

MODERN LUXURY

# HAMPTONS

## SUMMER VIBES+ FABULOUS PHOTOGRAPHY

THE ICONIC AERIAL IMAGES OF GRAY MALIN

BEN FINK SHAPIRO'S SWOON-WORTHY BEACH SNAPS

SHUTTERBUG MICHAEL DWECK'S RAVISHING ROSÉ DEBUT

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*APRIL GORNIK'S MISSION TO REVIVE  
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*A COMPLETE GUIDE TO EAST END GALAS*

MARSHALL WATSON'S  
GARDINERS BAY CLASSIC



Photographer Gray Malin at his home in Los Angeles. OPPOSITE PAGE: One of his aerial photos of the Hamptons, *Montauk, Point Beach Vertical*, which he shot in 2012 for his series *À la Plage*.







THIS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY © GRAY MALIN. OPPOSITE PAGE: PHOTOGRAPHY BY NICHOLAS SCARPINATO

# TOUCH *of* GRAY

Whether captured from a helicopter high above Ipanema Beach, the bow of a ship in the middle of the Mediterranean, or the rafters of a Hollywood studio, Gray Malin's fine-art photography makes every day a getaway.

by ALLISON BERG

**E**xiting a congested West Hollywood street and ascending a meticulously photo-lined staircase into a sun-drenched white-brick loft, one gets the sensation of escaping to another realm, a place of celebration and fantasy. This is the world of Gray Malin.

As he plays gracious guide on a tour of his vast body of work, it's a wonder this strikingly handsome human spends so much of his time behind the camera rather than in front of it. To a visitor who has only just met him, Malin nevertheless feels like an old friend. Immediately he begins casually describing the hows and the whys of colorful compositions captured in far-flung locales like Forte dei Marmi, Bhutan, St. Barths, and the Hamptons, featuring geometric arrays of umbrellas or monkeys dressed as bellmen or words spelled out in shimmering three-foot balloons floating over deserted landscapes. Surrounded by product-filled shelves and boxes, mementos of past collaborations, piles of balloons for an upcoming shoot in Bolivia, and an assiduous staff of 12 at long, white, symmetrically aligned lacquered tables, this rising star projects an uncanny sense of calm. As we pause at a perfectly placed vase of fresh hydrangeas, Malin chuckles. "My life would make some sort of crazy reality show, I'm not gonna lie to you."

As his whimsical photos suggest, Malin tries not to take himself too seriously. Raised in Dallas, he was deemed a Hollywood success story at age 21 by his family and friends when he landed the job of second assistant to the president of Paramount Pictures. "But I felt like a failure," he admits. While learning how award-winning

quite different, as is his goal: Aarons was trying to perfect people, while Malin is trying to perfect a sense of place.

For his *À la Plage* series, shot from a doorless helicopter, he traveled to seven continents to document beaches, including those of Cape Town, Dubai, St-Tropez, Hawaii, and the Hamptons. Each beach project takes about three months from concept to final shoot, and on these daring flights designed to seize spectacular bird's-eye images, Malin has learned that anything can happen. Indeed, he's counting on it, always hoping to catch a dramatic moment with a lone swimmer, a wave breaking at a beautiful angle, or a striking umbrella. And his work is filled with fascinating insights—like how people of different countries arrange themselves on the beach. In Rio, for example, beachgoers are comfortable lounging nearly on top of each other, while Americans prefer more space. The umbrella patterns are also distinctive, with most Italian beach clubs placing umbrellas in geometric patterns, while in the US they're more haphazard. Malin can even tell the difference between public beaches and private beach clubs based on the umbrella colors and patterns, as well as the presence of loungers (they're noticeably lacking in the US).

Malin is also acclaimed for his unexpected interventions in exotic locales. One of his best-known photos, for instance, is *Llamas Black and White Balloons*, featuring two balloon-sheathed llamas with red tassels on their ears standing amidst the otherworldly terrain of Bolivia's salt flats. Like the other fanciful photos in his *Far Far Away* series, Malin shot it under the mentorship of renowned Bolivian photographer Gastón Ugalde. The happily

*"Art can be humorous and joyful with the right eye and right approach."*—GRAY MALIN

films are made from beginning to end was an amazing experience, he says, it was the wrong job for him. Everyone else at the studio was remarkably passionate about filmmaking, but he wasn't.

Although Malin's photography earned him a spot in the Dallas Museum of Art's Young Masters exhibition when he was in high school, he had never thought of photography as a viable career. But the young Emerson College graduate decided it was time to take a risk. He enrolled in a professional development class for photographers, where he interacted with other practitioners and learned how to think about the medium more broadly, that "art can be humorous and joyful with the right eye and right approach," he says. It was this revelation that gave Malin the courage to start doing things differently.

A professional career that began with a self-constructed sales booth at a Los Angeles swap meet in 2009 is now a flourishing practice that has produced 23 photo series, a *New York Times* best-selling book, and numerous public installations, as well as chic products and a growing lifestyle brand. Whether it's an Hermès-clad camel at Le Parker Méridien Palm Springs, a herd of rainbow-hued sheep in an Australian field, or an arrangement of Eames furniture floating on a platform in the water off Bora Bora, Malin continues to push the boundaries of fine-art photography.

He may be most celebrated, however, for his aerial photographs of resort destinations. While his beach and pool images have been compared to those of the renowned Slim Aarons for their atmosphere of colorful fantasy, Malin's compositions are

captivating photo required no postproduction editing other than removing the animals' ropes. For an earlier series, *Prada Marfa*, Malin revisited one of his favorite family vacation destinations: Marfa, Texas. As a fan of Elmgreen & Dragset's 2005 installation in which they placed a small Prada store on a lonely desert road, he was excited to insert figures and props before this exquisite backdrop. One notable photo from the series is *Cowboy and Mule*, a tongue-in-cheek version of "New York chic meets cowboy cool."

"People ask me, what does it mean to have the eye for photography?" he says. "It means that you can immediately see the composition." Looking to fine-art photographers like André Kertész for inspiration, Malin always starts with lines, shapes, and forms. His eyes light up when talking about Kertész and how he mastered the beauty of linear composition. "Google *The Fork*," he exclaims, referring to his favorite Kertész still life. Next, Malin looks at color, then finally at the overall scene.

Among Malin's many global photographic locations, one stands out for him. "It is an unbelievable feeling to come to the Hamptons and create artwork that becomes beloved by the community," he says. With the goal of creating an idealized all-American Atlantic coast scene, he visited Southampton, where his father's closest friend took him under his wing. Initially, Malin was most drawn to the wide beaches. Then he fell in love with the dark green water. But the clincher was, as always, the composition—a specific pattern of houses, then greenery, then sand, then water that he says exists only in the Hamptons and Hawaii. East

OPPOSITE PAGE, TOP:  
*Jetties Beach II*,  
Nantucket, 2016,  
from Gray Malin's  
*À la Plage* series.  
BOTTOM: *Blue*  
*Umbrellas Amalfi*,  
2015, from Malin's  
*La Dolce Vita* series.







End beachgoers are also partial to playful umbrellas, fun accessories, and lots of stripes—they put their heart and soul into what they carry to the beach. “The images are like a live magazine, and people carry it within their spirit,” he explains. “From above, it all looks stunning together.”

Malin admits that while he could of course have any of his photos hanging in his bedroom, the one he chose is a Hamptons piece: a grouping of beautiful beachgoers, surfboards, quintessential wooden fencing, rocks, and people on the water. “I haven’t gotten such a rich shot anywhere else, and I get to see it every day.” The surfers have been the greatest surprise for him; he had no idea the East End had such surf culture.

For the past four years, Malin has faithfully visited the Hamptons annually and always enjoys a sense of inclusion. His local fans now recognize him and compliment his work as he walks down the street: “It makes me feel a part of the community.” He loves that on the East End, depending on your mood, you can walk your dog on a quiet beach or drink a piña colada at a fabulous beach club with yellow striped umbrellas. Last September, he ventured to the Hamptons in the fall for the first time, resulting in aerial photos in which horseback riders replace the sunbathers.

Malin has spent most of his time at Fowler Beach, but last summer he discovered energetic places like Gurney’s and The Surf Lodge. He was thrilled when he received a commission from The Surf Lodge for a permanent installation. His playful work is perfect for the venue’s recent Fiona Byrne refresh: With its minimalist rooms—stark white with hints of color—the art is extremely important. When it comes to interior design, he recommends choosing a piece of art that moves you, then fashioning the interior around it.

As playful as he often appears, Malin’s approach to his work is meticulously systematic. Every detail of his workspace interiors, his photographic series, the rollout of his lifestyle website and products involves years of planning. “I feel really lucky that I got business instinct from my dad,” he says. “I’m an artist, but at the end of the day I know what I’m trying to say, and it works.” His goal from the start of his career has been to travel to the ends of the earth to offer people escapes, as well as feelings of joy and belonging. This is no simple task, he admits. Despite appearances, the life of a globe-trotting photographer can be anything but glamorous. He finds himself consumed with questioning whether he has the right lighting or the right timing or how he might make the shot even better. “Your mind sort of races a bit,” he says. “It’s work, but I can’t complain.”

The projects can also be hair-raising. Antarctica proved dangerous for one of his lighthearted balloon-word shoots, when a gust of wind sent an N flying over a distant bluff, leaving the team in a snowy wilderness with no N for ANTARCTICA. An assistant managed to recover it while everyone else held down the remaining letters. (Since then, Malin has brought ample amounts of tape to his balloon shoots.) The incident reminded him that he can’t do this alone, and he heaps praise upon his team: “I help them grow, and they help me grow. We all push each other.”

A different kind of adventure began in 2011 with the launch of Maison Gray, Malin’s first direct-to-consumer ecommerce site. After he began taking aerial photos, he decided to eliminate the alias, and GrayMalin.com was born in 2014. Around

the same time, he debuted his photo-printed Orlebar Brown swim trunks. Since then he has collaborated on a capsule shoe collection with Sperry, an art project with Le Méridien, and, most recently, a limited-edition line of beach umbrellas with Santa Barbara Umbrella, among other ventures. In addition to photographic prints, fans visiting his website can now acquire photo-adorned Gray Malin cocktail kits, iPhone cases, luggage tags, and acrylic trays, as well as signed copies of his best-selling book *Beaches*. His products are also available at many Neiman Marcus stores, Le Parker Méridien Palm Springs, Shopbop, and One Kings Lane. Malin loves the feeling of walking into a store and seeing the brand he created on display. “My work hangs in so many private homes,” he says, “but I never get to see that.” Moreover, by pushing the boundaries of his photography, he can ensure that everyone can own a piece of his work, even if they can’t afford an original photo. “The art world used to be so exclusive,” he says. “Now you can sit in a living room and feel a part of it with my stuff.”

What’s next for Malin? In Bolivia, he recently completed a follow-up to his Far Far Away series, which will be shown later this year. This summer he will return to the South of France and the Italian coast, with a special stop at Lake Como, to create more images for his À la Plage beach series. This October, keep your eyes peeled for Malin’s next coffee-table book, *Escapes*. This highly anticipated sequel to *Beaches* features parks (urban and rural), snow, islands, pools, and surf—an exploration of perfect escapes all around the world. “People love books that make them feel great,” he says. With the shimmering water of a swimming pool on its cover and silver-leaf edges, the book itself becomes a decorative object: It looks like a pool installed in the middle of the table.

Malin’s work is quickly becoming part of the fabric of the Hamptons, and he couldn’t be happier. “It’s nice to be honored for just doing something that makes people feel good and in turn become a part of their lives.” @graymalin; graymalin.com ■

## Tray Bien!

Gray Malin’s photographs are no longer just for hanging on walls. Thayer’s Hardware and Patio now carries trays featuring his well-known aerial beach images, one with multicolored umbrellas poking from the sand. The trays come in two sizes—a 22.5-by-14.5-inch version with handles (\$349) and a 17-by-15-inch one without (\$295)—making it easy to have a glass of rosé on the beach without getting sand in your suit. 2434 Montauk Hwy., Bridgehampton, 631-537-0077; thayershardware.com



Shot on the otherworldly salt flats of Bolivia, *Llamas Black and White Balloons*, 2013, from Malin’s Far Far Away series, presents “party animals garnished in festivity.” OPPOSITE PAGE: Gray Malin.



