

GALLERY

## Diana Ross and Truman Capote Partied Around This Paparazzi Photographer

By Sarah Moroz



Diana Ross at the Motion Picture Pioneer of the Year Awards, 1978. Photo: Gene Spatz/POBA.org

day.

Spatz's archive — seven banker boxes with approximately 200 envelopes each — encompasses photographic prints, slides, negatives, and contact sheets in envelopes, many of which were labeled but not organized. More than 10,000 negatives have been scanned, though Spatz's work has only been exhibited once before, in Louisville at the [Kentucky Museum of Art and Craft](#) in 2013, where one of his sisters lives.

Regan McCarthy, co-managing director of POBA, who was involved with this archive, noted that Spatz's images show a surprising naturalism given that film photography — unlike the lighting capacity of digital — was, of course, “without the capacity for retakes.” Spatz also broke away from the connotations associated with most paparazzi: McCarthy distinguishes him from other predatory photographers of the era like Ron Galella (“who considered himself to be *numero uno*,” McCarthy noted), Bill Vetell, Dick Corkery, Mike Norcia, and Adam Scull. Spatz's photographs, according to McCarthy, “tell me he viewed celebrities as once-regular folks who may simply have forgotten that — but he could not. At every level, that captures his quirky, fun yet serious eye for life as it was then.”

Eugene “Gene” Spatz, a paparazzi photographer who died in 2003, left behind more than 50,000 photos of New York street life and nightlife in its 1970s and '80s heyday. His lens captured both everyday urban goings-on and the raucous fashion fantasia of club-scene spots like Studio 54 and Xenon, filled with dangly earrings, deep slits, shimmering fabrics, and big bow ties. The term paparazzo was invented by Federico Fellini in 1960: It is a contraction of *pappataci* (mosquitoes) and *ragazzi* (ruffians). Though the paparazzi are generally considered anti-heroes, Spatz's observer status provides a capsule of the late-20th-century metropolis: hedonist New York and its starry iconography.

Spatz's images not only tap into a vanished era, but also reveal what “celebrity” meant before protective publicists and carefully orchestrated selfies. His portfolio contains a pantheon of celebrities caught off the cuff: Bianca Jagger with pursed lips and a white fur stole, [Jon Voight](#) dipping back [Diana Ross](#), [Robert Redford](#) sticking out his tongue, [Lauren Hutton](#) with a cigarette dangling from her sardonic smile — plus a few queasy sightings of [Woody Allen](#) and [Bill Cosby](#) out on the town.

Spatz was born in Brooklyn, spent his formative years in Long Island, and later moved to the West Village. (What drew him to photography is unclear — he initially started his career as a biology teacher.) His images were published in news outlets such as the *National Inquirer*, *People*, and *Esquire*. The images selected here are the fruit of a collaboration between Spatz's two sisters and [POBA, a nonprofit consultation service](#) that helps organize and appraise collections posthumously. POBA has previously reviewed line drawings by Norman Mailer, unpublished recordings by Andrew Gold (the creator of the theme from the *Golden Girls*, “Thank You for Being A Friend”) as well as the photographic practice of unknown artists who were, say, insurance brokers by