

# THE BIG PICTURE

*Guided by the greatest visionaries of our time, esteemed Canadian photographer Gabor Jurina makes his mark. By Juliette Lie Baxter*

To witness fashion photographer Gabor Jurina working on set is to peek into a world that resembles a golden age of collaborative image-making.

Like so many acclaimed photographers of the past — luminaries like Helmet Newton, Guy Bourdan and Herb Ritts, who were known for prioritizing connecting with their subjects — Jurina isn't caught up solely in the technicalities of a shoot. His concerns are multi-layered, as are his soulful images. In fact, the London, Ontario-raised, Los Angeles-based lensman often prepares for his sessions by having informal private chats with his subjects. This jovial approach has made him fast friends with models like Jessica Stam and actresses like Meghan Markle.

Beyond the social benefits, the rapport Jurina builds while on set often ends up organically translated onto the camera. Smiles captured in stunning photo moments are generated by jokes he tells mid-snap, and pensive poses are the result of thoughtful chats he initiates in between lighting changes. What also enhances Jurina's craft is the fact that he completely immerses himself in whatever location he's in. Whether it's taking a dip in the turquoise waters fringing Bora Bora during a shoot break or accompanying a model to the top of an active volcano, his M.O. is to soak in every inch of his environment before he pulls focus. He'll even try on clothing to be photographed

on a model, just so he can see how the garment moves before he takes pictures of it. That visual empathy is what he sees as his upper hand. "I see myself as more of a director who creates a world or an experience that people want to be a part of," he explains. "I always want to make myself part of the process instead of just capturing [images]."

A strong belief in the importance of sustaining the energy of a location — and the team he is working with — has clearly made Jurina one of the most successful photographers in the country for more than 20 years. At the beginning of his career, clients such as Holt Renfrew, *Harry* magazine and *FASHION* magazine grew accustomed to his mastery of the art of creating a comfortable work atmosphere in his 2,200-square-foot studio in Toronto, which he still uses for his Canadian photo shoots. The expansive space features an innovative elevated cube, crafted by 3rd Uncle Design, which conceals Jurina's personal living area and keeps models and artists focused on the work at hand and, in the case of guests, on relaxation. From his choice of music (be it the soundtrack of *A Single Man*, Lana Del Rey remixes or Ryuichi Sakamoto compositions) to his selection of tea (Mariages Frères, naturally), Jurina demonstrates an insouciant ability to foster an ambience that jump-starts creativity.

It's in his Toronto home/studio where he photographed Canadian runway darlings Coco Rocha and Daria Werbowy when they were >

LEFT: Model Marie-Eve Nadeau is snapped by Gabor Jurina in Eleuthera in the Bahamas for a shoot styled by his longtime collaborator, Susie Sheffman.





“I see myself as more of a director who creates a world or an experience that people want to be a part of,”

still up-and-comers in search of the shoot that would catapult them to New York or Paris and on to supermodel-dom. And it's his acumen that has earned him the trust of some of the world's most famous women. Taylor Swift was photographed by Jurina before the launch of her megahit album, *1989*, in which he reimagined her as a woman worthy of wearing high fashion — and not only high-waisted jeans. Rihanna came to Jurina when she was positioning herself as crossover R&B/pop artist and moving into style-icon status.

Jurina's status among celebrities has culled plenty of clickbait to fuel his reputation. However, it's the craftsmanship of haute couture that's the fire starter for his imagination — say, an appliquéd gown from Gucci or an embroidered jupe (jacket) from Prada. “In art school, I didn't hang out with the photography department. I hung out with the fashion students,” says Jurina. While his classmates were preoccupied with Farrah Fawcett's blond tresses and buxom bod, Jurina was fine-tuning his visual intuitiveness by watching classic films starring Katharine Hepburn, for example, garbed in her vanguard adaptation of menswear, and Audrey Hepburn, who defined understated luxury via Hubert de Givenchy.

Jurina's love of bold and distinctive images of femininity has earned him accolades from the Canadian Arts & Fashion Awards (CAFA) and the National Magazine Awards Foundation, alongside magazine cover assignments. The feather in his cap that attracts industry heavy hitters is his “representation versus objectification” philosophy of portraying women in pictures. “Sex is not my motivating *raison d'être* and I think that has helped me in many >



THIS PAGE: Model Karolina Wallace strikes a pensive pose in Bora Bora island. OPPOSITE PAGE: (Top) model Natalya Piro on a fashion shoot for Palm Beach Illustrated magazine; a grown-up Taylor Swift.

ways,” he says. “I'm driven more by beauty. And I'm not saying that sex isn't beautiful. I'm just not drawn to showing the animal instincts of pure sexuality. I try to tell a story and bring out the strength of character of the women I work with.”

This is a cue likely taken from his ardency for Italian fashion photographer Paolo Roversi who has shot portraits of Icelandic singer and lyricist Björk, actor and award-winning chameleon Tilda Swinton and iconic parisienne muse Inès de la Fressange (there isn't a hint of a Kardashian or a Hadid in his portfolio) with a delicacy that still manages to punctuate their fierceness. Similarly, whether in Nicaragua, photographing a global nomad poised on the edge of Masaya Volcano, or shooting a model in Harajuku-inspired sculptural clothing against the backdrop of the Arts District in downtown Miami, Jurina is committed to weaving a graphic narrative wherein the subject is always shown as empowered.

While his lens naturally attracts headlining ladies

who value his visual instinct, Jurina's close encounters of the celebrity kind have also led to kinship, most notably with actor and philanthropist Meghan Markle, who recurrently handpicks him to shoot her for retail and editorial campaigns. Last year, Markle personally asked Jurina to accompany her to Rwanda to document her visit in her role as a World Vision Global Ambassador. "She was so thankful that I went, but I was so much more thankful for the experience," says Jurina. "I witnessed such extraordinary gratitude and grace, in the absence of modern conveniences and trappings, which are so easy to forget in everyday life."

In Rwanda, curiosity and open hearts gifted him with willing subjects when he arrived, he says. "[That] trip had everything to do with capturing a strength of character and perseverance, and I hope my photos show the nobility of what I saw." He pauses, then crystallizes into words his motivation for any photo he takes, whether it's in a far-flung remote locale or in a downtown studio replete with modern accoutrements. "When I talk about representing beauty, it has to have a quality that breaks my heart...but not in a sad way — rather, in the best and most joyful way possible." □



**THIS PAGE:** (Top right) A photograph from his World Vision trip to Rwanda with actor Meghan Markle. (Left) Jurina's sunny Toronto studio is an ode to modern design. On the wall is his photo of a stylized Yves Saint Laurent figure. Studio photo: Dave Picard. (Below) Gabor Jurina. **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Model Rachel Alexander perched on a tree in Nicaragua.



## INSIGHT

## HOT SHOTS

*Gabor Jurina's personal list of what's memorable, covetable and important:*

**THE AURAL TRIP THAT CHANGED HIS LIFE:** *Coexist*, by The xx. Imagine a sexy, yet lethargic, mash-up of Everything But The Girl and New Order that quietly strums at the heartstrings.

**THE FLICK THAT HE'LL NEVER FORGET:** *In the Mood for Love*, directed by Wong Kar-wai. "He embodied every possible human emotion in one movie. The more you watch it, the more you appreciate it."

**HIS IT POOL:** At The Raleigh Hotel in Miami. In his own Instagram words — [#heavenisaplaceonearth](#).

**HIS IT HOTEL:** Surprise, The Raleigh in Miami. "It's like walking back in time, when discretion and privacy was a virtue."

**THE CAFÉ HE DOES, BUT KIND OF DOESN'T, WANT YOU TO KNOW ABOUT:** Művész Kávéház, in Budapest, Hungary, where he typically orders espresso with a hint of milk.

**THE TRAINERS THAT GIVE HIM LIFT-OFF ON SET AND BEYOND:** Nike Air Max 95. He's been through at least 20 pairs over the years, mostly in grey and neon green.

**THE SCENT THAT DEFINES HIM:** Green Irish Tweed by Creed, famously worn by Cary Grant, who, along with Gene Kelly, is one of Jurina's male icons. "I know I can live in the past, but I think it's so important to know what came before you."

**HIS DREAM SET OF WHEELS:** To match his high-fashion persona, a well-suited love of a retro-classic roadster — the 1974 Alfa Romeo GTV 2000.

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