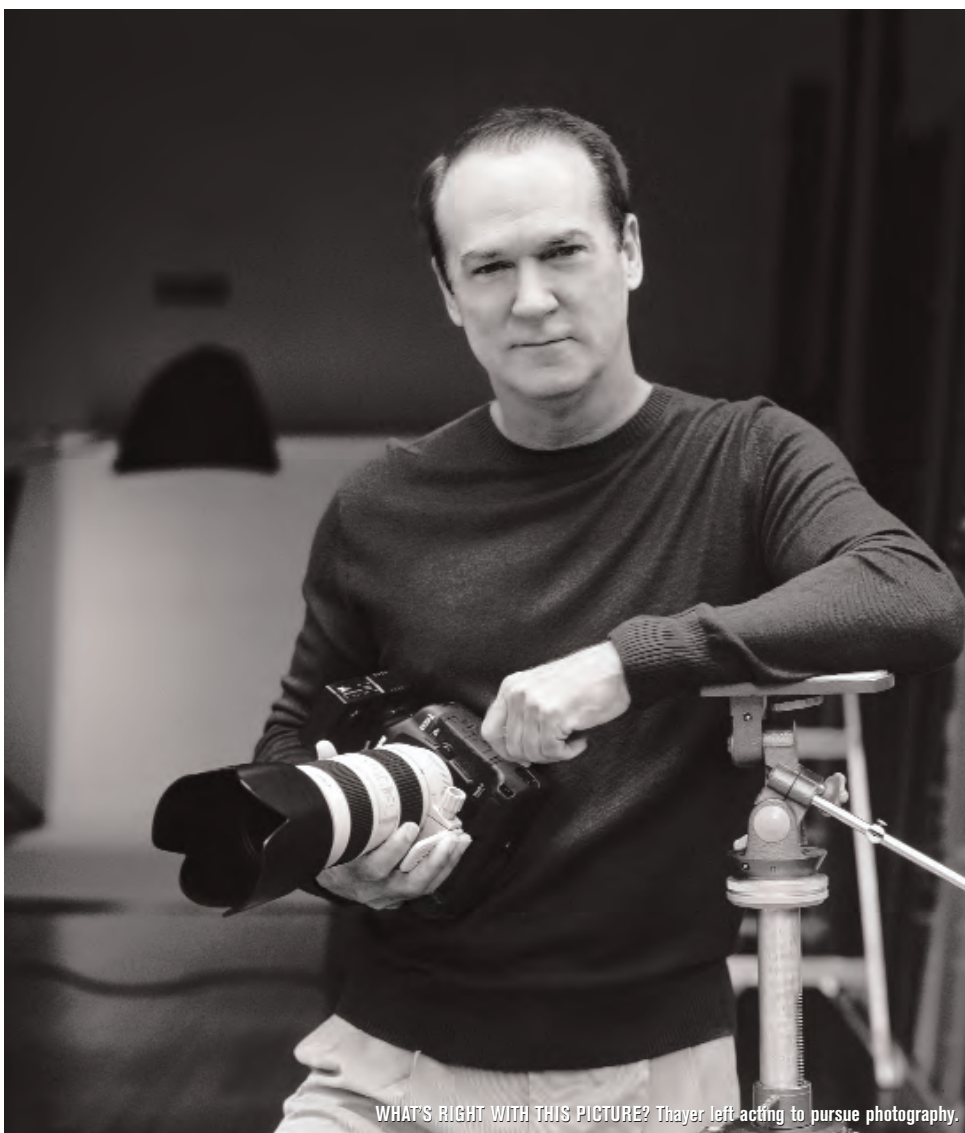


THE LOOP MILESTONE

BY MARENE GUSTIN
PORTRAIT BY STEVE HENRY



WHAT'S RIGHT WITH THIS PICTURE? Thayer left acting to pursue photography.

HE SHOOTS, HE SCORES

Houston's most celebrated portraitist marks three decades of life behind the lens

This month Evin Thayer marks 30 years of photographing Houston's movers and shakers, socialites, artists, families and, well, half-naked firefighters. (More about that later.)

Thayer, an articulate and well groomed fellow, is dressed casually yet elegantly, in short sleeves and slacks, for his meeting with a writer this day. In the gorgeous 100-year-old home in the Avondale District that has housed his photography studio for the last four years, he proudly points out the original moldings, hardwoods and fireplaces that helped win the American Society of Interior Designers' 2002 award for best use of an old building. And, of course, the walls are lined with the huge portraits of Houstonians—the rich, the powerful and the Everyman.

A third-generation Houstonian, Thayer picked up his father's camera at age seven and hasn't taken his eye off the viewfinder since. After graduating from Lamar High School, he enrolled at the University of Houston School of Theatre where he segued from still pictures into moving pictures for a spell, studying under the tutelage of the late, legendary professor Cecil Pickett alongside the likes of the Quaid boys—Dennis and Randy, Brent Spiner (Data from *Star Trek* series and films) and *The West Wing* producer-director Tommy Schlamme. In order to earn tuition money for grad school in Los Angeles, he circled back to still

photos and opened up a business in Houston.

And then he stayed.

"I got used to eating and paying the rent," jokes Thayer, who decided not to move to California. "But I can't believe it's been 30 years. It seems like only the other day."

During those three decades Thayer became among the most recognizable names in photography in Houston. He shot fashion for Foley's, saw his work published in *Texas Monthly* and *Town & Country*, and there's nary a home in River Oaks that doesn't sport one of his large-scale black and white family or wedding portraits—his trademark in the '90s.

"I saw a [Robert] Mapplethorpe show in New York," Thayer explains, "and I thought I could do family portraits like that." So he did. Huge, wall-dominating portraits in which the contrast between light and dark, black and white and shades of gray are both artistic and casual, much like the photographer himself. "We became known for our black and whites, but I really do about as much color. Black and white is timeless, composed, simple and classic. And you can't cheat in black and white."

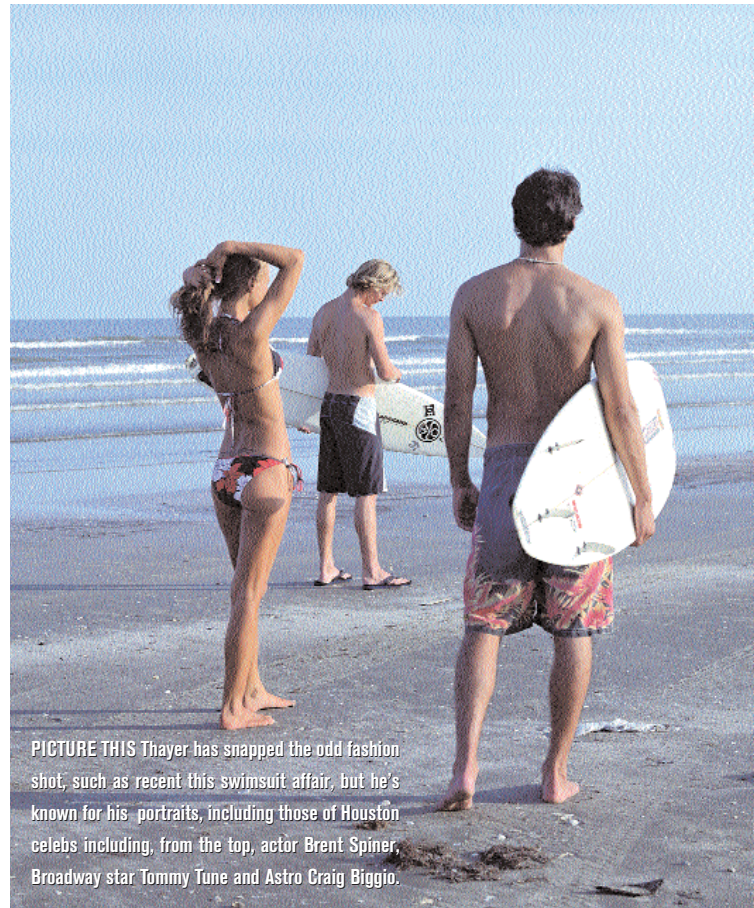
Thayer stuck with the two-tone concept when he set out to create a love letter to his native city, the 2000 coffee-table book *Houston's Millennium Makers* (available at Thayer's studio, 405 CONTINUED...



CONTINUED... Avondale St. 713.524.0199, and at www.amazon.com). Its pages are packed with beautiful portraits of Houston's most revered and famous. The book features former Texas First Lady Nellie Connally, designer Victor Costa, ballerina Lauren Anderson and astronauts like John Glenn and Alan Bean. Famous artists, athletes and socialites also turn

up, along with legendary newsman Walter Cronkite and the former President Bush.

"You have to be curious to be a good people photographer," Thayer says. "What's so cool about it is having a one-on-one with people for an



PICTURE THIS Thayer has snapped the odd fashion shot, such as recent this swimsuit affair, but he's known for his portraits, including those of Houston celebs including, from the top, actor Brent Spiner, Broadway star Tommy Tune and Astro Craig Biggio.

hour. After I photographed President Bush, he spent half an hour giving me a tour of his office.

"He was taller than I expected, and he wore rubber-soled shoes because he was on his feet all day. He said he was getting some for his son," muses Thayer. "Whether they are politicians or astronauts, I love to photograph people who are making a difference."

Thayer himself makes a difference, devoting countless hours and rolls of film to charities, everything from the arts to AIDS to animals. In fact—here's the part about the half-naked fire fighters—for 13 years Thayer shot the back-draft babes for the *Houston Fire Fighters Calendar*, a project full of bare-chested HFD hunks. This fundraiser has raised more than \$1.5 million for the Houston Fire Fighters Burned and Crippled Children's Fund, Thayer says.

In his personal life, Thayer makes the most of his Midtown home, minutes from his studio. He loves the local eateries—Thai and Japanese, the occasional trip to Tony's and Tex-Mex. "If you live in Houston, you have to love Mexican food and margaritas," Thayer insists. (His faves include El Pueblito Place on Richmond and Hugo's on Westheimer, where the carnitas rule.) He's also an avid water skier and sailor. And somewhere along the way he also found time to shoot the cover and co-produce his friend Kenneth Gayle's new CD, *On a Personal Note...*, which features standards and operatic pieces.

"I like all kinds of music, from opera to pop," he says. "And I like the producing. It's just another creative outlet. I was actually approached to do a rap album, but I said I don't think I'm your man for that."

Thayer thrives, as he has for 30 years now, on stimulation, whether it's creating art, building and remodeling homes or just giving back to his city. "I love Houston, and people are my favorite thing about Houston," Thayer says. "From the average Joe off the street ... to the President." ■