

NO REGRETS

When David Bailey was between marriages to Catherine Deneuve and Marie Helvin, he ran off on a wild adventure with Anjelica Huston. As he releases a book of photos documenting their voyage, **Britt Collins** meets him and finds him unrepentant about the hundreds of women he has slept with and the many mistresses, and several marriages, he left behind

Famous for photographing, and for sleeping with, the world's most desirable women, David Bailey defined the glamour of the Sixties and of every decade since. As a great, lasting chronicler, he captured some of the freshest and most memorable images of the movers and shakers.

In among the stories of his bad-boy exploits and saying the unsayable, there's an anecdote about Annie Leibowitz's recent shoot for American Vogue, a group portrait of legendary photographers. She instructed Bailey to settle between the legs of the fashion director and former Sixties model Grace Coddington. "Fuck me," he announced, stunning everyone into silence. "I'm back where I was 46 years ago." "That was a joke," he says, when we meet in his London studio. He definitely "didn't sleep with her, didn't even like her."

What about those other 350 women that he claimed to have slept with? "Oh no, some fucking journalist made that up. It was at least double that," he says with his trademark wheezy laugh. He may have lived up to the Sixties mantra: "David Bailey makes love daily" but, he says, "I never did anything sinister. I was perceived as bad because I was having a good time. It was a two-way thing. The girls were getting pleasure. I wasn't raping them."

At 70, he is still attractive, if a little worn. His black hair has gone wild and peppery, his whippet-thin figure rounder, but he retains the cheeky, streetwise swagger and seductively black humour that have served him well over the years. Someone once likened his elusive, roguish charm to a kind of black magic. It's not hard to see that as a young man he was incredibly good-looking: a dark-eyed, snake-tipped Lothario "chasing round the world after big-eyed, skinny birds."

Not that he's bothered about ageing — at least he "doesn't need Viagra." "There's nothing worse than hanging on," he says. What, like Rod Stewart and Peter Dinklage? "Yeah, that lot," he winces, laughing. "Terrifying."

His latest book, *Je T'Am So Kiki*, documents his year-long collaboration with Anjelica Huston, played out on the pages of British

Vogue. Its title is inspired by her father, the hard-drinking, hard-talking Irish-American film director John Huston. "Whether you were talking about the great mysteries of life, or whatever unimportant nonsense, in a deep, smoky voice he'd always reply, 'Is that so kid, is that so?'"

In 1971, while the world was in turmoil, with Vietnam, the Watergate scandals, the oil crisis and Elvis Presley's divorce dominating the headlines, Bailey and his young muse cruised the beaches and grand hotels of Europe on one of fashion's greatest road trips.

"It was a moment in time and it's fucking boring to talk about," Bailey tells me on a rainy September morning, debunking the glamour of his life with a petulant shrug that makes him seem like a world-weary, ageing rock star. "Haven't you read the book?" Yes, but it's quite slim and short on words. "Well, that's it really. It's only a fucking fashion book."

Tucked away at the end of a cobbled mews in fashionable Clerkenwell, Bailey's second-floor studio, all breezy simplicity and clutter, is not as glam as you would expect. A blue Damien Hirst painted with dead butterflies stretches across the back wall. Alongside a sensual black-and-white male of his 46-year-old wife Catherine, Kate Moss, Jean Shrimpton and Mick Jagger loom over us. Bob Dylan's *Modern Times* is drifting across the studio — "Dylan's still the go-to," and still his favourite. His little white terrier, Pig, settles on my lap, while Bailey, scruffy and unshaven, is propped on the sofa opposite like a sun king, his assistants swirling around him and seeking his approval.

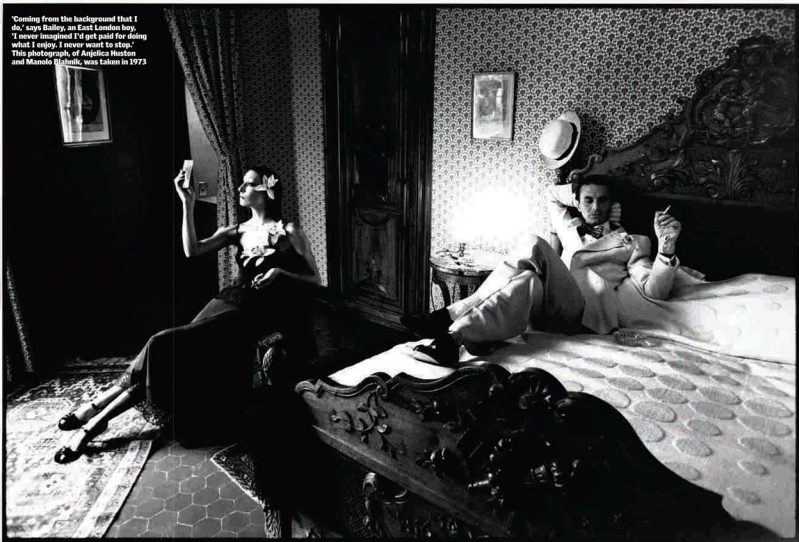
"The books before it were better, more interesting, like *The Pictures That Mark Can Do*," he says, his mood lifting, throwing knowing snirks at his assistant Mark, who inspired the jokey title.

"It's fresh and current. It's not sentimental. I don't like nostalgia, it's a disease."

These days, Bailey rarely shoots any fashion, but he is prolific. Alongside his portraits, commercials and documentaries, he has published a spectacular collection of art books.

"Coming from the background that I do, I never imagined I'd get paid for doing what

'Coming from the background that I do,' says Bailey, an East London boy. 'I never imagined I'd get paid for doing what I enjoy. I never want to stop.' This photograph of Anjelica Huston and Manolo Blahnik, was taken in 1973



Bailey bristles slightly when I revisit the Sixties. 'It was fabulous, but it was also a horrible, superficial decade'

I enjoy," he explains. "I never want to stop." More than ensuring his legend, he feels the need to keep putting out books "so people know I'm not dead or living in Chelsea."

What was his life like at the time when he was whizzing across the Riviera with Huston?

"What, do you want to know what stockings she wore?" he says teasingly, his eyes gleaming with mischief. "Was sleeping with her at the time?"

That's pretty obvious from the intimate, sexually charged images of Huston.

"It was just one of those things, as Cole

Porter would say, I guess she was a girlfriend then."

They met at a party in Belgravia, thrown by Angelica's best friend's parents, when she was 14, "long of limb, nose and hair." He was in his 20s, already on his second wife, and an international superstar.

"I don't remember much of the evening," Bailey recounts succinctly, "except for two teenage girls peeping behind the party doors, giggling hysterically."

One girl was Joan Juliet Buck (the writer and former editor of French Vogue) and the other was Angelica.

Huston, now 57, remembers the first time she saw Bailey across the crowded room, and that everything about him was dark and mysterious.

"He wore a black leather jacket, black stacked cowboy boots, and he had black eyes and shaggy black hair," she writes in his book. "Beside him, in a pale-pink angora mini-dress, with skin like a dove and long, pale-gold hair, sat the ravishing Catherine Deneuve. They were like day and night across the room, light and dark, her cool and his intensity."

Huston was intrigued, as his reputation

preceded him "as the discoverer and lover and photographer of the other most beautiful woman in the world, Jean Shrimpton. She was now living with the most beautiful man in the world, Terence Stamp."

Several years passed before they saw each other again, but the teenage Huston followed Bailey's soaring career and sexual adventures through the cut-outs of fashion magazines: "most of the iconic photographs of the time were Bailey's". Then, when she was 16, her father cast her in her first film *A Walk with Love and Death*. Already caught up in a whirl of international famelessness, she was

FORGET ME NOT

jetting off to Ireland on Richard Avedon's shoots. It wasn't long before her mood. Modigliani looks made her a favourite of Bailey's too. He shot her for *Vogue* in sidely eyelashes. "With eyes like starfish," facing the lens warily.

She remembers it as a troubled time. Feeling insecure and vulnerable, she thought she "was hideous"; she was lost and adrift in a sea of pain; her mother had been killed in a car crash; she had fallen out with her father; and instead of finding a safe harbour, she ended up as carer for her schizophrenic and mercurial 42-year-old boyfriend, photographer Bob Richardson.

"When I walked into a dressing room, a famous model, the perfect English rose, Celia Hammond, was leaving. She was the most beautiful girl I'd ever seen, with hair the colour of lemons, skin like peaches and cream, huge blue eyes. As the door closed, I was left in her dark wake, as if the sun had disappeared behind a cloud," Angelica recounts, as she struggled to glue on her fake eyelashes on the verge of tears and hysteria. She and Bailey didn't quite hit it off; she later confessed. She was shy and odd, although "he had been kind to me".

Later, among the good memories she had of *A Walk with Love and Death*, she recalls Bailey's visit on set, looking "like the cat that got the canary" with Penelope Tree, the wide-eyed, WASP-ish, lit-girl from New York: "He was laughing with my father, and carried a bunch of cameras and looked like a poet and acted irreverent, like life was a big laugh and he was in on the joke."

Years later, Huston ran off with Bailey on their whirlwind adventure around Europe, reversing his extravagant couture fantasies. She was 22 and he was 35, and in-between marriages to Deneuve and Helvin. Their romance blazed brightly, if briefly. This is the volume of his new book, decadent and dreamy, shows Bailey and Huston rolling around on the floor together, she in a cinky knit and he in his bug-bugging Barney's bowtie heels, reflected in a ceiling mirror of a Milan hotel. They had flown there from Paris, to capture the opulent setting of L'Hotel, formerly known as L'Absace, where Oscar Wilde spent his last days while exiled from England, drowning his sorrows in cognac and champagne and moaning about dying beyond his means.

There are other larger-than-life characters running through the book, all at pivotal moments of their careers: there are photos of Huston, ratty and regal as a greynosed, lounging beside a youthful Yves Saint Laurent, then a rising star of Parisian haute couture in his sun-dappled garden with Olivier Toscani, a budding fashion photographer for Italian *Vogue*, who would later achieve renown for his Benetton campaigns, sporting through the park along on the back of his motorbike, her long, black-stocking legs jutting out, and clouds of Marlene Dietrich behind her like a witch's cape; and languishing at the seaside in Nice and Corsica with shoe designer Manolo Blahnik, a flamboyant Italian designer who had just opened his first shop in Paris.

"I stuck Manolo in because he's a mate. He wasn't a model," Bailey explains. "But he was difficult." How did you get him to pose naked? "You're talking nearly 40 years ago

Oh God, I can't possibly remember."

Huston, however, vividly remembers the heady moments and high drama of terrifying mountain drives with roadside shrines, and raging storms with a plane-load of men. She recalls the turbulent flight to Corsica, she and Bailey were both hungover and annoyed by the presence of so many sisters of Christ, who were taking a deceased sister home. And she was stuck in this lightning storm over the ocean, with her body in the belly of the flying beast.

Then, arriving to their hotel, they found the main square was shut up and swarming with riot police; and the guy from the tourist board who had driven them there had a car boot full of rifles.

"From that moment on, we were mystified by the place," she says. "Our first night, three Black Marías came pouring out of awns. I saw that old three-tonne had been out of the general vote, and they'd come down to the main streets to shoot it out. Every morning, Manolo and I would shout to each other from our balconies. 'Vive la Corse! Vive la Corse!' [Long live Corsica!]"

Often offbeat and oddly cropped, but always beautiful, Bailey's collection of images evokes a sense of magic and the unexpected. His fashion photographs, he says, transcended fashion and don't fluctuate with the trends. His break came in 1940 when the *Daily Express* published his picture of the model Paulene Stone in a mini and a mohair sweater, crouching down amid a swirl of autumn leaves, playing with a squirrel.

On the day it appeared, Bailey's mate and rival, the late photographer Terence Donovan, called and teased him: "You cunt, did you do that on purpose or was it an accident?" And as Donovan had forecast, it sparked a revolution in fashion photography, ushering in the heyday of the Sixties — the icy, perfect, society beauties were replaced by the sweet, sexy, girl next door.

Donovan's suicide was a crushing blow for Bailey. "It was hard," he says, suddenly looking lost and fidgeting with a paperback of Bukowski's *Ham on Rye*. "It was the worst thing that ever happened to me. I'd miss him. Oh, he was funny, probably one of the funniest people I've ever met. He had that gritty Cockney humour, I guess he got bored with life. I think part of the problem is that he got too obsessed with money, rather than what he was doing. But, then, if you were brought up like we were, you don't want to do without money."

In 1960, before the mods and rockers, Carnaby Street, the Beatles and the Stones, the Terrible Three — Bailey, Terence Donovan and Brian Duffy — had burst onto the London scene with an irreverent attitude and bold sense of style. The laddish young photographers, working in gabine and spud, whose lifestyles reflected the emerging youth culture — had gatecrashed the elite, opulent world of fashion and art. They were older, sexier and more enterprising. Antonioni's 1966 cult film *Blow-Up* immortalised the Bailey myth, depicting his life as the cool, cutting-edge fashion photographer. While Duffy and Donovan burned out and disappeared, Bailey continued to reinvent himself with his portraits and films, gaining fresh notoriety through his famous *Lyme* and *Star Cinema* ad

— "It takes a dozen dumb animals to make a fur coat and just one to wear it!" Bailey bristles slightly when I revisit the Sixties.

"It's dull," he says dismissively. "You're not going to get anything out of me if you keep asking about the bloody Sixties. The decade didn't end in 1969. Look at you, you've got a Sixties haircut, a Sixties face, even. I guess that qualifies you to be obsessed with the Sixties. Well, you shouldn't be."

There is a tendency to romanticise all the excitement and energy, says Bailey, "and it was fabulous," but it was also a "horrible, superficial" decade.

"It was great for about 500 people in London, but rotten if you were a coalminer in Yorkshire. People had dandruff because there weren't any good shampoos. Everybody ate shit food. There was still food rationing. And there was that awful middle-class *Look Back in Anger* with life. Most of those angry young men were frauds. Before Michael Caine, all the actors were push and they put on Cockney accents. And they sounded appalling, like Guy Ritchie, who, by the way, isn't from the East End. Barely knows where it is. He went to public school.

I mean, I had a great time in the Sixties. I used to see the Rolling Stones and Beatles at the Ad Lib Club in '63 or '64. I was mates with all these people from the music star. I was going out with Beari's sister, Chrissy."

Back then, he says, celebrities were very different to the "vacuous, boring cunts" he runs across today. "Most of them were famous for actually having some sort of talent. They were normal, down-to-earth people. Now they bring their PRs and their minions. They can't cross the road without their bloody PRs — actually, it tends to be the second-raters who do that. People like Jack Nicholson and Johnny Depp still turn up on their own."

A working-class boy from Leytonstone, Bailey is similarly clear-sighted and coldly objective about his own life.

"There was nothing in the East End," he says of his early childhood, which was clouded by the war. "It was a wasteland; tenements and bombed churches."

When his family home was blitzed, they moved to East Ham with his Aunt Dolly, where he and his sister grew up with a bull terrier and a parrot. He doesn't like to dwell on long-past miseries, but it was a tough life, "all bombs, funeral hearses and hiding out in the cellar." He came to understand, even that time, surrounded by death, how fortunate he was and how he "learned not to waste a minute".

His father, a tailor's cutter, who eventually walked out on the family, worried about his son's twin loves of bird-watching and vegetables.

"I was 15 and was queer because I hated football and wouldn't eat meat, or drink milk!"

Even early on, Bailey saw himself as an outsider. An impervious, mouthy boy, he often got beaten by the teachers at school. He dropped out at 15, and started a series of dead-end jobs.

"When I left, the head told my mother: 'Well, someone's got to dig the roads. I hope he rotted in hell.' After a stint in the RAF to make a living and Singapore, Bailey returned

home, and charmed his way into a job as an assistant to society photographer John French. Not long afterwards, he landed a £600-a-year contract with *Vogue*. He dabbed in jazz, and spent nights frequenting the clubs, where he met his first wife, Rosemary Bramble, a council-house beauty queen and jazz singer, and an original Playboy bunny.

He cultivated his great loves, photography and art — and women. He has always liked, he says, women like Anjelica Huston and Penelope Tree: "I had a beauty that was all their own" and "curiosity and a sense of humour are the most important qualities in

a woman", he says, citing the story of his divorce from Deneuve in his crisp, engaging way. "She phoned from Paris and said, 'Bailey, guess what, we're divorced?' It's great, now we can be lovers." So that's how it ended.

In 1967, Bailey hooked up with Tree, a teenage model and rebellious socialist from a fabulously wealthy, well-connected political family. Her strange, moon-faced look and avant-garde style made her a poster child for the flower-power generation.

"I remember when Catherine saw some pictures of Penelope by Avedon in *American*

home, and charmed his way into a job as an assistant to society photographer John French. Not long afterwards, he landed a £600-a-year contract with *Vogue*. He dabbed in jazz, and spent nights frequenting the clubs, where he met his first wife, Rosemary Bramble, a council-house beauty queen and jazz singer, and an original Playboy bunny.

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them any more. It's not about discarding one person in favour of another. Emotions are fluid and life moves on. Like anything else, relationships bloom, wither and die. Nobody leaves anyone. You sort of leave each other, don't you? I never had any trouble because I never cared about money and possessions. When you start arguing, the lawyers get all the money. It cost me a few Warhols over the years, but I have no regrets."

"I see all my old girlfriends, Angelica, Penelope and Jean," he says, describing the latter as "the greatest model of all time. I didn't realise how important she was to me until we split up. I didn't cry. I just worked obsessively hard to get over it."

"The thing about relationships," he muses, "is that they don't end because you don't like



'It was just one of those things, as Cole Porter would say. I guess she was a girlfriend then': Bailey's portrait of Angelica Huston

knée-high boots before kissing her goodbye. As she leaves, he returns to his usual surliness, though I'm starting to realise that it's all an act, and he's as soft as a pussy-cat.

He met Catherine, his fourth wife and mother of his three grown children, on a shoot for *Italian Vogue* in 1983.

"She was the best thing that's happened to me, apart from being born," he says.

Was it love at first sight?

"What?" he asks, screeching with laughter. "You sound like that creepy old spinster in pink. What's her name? The one that writes those romance books, with all the cracked make-up and Holly Hopes?"

Barbara Cartland? She's at least 100 years older than me.

"She's dead as well, or if she isn't, looks like she should be," he says, chucking to himself. "She used to say love at first sight. No one says that nowadays. Now it's sex at first sight."

Was he still married to Marie Helvin when he went off with Catherine?

"Probably. But I still love Marie." Amazingly, he has remained "good friends" with Helvin, who painted him as a bullying philanderer in her recent memoir. Amid the African grey parrots and black-painted walls of their North London home, she

recalled the final days of their 10-year marriage, when her friend Jerry Hall broke the news about Catherine, a young English model she and Mick had seen with Bailey in Paris.

So will this be his last marriage then?

"Yeah, unless she runs off with fucking someone else."

You might run off with someone else too?

"I don't think I'd run. I might walk off."

"Are you married?" Bailey asks, noticing my ring shimmering beneath the dim studio lights.

Sort of. I say evasively.

"How can you be sort of married?" When I explain that the ring is actually a reminder to get divorced so I can move on to my second husband, like a forget-me-not, Bailey falls into a fit of laughter and persists with his questioning: What does my ex-husband do? Is he English? And what about the boyfriend?

Playful and unpredictable, he seems genuinely curious about me. Do I have children?

No, I have eight cats. Children are demanding, expensive and not at all environmentally friendly.

"It's true," he says. "Why would anyone

want kids? But once you have them, it's great. None of my ex-wives wanted kids either. But I never asked them."

Anyway, I'll probably end up like Celia Hammond, the patron saint of stray cats.

When I mention Celia, one of the Sixties' most failed faces, who gave up all her worldly wealth to set up London cat rescue clinics, he smiles. "A lovely woman, with a pure heart."

Did he shag her too?

"No, she was one of Donovan's girls. I didn't get much out of her, apart from a few snogs and blow-jobs. She used to drive me mad, though. Once she saw a stray cat in the road, she'd make me drive back to get it. But she was truly beautiful."

She still is, I remind him, even though she has gone, as Bailey would say, with the elements.

"Yeah, well, she wouldn't be any good to me now, would she?" he says.

"You're complicated, aren't you?" he says to me.

Not really, just unconventional.

"More like plain bloody mad!"

Maybe, but I wouldn't know, would I?

"Oh, you're complicated alright," he insists. But isn't everybody?

"I'm bloody not," he says with his rasping,

asthmatic chuckle. "I'm straightforward and easygoing."

Well, I am too.

"No you're not. You're full of angst. I watch your hands moving all the time."

It's probably a caffeine overdose, combined with the stress of one of the cats murdering a pigeon in the corridor this morning and being interrogated by a grumpy, curmudgeonly photographer.

"So how old is this boyfriend of yours?"

He continues with an almost feline curiosity, intrigued. "He's 26? Forget it. He's too young. It won't work. Get rid of him."

With his staggering collection of ex-wives and mistresses, Bailey is hardly a good example, I protest, and he's married to someone 25 years younger. "Well, at least I'll die before she gets really old. It's different with men anyway. Women are emotional. Men are aesthetically driven. It's fine now. But sooner or later he'll be out looking for a younger model."

As I leave, he kisses me goodbye, still laughing, and whispers sweet-nothings: "Sort out your sex life, love. And get yourself an older man, you silly bitch." ■

'Is That So Kid' by David Bailey, £40, Sidell. See www.sidell.co.uk