

At first glance, it might be tempting to view the photographs on the following pages simply as paparazzi work or quaint disco nostalgia. You'll find Liza, Liz, Mick, Bianca, Truman, Halston, Andy, Calvin, Brooke, and hundreds of lesser-known revelers in designer jeans cavorting in the hours after dark, caught—and caught up—in the ecstasies of their own Saturday night fevers. But the pictures represent more than just memories: They are visual history, stories of another time and a very different America.

The inspiration for this special issue of *American Photo* is an exhibition called "The Last Party: Nightworld in Photographs," which opened at New York's Serge Sorokko Gallery in April and is currently traveling. Timed to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the opening of the legendary disco Studio 54 (which unhooked its velvet ropes on April 26, 1977), the show consists of work from many different photographers, past and present, all of them celebrating the art of the night. Anthony Haden-Guest, a writer and celebrated nightlife aficionado, has coined his own term for the culture of the night—he calls it the "nightworld," and in his view it is a place filled with fantasy and desire. It was Haden-Guest who conceived the nightlife exhibition while researching a book about the disco era and its aftermath (*The Last Party*,

William Morrow), and he's contributed an essay to this issue (page 51) about the enduring appeal that the nightworld holds for photographers.

Never was that appeal as strong as in the 1970s and '80s in New York. Disco came of age after Vietnam and Watergate had transformed America. As Haden-Guest notes, the idea of "liberation" went mainstream as "fun," and photographers were on hand to record the spectacle (page 60). Only now have some of those photographers, like photojournalist Allan Tannenbaum, realized just how much history they had witnessed on the dance floors and in the lounges of the clubs (page 76). And as you'll see in our closeup on photographer Patrick McMullan (page 78), the camera continues to be the life of the party.



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Disco as art: the Serge Sorokko Gallery.

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