

# Bill Curry On Both Sides Of The Lens

[Lynne Robinson](#) / [June 26, 2017](#)



He's contributed to **taoStyle** since its inception.



His influence on the blog's visual integrity is a given and to say I value his continued input and ideas, is an understatement. But since many of you may not be aware of his iconic persona on the other side of the camera, I thought it about time, I introduced him to you properly.

He's traveled the globe, and continues to do so, he's dined with paupers and kings, appeared in countless editorial and ad campaigns, on TV and in Film, yet he's as unaffected as it gets – fun to hang with, sensitive, thoughtful and generous; Bill Curry is a gentleman and a sweetheart and I count myself blessed to have him as a creative collaborator.



I considered writing a story about him, but Billy is such a character with his own, distinct voice – I wish you could see him break into fluent Patois, imitating Bob Marley on a NYC street corner with every nuance down pat!

Jamaica has long been a special place to Billy, as has Taos, where he's lived off and on for decades.

Billy is the real deal. He's been there, done all that and has lived to tell the tale.

In his own voice. Bill Curry.





*1) You were considered the top male model in your era of constant work, how did it feel to be looked upon as an icon of physical beauty and style?*

For me the traveling the world for photo shoots and commercials interacting with cultures across the globe was the pinnacle of success. As a young boy growing up in West Virginia, I vowed that one day I would travel to far away places. I had no inkling then, that within 15 years of that dream, I would be living in Paris and Milan, taking trips to Morocco, Iceland, Jamaica and Bora Bora for photo shoots, while being paid to be in front of the camera representing the top designers of the world. Inside I was still the geeky shy boy wearing overly thick coke bottle glasses, being made fun of for my big ears. Suddenly it seemed I had freedom to move within diverse circles from an Iban Head hunter in Borneo to hanging out with Andy Warhol in Aspen and Nureyev, Cher, Muhammad Ali at Studio 54

I was asked to do a Uniqlo campaign last year at the age of 62 and traveled to NYC. I showed up on set feeling like an imposter and suddenly realized that I have been in front of the camera for forty years representing some ideal in a photo that was just my image. Through diligence and study I learned how to have a good photo of me taken and through that I have learned how to take a good photo of others. My grandmother June told me when I was ten that pretty is as pretty does. It was sage advice of how to not take those worldwide published images of me to heart. It was a well paid, adventurous job that afforded access to worlds beyond my social upbringing and travel far beyond my means.



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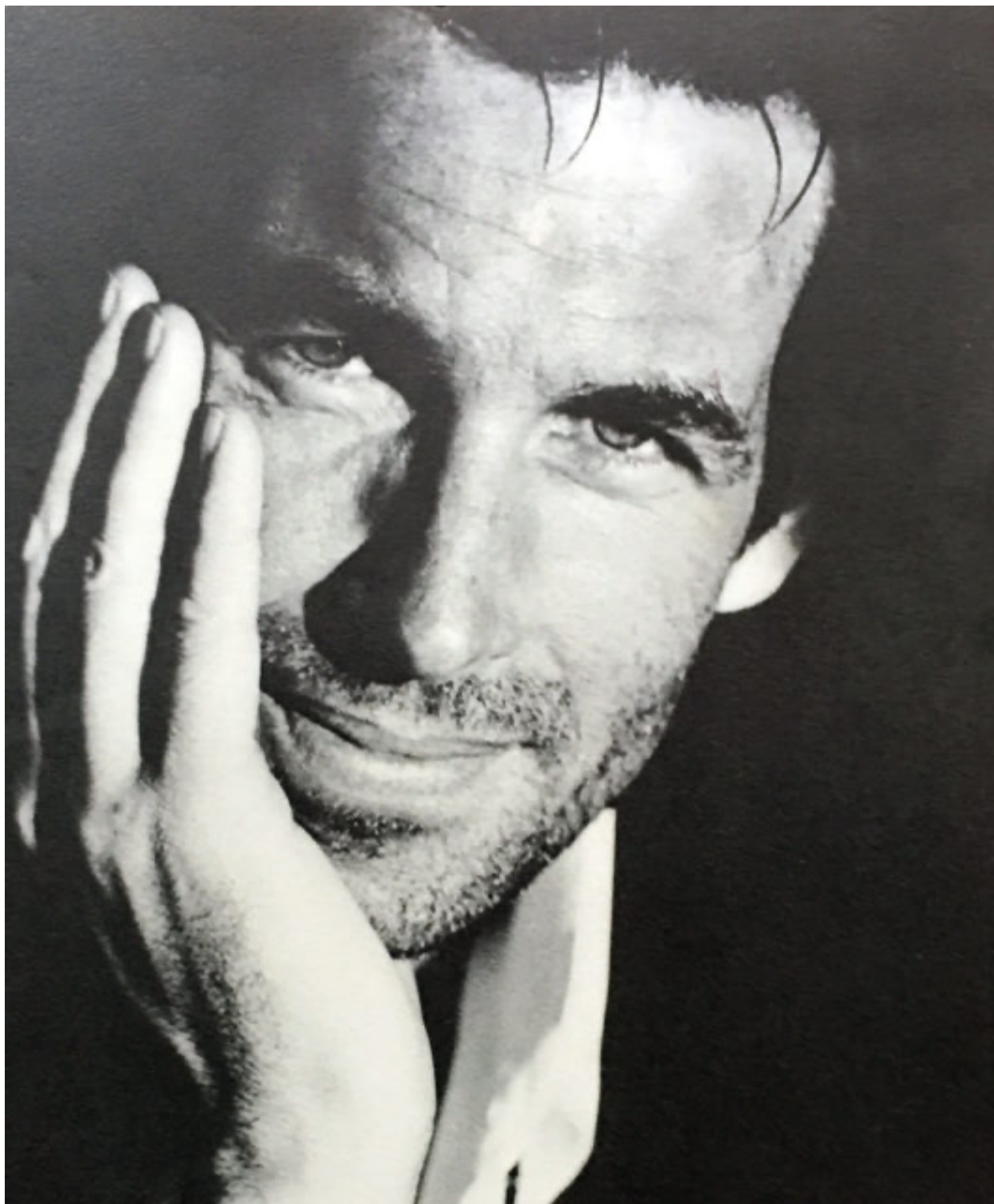
TAN, BLACK, WHITE  
SPARK SPORTSWEAR



*2) You came of (modelling age) in an era of decadent expression; Andy's Factory literally manufactured a scene that exploded – what was it like to be there?*

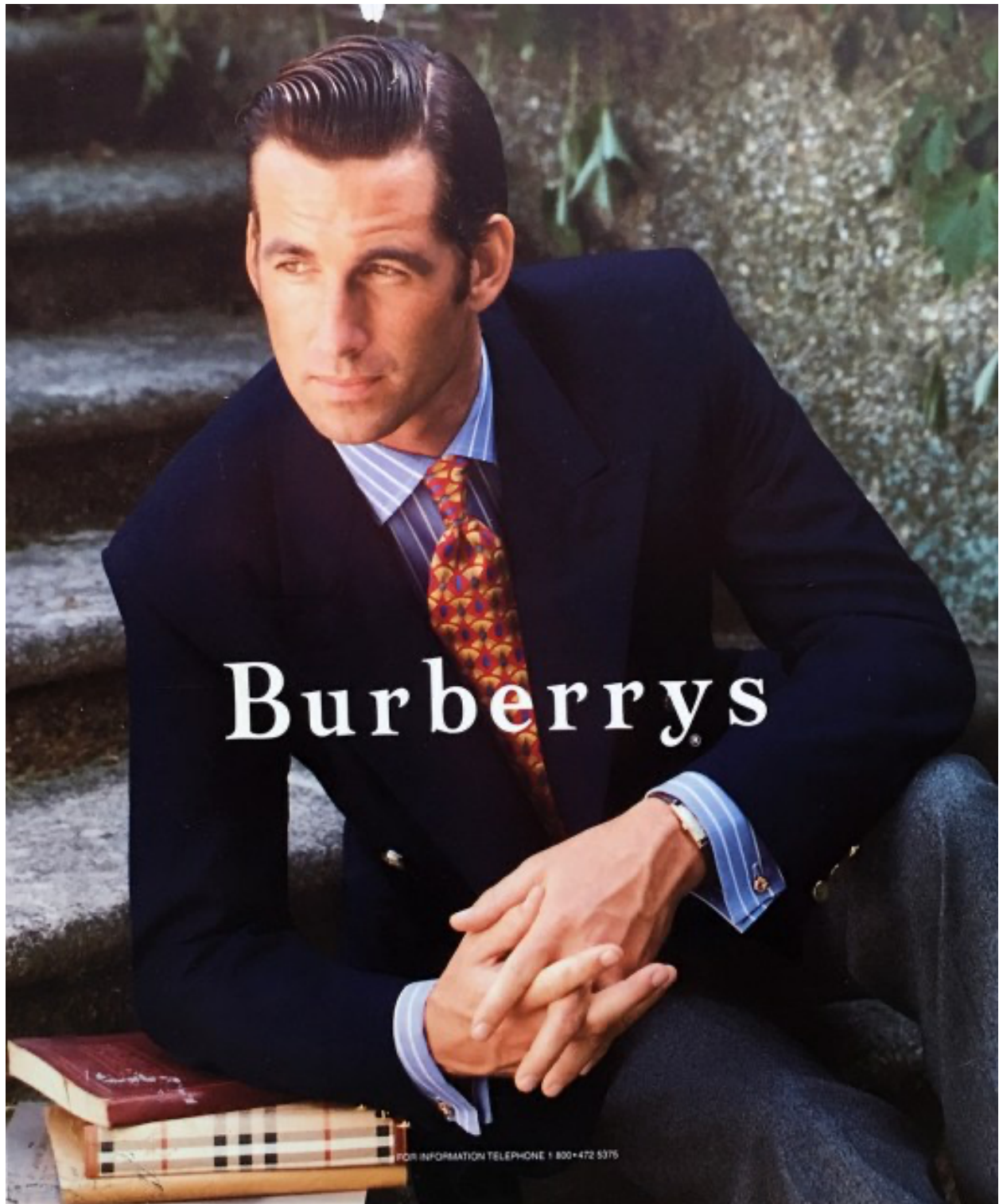
I moved to Manhattan in 1977. Saturday Night Fever and Studio 54 exploded upon the scene in NYC. At the time it did not seem decadent and in comparison to the flaunting feckless lifestyles of Kim Kardashian, Puff Daddy and today's America of a reality TV president and the daunting Corporatocracy we live in now, those days were about exploring all the possibilities of artistic, individualistic expression. It was a sensualist's delight to be caught up in the musical rhythms of the vibrant New York fashion-art scene. Andy invited me a number of times to the Factory for these electric lunches he put together. At the table would be an actor, a homeless man, a Senator, a movie star or one of his crew. He would sit and watch the interaction. He loved being the facilitator for bringing diverse authentic people together and watch how they would interact. It was dynamic and funny to interact as me (asking myself how did I ever get here?), but he was seeing me the top model as part of his tableau.





*3) You parlayed your time in front of the camera into acting and you have always carried a camera, was the shift to working in those mediums easy for you?*

I was fortunate to be in an elevator and met Wilhelmina who took me upstairs to her men's division director and overrode his desire to send me back to Ohio where I had gone to University. She told him that I was going to work in catalog, editorial, runway, advertising, campaigns, TV commercials and eventually become an actor. I sat in shock and disbelief as I could not envision such a life ahead. I barely had a floor to sleep on at a friend's apartment in those early NYC days. Three weeks later I found myself at the Tonight Show with Uber model and agent Wilhelmina and Patti Hansen, then the top model girl in the world, who eventually married Keith Richards. A month after that I was in Greece at the ancient site of the Olympic long jump, doing photos for a Cerrutti campaign. The travel and adventure did not slow down for nearly twenty years. As soon as I got to Europe I bought a Canon AE-1 and began staying at a location after a photo shoot to photograph the local cultures. I was learning in front of the camera and behind the camera about light, composition and being in the moment with full intention. I was working with Avedon, Horst, Penn, Arthur Elgort, Jean Pagliuso, Victor Skrebneski and many other master photographers. I was in school every photo shoot I did in studio and on location.



At that time I had no idea that I would be soon be enrolled with the great Sanford Meisner at his Neighborhood playhouse and those studies would take me to Jamaica for six weeks for a film with Peter O'Toole, Robin Williams, Twiggy and Jimmy Cliff and then in a few years later to South Dakota to be a Confederate officer in a film about Lakota Souix people with a young actor



Kevin Costner (photo of Bill on *Dances With Wolves* set below), or that John Oates from Hall and Oates would become one of my life long dearest friends and we would do a TV show called Max Music that I hosted. Wilhelmina and that chance encounter in the elevator, elevated my life beyond my dreams.

The taking of beautiful and interesting photos was easy and the transition to becoming a professional photographer was a necessity when I was living in LA and the SAG strike necessitated that I pick up a camera and begin making money with my skills and eye as a shooter.



*4) You spend your free time travelling to remote and beautiful places where you have, over time developed relationships with many indigenous people,. Can you tell us a little about that?*

One of my first trips was to Morocco. We went to Marrakesh and stayed at the world-famous Hotel Mamounia. The photographer, art director, makeup and hair artist and other model went to the desert for two days. I was left behind in one of the most exotic hotels in the world poolside. The first afternoon to my great surprise a Hawaiian dance troop on tour of the Middle East gave a performance. I had my camera and my smile so my first interaction with indigenous people were 10 Hawaiian goddesses. The next week after the photo shoot wrapped I stayed on and went up to the Atlas Mountains to spend time with the Berber tribesman. It was a defining experience



for me to live with tribal people for a few days not knowing their language and I found that by me being fully present in a loving space, I was included in song, dance, food and laughter. That trip began my immersion into a lifelong involvement with tribal people. When I returned from that trip I was watching TV in my Gramercy Park Penthouse and there was a Karuk Elder named Charlie Red Hawk Thom speaking of Sweat Lodge Ceremony. It turned out he was going to be in New Paltz New York two hours north of the city the following weekend, so I drove up and took part in my first traditional Inipi ceremony. I had no idea that for the next twenty plus years he would be an integral part of my life as a spiritual mentor. I was living an uber urban glittering life, jet setting around the world, being paid to wear Valentino, Armani, Versace, Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Donna Karan, and have dinner with them after the shoot. And at the same time deeply involved with indigenous tribes around the world. It was a wonderful balance.



5) *Here in Taos you are close friends with [Robert Mirabal](#) and other [Native artists](#) and healers, is this a part of what makes Taos special to you?*

When I first came to Taos in 1990 I had been living in Montana on 80 acres for a few years, elk, moose, trout and water were plentiful. My spirit sister Miriam Foronda who I had met at the Harmonic Convergence ceremony in 1987 at the Apache Mescalero reservation asked me to visit Taos. I was not impressed. The country seemed to dry and barren for my aesthetics. I stayed maybe three days. I came back that September and she took me to the Pueblo to see the Saint Geronimo feast. My heart was captured by the pureness and beauty of that day. I noticed the light was magnificent like nowhere in the world I had been. I met many people from Taos that day. I was thunderstruck and the Mountain pulled me in. Taos for me is my spirit home now

since those days. It is the people of this land along with the interaction with the land that makes it like no other place on the earth. There is an authenticity. an acceptance of individuality and a celebration of diversity that holds my heart here in Taos. Of all my world travels there is more cultural diversity and interaction than anywhere I have ever traveled. Living in Authentic Self seems to be the mantra here.



After I'd put together this blog post, I received an email from Billy.

"P.S." He wrote. "Current planetary degradation is decadent. Enjoying Louis Roederer Cristal Champagne, an occasional line of coke and dancing the night away at Les Bain Douche in Paris with a Brazilian model seems like quaint fun."



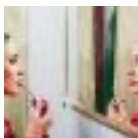
For more on Bill Curry and his work on both sides of the lens, please visit his site linked below.

[curryimages](http://curryimages.com)

All photographs thanks to Bill Curry

[June 26, 2017](#) in [People and Places](#).

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## 5 thoughts on “Bill Curry On Both Sides Of The Lens”

1.



[\*Don Richmond\*](#)

[June 27, 2017 at 12:29 pm](#)

The most amazing thing about all of this, is that Bill Curry is a kind, considerate, unassuming man and a delightful human being, even after running the described gauntlet, that would seem designed to make one anything but. Thanks for sharing his remarkable story!

o



[\*Lynne Robinson\*](#)

[June 27, 2017 at 6:08 pm](#)

Thank you so much for commenting. Bill is extremely modest. Humble in fact, but I've noticed that most truly great people usually are. There are exceptions but that seems to be the rule.

2.



[\*Alan Robinson\*](#)

[June 28, 2017 at 1:06 pm](#)

How interesting I was in New York city in the late 1970s early 80's as an actor i.am now involved with poetry would like to have some of your photographs about vultures so diverse in my.next poetry book ,my poetry encompasses my travels and a spiritual Connectio.n



3. [\*Mary Domito\*](#)

[June 25, 2018 at 8:54 am](#)

I count myself fortunate to be photographed by Billy, but more so to count him as a friend. Ditto what Don Richmond posted. Truer than true.



4. [\*Leslie Fallon\*](#)

[March 17, 2022 at 10:26 am](#)

He is one of my faves. Worked a lot with him in the 90's. Great guy! And that Jamaican accent he would speak in was to die for. Truly one of my faves while art directing in the fashion biz!

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