Activist and Rebel*, which documents the publisher's role during the turbulent postwar period. (For a review, see Film openings.) In it, director Berman makes that case for Hef as crucial figure and spokesman for not only the sexual revolution but civil rights and human rights. That was not the

>> 18) prevailing wisdom of the time.

During a vintage television interview, future *60 Minutes* icon Mike Wallace drilled into Hefner and *Playboy*: "I think you'll agree that it's a sniggering kind of sex. It's a lascivious kind of sex. It's certainly not a healthy approach to sex, but you suggest that it is."

Gloria Steinem has ridiculed *Playboy's* revolution as being about "Making more women sexually available to men," and refused three times to be interviewed for the documentary, but feminist Susan Brownmiller appears in the film, in footage from her withering 1970 debate with Hef on Dick Cavett's show and in a new interview. Brownmiller's views on the man are unchanged.

"She still thinks he's the devil," says Berman. "I don't agree with her, but I respect her opinion. She fought for that. Indirectly, I was also helped and affected by that whole feminist movement. ... It still is a man's world. Getting less so."

Playboy began during a time of social and cultural upheaval, and Hefner chose to embrace change. He hired Dalton Trumbo to write for the magazine during the blacklist era, defended the confrontational work of comic Lenny Bruce and allowed African-American Dick Gregory onstage in front of a visiting white, Southern audience at his Chicago *Playboy* Club. The publisher debated loosening sexual values with William F. Buckley on public television, hosted Martin Luther King Jr. at the mansion in Chicago and published the last essay King wrote before his death.

There were consequences. Hefner was arrested in Chicago after printing a 1963 pictorial on Jayne Mansfield. "The real reason behind the arrest," Hefner says now, "was because I had spoken out in an editorial in the magazine protesting Chicago's too-friendly connection to the Catholic Church, and the fact that they had arrested Lenny Bruce. When I objected to that, they came and arrested me."

Berman first met Hefner years ago as a result

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of her films on jazz greats, including his favorite, Bix Beiderbecke. For the new film, she spent many nights working deep into the early morning in the mansion's third-floor scrapbooking room, reading the history Hefner has kept since adolescence, filled with drawings, snapshots and every article written about him, good or bad. Many times, Hefner was up there too, working on another scrapbook of memories, adding another page to his recorded history.

Berman's most recent visit included a screening of *Chinatown*, accompanied by an introduction read by Hefner and a lengthy discussion afterward. He is a movie fanatic, hosting screenings at the Mansion three times a week. He produced some feature films in the 1970s but is now more fan than player, donating millions to the USC and UCLA film departments, and he's twice written checks to preserve the Hollywood sign.

There have been discussions of a feature film based on his life going back to the '50s. A movie is in the works, with Robert Downey Jr. expressing interest, and a screenplay to be written by Diablo Cody. "It looks like it's going to happen," Hefner says hopefully. "Brian Grazer has the project, and I said to him not too long ago, 'I don't want this to be a posthumous tribute here.'"

Hefner has his plans for eternity already

mapped out, entombed right beside Marilyn Monroe. He owes much to Norma Jean. Her prefame nudes in the first issue of *Playboy* turned the magazine into an immediate sensation, sending the young, untested publisher on his momentous journey toward becoming Hef. They were born within months of each other in 1926, but he never met Monroe, and only spoke with her once, on the phone in the weeks before her death. He wanted her to appear again on the cover. When Hefner discovered the slot to her left was available at Pierce Brothers Westwood Memorial Park, he reserved the crypt. "It seemed to be a natural," Hefner says.

He has other friends buried on the grounds there: among them, Mel Torme, Buddy Rich and Dorothy Stratten, the 1980 Playmate of the Year, murdered by her husband. Hefner's mother lived to 101, but his father died of a stroke at 80, so the future remains uncertain, and the end is inevitable, though he likes to quote the key lyric to Sinatra's "Young at Heart": "If you should survive to 105/Look at all you'll derive from being alive."

Some things at *Playboy* are eternal. At the magazine's West Coast offices in Santa Monica, another naked lady is having her picture taken. She is Rachel Summer, a regular over at the

Mansion, and her Playmate test is being photographed in Studio A by Army Freytag, a 34-year veteran at the magazine, with more centerfolds shot than anyone. He will shoot at least 500 pictures of Summer today.

Freytag is working with three assistants, including a female intern, on a simple set of soft pinks and white. Summer stands in a bathrobe, but her nude image from earlier is still on the digital monitor. In it she is kneeling on a white-leather chair, facing the lens with a warm, inviting expression, wearing nothing but a pair of pink socks.

"Most girls don't walk in with a body like that," Freytag says, looking at the screen. "That's pretty rare. That's a pretty awesome body." This is a man who loves his work.

The pinups of Freytag and photographer Stephen Wayda have been at the magazine's visual core these last few decades, hardly shifting with contemporary trends seen in the evolving starlet images in *Esquire* and *GQ* — just as Hef likes it.

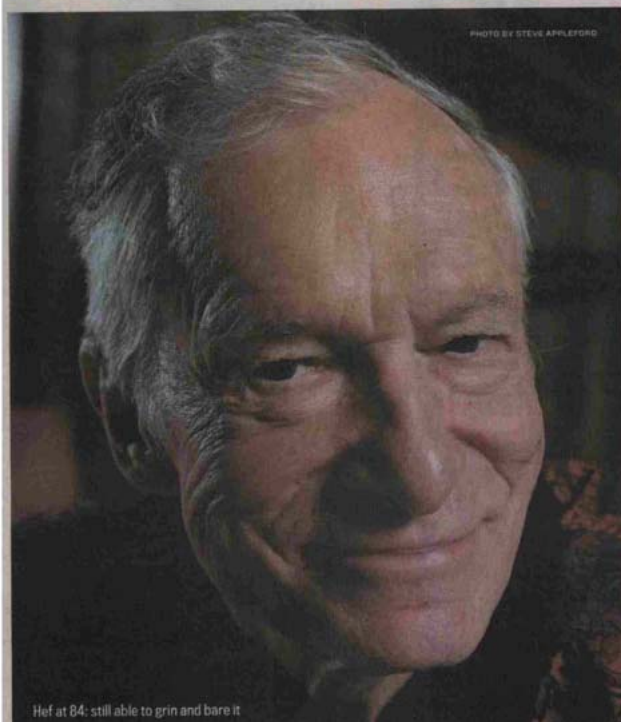
"I can make any girl look really good," Freytag says. "I believe there is one angle on every face that will look fantastic, and I will go until I find it."

The old man doesn't micromanage the making of these pictures, but once the day's test is done, Summer's session will go directly to Hef. The publisher rarely makes an appearance at Playboy Studios West, but his presence is felt, with stylish framed photographs of the young *Playboy* founder in the '50s and '60s lining the hallways. And his surprising move to retake full ownership of *Playboy* is fresh news.

"I hope he gets it," says Freytag. "It's impressive that he's still interested in keeping it going his way at this stage of his life."

If Hefner prevails, the bunny brand may spread into new venues, but content at the magazine will still unfold the old-fashioned way — Hef's way, just as it always has. **■**

“WHAT MY LIFE HAS BEEN ALL ABOUT IS THAT THERE IS MORE THAN ONE WAY TO DO IT, MORE THAN ONE MORAL WAY, AND A LOT OF THE TRADITIONAL WAYS ARE SUSPECT.”



Hef at 84: still able to grin and bare it