

'He'd snap a few shots. We'd eat our cereal'

Photography | As a new show and book celebrate the career of Arthur Elgort, his daughter Sophie Elgort recalls life behind - and before - his lens



Images from Arthur Elgort's new book: Christy Turlington and Naomi Campbell in New Orleans, 1991 (above); Sophie at six years old in 1992 (left)

My dad kept cameras in every room of our New York City apartment, and one around his neck. As children, my brothers and I would plop down at our places at the kitchen table each morning, our eyes barely open, while my dad would sit across the table with his camera: "Let me get a shot of you." We would look up, or not, while he snapped a few shots on his Rolleiflex or whatever was lying around, and then get back to our cereal.

When we didn't have school, we went to my dad's photo shoots at his studio, in SoHo, New York, and on location around the world. As kids, we were often put in the shots with the models. There are many photos I now know well but am too young to remember: me as a toddler, wearing a white tutu, standing next to Darcey Bussell. Another, taken that same day, lying next to my dad with a camera in my hands - both of us taking pictures of Darcey. I remember the shoots as I got older: the one with British model Stella Tennant, where they had me stand behind a glass pane - you can just see me looking into the room at her. I really wasn't a big part of the photo but dad just thought those little additions told a story. He thinks children make the shots more interesting.

When you weren't in the shot, you were put to work, steaming clothes for the stylist, holding brushes for the make-up artist, getting water for the



Christy Turlington in New Orleans, 1990

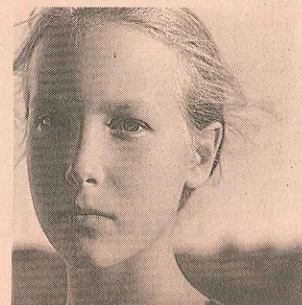


'I was never overwhelmed. We didn't realise who anyone was. Cindy Crawford was my pal'

assistants, standing in for the lighting tests and, more recently, on a shoot for British Vogue with Beyoncé, controlling the iPod.

There's a very relaxed atmosphere on my dad's sets, something I try now to emulate on my own. As a child I remember the sets as places where people were friendly, music played, and everyone would eat lunch around the same table. Watching the team work, I learnt the value of building your own crew. And though we were on sets with some of the most important people in the industry, for the biggest publications and brands in the world, I was never overwhelmed. We didn't realise who anyone was. Cindy Crawford was my pal.

My brothers and I were using cameras before we could walk. My dad was never nervous we would break them. Instead, he taught us to put the straps around



Sophie in Southampton, NY, 1997

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Sophie with Darcey Bussell in a 1989 Vogue photo shoot

our necks so we didn't drop them. In middle school, I would bring my camera to school and take pictures of my friends in the hallways. After school, I would dress my friends up in my mum's clothes, and stage photo shoots around the neighbourhood. This continued through college but I didn't really think about becoming a photographer until after graduating when I was asked to take some photos for a friend's brand. I had the most photography experience of anyone they knew. I used my Dad's studio and borrowed his equipment. That shoot made me realise that maybe I could do photography professionally.

Dad gave me lots of technical advice when I was starting out but the most important lesson I've learnt from him is how important it is to put your subject at ease - that's my dad's real gift. My father is genuinely interested in everyone, from the model, to the lowliest intern on set. And it's because of this he's able to capture such incredible moments.

Of the three siblings, two of us now work behind the camera (my brother Warren Elgort is a film director), while Ansel has become an actor. Ansel was always performing. He started at the School of American Ballet when he was very young, sang in children's choruses and performed in musicals. He studied drama at LaGuardia High School. I think being in front of my dad's camera throughout the years made him extremely comfortable in front of a camera. We all are. It has become so normal to have a camera in our faces over all these years that it doesn't faze us. My dad still gives us direction from time to time - "stop doing that with your lip". The first time he met my now husband a couple of years ago, he yelled at him across the dinner table because he said he was ruining all the pictures. My husband has since learnt to sit up straight.

'Arthur Elgort: *The Big Picture*' runs at the Staley-Wise Gallery, New York, until January 10, staleywise.com
A book of the same name is published by Steidl at the end of December (\$98)