

Revealed: the last intimate moments of Marilyn Monroe

Lawrence Schiller photographed the star on her final movie set. How did he get so close to her? "She loved Jews"

By **Melanie Abrams**, September 6, 2012
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Schiller's favourite shot of Monroe, practising her lines with drama coach Paula Strasberg

Marilyn Monroe bonded with photographer Lawrence Schiller on the set of *Let's Make Love*, during his three-day shoot for *Look* magazine in 1960. Their close connection was sealed two years later on the set of her last, unfinished film, *Something's Gotta Give*, when she discovered he was Jewish.

"You know, I'm Jewish too," she told him. Monroe had converted when she married the playwright Arthur Miller.

According to Schiller: "The photographers who related to her and stayed in touch with her were the Jewish photographers. A lot came out of a sense of shared oppression and there was an extra moment and unspoken heritage."

Schiller's intimate portfolio includes the famous images of Monroe swimming naked in a pool for *Something's Gotta Give* (the film was never released — shooting was abandoned after Monroe died).

He says: "She was taking a chance with me because she had no one else left. She was the one who wanted the publicity. She saw that I had a lot more chutzpah [by, for example, negotiating exclusivity for the pool shots] so she trusted me."

The chutzpah appealed to Monroe from the start. She did not mind him lying in wait for her outside her sacrosanct dressing room. Instead, she turned on her famous wiggle walk and suggested he shoot while she walked to the set, discussing the upcoming scene with her *Let's Make Love* co-star, Yves Montand.

Schiller says that Judaism appealed to Monroe — it stimulated her intellectual side that was well hidden by her blonde sex bomb screen image.

Schiller's new book, *Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs*, published by Taschen, reveals fresh insight into the last two years of her life, with many unpublished images of the star. Shooting Monroe on *Let's Make Love* was one of Schiller's first professional assignments. His first impression of her was that she was untouchable.

"She was in total control of what was going on. She got anything she wanted."

But their connection allowed him to see another side to her. "She had kindness, sincerity and was interested in other human beings," he says.

Her immediate empathy also surprised him. "She saw that I couldn't close my left eye, which no one I had photographed ever noticed, and was saddened by the story of how it happened," he says. He lost most of his sight in a childhood accident, when an umbrella thrown down the shaft in his Brooklyn apartment building hit him in the eye.



"Marilyn & Me", published in a limited edition by Taschen

His favourite photograph in the book captures Monroe lying on the couch in her bungalow on *Something's Gotta Give*, practising lines of dialogue with drama coach Paula Strasberg. "Marilyn is the diva movie star and Paula in her black cape is the Rasputin-type figure. It brings two conflicting elements together," he says.

Schiller's ability to blend into the background also helped cement his bond with Monroe, and with other celebrities such as Paul Newman and Clint Eastwood. "I ingratiate myself, becoming one of the entourage or one of the family so I could get complete access. This allows the intimate moment to unfold, which people don't realise is being captured."

However close Monroe was to Jewish photographers — Sam Shaw and Eve Arnold also had warm relations with her — she remained ruthless about controlling her image and destroyed shots she did not like. Schiller's experienced this at first hand with his potentially explosive swimming pool images. "We were sitting in her car, drinking Dom Perignon champagne. She was editing the images, using pinking shears to cut up my colour strips. I was scared witless about what I was going to end up with. I thought: 'Is this really the way Marilyn Monroe operates?'"

But working with Monroe taught Schiller valuable lessons that he has used ever since. "It made me a shrewder and smarter businessman. I learnt that exclusivity was important, access was important. So I take control of every image," he says.

'Lawrence Schiller: Marilyn & Me: A Memoir in Words and Photographs', Taschen, £650