



Meredith Jencks

Meredith Jenks is a New York-based commercial photographer whose photos range from quiet fashion portraits to energy-filled action shots. Her clients include Converse, Nike, The New Yorker, and Bloomberg Business Week, among others. When she is not shooting for work, she is probably taking iPhone photos of her dog, Mouse.

Tell me about your path to becoming a photographer. My dad is an oil landscape painter, so I was exposed to art while growing up. My dad took us to museums often and I did my first oil painting when I was seven years old. Growing up, I wanted to be a fashion designer. My grandparents both thought that was cute, so when I was 10, they got me a subscription to Vogue. So, from a young age, I was exposed to fashion and fashion photographers. I noticed Helmut Newton's photos early on. Those were the ones that really stuck out to me in the magazine. That's when I realized that there were people who made that imagery.

Where did you grow up? We moved around. We lived in England for a year before we moved to Sedona, Arizona, for seven years, and then ended up in Northern California. I

went to middle school in Mendocino and then went to Cate School, a boarding school near Santa Barbara, which was an interesting little twist. While at boarding school, I took a photo class on a whim. For most people, it was a slacker class, but I was into it. When the class started, I thought, “Well, maybe I won’t actually become a fashion designer. Maybe I’ll become involved by shooting it.” I still really loved fashion, and thought it was magical to be able to create those scenarios on the pages. In my sophomore year of high school, my photo teacher sent a photo I took to an international contest. I don’t know how big the contest actually was, but I won. I got a brick of 35mm black and white film and a gift certificate to B&H. This was the first time that I had ever won anything, and it felt good. I became known around school as the photographer girl. It became part of my persona. I decided that I wanted to be a photographer when I was 16. It was an easy decision because my dad was an artist. I knew there were artists out there who created for a living, so I didn’t feel pressure to do something else.

Did you go to college after high school? I applied to three colleges: UCLA, Cal Poly San Luis Obispo, and Art Center College of Design in Pasadena. I chose Art Center because I had already gone to boarding school and wasn’t interested in college dorm life. Art Center is like a trade school, where you don’t live on campus. It’s really intense. You only learn about your major. Since I was so young, it helped me push myself and figure out what I wanted to do. That’s the gist of why I’m doing photography. I don’t think all people need to go to art school to become a photographer, but I’m glad I did. At Art Center, I shot



*“It’s important
to get your name
and work out
there, even if
you feel insecure
about your work
and don’t think
it’s ready to show.
Just show your
work and take
jobs. It’s practice.”*

35mm on-camera flash back in the day before digital was around. A teacher told me I wouldn’t get work because it was unprofessional and that magazines and ad agencies don’t like the look because it appears amateurish. He was trying to be helpful, but that led me into six years of portrait lighting setups, which I was never successful at. It was frustrating. I did everything how I was supposed to and it didn’t work. All along, I was still taking snapshots of friends. Two friends in particular—one who now has a design firm in LA called National Forest, and another who I was at college with—told me, “These photos are so much cooler than what you’re doing for your clients. I don’t understand why you don’t do that for work.” Meanwhile, Terry Richardson had gained attention for working with a point-and-shoot. People were out there doing it. That’s when I questioned what my college teacher had said and the work I had been making.