

N O R T H E X P O S U R E

BLAISE HAYWARD
By Matthew Porter

The life of today's commercial artist is fraught with anxiety. The good old days, if ever there were any, are gone. Photographers and illustrators are confronted daily with an indifferent, insatiable marketplace of borrowers, hagglers and barterers. With the demands escalating—faster, cheaper, better—and the rewards in decline, it's a wonder that the best photographers don't just fold up their reflectors and go home. Some have. Fortunately, Blaise Hayward is hanging tough.

At 48, the Canadian and long-time New York resident has muscled his way to the highest levels of commercial photography, attracting attention from art buyers at the hottest advertising agencies and winning his share of high-profile work, such as projects with mcgarrybowen for Chase and Verizon. With such complex, big-budget productions, time is the most valuable commodity. Travis Kinsella at mcgarrybowen saw the speed with which Hayward could connect with his subjects during the Verizon shoot: "We had to shoot hundreds of portraits for one campaign and so I witnessed Hayward instantly disarm every subject in a manner of minutes, leading to nuanced, soulful work over and over again. This kept us thinking of him, recommending him and hiring him on a regular basis."

Trouble is, the big career jobs are harder to come by. And the wait between them can be long. On a trip to New York recently, I found the normally



Right: "A personal image from one of my many collaborations over the years with my muse and old friend Veljko. Each and every time we shoot together, we come away with memorable images. We have a very spontaneous and organic way of working together."

BLAISE HAYWARD

upbeat Hayward suffering through a work drought. Rainfalls had been setting records, and as we looked out at a wet lower Manhattan from his north-facing seventh-floor studio at Broadway and Bond one May morning, that rain pummeled our mood. “The sun will come,” he said, half to himself. “It always does.”

The vicissitudes of abandonment

Hayward grew up in Toronto, the eldest of three children, including a middle sister and younger brother. His parents, David and Anne, emigrated from Great Britain in the 1950s, when the Canadian Commonwealth was more welcoming to Brits and “the Queen was on the money,” as Hayward recalls. Both parents worked in advertising: David as a prominent executive, Anne as a secretary. It was neither a long nor a happy relationship. The suave, pipe-smoking and free-wheeling David Hayward had his talents, but he had mighty faults. In 1974, when Blaise was ten, his father left his mother for a younger woman and moved to pursue a fantasy of being a gentleman farmer.

This decision left Anne Hayward alone to raise her children, Blaise, Rachel and Luke. She took a job at a small advertising agency and, later, the Children’s Aid Society of Canada. She drew public assistance and took on boarders to pay the mortgage. Hayward recalls how his father would tell Anne that his support check was in the mail. “She’d tell me to check the box and, of course, there was rarely a check there.” That kind of disappointment, he says, could have destroyed some mothers, but not Anne: “She was a rock. Our furniture was natty, our house a bit rundown, but she never, ever, let us miss a meal or leave the house in ragged clothes.”

The economic hardship, his mother’s indomitable spirit and his exposure to public assistance and strangers in his home provided Hayward valuable perspective. It also taught him compassion and empathy—traits he’d use to elicit truth and candor from the subjects of his photography.

An affinity for the camera

Hayward started taking pictures for his high school year-book after his father bought him an Olympus OM-10 and a 50mm lens. His affinity for the camera was immediate. “I instinctively knew how to frame a shot,” he says. After high school he enrolled in the media arts program at Ryerson University, but after a year he abandoned formal education to work as a flunky in the shop of a local photographer. He learned his trade the old-fashioned way: he swept floors,



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made coffee and took out the garbage, he says, but he also watched, listened and learned, gaining the trust of his seniors and, eventually, their office keys too. He began shooting tests on weekends and improved his skills. In 1989, he opened his own studio.

Looking back, Hayward says he “dearly missed having a photographer mentor.” But he had life mentors, especially three chain-smoking, hard-living Serbian general contractors named Veljko, Vez and Radomir Pajkovic who together taught him important lessons: show up on time, no excuses, no whining, work hard, ask for help and stick up for yourself. Hayward worked for them as a day laborer and his friendship with the brothers continues today.

Hayward also benefited from the advice of his idol, Irving Penn, whom he met in 1991 on his first visit to New York. Hayward found Penn’s office number in the NYNEX white pages and called. The receptionist invited Hayward down to Penn’s office at 83 5th Avenue. Instead, the starry-eyed young man took a taxi to 83rd Street and 5th Avenue. When he finally arrived at Penn’s office, he waited in the seating area for half an hour before the 74-year-old legend came out to greet his astonished guest. During their visit, Penn told Hayward that anyone who was serious about photography had to live in the center of the creative universe: Manhattan. Five years later, in 1996, Blaise Hayward arrived in New York. With him was Rebecca, the girl he met in seventh grade, the young woman he started dating at 21, the woman he married at 30 and the mother of his two children, Ava and Keifer. As Hayward says proudly, “I am still madly in love with her.”

Beyond talent and skill

Those who know Blaise Hayward suggest that it is not simply his talent and skill that set him apart. There’s more to it, they say. Curious and empathetic by nature, he can draw from his subjects the essence of their character and capture it. “It is his enthusiasm going into a project that really makes the experience enjoyable,” says Sandra Locke,

Right: “I was hired by a rebranding team at AOL to shoot **senior employee portraits** ‘that stood out.’ They wanted something different, something that separated them from the field. They also wanted AOL to be viewed as a cool and relevant place to work. It was their idea to present the imagery in black and white.” Debora Marroccchino, art producer; AOL, client.

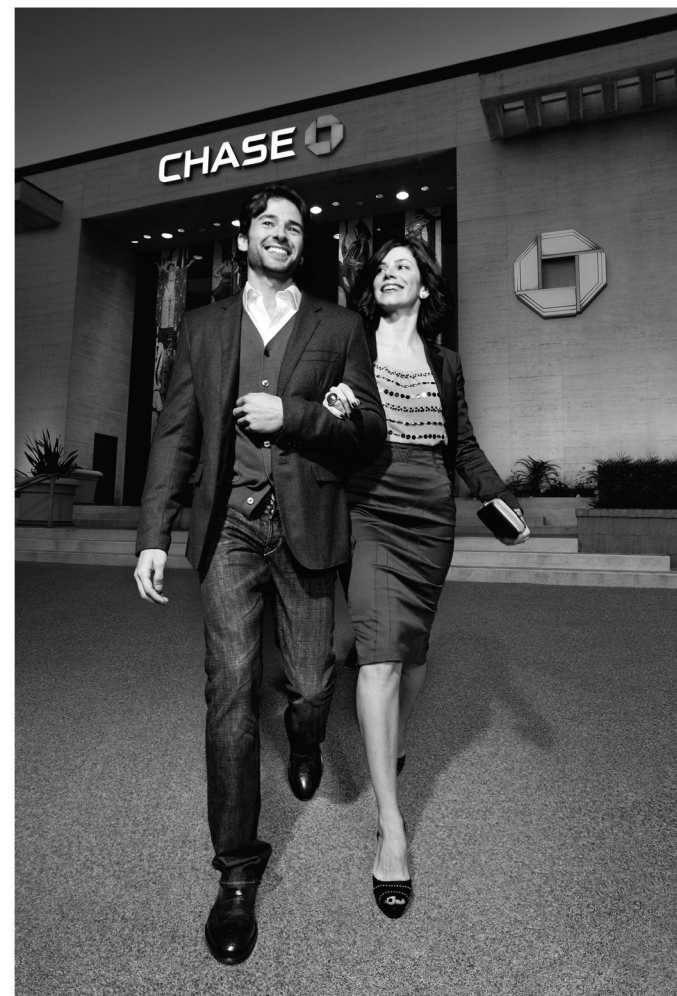
“Three images from a series of what eventually became hundreds of portraits shot with mcgarrybowen for **Verizon Wireless** in both Los Angeles and New York. Sometimes I had only 15–20 minutes with each subject and had to capture the essence of each and every person—something from within. To the great satisfaction of all involved, we did just that. A terrific agency, a fantastic client and an exceptional crew that became like family by the end.” Erik Jansen, art director; Enrique Mosqueda, creative director; Karen Strauss, producer; Travis Kinsella/Amy Zimmerman, art producers; mcgarrybowen, ad agency; Verizon Wireless, client.



This page: “From a shoot for the Nature Conservancy of its founder **Dick Pough**. He was in his 90s when this was shot and died shortly after. I flew to his home on Martha’s Vineyard for the shoot. He was very sweet and gracious and allowed me to pick the wardrobe from his closet. We all owe him a debt of gratitude. He saw the future and did something about it.” Iridium Group, design firm; The Nature Conservancy, client.

“I had two minutes at the end of this shoot with **Tony Danza**, and I wanted to get something different, something real. He is a lovely person and was so gracious with his time. He serenaded the whole crew with his ukulele at the end of the shoot; a gentleman and a talented musician to boot.” Ed Cousineau, creative director; Samantha Jaffoni, art producer; Publicis, ad agency; Metamucil, client.

Right: “Two images from the Take a Step Forward campaign for **JP Morgan Chase** shot over ten days in the Los Angeles area with mcgarrybowen. Great shoot, great crew, great memories. I have done several projects with Chase and always enjoy working with them. They also hold my mortgage.” Becky Armentrout/Christine Capelli, associate creative directors; Megan Skelly, creative director; Karen Strauss, producer; Amy Zimmerman, art producer; mcgarrybowen, ad agency; JP Morgan Chase, client.



BLAISE HAYWARD

a senior producer at Publicis Kaplan Thaler. “People respond to his work because it exhibits a sense of joy and playfulness without being affected or insincere.”

Warmth, truth and openness: the same qualities that set Hayward’s work apart also attract talented people to work with him, such as retoucher Frank Fierro, who speaks of Hayward’s “ability to create a moment of unique connection with people,” and Karen Strauss, his longtime producer and friend.


“Talent without integrity is a waste,” says Strauss, who is based in Los Angeles. “The hardest thing to do is stay motivated when people around you are disrespectful.” She says she promised herself she’d only work with people she respected, people like Hayward: “I respect his passion and enthusiasm for his craft; I respect his relationship to his family; I respect the way he interacts with people. I respect his curiosity, candor and sincerity.” She believes those traits enable those in front of his camera to be equally honest and intimate. “Combine that with his talent and skill and you get stunning images.”

On the wing

Blaise Hayward today is a nationally recognized photographer—the kind leading agencies trust with big-budget productions such as the ones he shot for mcgarrybowen. “Some big campaigns came my way,” he says, and he believes those assignments were “game changers,” the type that can create their own weather systems of opportunity and fortune. Hayward says he is grateful for his family, his health and the good fortune he’s enjoyed throughout his career. And he is pushing ahead: on the heels of his recently finished personal promo series *Small Business*, he is working with his agents John Kenny and Ed Varites on a promo for New York’s theater industry. Both will bring him added recognition. He is not the type to wait for the phone to ring.

“Can anyone working in photography today achieve a level of peace and comfort?” Hayward asks me, repeating aloud a question I just asked him, as we stare north out the window, toward Cooper Union. While he mulls his response a large hawk suddenly seizes a grey dove from a feeder attached to a fire escape. In an instant all that remains of the violence is a cloud of feathers drifting down like falling snow. One minute you’re dining. The next minute you’re lunch.

Hayward races up a flight of stairs to the roof of his building, hoping not to find the stunned and bloodied dove. There is no bird. Hawks eat what they kill. Hayward mentions his sorrow for the dove’s mate, who, he reminds me, mates for life.

Later, he answers my question: “Does anyone ever feel truly comfortable in his or her position in life? Probably not. Or if they are, they ought not. You must adapt to survive. That’s one lesson I learned long ago from my mother. I will not, I cannot, give up.” 



BLAISE HAYWARD

Left: “Part of a personal fine art project shot in Northern Ontario, in the middle of winter in a huge **gravel quarry**. I drove up, shot for a few hours and left without seeing a soul. The light was perfect.”

“Part of an ongoing personal project titled *The Actors*. I have been shooting all these pictures with a deliberate intent of going ‘outside my comfort zone’ with regards to lighting and composition. For inspiration I sometimes reference films and/or actors, and this actor had me thinking of Javier Bardem in *No Country for Old Men*.” Solange Khavkine, stylist.

This page: “A personal picture for an ongoing fine art portfolio taken at my **wife’s parents’ farm** in Ontario. Living in New York, I both need and cherish my time in nature. The solitude, the clean air, the sounds of nature—they are as important to me as the energy and chaos of New York City.”

“A personal image, *Ocean Study III* from the *Adrift* series. All the images were captured on film and then scanned. Shot in Long Island, where we were renting a little cottage by the water and I would arise each day at 5 a.m. to catch the light at just the right time. Back to bed at 6:30 a.m. for an hour or two, if I was lucky.”

