
Chapter Twenty Eight

Great Man – Dan Morgan

My brother, Dan Morgan, suffers from the same syndrome as everyone in my immediate family (with the possible exception of my sister Lynn). We all want attention and fame. Nothing validates us better than a little press. The following is an article that needs no further editorial comment from me.

People in Style

Shooting for perfection in world of high style Lakewood-born photographer has eye for finery

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New York- Since moving to New York City in 1997, former Cleveland photographer Dan Morgan has hung out in Gianni Versace's Manhattan townhouse, held Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis' personal effects, arranged Marilyn Monroe's jewelry, touched Madonna's lingerie and handled enough diamonds to fill a South African mine.

He's had these - and more - brushes with greatness as a photographer for Sotheby's, the uber-auction house to the world's rich and famous in New York City.

The company produces more than 100 auction catalogs each year, and Morgan has been photographing the sought-after treasures they feature for seven years.

Morgan moved to the Big Apple at 38 - an age when many New Yorkers contemplate leaving the Big-city rat race.

He had no job prospects, little money and nothing more than a dream of making it when he moved from Cleveland. He left behind a thriving commercial photography business along with hundreds of friends and family members to move into New York's Chelsea neighborhood.

For a year, he roomed with four students from the Fashion Institute of Technology whom he had never met before. It was a

long way from the comfortable loft apartment he left behind on the west side of the Flats.

“Yes, everyone thought I was crazy,” Morgan says.

He says he made the risky decision to broaden his knowledge of the photography industry, to live in the center of the world’s publishing industry and, hopefully, to marry a Swedish supermodel.

“I went as far as I could go in Cleveland,” he says.

Morgan was - and still is - well known in art circles here for holding regular art openings and launching the careers of emerging local artists at his former gallery, Gallery 0022 on the Superior Viaduct.

He’d grown up in Lakewood, graduated from Lakewood High School in 1976 and then majored in photography at the University of Dayton.

After graduating from college in 1980, he started his own commercial photography studio, which served clients such as Bonne Bell, Parker Hannifin, General Electric and the Peterson Nut Co.

“I wished him well when he left, because he’s very talented,” says Jesse Bell, chairman emeritus for the Bonne Bell cosmetics company in Lakewood. “We never doubted he would make it in New York - he’s a great guy and meets people easily, he has a great work ethic, and he’s always smiling.”

When Morgan left, he told everyone he’d be back. And while he does come back to visit family and attend the Tremont Art Walk three or four times each year, he has no plans to return permanently.

His luck and accomplishments in New York have simply been too great.

Upon his arrival in Manhattan, Morgan started free-lancing for emerging jewelry and fashion designers. He quickly picked up photography jobs for Kate Spade - the maker of high-end, fashionable handbags and accessories - shooting bags for the company’s promotional materials.

He had an “aha moment” one day in 1998, while he sat in

a coffee shop thumbing through a Christie's auction house catalog.

"I made a cold call to the photo editor at Sotheby's and I got lucky," he says. "I showed them my portfolio and they started hiring me for jobs right away."

For seven years now, Morgan has worked almost fulltime as a consultant photographer at Sotheby's. The arrangement has allowed him to pursue side projects that fulfill his desire to work with artists and designers who are at the beginning of their careers.

His specialty at Sotheby's is jewelry. He works alone in a tiny, 8-by-8-foot studio at the Upper East Side auction house for eight hours at a time.

A Sotheby's staffer signs over the dazzling goods to him in the morning and picks them up at the end of the day.

Morgan says he likes working with "things" as opposed to "people" because there is less hassle.

"If you work as a photographer in high fashion or with celebrities in New York, you're invariably going to be dealing with an entourage of people: the stylist, the makeup artist, the assistant, the caterer, the poodle," he says. "Before you know it, you've got a circus on your hands."

Patience, ingenuity and lighting expertise are the qualities Morgan says are most important when he photographs "shiny things."

He often uses wire hangers and coffee stirrers to move the merchandise. Toothpicks, tacky wax and straight pins also come in handy for propping things in place.

Matthew Weigman, senior vice president of corporate affairs for Sotheby's, says Morgan's success comes from his versatility.

"He's photographed everything from diamonds to dinosaur bones," Weigman says. "In our business it's all about presentation - how something looks in a photograph determines interest level and ultimately, salability."

"And Dan is a master at unlocking the beauty of a scene or an object and making it look as appealing as possible."

With his career on track, Morgan got lucky in love in the big city as well - but not with a Swedish supermodel.

“I ended up marrying a girl from Parma, Ohio,” he says.

He met Annette Dessoffey, a nurse at Bellevue Hospital, at Lola in Tremont while both were home visiting. They married in 2002.

Today, the couple lives in a \$2,500-a-month, one-bedroom apartment on the city’s Upper East Side and enjoys the international experience the city offers. Their flat is walking distance from Sotheby’s.

Surprisingly, Morgan says their future may hold a farm in Ohio or Pennsylvania. “We don’t plan on having any children, but we may buy an alpaca farm,” he says. As for photography, Morgan says he’ll be a shooter until the day he dies - no matter what the subject matter.

Colan is a free-lance writer in Cleveland.