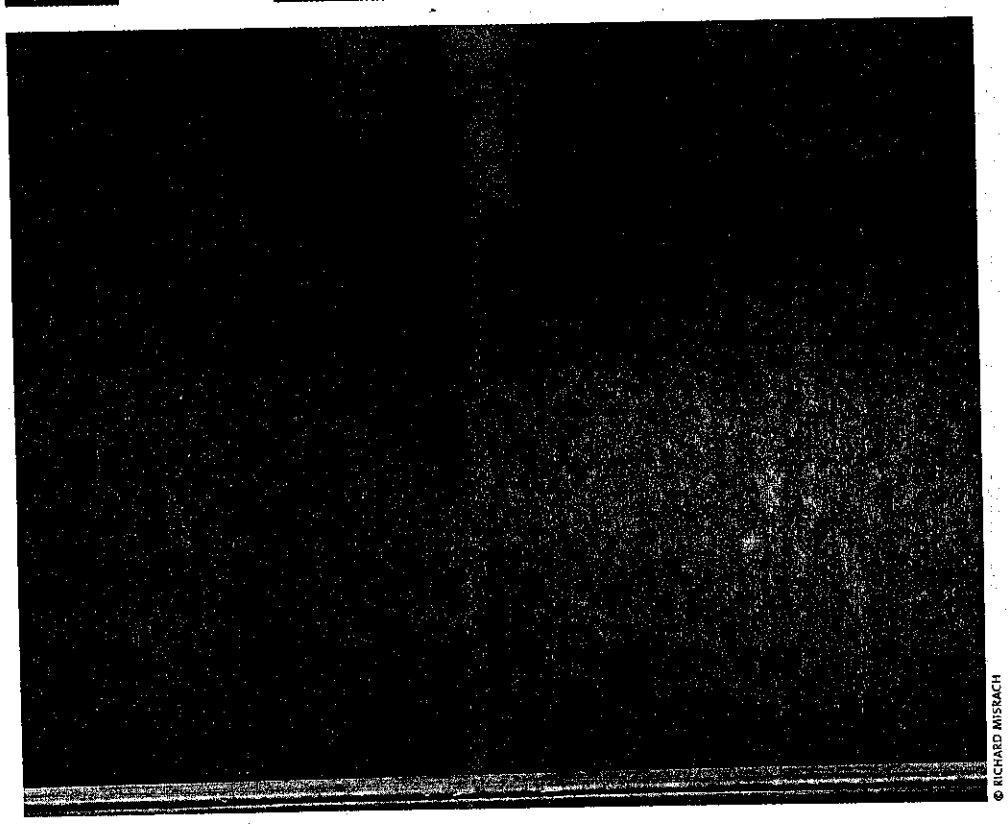
PRECIOUS AND FEW

THERE'S A GROWING MARKET IN LIMITED-EDITION BOOKS WHICH SERVE TWO MARKETS: LOVERS OF PHOTOGRAPHY AND BOOK COLLECTORS.
BY SYLVIA LINDMAN



© RICHARD MISRACH

PUBLISHING A BOOK was never a big goal for James Fee. "There are too many books out there," the Los Angeles photographer says. "I'd rather do catalogues that identify a body of work. Catalogues are more accessible."

In 2001, after working as a photographer for more than 25 years, Fee finally did publish a photo book, *James Fee*, with St. Ann's Press. It includes several bodies of work—figurative studies, American images and pictures taken in Peleliu in the South Pacific—and lists for $75 as a trade edition. There is also a slipcased, signed limited edition of 200 priced at $600.

That may seem expensive, but for Fee the limited edition was another opportunity to champion accessibility. Typically, a limited-edition photography book includes one original print. Fee's book comes with a portfolio of three—two in black and white and one in solarized color, each representing a different theme in the book. Fee's standard prints sell for $800 and go up to about $2,500, with his large solarized images much higher than that—so the 8 x 10 prints packaged with the limited-edition book were a bargain. The limited-edition book was "the best way of getting prints to new collectors," Fee says. "People could buy the book and have three prints and have the beginnings of a collection."

Limited edition. Collector's edition. Deluxe edition. Special edition. These terms are used more or less interchangeably to identify a small edition (from as few as 25 copies to more than 1,000) with something extra—a box or slipcase, an original work, the artist's signature, and sometimes a luxury binding.

At one echelon are those ultrarare editions—usually fewer than 100 copies—unique works of art in themselves. The entire book, from printing to binding to presentation material, is handmade. They are priced accordingly, in the thousands of dollars. The periodical *21st: The Journal of Contemporary Photography* is known for these works, with small editions produced in trade (1,200 copies), deluxe (165 copies) and museum (50 copies) editions, each increasingly fine in its details. Each volume is "a celebration of multiple genius, the genius of artist, writer, designer, typesetter, printer, binder and even papermaker," says editor John Wood.

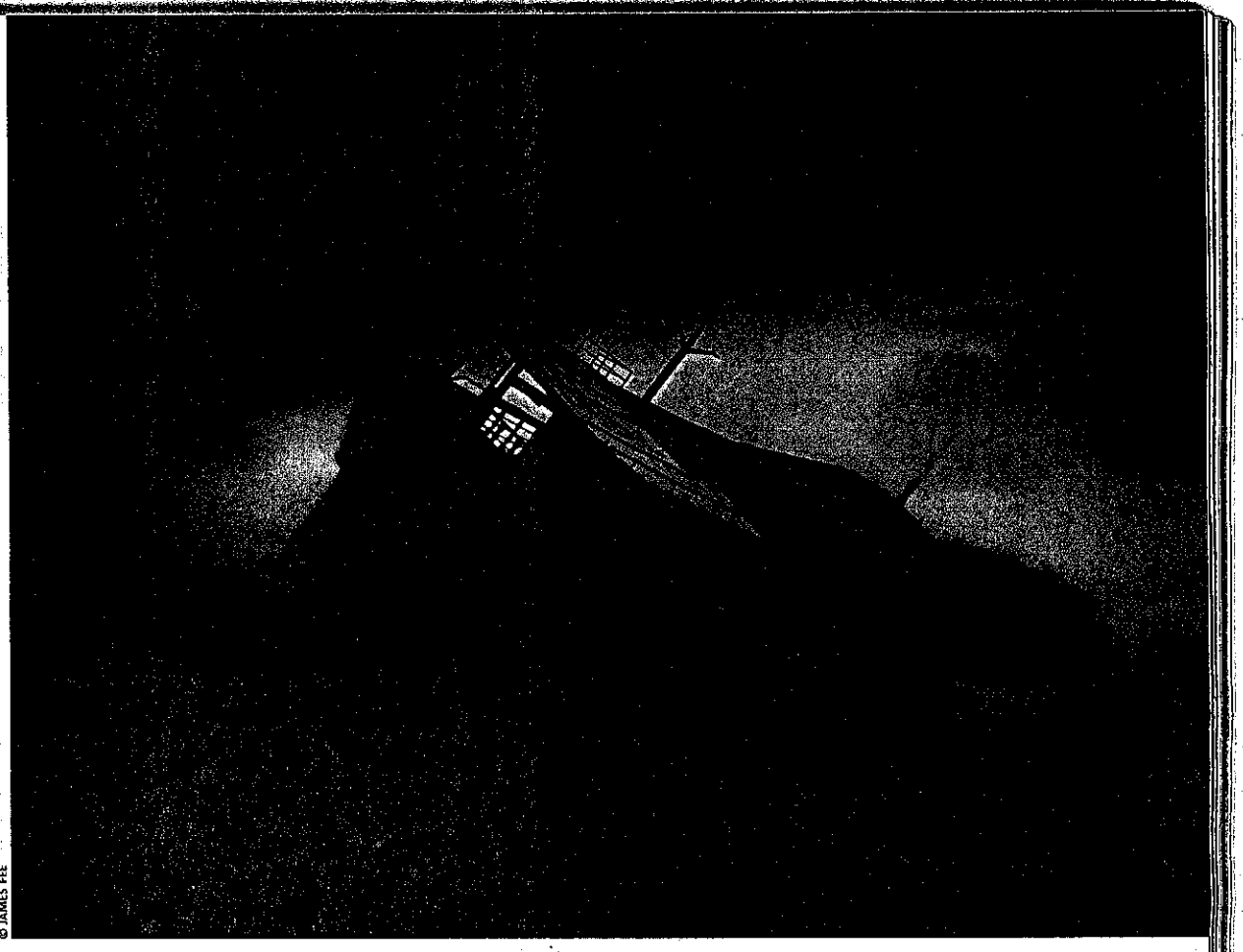
21st also produces handmade books for Leo & Wolfe Photography, such as the book *New York*, featuring photographs by Sheila Metzner and poems by Walt Whitman. The edition is limited to 35 copies, on handmade rag paper with ten bound, hand-coated platinum prints in a handmade, Moroccan goatskin binding. A signed, unbound platinum print accompanies each book. The price starts at $5,000 and increases with demand.

Another category of books, though not all handmade, also is published as a unique numbered and signed limited edition. Taschen, a German company with offices and shops worldwide, publishes two or three such books a year, usually in editions of 2,500, but sometimes more. This "Taschen Limited" series includes books such as Helmut Newton's *Sumo*, a lavish and literally huge volume (it weighs 66 pounds) that comes with a special display device designed by

Philippe Starck. The Newton book, printed in an edition of 10,000, started at $1,500 and has risen to $3,000 now that it has almost sold out. "We work very hard on getting the best quality possible in terms of reproduction, printing, paper, binding, etc," company executive and editor Angelika Taschen says: "Moreover, we always try to find the best and most beautiful way to present the artist's work including the packaging."

More common—too common, according to some critics—are the limited editions that routinely accompany a growing number of trade photography books. Though not entirely handmade, many are of very high quality, and they command a premium above the price of the trade book. Although some limited editions are priced under $200, many are in the $600 to $800 range or more.

Producing a limited edition with a trade edition benefits both the publisher and the photographer. There's artistic satisfaction for both parties in the beautiful product, but for the publisher there's also commercial satisfaction. A limited-edition book reaches two audiences—book collectors and lovers of photography—and many publishers expect sales of the limited edition to underwrite the trade edition. "To do a trade edition at high quality, it's often a loss leader," says Robin Hurley of St. Ann's Press. "With a limited edition, small presses can keep their heads above water."



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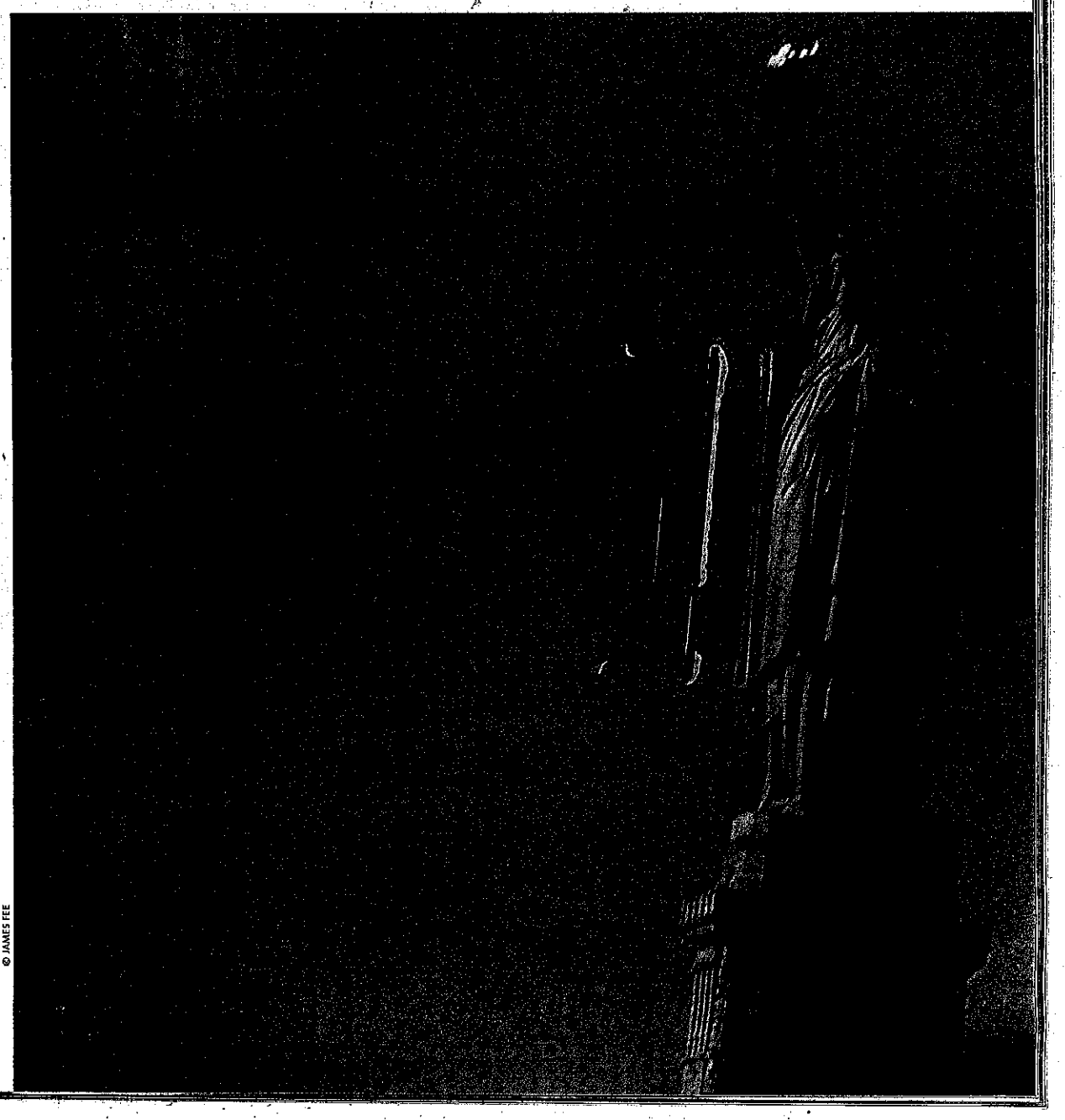


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For the photographer, the commercial reward, if any, is small—although every contract is different, of course. Photographers may see royalties, but the costs of design, printing, binding, promotion and storage have to be paid first.

"The financial reward comes through your sale of prints," says Ron van Dongen, a photographer based in Portland, Oregon, who has published four books with Nazraeli Press. "When you have a book, it helps establish your name."

"Every limited edition is a sales catalogue for the photographer," says bookbinder and book historian

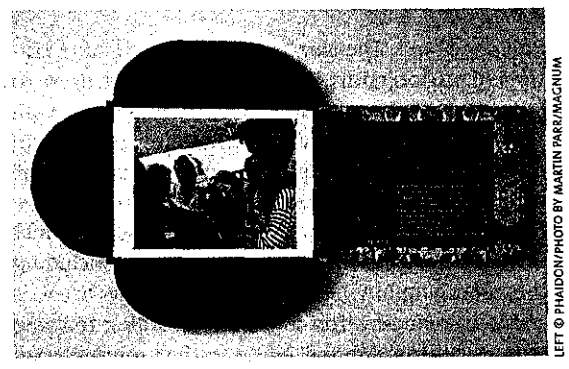


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Opposite: Taken from Richard Misrach's first limited-edition book published by powerHouse: *Pictures of Paintings*. Top right and right: The work of James Fee published by St. Ann's Press. There is a trade edition for $75 and 200 limited-edition versions for $600. Above: Some of what's on offer from *21st*, which produces handmade books for Leo & Wolfe Photography.



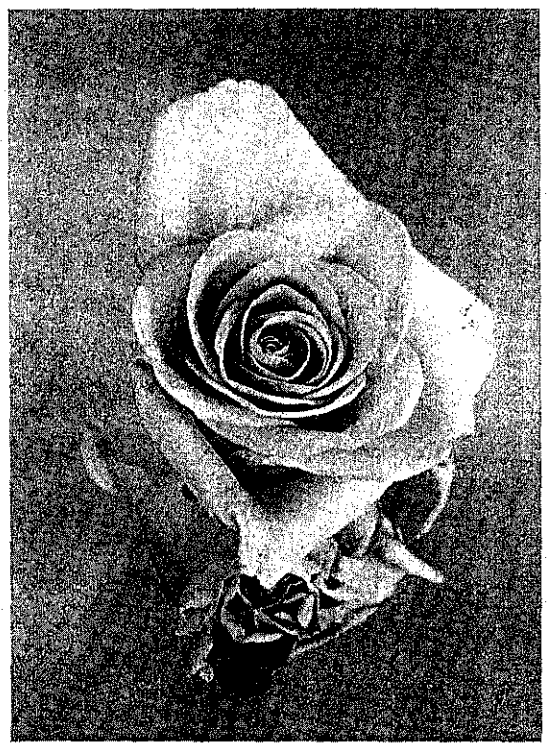
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PHOTOGRAPHERS LIKE WORKING WITH SMALL PUBLISHERS BECAUSE THEY ARE FLEXIBLE, CREATIVE AND USUALLY WILLING TO OFFER GREATER LATITUDE TO THE ARTIST.

Above: Phaidon has recently published *Martin Parr: Photoworks 1971-2001* in both a trade and a limited edition priced at $650 which includes an original print. Below: Ron van Dongen's *Rosa Ferreus* is part of the series One Picture Books, published by Nazraeli Press. Each 16-page book includes an original photo



© RON VAN DONGEN

Charles Mohr, whose Custom Bindery in Los Angeles creates handmade portfolios and book bindings for James Fee and other artists.

Richard Misrach has published many books, but his first limited edition has just been issued by powerHouse press. The so-called deluxe edition of Misrach's *Pictures of Paintings*, an edition of 100, is presented in a clamshell box along with three signed prints. The deluxe edition goes for $950, the book alone for $125.

The deluxe edition helps offset the high production costs of the trade edition, Misrach says. "Perhaps more important," he adds, "my original photographs are getting more expensive all the time. I'm doing smaller editions and large-scale prints, which puts the price of a lot of my work out of people's range of affordability. To be able to offer a beautiful edition like this that is still relatively affordable is deeply satisfying."

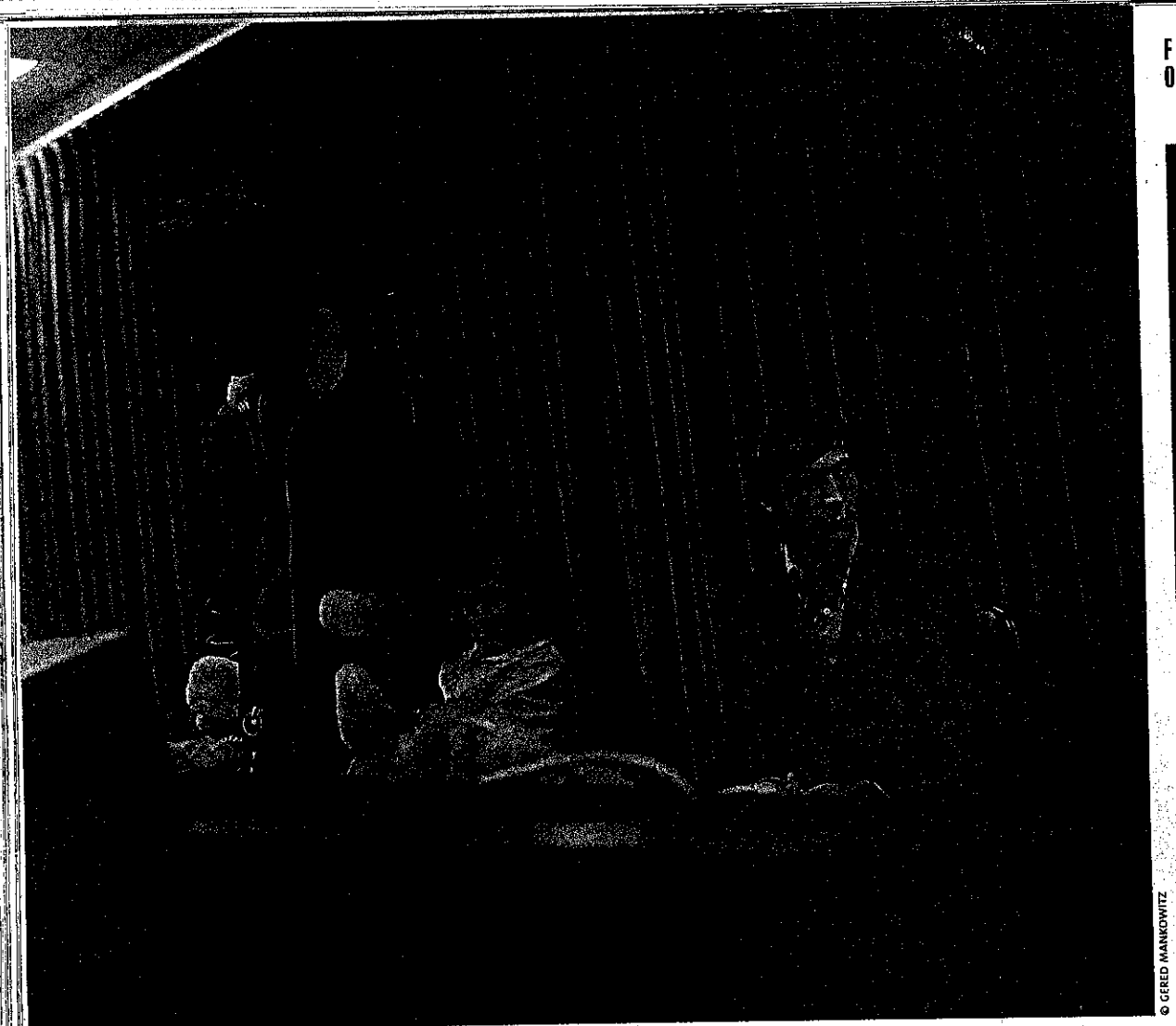
Bruce Davidson, whose first limited edition, *Brooklyn Gang*, came out two years ago from Twin Palms Press, has two new books from St. Ann's Press. *Time of Change*, featuring his photographs of the Civil Rights era, was published in 2002, and an expanded, reedited version of his classic *East 100th Street* is due early in 2003. "The limited edition in each case augments the book," Davidson says. "It gives the audience one more dimension to think about. And it's nice to have something very special."

Despite their aura of exclusivity, limited editions are rather democratic in the context of fine art. "It's a middle market between prints being rather expensive and books being relatively cheap," says London photographer Martin Parr, whose retrospective *Martin Parr: Photoworks 1971-2001* has just been published by Phaidon in both a trade and an elegant limited edition, priced at $650 and including an original print. "The cheapest print of equivalent size is double that, at a minimum," Parr says. "So in fact you're getting an original print at a substantial discount. Yet, if you go into a bookshop, they'll say it's horrifically expensive."

One of the more popular of recent limited editions, perhaps because of its mass-market potential, is *The Rolling Stones*. It's the third book featuring photographs of the band by Gered Mankowitz, who traveled with Jagger and company in the 1960s. Mankowitz's two previous books, published by Genesis, also were accompanied by a limited edition, but those included an original print and cost a few hundred dollars. Wanting a more affordable book this time, Mankowitz produced his third limited edition not with a print but with a 32-page supplement of Stones photographs from 1982. The limited edition of 1,000 copies also has a different cover image than the trade edition, is hardbound and boxed, and sells for $160.

The concept of the affordable limited edition can't go much further than the $35 One Picture Books published by Nazraeli Press in Tucson, Arizona. This series, which now numbers 12, is made up of identically sized (5 1/2 x 7 1/4 inches) hardbound books with plain covers in signed, numbered editions of 500. Each 16-page book includes a tipped-in original photograph. The book focuses on that one picture, but the presentation is up to the photographer. Van Dongen's *Rosa Ferreus* shows a sequence of photographs over two weeks of a pair of roses in a vase.

Most of the publishers of limited-edition photography books are small and independent. Photographers like working with small publishers because they are flexible, creative and usually willing to offer considerable latitude to the artist. Chris Pichler, the founder of Nazraeli Press, describes working with artists at his dining-room table to lay out a book, sequence the photographs, choose the print for the limited edition



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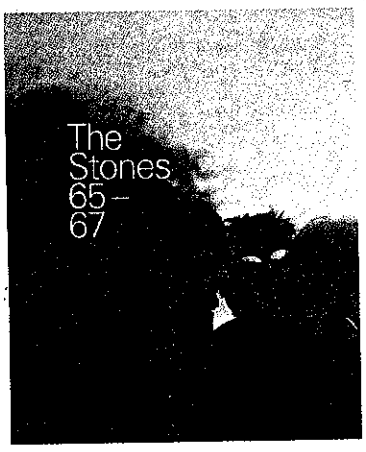
and decide how to present it.

But without the resources of a big company, "every book is a financial puzzle," Pichler says. Van Dongen, who is known for his botanical still lifes, has published three books with Nazraeli accompanied by limited editions of just 25. Before publishing his first book, *Alba Nero*, Pichler called galleries that represent van Dongen to make sure they'd be willing to sell the book. Because the artist's photographs were selling well, they had confidence the book would sell, too, and they agreed. In fact, it sold so well that Nazraeli published a second edition this year.

"What's nice is that [the book] doesn't take anything away from the big galleries," Pichler says. "A print collector would still buy a print. It's a nice middle."

Publishers succeed by intimately knowing their small market, Pichler says. "A reason we've survived," he says, "is that the number of people who buy photographic books like this is finite. We never try to do a best-seller. We just try to please these 1,000 people."

How does one land a contract for a limited edition? There's no single way. Publishers occasionally showcase new photographers just because they like the work. And they publish well-known photographers and photographers with proven gallery sales because their reputation assures a market for the books.



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Limited-edition books have their critics. "The term is overused," Mohr says. A true limited edition, he says, is handmade and represents the best possible quality in every aspect of the book. But most people don't know the difference. "The majority of people buy it simply because right now they like it, but if they can flip it on the market [for a profit] in a few years, they sell it. It is pure investment."

Nonetheless, for the artist, the limited edition will carry sentimental value as well as prestige. Davidson says he'll keep his limited editions as a legacy for his children. "They'll stay in the family," he says.

"When I first got involved in limited editions," Mankowitz says, "one of the great attractions personally was that I felt if people were prepared to pay this sort of money for a book, they would value it, and it would be protected and looked after." □

Above and top: This is Gered Mankowitz's third book on The Rolling Stones. The limited-edition version of the book includes a 32-page supplement of Stones photographs from 1982; 1,000 copies have been printed and are retailing for $160 (published by Vision On). Note how drummer Charlie Watts exudes natural cool, something Jagger and Richards have spent years trying to cultivate.

FOCUS ON BOOKS

PUBLISHER CONTACTS

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