

Conversation With Reuel Golden, Author of *London. Portrait of a City*

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London. Portrait of a City is Taschen's timely homage to London.

This thoroughly stylish book feels like a celebration of the magnificent metropolis, with hundreds of meticulously researched, beautifully presented photographs. The generous full page spreads in particular reveal eye opening details of London street life and colourful characters.

From Victorian London to the 2012 Olympics, Charles Dickens to Punk, the book tastefully blends the work of iconic photographers Beaton, Brandt, McCullin, Testino and Rankin among others, with somewhat magical documentary photographs of more obscure professionals and amateur snappers.

Alongside images of London's history, literature, movies, architecture, fashion and music scenes are illuminating quotations from George Orwell, D H Lawrence, The Ladykillers, Alfie, Clockwork Orange and Ian McEwan to name but a few; a testimony to the city's immense contribution to the world.

Here, author Reuel Golden talks about defying the long-standing London black and white cliché and how the Norman Parkinson cover image earned its prime spot.

Q: Was this book intended to be an homage to this magnificent city?

A: It's an homage to all the things we love about London, whether we are from London, a frequent visitor, or dream of living there one day. It's a rich visual testament to what the city was and what it has become. The photographs show all aspects of London and what people consciously or not, associate with the city -- the street life, the Swinging 60s, WW2, the different architectural styles, the landmarks, the music and fashion, the eccentricity, the cool, the class distinctions, and so on.

Q: How did you tackle the mammoth task of selecting images for the book?

A We want to show the most compelling and visually arresting photographs ever taken of the city. But a great photograph isn't enough in this context, it also must tell the story of the city, and be readily identifiable in some way as "London." Logistically this entails, putting together a first edit of around 3000 images, gathered from multiple sources. The painstaking research is one of the many things that make our books stand out. In this case, going into archives such as the City of Westminster Archives, the Imperial War Museum, the London Metropolitan Archives, and countless others; pulling out dusty prints from drawers and files that people haven't seen before. The research alone took about a year. The 3000 is then narrowed down to around 550 images which end up in the book.

We want to dazzle people with new images that will surprise even the most jaded Londoner, but also show a few, for want of a better word "iconic" shots that the less familiar with the city will immediately recognize. It's also important to mix up the photographers in terms of nationalities-for instance certain American and German photographers had a really cool and different perspective on London.

Q: This is a 'well recorded' city whose history is very much intertwined with the history of photography itself.

A: In some ways London is a well recorded city, especially during certain periods like the Second World War and the 1960s, but immediately following these key periods in the city's history, we had to dig deep to find great pictures from the early 1950s or 1970s. Similarly if you go back further to the 1920s and 1930s, there are endless photos of foggy, cobbled streets, but the challenge was to find images that tell the story of the spread of suburbia. The other remit is to use colour wherever possible. This is partly because all of us at Taschen love color photography, but also because London is always portrayed in quite stark black and white and we wanted to defy this cliché a little bit.

Q: How was the cover chosen?

A: The cover by Norman Parkinson was chosen by the publisher who spotted its potential right away. The model looks great, she's got that slightly aloof London air about her, the red bus in motion is a readily identifiable London symbol, with the road sign saying "keep left" completing the picture.

Q: What has the process of producing this book taught you about London?

A: From a personal point of view, I was born and grew up in London and lived there until I moved to New York in 2000, when I was in my late 30s. So doing all the research for this book has made me rediscover the city and made me fall in love with it again.

More broadly, it's very interesting how the invention and adoption of photography as a legitimate means for documenting the human experience coincided with the unparalleled growth of London in the 19th Century. These early photographers right away got the extremes of Victorian London. Great architectural photographers shot the magnificent grandeur of the Palace of Westminster, while people like John Thomson, the first social documentary photographer, focused on urban blight. London's extremes captivated these photographic pioneers and it's still one of the city's most alluring aspects.

London. Portrait of a City by Reuel Golden is available on Amazon