

THE PORTRAIT OF MAJESTY

David Bailey photographs Queen Elizabeth in support of Britain's GREAT campaign. Essay by Fay Weldon

SINCE ITS LAUNCH in 2012, the British government's GREAT campaign—a global initiative designed to increase trade and tourism—has gone a long way toward raising awareness around the world of the best and brightest that the country has to offer. Hundreds of high-profile people, from David Beckham to Richard Branson, have participated in the effort to date, and in its inaugural year it generated more than £500 million in economic returns in the U.K. The royal family has even gotten involved: Prince Harry helped kick off the program with an event on Sugar Loaf Mountain in Rio de Janeiro, and the Duchess of Cambridge attended a reception at the Royal Academy of Arts celebrating Britain's creative industries.

Now, in recognition of the work of the GREAT Britain campaign, Queen Elizabeth sat this past March for a series of portraits by the legendary photographer David Bailey. For more than five decades, Bailey—a prime example of British creativity if there ever was one—has made images of men and of women, of politicians and of rock stars, of overlords and of underdogs, that have provided both the lens and the context through which much of British culture of the era is often viewed. Of course, we're all fascinated by the British royal family, and big, transcendent cultural moments like Helen Mirren's Oscar-winning portrayal of Elizabeth in 2006's *The Queen*, William and Kate's wedding, and the birth of Prince George have all provided a more modern—and in many ways, more human—perspective on their lives. These portraits of the Queen by Bailey are in that vein, and we are pleased to publish them and present them to the world for the first time in the pages of *Bazaar*.

Here, the novelist Fay Weldon, one of the great lionesses of modern English literature and a longtime friend of Bailey's, offers her own personal take on these extraordinary images and the great new Britain that they represent. —*Harper's Bazaar*



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Shakespeare claimed that there was “no art to find the mind’s construction in the face.” But he lived in a time when there was no camera—and no David Bailey behind it. Bailey’s new portraits of Queen Elizabeth II show the candor, wisdom, benevolence, and strength of will of the constitutional monarch of Great Britain these past 62 years. The jewels that the Queen brought out for these portraits are sentimental favorites of hers: the spectacular sapphire-and-diamond necklace with matching earrings that were a present from her father, George VI, on the occasion of her wedding to Prince Philip, in 1947. Leaving aside their great worth and beauty, one imagines that she feels at home in them because of what they mean to her. The dress in the photographs was chosen by her personal assistant and designer, Angela Kelly, who knows well what stands up to the British public’s expectations and inspection: It all must be suitably lavish yet avoid ostentation. And so it is.

Bailey’s iconoclastic energy is transmuted for once to deliver these most modern, most understanding of royal portraits. In Her Majesty’s face we see a life of resolution, integrity, forbearance; a dignity free of pomp and circumstance; and the inner beauty we have left if we’ve earned it, once the superficial gloss of youth has passed. Bailey shows us not an icon but someone familiar, friendly, engaging, and frank, with her strength in its own understatement—so British a quality. He flatters us by suggesting that she is the head of state that we Brits deserve—and we, her subjects, are left feeling we’d better live up to that.

Bailey is one of our most gifted and charismatic photographers; he’s a great artist who will be seen in the future to have defined modern Britain as Van Dyck defined the early Stuart Age in this country or Jacques-Louis David defined Revolutionary and Napoleonic France. I’ve known him a long time. On the face of it, he couldn’t be more different from the Queen. A cheeky, working-class kid from the tough streets of East London, born 12 years after Her Majesty, Bailey answers anyone back at the drop of a hat, whereas the Queen has spent her public life taking care not to. But there’s something quite similar about them too: the way they’ve both devoted themselves to patiently and accurately observing other people, the way they’ve both had long careers of absolute dedication—hers to the duty of an allotted public role, and his to the obligations of his art and its excellence. They’re both still working, and thriving. They’re amused by life. And they’re both very British, and both great.

Taken just prior to the Queen’s 88th birthday, these portraits—devoid of guile, as they seem to be with their what-you-see-is-what-you-get approach—are so unlike any we have seen of Elizabeth before that you’d be a sourpuss not to be seduced by them.

Bailey was the leading light of the new wave of British fashion photographers who started out in the 1960s, taking sexy pictures of the world’s most beautiful women. He married three of them—they’re all still friends—and typified the burst of creative energy that characterized Swinging London. It was the time of the Beatles and Carnaby Street, when we realized that the shoes we put on our feet needn’t be brown or black leather but could be yellow satin and be the more attractive for it. Bailey saw that if you could photograph a beautiful woman in a totally different way, transform her from a frozen, respectable clotheshorse to a living, moving, emotional creature, much more than fashion was going to change. Just a little push and all would be off into a new future. He was right—and he’s still doing it.

WHAT STARTED in the 1960s in Britain was a new tradition of innovation that’s alive and kicking today in the creative arts. I once had a stage play on in a European capital I shan’t name. I remember the producer saying to me in aggrieved tones, “We keep having to translate plays from Britain. It’s too bad. Why do we have no writers of our own?” And I answered, with the chutzpah of youth, “Because that’s what we do over there. Ideas.” I know that these pictures are linked to an official British government campaign telling you abroad that what we have is “great”—which must seem pretty radical coming from a nation whose favorite word is “sorry.” But I think they achieve the desired effect by showing why we don’t need to boast. Our champions of the visual and screen arts, of fashion, of architecture, of design, and of the written word do the job for us. It’s a bit like this: In the grand 17th-century cathedral of St. Paul’s, in the City of London, there is an unassuming slab of stone dwarfed by the more arrogant monuments to the great and proud. It commemorates the architect Sir Christopher Wren, who rebuilt St. Paul’s after the Great Fire of 1666, and it says, “If you seek his monument, look around you.” When we look at these truly great portraits—at this collaboration by two Londoners, one a boy from the backstreets and an artist, the other a queen—we see, in an instant, the new spirit of a Great Britain that welcomes the future. ■

The New Countess (St. Martin’s Press), the final book in Fay Weldon’s “Love and Inheritance” trilogy, is out now.

