



# Stealing Beauty

Acclaimed photographer Greg Lotus—whose sought-after work appears in international fashion magazines—perfected his craft in Miami.

BY ROBIN SAYERS



An image from Italian  
*Vogue Beauty*, May 2009

Greg Lotus



**I**magine: You're a high school junior, living in rural West Virginia. Your closest neighbor is 12 miles away. Your school bus stop requires a two-mile trek—each way. You've never been to a city, even though the nation's capital is but a four-hour drive east. Your idea of a pet is the motherless baby deer you bottle-feed.

In the cosmic blink of an eye, you're photographing covers for Italian *Vogue*, shooting celebrities including Penelope Cruz, Pierce Brosnan and Chris Brown, and your photos are sought out by art collectors.

Yes, there's quite a story in the middle.

"When I was 16, I wrote an essay and was chosen to be West Virginia's delegate to the Model United Nations," says Greg Lotus. "I got to go to New York City for a week. It was an eye opener and really moving."

But a funny thing happened on the way to the UN. While in Manhattan, "I strangely got scouted to be a model by someone from the Ford agency."

After returning home briefly, Lotus shipped out to Barcelona and a dream life of striking poses. Or not. "I stayed there for a few months, but I didn't really like it, so I came back."

Although retired from the business, Lotus, who landed in Seattle, still lived among models.

"I picked up a camera and started taking pictures of my roommates just so they could have more shots for their portfolios. I'd never even played with a camera before that."

Using a secondhand Pentax 35mm given to him by a friend, and with just their home as a makeshift studio, Lotus and his work started getting noticed.

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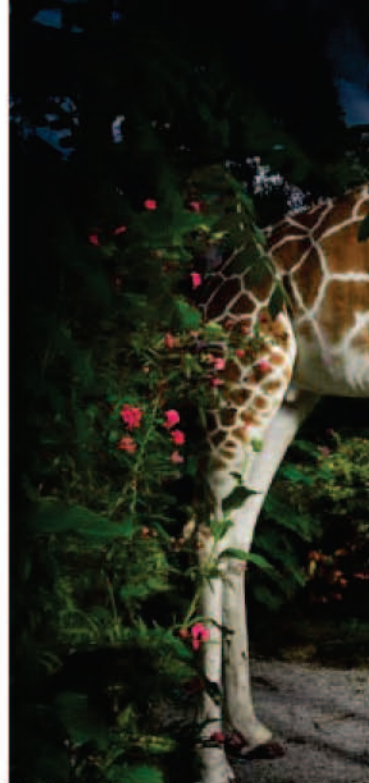
models that needed photos for their portfolios. I said, 'I'm not really a photographer.' They said, 'But we'll pay you,' and I'm like, 'OK!'"

Three short months later, someone from Bruce Weber's office called about a possible photo-assistant gig. Lotus flew to Florida and met with the legendary lensman at his oceanfront Golden Beach estate; Weber praised his work and offered words of encouragement. While that position fell through, Lotus decided that Miami was the next logical step. It was here, over the course of three years, that Lotus honed his skills and developed his portfolio to the point that the insane thing that happened next could happen at all.

"I knew I wasn't ready to go to New York because of the competition, so I decided to try Paris," he says. "I got off the plane and went to meet my friend Philippa who ran Madison Models. She greeted me very kindly, looked at my portfolio, picked up the phone and called the magazine *Citizen K*. Later that same day, I met with the magazine's editor and left his office 10 minutes later with a cover and a 40-page story—and I hadn't even been in Paris for four hours. Two days later, I'm in Paris, shooting. It was amazing."

Soon, "I got an agent there, who is still my agent today. She called me about a month later and said, 'I have an appointment for you with Franca Sozzani,'" the famous editor of Italian *Vogue*. "I remember that meeting very clearly, because I was so intimidated by her that I couldn't look her in the eye. She reviewed my book, then slid it back to me. I thought she was going to say, 'Thanks but no thanks,' but she said, 'OK, give me a story. I want 10 pages.'"

So what has people beating down the door to work with the boy from West Virginia? "Greg's work is distinctive," says Sara Maino, senior fashion editor for Italian *Vogue*. "He has a unique sensibility when it comes to defining female beauty." Amy Adams, creative director of Neiman Marcus, who since 2004 has assigned Lotus to shoot "everything from Armani to Zegna" had this to add about the photographer's unerring visual aesthetic: "He's one of those perfectionists that can find joy in



spontaneity and communicate broad messages via subtle details."

Today, Lotus boasts a roster of both editorial and commercial clients, as well as the artistic freedom that comes with success. He recently shot a story for *Vogue* in Cass, West Virginia. "It's literally just a three-street town about 30 minutes from where I grew up. What's so unique about it is that every single piece of housing or school or church or fence is painted white. It totally looks like the set of an Alfred Hitchcock movie—it's incredible."

While he has homes in Manhattan and Paris, Miami is still a big part of Lotus' life. "I have a house here now. I'm here a lot in the winters of course, and we can shoot with the sun. I'm fortunate."

He can say that again. **OD**



Clockwise from top left: Images from Italian *Vogue Beauty*, February 2009; 2007; *Telegraph Magazine*, March 2008; Italian *Vogue Beauty*, June 2007; February 2009; May 2009; April 2005. Here: covers from French *Playboy*, June/July, 2009; Italian *Vogue Beauty*, April 2005; June 2006



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—Sara Maino, Italian Vogue

