WEEKEND *INVITE*

PHOTOS COURTESY OF MATT WEINBERGER



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What separates Weinberger from paparazzi is trust. In a space where images can be misused, his access is earned with persistence, respect and restraint. That pact keeps doors open, helping him build relationships with celebrities and gain entry to spaces that usually shut cameras out.

His work is grounded in a photographic lineage. Weinberger shares a downtown studio space with The Cobrasnake, aka Mark Hunter, and stays friendly with NYC and Los Angeles photographers like Myles Hendrik and Tyrell Hampton.

"There's nothing greater than if I'm photographing something or someone or some moment, and there's a million other, not a million, but like tons of other people photographing the same thing," Weinberger explains, "it sort of validates that what I'm doing might be the right thing and that what I'm documenting is worth documenting and will enter the cultural canon.

Weinberger describes his approach as "improvisational photography," unscripted shooting without environmental control. Unlike studio portraiture, where lighting and composition are pre-planned, nightlife is unpredictable and Weinberger embraces that as part of the image.

He divides his work into true candids, portraits and what he calls "performatively candid shots" — where subjects know they're being photographed but act unaware.

"I think it's actually very important to note, when you have a camera, versus having an iPhone, the way people react to that is different. When you take out a point-and-shoot film camera, I think that people are a lot more at ease than if you're doing an iPhone photo," Weinberger adds. "It's just a whole different vibe and energy."

Weinberger plans to release a book about his philosophy on photography called "Seen or Not Scene," and hopes to show more of his work in physical spaces.

Although celebrities appear, Weinberger centers the nonfamous — friends, artists and regular partygoers — who form New York's creative underground. He says Hunter's catchphrase, "YOU'RE A STAR ON THECOBRASNAKE.COM," reflects his belief in equal treatment, giving everyone the chance to become the focus of their own shot.

Weinberger says photographing people who aren't known feels most important, but for his practice, celebrities are essential too.

"When you have a known face and a known individual, they are markers of a time and place in culture and in history, and then to put normal people next to them, having the celebrity there provides the context and provides the kind of esteem needed to then elevate all the other images in that moment."

Weinberger seems acutely aware of the role he plays, within his niche and beyond. With that comes an awareness of risk — once an image enters the public sphere, it can take on unintended meanings.

YOU'RE A STAR ON THECOBRASNAKE.COM









At the latest Paris Fashion Week Saint Laurent show, he photographed Hailey Bieber, Zoë Kravitz and Charli XCX, not realizing that Rosé — of BLACKPINK fame — sat just beside them, her shoulder barely visible on the side. When the image ran, some fans assumed the crop was deliberate.

"All of these people, like her fans online with the magazine that published it, were, like, getting mad at this magazine, saying, 'Oh, you're intentionally excluding Rosé,'" Weinberger recalls, explaining that the moment became "this whole big thing that people were assuming was a highly thought out, politically motivated way of putting down this musician. And for me, it was something I did without much thought, where I was just doing a photo of the people I knew."

Weinberger's photography — glossy, flash-lit and full of recognizable faces — is a historical record in real time, preserving art and connection. He's part of a lineage of photographers who've ensured that these scenes, however fleeting, are documented into a larger cultural memory. In that sense, there's a humanism in what's going on both in front of and behind the camera.

Weinberger ended our talk on a thoughtful note, saying, "This sounds so cheesy, but don't do drugs and alcohol in excess, because I've seen so many really great people with a lot of potential throw it all away because of addiction and problems with substance abuse."

Though brief, the comment reflects a genuine care for the spaces he photographs and the people who inhabit them. He embodies that New York myth of beating down every door. In a culture obsessed with virality and "industry plants," his success feels refreshingly earned. And perhaps there's a moral to his story — to showing up again and again — that we can all learn from.

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WEEKEND RECOMMENDS:

BLISTER PADS WITH HEELS