Celebrity Photographer Matthew Rolston On Taking the Perfect Portrait

Posted on November 19, 2012 at 11:40 am / Posted by Suzanne Weinstock Klein

The perfect portrait has never been more important. Whether it's for social media, professional networking, or even online dating, our profile pictures have become our calling cards. "A good photograph can define you (or your subject) in many ways," celebrity photographer Matthew Rolston (*pictured above*) shared with us. "[Thankfully,] it's one form of visual communication that we can control."

Rolston has built his career on his ability to make women look their absolute most beautiful. And that's saying a lot when you're photographing the world's most beautiful women to begin with (Rolston has shot everyone from Charlize Theron to Angelina Jolie). That's why we turned to this pro for some tips on how to take the ultimate portrait and put your best face forward.

1. Look Your Best. "It should go without saying, but I'll say it anyway: 'If you want to look good in a photograph, take the time to look good yourself.' That means making grooming, wardrobe, and other choices that enhance your appearance. Beyond grooming, consider your posture, body language, and expression. Pull it in, stretch it out, or do whatever you have to do to get the most pleasing result. Practice in the mirror if you have to. But above all, find out what works for you and how you want to present yourself.

Consider appropriateness. A business portrait has a different communication goal than a boudoir picture. A formal and dramatic portrait communicates something different than a fun, spontaneous snapshot. Think about it."

2. Get the Right Lighting. "There's no one way to light a good portrait. But there is one bad way: on-camera flash. Rarely does this produce a pleasing result. Turn *off* the on-camera flash. If you have access to professional lighting equipment, generally the most pleasing result comes from a light placed directly over the lens or just to one side. This minimizes the amount of shadows in the face, brings out bone structure, and creates some sparkle of reflection in the eyes. Or you can work with soft natural light. A good technique is to turn your back to a large window and place your subject center to that window light source just in front of you. That way, the light is coming from above and around the camera, creating a flattering soft light on the face. Avoid harsh direct sun."

3. Angles, Angles, Angles. "First, you have to experiment in the mirror (or with your subjects) to discover what angles of the face are most pleasing. Most people look good with their face turned at a slight angle to the camera, rather than straight-on. If your nose curves to the right, favor the right side of your face or vice versa. If you do the opposite, unfortunately the curve of your nose will be greatly exaggerated. If emotional engagement is what you're after, the best eye line is directly to the lens. It's usually flattering for the lens to be slightly higher than the center of the face. That way you avoid seeing under the chin (who wants their double chin showing?) and you'll discover a more engaging expression in the eyes of your subject because they are looking up ever-so-slightly at the lens."

4. The Art of Performing. "A photographic portrait is a performance. It's a kind of collaboration between the photographer and the subject. Often a good portrait contains a lot of the personality of the photographer, so in a way it's a performance on both sides of the camera. The main thing to consider is what do you wish to convey? A photographic portrait is, after all, a communication device. You might begin by considering the reaction you'd like to engender in the viewer. Should they like you, or be impressed by you? Should they trust you, or desire you? These are all very different communication goals. Be specific in your goal. Present yourself accordingly."

5. Post-production. "There are endless ways to alter the appearance of a photograph. Photo editing, or what used to be called 'retouching' is now available to all. My advice is don't overdo it. The enhancements to a good picture should not be obvious. Yes, why not improve the quality of the skin—but do you really want to look like waxed fruit? Leave some reality. There are a number of photo apps with interesting preset filters. Explore Instagram, Hipstamatic and the like. Experiment with the looks these apps can deliver. Many are quite attractive and just a 'push button' away."

Most loved from The Vivant

- The A-List: Behold, A Luxury Train From the Masterminds Behind Tod's and Ferrari
- Watch Christopher Walken Cook Dinner
- Toniest Locales To Buy A Vacation Home
- 10 Most Beautiful Beaches in the World

NEWSLETTER

Get the inside scoop on the latest openings, deals, and insider luxury secrets

Email Address

AROUND THE WEB

- The Most Horrifying Photoshop Hand Disasters Ever
- Three Common Food Myths Busted!
- Top 5 Date Venues in Edinburgh
- Ridesharing in Spain: the BlaBlaCar Experience