

HAROLD FEINSTEIN is to flowers what David Beckham is to football, according to a recent article in *The Independent*. On *BBC Breakfast* David Sillito claimed that Feinstein's photograph of a white rose, which sells by the thousand through IKEA, is probably the world's best-selling image. **Annabelle Ruston** catches up with him

The beauty in the familiar

What was your lucky break?

When I was 15 I took my portfolio of photographs round some well-known photographers. Arnold Newman said I had my own vision so probably wouldn't make a good assistant. He called *Modern Photography* magazine and told them to look at my work; they published an eight-page article about me, then continued to assign me photographic projects. My career took off from there and I was honoured to have work in the Museum of Modern Art permanent collection by the time I was 19.

What is the key to taking a great photograph?

I hold eight-week photography workshops and my basic teaching is: when your mouth drops open, click the shutter. But then take many others for the fun of it. Too much technical know-how can be a diversion; a good photographer is guided by intuition and the camera becomes an extension of their vision.

What drives you to take photographs?

I want to make people see the beauty in the familiar; people look but they tend not to really see things. I want to open people's eyes to the wonders that God has created and make them notice, and be grateful for, the wonders we are all blessed with.

Do you mainly photograph the natural world?

No, I'm just particularly well-known for my florals, partly because my book *One Hundred Flowers* has been re-printed so many times. This led to books of tulips, roses, foliage, seashells and this year a book of my orchid photographs will be published.

My career was launched by my black and white photographs of people in the pursuit of pleasure on Coney Island, and I have done lots of documentary work. I designed a special prismatic lens which I use to photograph buildings in New York; the results are fragmented and almost abstract.

How do you balance the creative and business sides of your life?

I've never been good with the business side of things. A number of books of my flower and natural history work have been published, which is wonderful as they get people calling me to buy images. I have had several agents over the years and am currently looking for a new one. I print my own giclées, license my work, accept commissions from magazines, work with book and print publishers and teach photography.

Your best and worst decisions?

The best has been to follow my heart; most of our decisions are choices between

love and fear. There is no worst; when you step in a pile of shit, wipe it off and keep your eyes open in the future.

What pictures are hanging at home?

A lot of my own work, including a selection of flower images and some of the black and white photos I have taken for *Life* magazine. Among my favourites are shots of Coney Island, New York City and army shots from the Korean War. ●

www.haroldfeinstein.com

Feinstein's work is available in the UK through Editions Limited, which is distributed by Print Portfolio,

www.printportfolio.co.uk

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