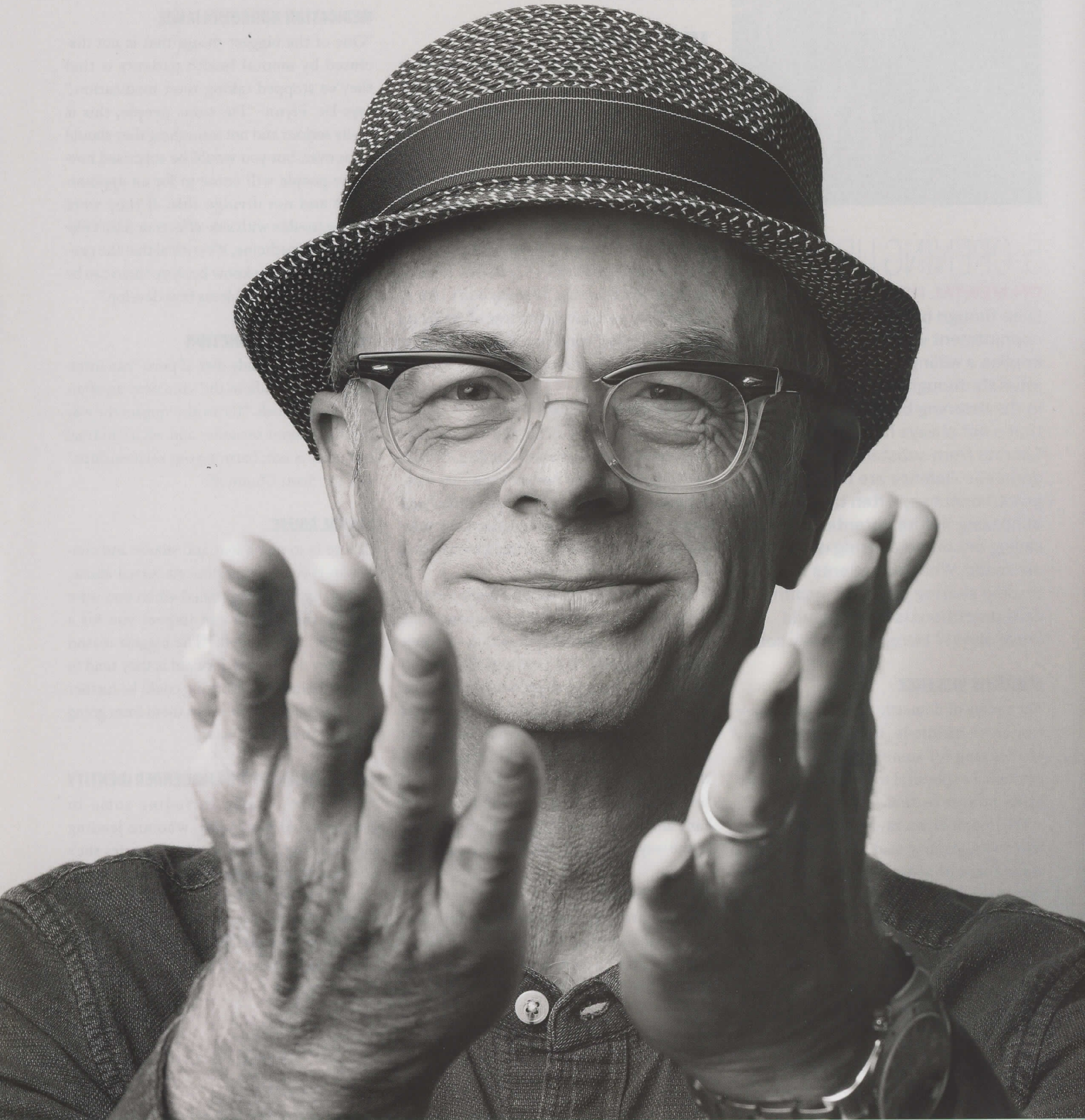


BY JILL JOHNSON • PHOTOGRAPHS BY CHRIS CRAYMER

TIME FOR ROMANCE

WESTPORT PHOTOGRAPHER CHRIS CRAYMER ON CAPTURING LOVE





PORTRAIT OF CHRIS CRAYMER BY ALEX DOW; DIGITAL ARTISTS SMOOCH NYC

Westport resident Chris Craymer, known internationally for his cinematic fashion photography and portraits, has zoomed in again on one of his favorite subjects—love—in his latest book, *American Romance*. Craymer grew up in London, but he and his family have made their home by picture-perfect Compo Beach for the past nine years. He took a moment, between shooting for *O, The Oprah Magazine* in L.A. and flying to Asia for *Ponds*, to answer a few questions about the book, a Brit's eye for romance and the perfect Valentine's Day with his true love...



What inspired you to do this book?

I've always loved imagery that is emotional. This is the prime motivating force in my work.

When did you start working on it?

It is a mixture of retrospective work from the past six years or so and new work that I have shot over the past eighteen months.

How did you choose the couples?

I look for couples who inspire me both in the way they look and the depth of their relationship.

How about the locations?

I like to find locations that my subjects either actually live in or, more commonly, locations that I can imagine them living in. Generally, I am attracted to locations with personality and something magical about them. In this book, one location—my friends Anne and Alberto's house—is actually in Westport. It is an old property that retains its charm. The garden is rambling and not at all manicured and reminds me of Europe, so I love it.

Is romance alive and well in our neck of the woods—or is everyone too busy achieving?

Love is not something you can buy, so it is a great leveler. People from the Northeast are no different from everyone else: We all seek some romance and love in our lives.

How did you get the couples to relax and be so open and natural on camera?

I like to talk to the couples before I work with them. I show them my work and find out if they are interested. It is a two-way process, as we all have to feel inspired and involved. My way with all my subjects is to gently encourage and create a safe environment where we can all express ourselves.



The book sends a message about the beauty of romance between couples, whether gay or straight, black or white. Was this important to you—and did you realize when conceptualizing the book how timely this message would be?

It was really important to me to show that romance is universal and that we are all the same. The timing was by chance.

In doing this book, did you notice ways in which American romance differs from British romance?

When I shot my first book

Romance in the UK, my subjects were from a narrow band of heterosexual early-twenties couples. I called them my "pre-mortgage" couples. *American Romance* is more embracing in that I have included lesbian, gay, transgender relationships and also couples with children and older couples. For me this reflects what American romance is right now.

Do you have a favorite shot in the book?

I have many favorites, but the cover is certainly one of them.

What did you learn from this book about love and romance?

I learnt that we are often defined as individuals in the way we brush up against and interact with our partners. It is a learning process and a growing process.

How long have you been married?

22 years.

Describe one of the most romantic experiences you've shared with your wife.

For me it is when we have





Q&A



in-depth conversations, where we really connect on a profound level. This year Zoe and I spent time at a retreat in Costa Rica and I treasured every moment because we opened up to ourselves and to each other. It is beautiful to learn new things about your wife, particularly when it is a long relationship.

What will you do on Valentine's Day?

I like having a quiet dinner with Zoe, just me and her being together. These are always our best moments. Sometimes I am traveling on the day itself, so if that is the case, we will celebrate on another day.

How did you get into photography?

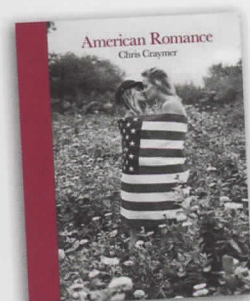
My father was a photographer and he introduced me to the camera and the darkroom.

Three tips for amateur photographers?

Take pictures as much as you can. Don't worry about the camera you have—an iPhone is perfectly fine, just take pictures. Finally, dream a little. Dream about what you want to create. Dreams often come true!

Anything to add?

I hope my pictures will make you feel good inside and smile a little! **W**



American Romance
(Damiani, \$50)