

Studio 54,

WHERE ARE YOU?

A book by Anthony Haden-Guest leads to a San Francisco photo exhibition recalling the 'innocent decadence' of New York's disco scene

By Cynthia Robins
OF THE EXAMINER STAFF

WHEN NIGHTLIFE chronicler Anthony Haden-Guest arrived in America from his native Britain, he got his days and nights mixed up. So addicted to the disco/party scene was he, you might think he hung upside down in the daytime.

Years of crawling through the demimonde after dark gave Haden-Guest a real perspective on what he calls Nightworld. He wrote about it continuously for New York magazine, starting with his first pieces in 1976, at the height of the popularity of Regine's, the transplanted Parisian disco, and the invasion of Euro-trash. (A cover line read: "The last time I saw Paris, it was in New York.")

It was Haden-Guest who clocked the action, taking mental notes on what he calls the "innocent decadence" of Studio 54. "Young people ask me, 'Was it all that

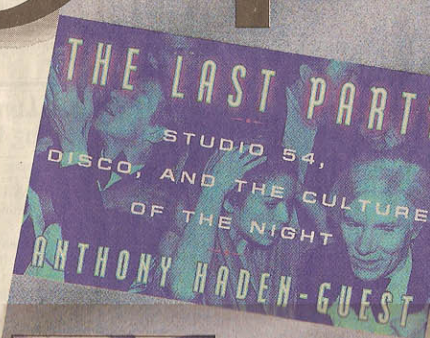
decadent?'" he said during a quick phone call from New York. "We were all pretty innocent back then. We came out of the '60s; we believed in the new sexual freedom. My peers thought that pot and hashish and cocaine were better for you than cigarettes and alcohol. I was much attacked even for drinking wine! But down the road lay crack and AIDS and the sky began to darken. But back then, coke was considered an innocent high."

Well, if you were ever curious about that whole scene around Studio 54 with Andy Warhol, Roy Halston Frowick (a.k.a. Halston), Liza Minnelli, Steve Rubell and Ian Shraeger, Tiffany designer Elsa Peretti, Bianca Jagger and the whole mess of European princelings and minor royals who were escaping the threat of terrorism, socialism and the tax man, then Haden-Guest's informative chronicle, "The Last Party: Studio 54, Disco, and the Culture of the Night" (Morrow) is just your cup of hemlock.

At the core of the book are an amazing collection of photographs — Bianca on a

[See HADEN-GUEST, B-7]

Nothing came between, at left, Calvin Klein, Brooke Shields and Steve Rubell; at right, Divine and John Waters; and, rear, Elton John, Andy Warhol and Jerry Hall



Anthony Haden-Guest
begins writing about the parties of the Nightworld decades ago.

◆ HADEN-GUEST from B-1

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white horse at her 1977 birthday party at Studio 54, a mostly naked Victor Hugo (Halston's lover) in a jockstrap moving furniture at the Studio, Truman Capote and Gloria Swanson — snapped by the *capodi-tutti-capos* of all the paparazzi, Ron Galella.

"Gathering these pictures, as an author is supposed to do," says Haden-Guest, "I realized that there was more than just a book in them. They had to be an exhibition."

Calling his friend, Russian expatriate art dealer Serge Sorokko, who has galleries in New York City and in San Francisco, Haden-Guest proposed an exhibition, also named "The Last Party." It has shown in New York and opens Tuesday night at the San Francisco Gallery through July 9. The exhibition expands the theme of "Nightworld" — the photos included are not restricted to the time period covered in Haden-Guest's book. "Nightworld, as I call it, has been around a lot longer than the Studio," said Haden-Guest. "We've used images from Brassai, Weegee and Helmut Newton."

Haden-Guest was scheduled to appear at the opening of the photography exhibition, but something has come up. He says he is in the midst of writing about his near-fatal contretemps with a member of the Nightworld underworld who waylaid him and his girlfriend last

year.

"I was attacked. Stabbed 14 times," he says. "The reason I was vulnerable was my girlfriend and I were very drunk. I am just confronting it. It was humiliating. She was as much a victim as I was. We were stabbed by somebody who wanted to rape her." And now, a year later, Haden-Guest is on the deadline, examining his life.

He calls himself part of the British upper middle class, but his credentials are quite posh. He prepped at Gordonstoun ("Prince Charles' school") in Scotland and went to Cambridge. His brother has a political title "which is quite recent," he says. Now in his late 50s, Haden-Guest started writing when London was swinging, Carnaby Street was cooking and the British invasion was about to be launched.

Years ago, Haden-Guest was subject to a biting Spy Magazine parody (along with fellow night-crawler Carl Bernstein) and tweeted for the strength of his liver and his shark-like constitution (if he ever stopped moving, surely he would die). Club hopping and partying all night were never done for the pure pleasure of it, he says now.

"Er... how can I put this where I'm not going to sound pushy," he begins. "But political writers, unless they become really powerful, are not players. They're only commentators. I like to write what I call 'real life fiction.' So I write a lot about the art world. I just like to feel that my writing is part of the process and not just a mirror."

To those who accuse him of superficiality, Haden-Guest has one thing to say: "When one gets attacked for being gossipy, my response (and this is quite a gross example) is this: The Napoleonic hemorrhoid theory of history. If Napoleon had them, it's not really interesting. But if he had them and lost the battle of Waterloo — oh my, I must come up with a less

gross example. Well, I think of him sitting in the saddle and having a particularly bad day when he met Wellington."

Lately, Haden-Guest has given up his fly-on-the-disco-ball status and has become the person for whom the party is given. He's not at all comfortable with the situation. "I don't like this whole busi-

ness of promoting a book. I'd prefer to be on the fringes." Where he'd definitely be talkin' names.

"The Last Party: Nightworld in Photographs," an exhibition of works of more than 60 photographers, at the Sorokko Gallery, 231 Grant Ave., (415) 421-7770, June 17 through July 9; Hours, Monday through Sunday, 10 a.m.-6 p.m.