

Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs



Lawrence Schiller was one of only three photographers granted access to the shooting of the much-vaunted 'pool scene' in Marilyn Monroe's final, incomplete movie, *Something's Got to Give*. Fifty years later, he has collected his pictures – including some never seen before – with a personal commentary, in a new, deluxe book, published by Taschen.

Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs (http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/photography/all/06379/facts.marilyn_me_a_memoir_in_words_and_photographs.htm?gclid=CP7OuqKb2rACFU4lfAodBEpV0g) is encased in a clamshell box, with its title in embossed lettering. Like the box, the book has a blue silk cover. The hardback measures 11.4 x 15.6 inches, and is printed on archival paper. Translations of the text are available on request.

The book includes four foldout sections – featuring three sets of linked photos in triptych, and one double-sided, extended gatefold.

An Untold Story

The early chapters deal with Schiller's introduction to Marilyn, on the set of *Let's Make Love* (1960.) He was then just 23 years old, whereas Monroe, at 34, had been a star for almost a decade. She noticed instantly that Schiller was blind in one eye, the result of a childhood accident.

Schiller recalled that 'you could feel the heat' between Marilyn and her co-star, Yves Montand. Her lateness to the set, Schiller believed, was a response to her dissatisfaction with the film and her treatment by Twentieth Century-Fox.

He soon discovered that Marilyn knew intuitively what made a good photo. She had approval of all studio shots, and liked to pose near a mirror – so that she could see her reflection rather than just looking into the camera.

Schiller's next encounter with Marilyn was in early 1962, at the Santa Monica beach home of actor Peter Lawford. She was talking with historian Arthur Schlesinger, and Schiller was impressed by her knowledge of current events. Bobby Kennedy was also present.

That May, Schiller visited Marilyn at her home in Brentwood. He had read the script for *Something's Got to Give* and wanted to photograph the scene where Marilyn's character takes a night-time dip in her long-lost husband's swimming pool.

'The pool sequence is sure to be published everywhere,' Schiller told her. 'It'll be just like Sam Shaw's photo of you from *The Seven Year Itch*.' Marilyn then suggested that she come out of the pool without her bikini – much to Schiller's delight, though her publicist, Pat Newcomb, was less enthusiastic.

Something's Got to Give was, from the outset, a troubled production. Monroe resented being sidelined and underpaid – while the studio focussed their efforts on *Cleopatra*, the big-budget epic then being filmed in Rome with Elizabeth Taylor.

Though she often felt trapped within the studio system, Marilyn had gathered an entourage of loyal assistants – including make-up artist Allan 'Whitey' Snyder and drama coach Paula Strasberg.

Monroe was perceptive about the image she projected, but Schiller sensed her dual nature – she was 'tough and determined', and yet 'like a wounded animal constantly looking for a way out of the darkness.'

When Schiller gushed, 'You're gonna make me famous,' Monroe warned him, 'Don't be cocky, Larry. Photographers can be easily replaced.'

The pool shoot would exceed Larry's expectations. 'The curve of her spine complemented her natural curves as the water reflected the lights,' he wrote, 'and the whole scene sparkled.'

Though tame by today's standards, nude scenes in a major Hollywood movie were unheard of in 1962. In fact, Schiller's photos were more revealing than the actual footage.

The following day, Marilyn left the studio with co-star Wally Cox, and invited Larry to drive with them to Marlon Brando's home. But he had pictures to develop, and promised to join them later – forgetting that he didn't know where Brando lived.

When it came to selecting which pictures to use, Marilyn was no pushover. While Larry drove her through Hollywood, she flipped through the proofs, armed with pinking shears and a bottle of Dom Perignon.

'The next day I would throw away all the cut-up images, oblivious to their historical value,' he remarked. 'I was living in the present and not the future.'

Schiller teamed up with another photographer, William Read Woodfield, to sell the rights to international news agencies.

On June 1st, Marilyn celebrated her 36th birthday at the studio. The mood was tense, only lightening when the party convened to her dressing room. A week later, Marilyn was fired. She had been sick for months, leading to costly delays.

Understandably, Marilyn was furious. Meanwhile, Elizabeth Taylor's illnesses and extra-marital affairs had led to long absences from the set of *Cleopatra* – a film that would eventually bankrupt Fox.

Nonetheless, publication of Schiller's photos went ahead, and for the first time in his career, his work graced the cover of *Life* magazine. The next time he saw Marilyn, she said she was glad to have helped him buy his first house.

Hugh Hefner, head of *Playboy*, wanted to publish some of the more risqué shots, and proposed a future shoot with Monroe. 'The important gimmick is that the cover must have a peekaboo bareness and provocativeness to it,' he wrote to Larry, 'otherwise it has lost its point.'

Over the summer, Marilyn conducted a media blitz, giving interviews and posing for photos. Under new management, the studio began negotiating for her return. Yet when Larry visited her on the morning of Saturday, August 4th, Marilyn seemed irritable.

Pat Newcomb was opposed to the *Playboy* shoot, and Marilyn was undecided. 'It's still about nudity,' she complained. 'Is that all I'm good for?' He left her with some colour proofs from the pool scene to review.

A day later, Marilyn was dead. Returning to his studio on Sunday afternoon, Larry found a single print

in an envelope with the note, 'Give this to *Playboy*, they might like it.'

Over the next few days, Schiller photographed Marilyn's house – now surrounded by police – and the guests arriving at her funeral, including a grief-stricken Joe DiMaggio. These pictures were published in the next issue of *Life*.

'I was stunned to discover that they had used one of my photographs on the cover,' Schiller wrote; 'the ethereal shot where she looked like an angel.'

In 1972, Schiller curated an exhibition of some of the greatest pictures of Marilyn, taken by Milton Greene, Richard Avedon and others. A year later, these photographs were published in a book, *Marilyn*, accompanied by a semi-biographical text from Norman Mailer.

Parting Shots

Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs is a collector's item, and, at £650, will be out of most readers' price range. (It's worth shopping around, though, as several online bookstores are offering it for less. I was loaned a review copy by Taschen.)

An art edition (http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/photography/all/06383/facts.lawrence_schiller_marilyn_me_art_edition_b_frame_18_color.htm) will be released in July, featuring a signed print – and a pocket edition of the text, with a small selection of photos, has also been published by Nan Talese/Doubleday (<http://nan-a-talese.knopfdoubleday.com/2012/05/29/marilyn-me-by-lawrence-schiller/>).

The conversations between Schiller and Marilyn are 'reconstructed to the best of my memory,' he explained. 'Many of the words remain vivid in my mind, and therefore I felt confident in placing the dialogue in quotation marks.'

Writing for the *Huffington Post* (http://www.huffingtonpost.com/liz-smith/marilyn-monroe-vaudeville-fair_b_1469029.html), Liz Smith took a more sceptical view. 'As it always happens—especially with Marilyn – what Schiller said about the shoot, and Monroe, fifty years ago, has altered considerably,' she argued. 'The passage of time has improved his memory.'

Frustratingly, our knowledge of Marilyn is largely second-hand. Nonetheless, I found Schiller's account to be both credible and intriguing. He dealt with Marilyn on a professional basis, and he was very much the ambitious ingenue whereas she was, by then, an accomplished star.

Had Schiller been a close friend, his characterization might be different – but to his credit, he does not pretend that their relationship was an intimate one.

Magazine and newspaper articles from the era are featured, along with contact sheets from the various photo sessions. If anything, I wished that more of these negatives had been developed. Schiller did not work as extensively with Marilyn as some other photographers, but his work captures a unique moment in her life.

Marilyn & Me is the latest in a series of outstanding art books from Taschen, including works by Andre de Dienes (http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/photography/all/64401/facts.andre_de_dienes_marilyn_2_vols.htm), Bert Stern (http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/photography/all/04986/facts.norman_mailer_bert_stern_marilyn_monroe.htm), and a *Some Like it Hot* (http://www.taschen.com/pages/en/catalogue/film/all/46701/facts.billy_wilders_some_like_it_hot_dvd_edition.htm) special. All of these have been reissued in mass-market formats after initial, limited edition print runs.

It seems feasible that Schiller's *Marilyn & Me* could also be repackaged in this way at a later date. Meanwhile, for a more affordable taster, try Taschen's eye-catching paperback, *Marilyn Monroe* (<http://www.bookdepository.co.uk/Marilyn-Monroe-FX-Feeney/9783822821176>), published in 2006 as part of their Movie Icons series.

Further Reading

'A Splash of Marilyn', *Vanity Fair* (<http://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2012/06/marilyn-monroe-nude-photos-exclusive>), June 2012

Marilyn & Me at [ES Updates](http://blog.everlasting-star.net/tag/lawrence-schiller/) (<http://blog.everlasting-star.net/tag/lawrence-schiller/>)

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