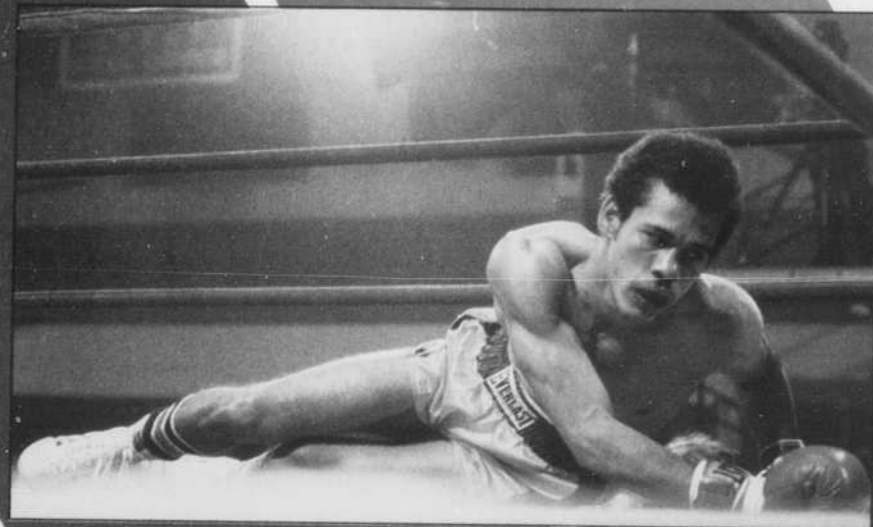


celebrity photographer
CHRISTIE BRINKLEY



BY DAVIN SEAY

"I like spontaneity, the look and feel of something happening and the excitement of trying to capture that moment. What I do when I'm in front of the camera is really worlds away from what I do behind it."

In either case, photography has been very, very good to 27-year-old mega-model Christie Brinkley. A photogenic fashion phenomenon, Ms. Brinkley, in seven short years, has proven her lensworthiness by becoming one of the highest-paid models in the business; her sensational face and figure raked in \$2 million worth of high-fashion magazine layouts, television, and print advertising in the last year alone. And by this time next year, Christie's trademark good looks will be attracting filmgoers' fancies when she appears in her first starring role as the mysterious blonde in the red Corvette in *National Lampoon's Vacation*, sharing the screen with Chevy Chase and Beverly d'Angelo.

"I love modeling," Christie asserts, adding with a quick laugh, "but not only for the obvious reasons. When I model, I learn and I've been learning from some of the best."

What this Malibu, California, native and current New Yorker is learning is the photographic art, a dominating obsession for her since high school days. A talented visual artist in more than one field, Christie turned to photography with characteristic energy and enthusiasm when, as a junior high school graduation gift, she received her very own Nikon camera.

"I was interested in an arts career," she recalls, "and was developing my painting and drawing. But photography really spoiled me. There was something so immediate about it, a very direct kind of creativity. I got very heavily into black-&-white work, built my own dark room in the basement, and started dabbling in special effects. It was around the end of the whole psychedelic era and the point was to make things as weird as possible. I was really into screens and gels and strange exposures. It was a good introduction to the possibilities of the camera."

A high school painting and photography tour of Europe clinched her interest in film. Even when she

returned to Paris to study painting at Le Grande Chaumière, working part time as an illustrator, her burgeoning fixation with photography kept her busily clicking. "I'm totally self-taught," she admits, "and I think that puts me at a little disadvantage. I carry around Upton's photography manual wherever I go, but I still feel I don't know as much as I should. Of course, I'm in a great position now."

It's an admirable understatement. It was in Paris that Christie was first approached to model and, climbing with astonishing speed up the hectic, highly competitive fashion ladder, she quickly found herself posing for such stellar names as Helmut Newton, Mike Reinhart, Anthony Scavullo, and Anthony Elcourt. "I listen and watch," she confides, "and when I don't understand something, I ask."

As much as Christie Brinkley can and does learn from these renowned photographers, the calculated, precisely detailed world of fashion photography bears little resemblance to her own work. Her interest in the blood, sweat, and sensationalism of professional boxing is one of the unusual aspects of Christie's consuming interest in the camera.

"I'd never really understood the appeal of boxing," she admits. "Guys I knew would just flip, drop everything to watch a good bout. When I came back to the States, all I heard about was this big fight, Muhammad Ali's last with Larry Holmes. I decided to go to Las Vegas to check it out. It was sort of a dare really. Everyone said I'd never get in, there were no tickets, it was the event of the century. I ended up in the front row, shooting like crazy."

Such are the advantages of a famous face. "I just walked right into the press party the night before," she explains with a laugh. "I was recognized and I guess they thought I belonged." Boldly going where no woman had gone before, she introduced herself to legendary fight promoter Don King who secured her a ringside seat. "It was the most exciting thing I'd ever seen," she enthuses. "I could hardly load the camera. Almost everything I shot that night was out of focus, but by some miracle a few just fell into place. It was magic just to be there."

Subsequently becoming the center of considerable interest in the sports media, Christie was immediately pegged as a de-facto woman boxing expert, offering off-the-cuff and often quite accurate fight analysis to the eager media. An early fan of Christie's work was *Ring Magazine* editor Randy Gordon, who hired her to cover dozens of bouts around the country. "I went to every fight I could," she continues. "I started meeting a lot of old-time professional boxing photographers — real characters. They were great ... giving me tips and telling me not to be afraid to get my elbows up in the ring. I'd end up at the end of the evening wringing with sweat and trembling with excitement. I think I was as exhausted as the fighters."

Traveling light — usually packing a Nikkormat and Olympus OM-2 cameras and no more than three or four close-up and wide-angle lenses — Christie confides the secret of good boxing photography: "Anticipating the punches. You've got to familiarize yourself with a fighter's style and try to think and see as he does ... looking for openings, probing for the opponent's weak spots."

A high point in Christie's boxing photography career came when Don King hired her to shoot the training session for the Leonard/Duran bout in New Orleans. "About a week before the bout," she recalls, "Roberto Duran decided he wanted to train at the Louisiana State Prison. With an atmosphere like that, the pictures couldn't help but be great."

Aside from boxing, Christie also has a growing interest in photographing Formula One racing, thanks to her boyfriend, French racer and champagne heir Olivier Chandon. "In any kind of sports shooting it helps to have a special in," she says, "someone to get you behind the scenes to where the action is really taking place."

"It's unusual for me to take a picture without a person in it, doing something. That's why the work I did around the Grand Canyon was a real change of pace for me."

On location earlier this year for *National Lampoon's Vacation*, Christie, as were countless millions before her, was drawn to the timeless splendor of the Grand Canyon. "It was strange," she muses. "It's such a



monument that it's difficult to know just how to approach it. A lot of times I felt as if someone had just rolled an enormous backdrop in behind me. It got me thinking about new ways to photograph landscapes, to try and avoid the clichés. In the end I tried to capture a feeling more than anything. Not so much the majesty of it all, but the little things ... the details that make it seem real."

The Grand Canyon, as well as other locations in the Southwest stood as a unique challenge to Christie's discerning photographic eye. "I needed to get beyond the tourist shots, to find something that gave a sense of the utter emptiness of that place. So much of it is not the glorious desert landscape you've come to expect but really huge expanses of nothing. That's at least as interesting to me as the mesas and sunsets."

This attention to detail carries over into Christie's sports photography. "I want to put together a book on boxing from an outsider's view. To pick up on the small things that escape most people's vision. It's boxing beyond the punches. To me, the expression on the face of a boxer's girlfriend is at least as interesting as what's going on in the ring. It's all part of the excitement, the spontaneity, and that's what makes photography so different from any other form of expression. The ability to capture and hold that split second when it all comes together."

While on location for *National Lampoon's Vacation*, Christie wandered off into a meadow and befriended two colts, who seem to prefer blondes ...

Christie Brinkley on her boxing shots: "You've got to ... think and see as [a fighter] does ... looking for openings, probing for the opponent's weak spots."

