

# Robert Redford: the Handsome Star Who Changed Hollywood Forever [C2]

Dopo il debutto in una Hollywood che preferiva il fascino rude, diventò una stella del grande schermo, un regista acclamato e un paladino del cinema indipendente.

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Robert Redford, who died on 16 September aged eighty-nine, was the golden boy of American cinema for more than fifty years. Redford, who was always ill at ease about his looks, was described by Sydney Pollack, for whom the actor made seven films, as “an interesting metaphor for America, a golden boy with a darkness in him.” To many of his characterisations, he added a wry wit, able to hint, via subtle nuance, at a more complex psychology hidden beneath the surface. Romantically flawed and fallen heroes were his forte, so he was perfectly cast in the title role of *The Great Gatsby* (1974). “I wanted *Gatsby* badly,” he commented. “He is not fleshed out in the book and the implied parts are fascinating.” Charles Robert Redford Jr. was born in Santa Monica, California, the son of an accountant and his wife, Martha. The family moved to Van Nuys, California. He was blessed early on with a graceful athleticism, excelling in swimming, tennis, football and baseball, the last of which won him a scholarship to the University of Colorado, where he could also indulge his love for climbing and skiing. When his lack of attendance at baseball practice led to him losing his scholarship, he left for Europe in 1957. Because he had displayed a certain talent as a caricaturist in high school, he did what all hopeful American artists did: he went to paint in Paris before being forced into the realisation that, as an artist, he was mediocre. On his return to the US, he married his girlfriend, Lola Van Wagenen, in 1958 and studied scenic design at the Pratt Institute in New York. When Redford was told that to really understand the principles of scenic design, he must put himself in the actor’s place, he enrolled at the American Academy of Dramatic Arts. “At the Academy I got the space and the opportunity to expand and form myself as an actor, but I didn’t learn to act,” he recalled. Nonetheless, in 1959, he made his professional stage debut on Broadway with a small role as a basketball player in *Tall Story*. He made it big on Broadway in Norman Krasna’s *Sunday*

in New York (1961). Redford's first credited film role was in the [untrumpeted](#) War Hunt (1962), an [off-beat](#) little picture, shot in fifteen days. It was three years before he returned to the big screen, gaining some attention in Robert Mulligan's Inside Daisy Clover (1965), in which he played Natalie Wood's egotistical, bisexual matinee idol husband and for which he won the Golden Globe award for most promising [newcomer](#). In 1967 he [starred in Barefoot in the Park opposite](#) Jane Fonda, and then one of his best-known roles, Sundance — a role passed over by Marlon Brando, Warren Beatty and Steve McQueen — opposite Paul Newman's Butch Cassidy in one of the most successful westerns ever. George Roy Hill's Butch Cassidy and the Sundance Kid (1969) created at its core an irresistible chemistry between its two male leads as charming [outlaws](#), leading to a [string](#) of buddy movies, including the equally successful The Sting (1973) with the same director and stars, this time playing [scam artists](#) in 1930s Chicago. By the end of the 1960s, Redford had become one of the world's top film stars and box-office attractions, with carefully chosen projects to keep alive his screen persona in [glossy](#) Hollywood star vehicles. Among the exceptions were movies that satisfied his liberal [leanings](#), especially Alan Pakula's Watergate [exposé](#), All the President's Men (1976). The perspicacious Redford had bought an option on the book by the Washington Post journalists Carl Bernstein and Bob Woodward prior to its publication in 1974 for \$450,000. In the 80s, Redford gradually [scaled down](## "ridurre") his acting, appearing in only four films, having taken up producing and directing. In 1978, Redford co-founded the Sundance film festival, held in Park City and Salt Lake City, Utah every January as a shop window for independent cinema, and remained a godfather to it. In later acting [assignments](## "incarichi, lavori"), he was shown in a noble, almost saintly, light, consistently [backlit](## "retroilluminato") to turn his golden hair into a saintly halo: as a prison reformer in Brubaker (1980), a mythical baseball player in The Natural (1984), and the English [big game hunter](## "esperto di caccia grossa") Denys Finch Hatton, the lover of Karen Blixen (played by Meryl Streep) in Out of Africa (1985). Redford's first film as a director, Ordinary People (1980), was a middle-class family drama, elegantly shot though not very original. Nevertheless, the film won Oscars for best picture and best director — Redford went on to win an honorary Oscar, too, in 2002 — as well as best supporting actor, for

Timothy Hutton, and best adapted screenplay. Its success encouraged Redford to continue directing over the next decades. Redford directed himself for the first time in *The Horse Whisperer* (1998), as a Montana cowboy who cures traumatised horses, a role that fitted him as [snugly](## "perfettamente") as his [faded denims](## "jeans sbiaditi"). *The Legend of Bagger Vance* (2000), continued his almost mystic interest in sport with a nostalgic look at golf between the wars, while *Lions for Lambs* (2007) was a [flabbily](## "senza convinzione") liberal and [verbose](## "prolisso") response to the Iraq war. From the 90s, the reasons for some of his acting choices were [a trifle](## "un po'") less clear. In Adrian Lyne's *Indecent Proposal* (1993), Redford's character, admitting to advanced middle-age, offers to pay \1m to sleep with Demi Moore, with her husband's approval. He finally gave in to advancing years at the age of sixty-eight and played a [crusty](#) and [grizzled](#) rancher in Lasse Hallström's *An Unfinished Life* (2005), the sort of role Newman and Clint Eastwood had been playing for years. Never straying too far from his persona of dignified masculinity, Redford continued to be active into his 80s. His solo performance in *All Is Lost* (2013) as a [castaway seaman](#) trying to survive was a tour de force, while he demonstrated his fitness in *A Walk in the Woods* (2015), and his integrity as the TV anchor Don Rather in *Truth* (2015). His last substantial role was as the real-life bank robber Forrest Tucker in the comedy drama *The Old Man & the Gun* (2018). He is survived by his second wife, Sibylle Szaggars, an artist, whom he married in 2009 after a long relationship, and two children, Shauna and Amy, from his first marriage, which ended in divorce in 1985; their son James died in 2020. Published in *The Guardian* on 16 September 2025. Reprinted with permission.

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# Glossary

- **scholarship** = borsa di studio
- **leanings** = inclinazioni
- **flabbily** = senza convinzione
- **climbing** = scalata
- **starred in Barefoot in the Park opposite** = recitare accanto a
- **backlit** = retroilluminato
- **snugly** = perfettamente
- **verbose** = prolisso
- **lack of attendance** = assenza, mancata frequenza
- **untrumpeted** = a cui non è stata fatta pubblicità
- **outlaws** = fuorilegge
- **string** = serie
- **exposé** = denuncia
- **crusty** = burbero
- **fleshed out** = sviluppare, dare forma
- **off-beat** = anticonvenzionale
- **assignments** = incarichi, lavori
- **scaled down** = ridurre
- **a trifle** = un po'
- **ill at ease** = a disagio
- **wry wit** = ironia pungente
- **hint** = insinuare
- **blessed** = benedire
- **made it big** = avere successo
- **scam artists** = truffatori
- **indulge** = dedicarsi
- **faded denims** = jeans sbiaditi
- **grizzled** = brizzolato
- **castaway seaman** = marinaio naufrago
- **big game hunter** = esperto di caccia grossa
- **nuance** = sfumatura
- **realisation** = presa di coscienza
- **enrolled** = iscriversi

- **Nonetheless** = ciononostante
- **newcomer** = debuttante
- **glossy** = patinato, delle grandi produzioni