

Hot shots

*The beauty of the island, captured by famous photographers*

by Daniele Auteri

How many faces does Capri have? How many secrets lie hidden in its seas? How many pictures have been plucked from the clutches of time to be preserved in our collective memory? Over the last 150 years many of the world's greatest photographers have tried their hand at the most difficult of challenges: capturing the spirit of the island in a still image, while all the while, just like a shy, absent-minded model, Capri just sits back, unenthusiastic, unmoving, simply being its beautiful self. Helmut Newton, Morgan Heiskell, Mimmo Jodice and Mario Testino are just some of the photographers who have scoured the island through their lenses, seeking out shots that capture the passage of time on the Faraglioni cliffs, down its narrow alleyways, on its wild hillsides and in its ancient Roman villas.

Photogenic and oft-photographed Capri was first immortalized in 1857 in a series of snapshots taken by Robert McPherson, a Scottish surgeon, painter and antique collector whose photographs spread Capri's beauty around the globe. That same year Robert Rive took a stereoscopic photograph that has been famous ever since, and is now conserved at the Schettino Archive. Since that time the island's landscape, caves, sheer drops, deep blue sea, bright white houses and lush green vegetation have been captured by photographers and painters from all over the world: Carlo Noya, Luigi Guida and Giorgio Sommer are just some of the artists who have fallen under the island's spell.

Between 1870 and 1905, when documentary photography was all the rage the Alinaris, the Brogi company, Gustavo Chauffourier, Wilhelm von Gloden and Wilhelm Pluschow were all drawn to the island. The turn of the last century brought photos from Arturo Cerio, Augusto Lovatti, Alfred Green and Morgan Heiskell, who in 1922 shot a feature for the National Geographic Magazine that included photos of the Faraglioni and of sheer cliffs rising from the sea.

Time has smiled on the island, augmenting its charms. The tourist boom has only fed the interest and desire to capture the secret of this paradise, this echo of eternity, in a single image. In 1981, Naples-based gallery owner Pasquale Trisorio's 'Capri Un Pretesto' project brought some of the world's top photographers to Capri to capture the spirit of the island through their own individual gaze and poetics. The event was an enormous success, attracting Mimmo Jodice, Luigi Ghirri, Franco Fontana, Ralph Gibson, Wilhelm Schurmann and Paul de Hollander to the island's shores.

The result was a memorable exhibition and a collection of photographs that was destined to become an icon of beauty, if not an everlasting testament to the island's appeal. More recently the famous Pirelli calendar combined the beauty of Capri with the beauty of the female form, when in 2001 the island was selected as a backdrop for the world's most beautiful women. Nature and woman came together through the lens of Peruvian photographer Mario Testino.

After the Bahamas, London and New York, the world's most sought-after calendar – given only to very important persons such as Prince Philip of Edinburgh and Albert of Monaco – immortalized the island. Model Aurelie Claudel striding through the gardens at

Villa La Roccia and Ana Claudia Michael getting ready to plunge into the deep blue sea are just two of the photographs in which the island's beauty offset intriguing and erotic feminine charm.

Capri's beauty features every year in a series of postcards which capture the appeal of the island's nature, sea, people and lifestyle, as photographed by Umberto D'Aniello, a professional photographer born on the island. Teodoro Bonavita, Helge Classen, Carmine Fiore, Francesca De Col Tana, Carlo Dumentet and the great "Venetian" Fulvio Roiter have also recently made artistic prints, continuing a tradition of 150 years' standing.

Capri is reborn in each of their pictures, its face as changeless as the past and yet undeniably part of the ever-changing present. The kinetic energy of people has often served as a counterpoint to the static nature of the island, as the lens captures its ever-changing reflection of reality. It is through this subtle interplay that, through time, Capri has revealed itself, allowing glimpses of its essence, though without ever completely laying itself bare.

From: *Capri Review Magazine* 15/06/2005 - Num. 23 2005