

V I E W F I N D E R

GLEN BAXTER, ONE OF CANADA'S MOST
RECOGNIZABLE TELEVISION FASHION
JOURNALISTS, IS STARTING TO MAKE
AS BIG A NAME FOR HIMSELF BEHIND
THE CAMERA

PHOTOGRAPHY CHRIS NICHOLLS WORDS CAROLINE VELDHIJS
CREATIVE PRODUCER JACKIE GIDEON





GLEN BAXTER and I are talking travel. With twenty years of experience and passport stamps from nearly 50 countries, he's certainly become an expert on the subject.

In his current job as the host of *In Fashion* (CTV), Baxter makes work trips to report on the latest in style, design and photography from cities including New York, Milan, Berlin and Barcelona. In fact, he was hopping in and out of the country when I tried to schedule a phone interview to discuss his career and his yearly photo expeditions to some of the poorest and most exotic places in the world.



He emphasizes that travel for his day job and his avocation are extreme opposites.

"Take the two work trips I've just been on. First I went on a model search in Tahiti. We stayed at the Meridien in Bora Bora, so a high-end hotel, surrounded by all these beautiful people. Then two days later I flew to Milan, where I was covering menswear fashion week, the most beautiful clothes.

"Then for one month a year I take my backpack and go to some of the most remote places, mostly Africa and Asia...I don't even take my Blackberry. The contrasts are pretty extreme."

Baxter's always had a curiosity about the world and he documents his

“My older son was in Sick Kids when he was very young and we almost spent Christmas there. It struck me: it’s an amazing hospital. I get asked to donate time and money to many less worthy causes and this seemed quite the opposite. I’ve got kids. I know how terrible it is to be in the hospital for a child. It’s an amazing hospital trying to do great things.”

solo journeys through photography, primarily of the people he encounters. In 1996, while sharing his images from India with a friend working in Hugo Boss, then-president Les Minion happened to walk by and notice they were worthy of exhibition. Fast forward and Hugo Boss now hosts Baxter’s yearly exhibits during the Contact photography festival, where he’s featured portraits of people and life in countries including Benin, Mali, Niger and Azerbaijan.

As with his participation in this year’s Oceana Ball and Oceana magazine, Baxter’s photographic efforts benefit children. After a trip to Burma he learned they had the world’s highest number of child soldiers and that Right To Play (RTP)—an NGO which aims to improve the lives of children in disadvantaged areas of the world through sport and play—was doing something to help them. Baxter decided to support the organization through sales of his own photography.

It’s all part of an honourable record of charitable work, which includes five years as a Junior Committee Member for the Canadian Foundation for Aids Research (CANFAR). He helped organize the foundation’s 8-Ball and Red Party, which raised nearly half a million dollars. Born and having grown up in Montreal, Baxter’s also been a guest speaker and host for Le Francais Pour L’Avenir (French for the Future), which encourages youth bilingualism.

Through his extensive off-hours travel, Baxter is familiar with the resource-poor environments surrounding children in Pakistan, Vietnam, Sri Lanka and Tanzania—just a few of the countries supported by the work of Sick Kids and the Herbie Fund and dozens more where quality healthcare is inaccessible. He snaps images that go beyond the suffering to capture positive and beautiful images of daily life and people, illustrating the human experience across the globe. This extensive world travel combined with prior support for both health and children makes Baxter’s involvement with the Oceana a perfect fit, an effort in which he tells me he’s both thrilled and honoured to play a part. “Herbie Fund is a great cause and when Jackie asked me of course I said yes...it’s a huge undertaking the way they have this annual party, combined with this glossy, world class magazine.”

At one time, he saw a potential role for himself in healthcare. “I wanted to be an occupational or physical therapist, but I couldn’t do calculus and just didn’t do well at things that required daily study.” A year of English literature at Concordia University was satisfying, “but I thought, what am I going to do to make a living? I actually went into journalism because I didn’t really know what I wanted to do. But I thought in journalism school you learn how to write and interview, and there could be opportunities at a magazine or newspaper... or in television.”

He’s built an illustrious career in the latter. After completing his degree at Ryerson and traveling for a



**“CHRIS IS AMAZING.
I’VE SEEN HIM WORK
COUNTLESS OF TIMES
IN STUDIOS WITH
CONTROLLED
ENVIRONMENTS AND
THEN IN ALL SORTS
OF OUTSIDE
ENVIRONMENTS: IN
THE COLD IN
NEWFOUNDLAND AND
IN ASSISI, IN ROME.
HE MAKES IT ALL
LOOK EFFORTLESS
AND EASY.”**

year, Baxter landed a job at the Société Radio-Canada (French CBC), and it’s been a relatively smooth and serendipitous path since, gaining increasing clout and visibility as an on-air reporter for FAX, (now Much News), entertainment reporter for CityPulse news; and now, since 2001, hosting his own weekly program *In Fashion* and reporting for the Fashion Television Channel.

“I never had a particularly strong interest in photography,” he insists, but there were harbingers along the way. When working with classmates on the Ryersonian student newspaper, he tried his hand with a manual Pentax K1000. When a classmate wrote a story about regulating the sale of herbal bitters, Baxter captured a poignant image of a homeless man in a bus shelter strewn with empty bottles, which was published in *The Toronto Star*. Even today his excitement over that accomplishment is palpable. He then bought his own K1000, only to have it stolen in Kampala, Uganda in the late 90s. Sans camera, film and ability to document his travels, the only sensible solution was to head to Zanzibar to get his scuba license.

He claims he’s had no photographic training, yet Baxter’s day job affords close proximity with high profile photographers he admires, including Steve McCurry, who in 1984 famously captured the haunting image of Sharbat Gula, better known as “the Afghan girl”. “He was in Toronto to do a photo workshop a few years back and I cornered him in the elevator and badgered him with a million questions, asking tips on everything like how to get a roll of film through X-Ray machines,” Baxter says.

Closer to home, another favourite is prolific Canadian fashion photographer Chris Nicholls, who captured these images of Glen for *Oceana* magazine. “Chris is amazing. I’ve seen him work countless of times in studios with controlled environments and then in all sorts of outside environments: in the cold in Newfoundland and in Assisi, in Rome. He makes it all look effortless and easy.”

Nicholls, whose work regularly appears in high profile ad campaigns and magazines such as *Flare* and *Elle*, is frequently asked to contribute his skills to projects, yet came on-board without reservation when Jackie put out the request. “My older son was in Sick Kids when he was very young and we almost spent Christmas there. It struck me it’s an amazing hospital. I get asked to donate time and money to many less worthy causes and this seemed quite the opposite. I’ve got kids and I know how terrible it is to be in the hospital for a child. It’s an amazing hospital trying to do great things.”

Baxter and Nicholls cross paths through their work and Chris says, “On TV we see the professional side of Glen, but he’s quite a comedian in front of the camera, here he became a bit of a Buster Keaton or something. He’s certainly not shy to look silly.” Nicholls was also game to switch roles and allow Baxter to capture his images for the magazine. “Glen’s a great photographer in his own right.”

“MY JOB AND LIFESTYLE ARE PRETTY GREAT. I HAVE THIS HUGO BOSS WARDROBE, I COVER AMAZING EVENTS, I GO TO GREAT PLACES AND MEET INTERESTING PEOPLE. AND THEN I JUST LIKE TO TAKE OFF ONCE EVERY YEAR FOR A MONTH ALONE... AND GO TO THE REAL WORLD.”

For his last photo trip, Baxter went to a place he describes as “a different world,” northwestern Ontario’s Sandy Lake, a fly-in First Nations community and the site of one of RTP’s first Canadian projects: Promoting Life Skills in Aboriginal Youth. This expedition marked a stark contrast to sun-baked Asia and Africa, where photo opps abound. “I usually go to warm climates where everything happens outdoors, there are markets, people take naps, they eat outside, there’s so much going on, it’s a big street theatre. But in Sandy Lake, it was -35 degrees and everyone was indoors watching TV and playing video games.” This time he took two trips, so he could build relationships, coax people outdoors and get enough photos suitable for the exhibition, which raised \$10,000 through silent auction. RTP’s Sandy Lake project has been so successful, it’s expanding to five more communities, helping some of our own nation’s disadvantaged kids getting a leg up. Baxter also points out with concern that the Sandy Lake community has one of the highest rates of diabetes in the world.

To date his photographic work has had a direct impact on 1200 children worldwide, each of whom has accessed a full year of RTP programming and yet, before that was pointed out, Baxter says he had never really thought about it that way. I’m not surprised he’s not enumerating his philanthropic accomplishments. Nor am I surprised when one of Canada’s most recognizable style journalists says, “The first time I saw Karl Lagerfeld backstage at Milan fashion week, my knees buckled.”

I ask how his recent charitable work has changed him, and after a lively conversation (he’s prone to giggle), he’s momentarily at a loss for words. “I don’t really know. It’s all part of who I am. I think maybe if I didn’t do this...I’d be different.”

“My job and lifestyle are pretty great. I have this Hugo Boss wardrobe, I cover amazing events, I go to great places and meet interesting people. And then I just like to take off once every year for a month alone... and go to the real world.”

One detects a thread of simplicity that runs throughout his life. He lives in downtown Toronto, walks to work every day and buys little on trips apart from having a penchant for unique silver objects spotted at some of the world’s bustling markets. “My home reflects contemporary design more than my trips, the only traces of my travels are some of my own framed photos, the ones that haven’t sold,” he jokes.

Ever the journalist, Baxter navigates between rags and riches quite seamlessly and exploring such vastly different worlds does indeed seem to be just a part of who he is. Though frequently in-flight, he’s grounded in spirit, happy he’s able to make an impact and be a part of good works like Oceana, while affirming he intends to stick with his day job, which he truly loves. It suits him to be in front, as well as behind the camera. “It’s my dream job, hosting my own show. I’ll continue to do this until they cancel the show...or they kick me to the curb.”



CONTRIBUTORS PHOTOGRAPHER: CHRIS NICHOLLS, CREATIVE PRODUCER: JACKIE GIDEON, STYLIST: RITA FIORUCCI, PUSH MANAGEMENT
GROOMING: JACKIE GIDEON, JUDYINC., PHOTOGRAPHY ASSISTANT: CLIVE CHIAO, DIGITAL TECHNICIAN: BRANCO KARAN
RE-TOUCHING: LORCA MOORE, ALL CLOTHING FOR GLEN BAXTER BY HUGO BOSS