

DIGITAL CONVERT
PROFESSIONAL PIONEERS IN DIGITAL SLR PHOTOGRAPHY

Stephen Eastwood

Stephen Eastwood is something of the fashion caricature, an ex-model turned photographer who entered the profession with far more interest in girls than cameras. Five years on and he's gone from clueless playboy to shrewd businessman and a serious player on the New York scene. And, most importantly, he's willing to tell us how



The same old tired explanations tend to get trundled out in interviews with fashion photographers. They're generally frustrated filmmakers, or potential Picassos that just can't paint, and every one of them lays claim to being the industry's foremost lighting magician.

So the novel mix of humility and candour offered by New York-based fashion and beauty photographer Stephen Eastwood is a welcome tonic indeed. Not only did he enter the profession to 'meet more models', he also admits to being 'the opposite of creative', and that most of his assistants 'know four times as much [as he does] about photography'; But don't be fooled into thinking that Stephen's self-deprecation is a product of industry failure. This is a man who commands between \$3,500 and \$10,000 for a day's work (he's doing around 15 days a month at the moment) and who also receives a further \$10,000 to \$20,000 for each of those days in usage rights. Do the sums. This isn't a yearly income that requires you to save up your Clubcard points. Yet neither is Stephen a member of fashion's megastar bratpack, whose work regularly stares out from the covers of elite magazines like *American Vogue* and *W Magazine*. The likes of Steven Klein, Steven Meisel and Craig McDean make Stephen's income look like it came from the DHSS; they command millions of dollars for advertising campaigns that can take just a few days to shoot.

In fact, Stephen's decision not to aim for the pinnacle of his profession is the very thing that has allowed him to earn an income where so many others fail. "Fashion is fiercely competitive" claims Stephen. "So many assistants come to me with wonderfully artistic shots of pale girls with black lip liner and wonder why they're not making any headway. There are about 18 guys that have this artistic side of the market sewn up; the superstars of the fashion industry. We can't all shoot for Gucci or Prada. The rest of us have to have some commercial viability and accept that we're going to shoot for sweater companies and cosmetics brands. Just look at the

Biography: Stephen Eastwood

Stephen is 'not much older than 29' and grew up in Great Neck, Long Island, New York. He grew up wanting to be a lawyer but studied Philosophy and Psychology at St. John's University in Queens. He describes life in Great Neck as being "almost like in Manhattan, except that they have parking". When in New York, he tends to shoot in Manhattan in one of the many rental studios available. He believes running his own studio is uneconomical. "While clients happily pay rental for studios and equipment hire, they're never prepared to pay those fees for your own, so by the time you've paid \$15,000 a month for rental plus your liability insurance, the studio ends up being the real liability." Stephen is a Canon PrintMaster, which is a prestigious and elite group of professional photographers in the US.

billboards and posters around you of models wearing make-up and ask yourself how many use that high fashion imagery. An ad agency isn't going to risk using you for a natural shoot with little make-up if all you have is avant-garde make-up and hair in your book.

"That's not to say that you can't shoot this sort of stuff for personal work, but it should be in a second portfolio and it should stay in a second portfolio. The greatest deficit of skills in photographers does seem to be business sense. People who want to get into the business come to me and say they're thinking of doing a photography course, and I advise them to do a business course instead. You've either got an eye for imagery or you haven't. You won't learn that on a course; and you can develop all the technical ability you need by reading books and magazines, playing about with a digital camera or assisting a professional photographer. I get emails from people with addresses in the middle of nowhere, wanting to shoot fashion, and I ask them whether they plan on moving to New York, Paris, or Milan. If they say no, I tell them to forget it then and shoot something else. You'll never get the right models and the right clothes for fashion unless you live and work in these places." >>



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Stephen himself is self-taught, learning largely through UK photo magazines that sell in New York stores, such as Borders and Barnes & Noble. The US equivalents, he claims, are just vehicles for advertisers, offering little more than news and equipment reviews. He turned professional aged 25 after spending some time on the other side of the lens as a model, and first shot glamour for the likes of *Maxim* and *FHM*. "In the beginning, I have to admit that I was probably more interested in the girls than the photography" says Stephen. "I think if you ask a lot of guys about what first attracted them to photography, it is the playboy side of the business."

"Nowadays it's the reverse really. I'm not thinking about how beautiful the models are but more about their flaws and what I'll have to fix. I've never claimed to be what you would call creative. I can fix or change an idea and make something workable. This is how I tend to work. As soon as I see something, I don't see the positives, only the negatives that need to be corrected, retouched or lit differently. I'm immediately drawn to the faults of the girls. You get people looking at your pictures and commenting that one of your least attractive models on a shoot is gorgeous, and you just want to scream about how this was probably the least photogenic girl you've

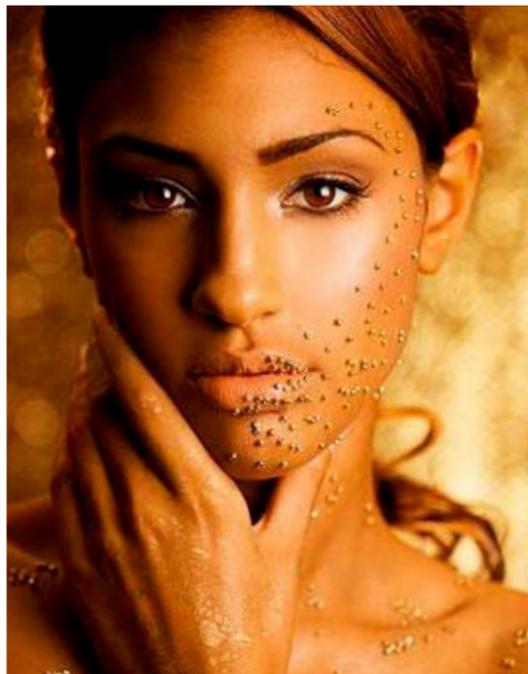
shot, and she looks good because of the work you've put in! But you just have to smile and politely talk about the perks of the job.

"I was using film when I first started shooting models and didn't really know what I was doing," admits Stephen. "You'd go out for the day and shoot ten rolls and get three good shots and think you were the next Richard Avedon. Then you look back later and realise you sucked. Early on you suss out that this or that guy's making an easier job of it because he's shooting Polaroid to check what's going on, so I bought a Mamiya RZ67 with a Polaroid back and learnt a little quicker. Now, with digital, people should be learning exponentially. I actually bought a three-megapixel Canon EOS D30 to use like a Polaroid camera, showing images to clients whilst the film was sent to the lab. I played around with them for a long while and used interpolation to produce great looking 24in prints. I started to realise at this point that if people couldn't make this look good on a single magazine page then the printer was doing something very wrong. The quality of the three-megapixel images from this camera was actually very, very good.

"I'm the first person to tell people that the resolution of some of these digital backs is overkill. I shot a billboard on a D30 and it »



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looked fine. The problem comes when you're thinking about the future of your own personal work and you want it recorded in the best way possible with the capability of printing it as large as possible. Once you use a camera with more megapixels, you can't really go back. Some of my favourite images were shot with the D30 and I do wonder how much better they might have looked with better colour fidelity or higher resolution.

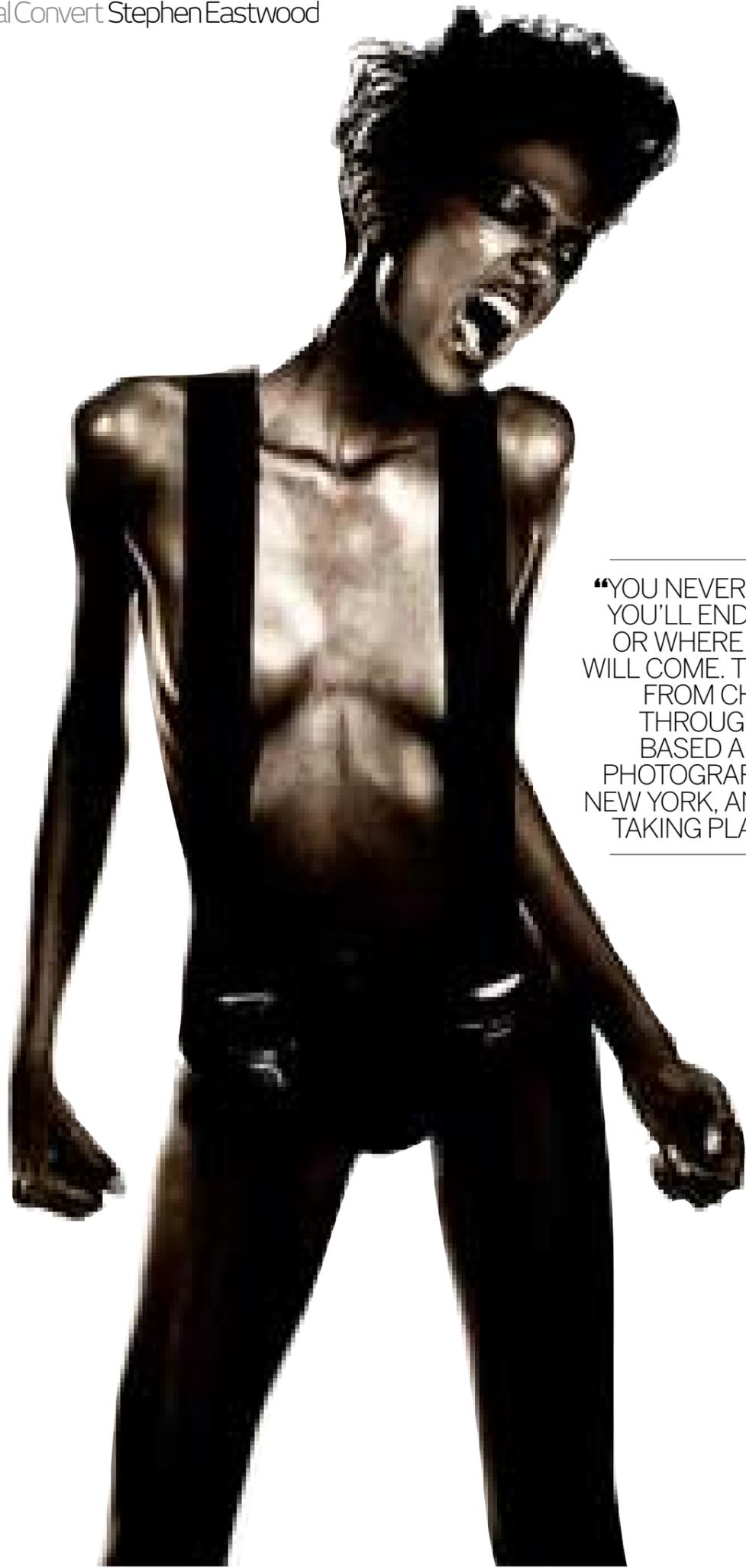
"Now I primarily shoot on a Canon EOS-1DS MkII, but use a Hasselblad H2 with 39-megapixel P45 digital back for some jobs. I'm due to receive the EOS-1DS MkIII soon. Having used it already, I know it's well worth the upgrade. The primary reason for the upgrade isn't the increase in resolution but the shift from 12-bit to 14-bit status, which in numerical terms is massive; a huge jump in

dynamic range. Battery life is doubled too, and on location, the 3in screen really comes into its own. People reminisce about film but in truth, if you go back and compare a digital image to a film scan, the scan looks awful. There's no comparison. I recently showed a scan of film rated at ISO 100 to an art director, didn't tell him it was from film and asked him if he thought the level of noise was acceptable for a digital camera set at ISO 800 and he said no! This just shows you how far we've come."

Stephen is based in Queens, Long Island, about 15 minutes outside Manhattan, though he works between New York, Los Angeles and Miami. His fashion and beauty work is predominantly for cosmetics agencies and sweater companies; though his LA work is more Hollywood-orientated celebrity >>



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portraiture and promotional material like CD covers and posters. Miami is a popular location for fashion work during the winter months, as the weather is always good and it has some of the best locations, but provides little in the way of business itself, most of which gets booked out of New York. His trips to California are now becoming weekly or biweekly, as he becomes more involved in commercials and videos, so he spends a lot of time on planes, and even more in airports; an unfortunate by-product of the war on terror, he claims. As his clients have become bigger and the companies start to sub-divide, says Stephen, there tends to be a lot more work. He could be shooting for ten sweater lines and five cosmetic lines, all for the same company.

“I do have a rep but also do in-house marketing,” claims Stephen, “but nowadays there’s less time to do this as I’m busy shooting. Luckily people are finding me. A lot of the work does come from word of mouth. People I worked with at one sweater company move to another and then get in touch. I do still send direct mail marketing to the ad agencies as this type of marketing still seems to have a tremendous hold. People like to have something substantial in their hands. I try to target agencies no matter where they’re based in the US now. You never know where you’ll end up shooting or where your clients will come from these days. The client could be from China, booking through a Michigan-based ad agency, the photographer based in New York, and the shoot taking place in Vegas!” >>



Stephen has three portfolios; one beauty (head and shoulders showing off make-up and hair), one fashion (more often full length shots to show clothes) and a portfolio of personal work (containing glamour and arty images). Each has a comparatively high numbers of images at 50. "My mentality is that I want every shot in my portfolio to make someone stop and say: 'Wow!'. You don't know at which page someone will dip into your portfolio when it's sat on a table with stacks of others, so every image must be strong enough to make them want to look at the rest and call people and say 'check this guy out.' Your work has to have an edge and show something different, but also be realistic for the market."

Stephen explains that the usage fee on top of his base day rate is worked out as a percentage of the client's total advertising spend for that particular campaign. When you consider that a magazine like *Vogue* charges around \$120,000 a page for advertising space, and a brand like Prada might take ten pages in that magazine, and the same in ten other titles in the US, before they've even bought billboard space in prime real estate areas like Time Square, you can understand why fashion's megastars end up with millions of dollars for a campaign; even if the usage rate was only three percent! "Working for a percentage of the budget is a good way of showing clients what your work is and should be worth. The most I've made from a single campaign in usage is \$300,000, and this was for 3 or 4 days work plus a few days on the phone.", Stephen claims.

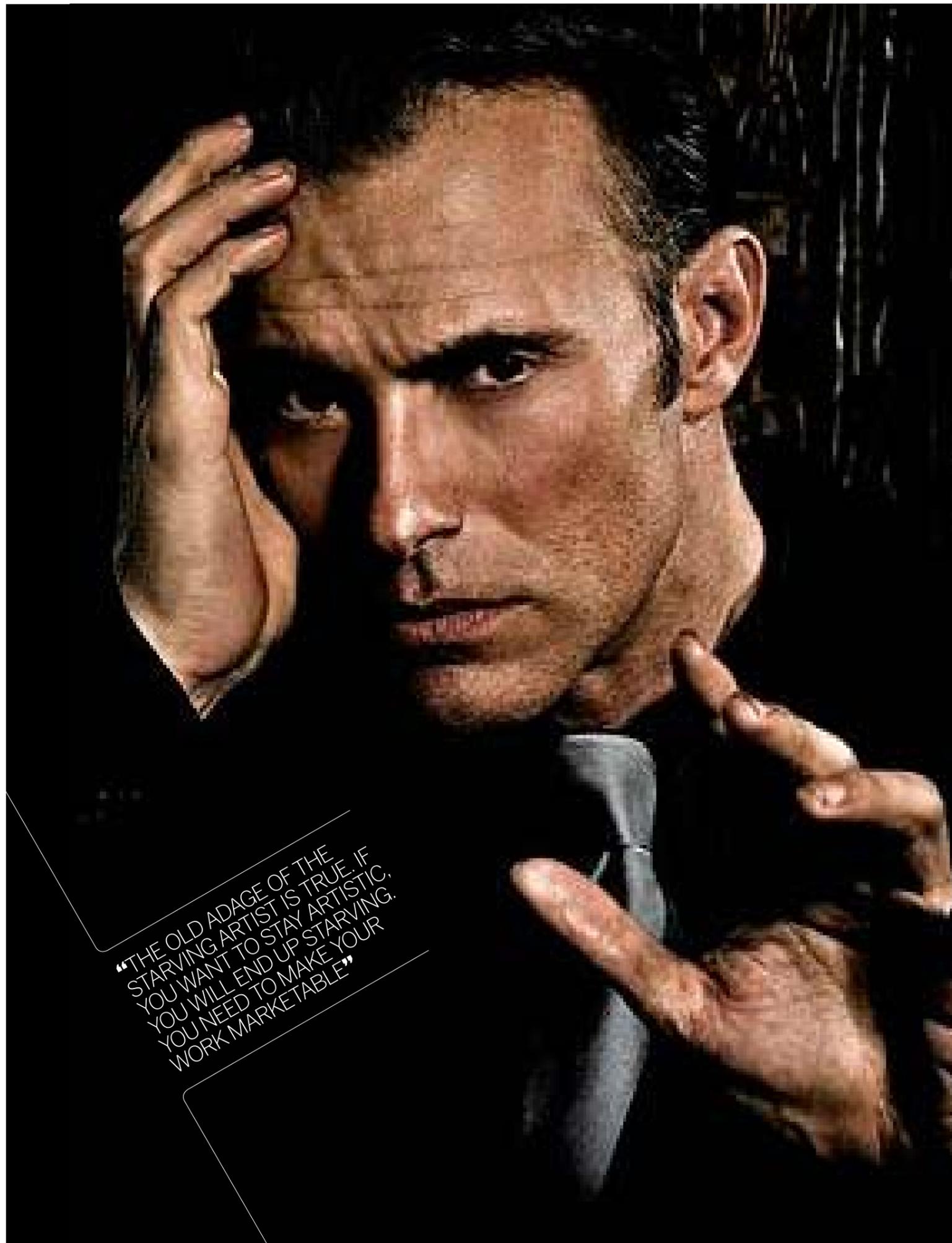
"These sorts of jobs don't just float around every day though and you have to work hard to keep them. You've got to be amenable on shoot. The client doesn't care that you're next Picasso. They want you to produce something that makes them money and really don't care too much about your opinions. They either like it or they don't."

Stephen's equipment

Stephen uses a Canon EOS-1DS MkII and on occasion a Hasselblad H2 with Phase One P45 39-megapixel digital back. With the Canon, he uses a 70-200mm f/2.8L IS lens, a 200mm f/1.8L, and 180mm f/3.5L Macro, a 300mm f/2.8L and a 28-300mm f/3.5-5.6L IS. He never shoots at less than f/8 so all these lenses are sharp enough for his work at that aperture. He uses a 120mm f/4 macro, 210mm f/4 and 300mm f/4.5 lenses with the Hasselblad. His lighting equipment is made up of packs and heads from the Broncolor Speedotron Blackline range and he uses all manner of light modifying accessories such as Octabanks, softboxes, reflector dishes and beauty dishes. He insists that everyone one of these is fitted with a grid to ensure minimum spill and maximum control. He uses several flash-heads (on average between seven and nine for a beauty shot) and lights for fashion as though it were still-life, ensuring the model doesn't move an inch so he can precisely sculpt the light. All his client proofing is produced on Canon iPF Prograf printers.

The problem photographers are experiencing is that as a whole they're more 'artist' than anything else. I'm not. I'm not a businessman. Artists create what they want to create but clients don't work that way. The old adage of the starving artist is true. If you want to stay artistic, you will end up starving. You need to make your work marketable. How many people do you think end up shooting the covers of *Vogue*? The truth is that if you aim for this and nothing in the middle, you will be disappointed." <<

Stephen is actively working on a new set of lighting and retouching DVDs, due mid-December that explain his styles and techniques. For details visit: www.stepheneastwood.com



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