

Sam Harnack's Pajama Glamour is making women comfortable with boudoir—and themselves. “From the very moment my clients walk through the door, my team and I are fostering that confidence,” he says.

PORTRAITS

Interview by Cameron Bishopp



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Pajama glamour

Boudoir for real women—lifting the taboo

He'd never had an interest in photography or even held a camera, so when Sam Harnack became a photographer in 2005, it was a case of serendipity.

Harnack's first career was computer programming. Tasked with photographing products for a website he was working on, he borrowed a Nikon D100. Meanwhile, close friends with a 4-year-old daughter asked Harnack to tag along with them to Disneyland. He was the only one who'd brought a camera, and who could resist taking photographs of a little girl's first encounter with Mickey and the gang? Harnack saved the day for the family, and was forever hooked on photography.

Now he helms Sam Harnack Studios in Lodi, Calif., and has two main specialties, high school seniors and his house boudoir brand, Pajama Glamour.

Celebrating his 30th birthday next month, Harnack has already made a name for himself with Pajama Glamour, which launched Valentine's Day 2007, when the studio's website went live. Advertising only online and by word-of-mouth, Harnack has photographed more than 100 Pajama Glamour women in the past year. Sessions start at \$450.

The evolution of the brand seemed natural, says Harnack. He started out photographing toddlers, then started to get calls from high school seniors. By his second year in business, he'd photographed 80 seniors. And then came calls from the seniors' Moms, asking if he offered something a little sexier for adults.

"I noticed everyone who asked was shy or embarrassed about it," says Harnack. The

women were apparently envisioning the girl-with-feather-boa glamour shots of the '80s. Harnack needed to come up with a boudoir concept that was beguiling, yet more tasteful than taboo. Enter Pajama Glamour. "It's fun, cute, and sexy," he says. That fixed the problem; his clients could feel at ease talking—and talking and talking—about it.

"The sexiest thing about a woman is her confidence," says Harnack. "No matter what a woman looks like, if she walks into a room and is confident, everybody will stop and stare. From the very moment my clients walk through the door, my team and I are fostering that confidence."

Professional Photographer: *How would you describe your clients?*

Sam Harnack: Most of the women are brides-



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to-be. I also have women who have lost weight and want to celebrate. I have married women with kids who want to do something special for their husbands for a birthday or anniversary. The age range of my boudoir clients is late 20s to early 40s.

How would you describe your characteristic style?

My style is very much who I am. I respect people and shoot that way, especially with boudoir. When your subject knows you respect her, she immediately trusts you. In return, I get a natural calm confidence out of her. The first thing that catches my attention about a woman's looks is her eyes, so that's my main focus. I shoot wide open, giving me a shallow depth of field that really brings the attention to the eyes, blurring everything else and leaving it to the imagination.

What do you think sets your work apart from other photographers?

The way I interact with my clients is the secret to a great photo, not the camera, the lighting, the wardrobe or Photoshop. You have to realize that these women are in a vulnerable situation. If you say the wrong thing or react the wrong way, their confidence goes through the floor.

What elements do you like to have in the studio for a successful session?

The studio itself is a big component. It's geared toward women, so when you walk through the doors, you just feel sexy. The floors are finished with white marble and the entire studio is white, with a sexy white couch and chandeliers. The music is catered to the client. It's often on only when she's getting ready. I tend to talk and direct a lot during the shoot so the music becomes a

distraction. There are white robes hanging from the wall that clients can wear around the studio between shots to be comfortable.

What's your secret to a good session?

I shoot wirelessly directly to the computer, so the clients have the opportunity to see the shots as they are taken. Women have boudoir photos taken for a million different reasons, but at the root of them all is that they want to look and feel good about themselves. When they look at the photos directly out of the camera and remark "Wow, that's me?" that's a good session.

Selling the end products seems like the most challenging part of the boudoir market.

What kind of products do you sell?

Often, the first time we meet clients face-to-face is the day of the shoot. By this time, the majority of them know what they want because they've seen the menu on our website and have picked the product or package that fits their budget. Most women are skeptical that they'll look good enough in the portrait to warrant ordering a large print for the wall. But when they walk into the studio and see an image of a real client in a large wall portrait, and then see their own shots in real-time, they get excited and their perception changes. Then they can visualize their portrait hanging on the wall as art.

The most popular product we sell is a coffee-table book. We've sold several canvas wraps and large wall portraits, but the majority of the women want to keep the

images private. The key is to have the sizes on your wall that you want to sell, and then shoot for them. All the wall portraits I've sold have been on the artistic side, not so much in your face but subtle, sexy. I've also defined certain sets for clients to choose from. This serves several purposes; first, it helps streamline the shoot and the clients know exactly what they're going to get. Second, certain sets yield shots better suited for a large wall portrait, because they're more fashion/art than glamour.

How do your clients hear about you?

All of the advertising for Pajama Glamour has been referrals or online through marketing using Google Adwords exclusively. We're listed in several link sites, such as



BoudoirPhotographers.net. We're also frequently linked by brides-to-be from their wedding profile pages and wedding forums like TheKnot.com. Women all over the country see these sites and then visit pajamaglamour.com.

There's something unique about Pajama Glamour that attracts them. I think it's the almost commercial look of the work; it's what they see in *Playboy* or *Maxim*, a look they're familiar with. It doesn't have that basement or garage feel that boudoir photos had in the past.

How does someone interested in shooting boudoir draw the line between fun, tasteful sexy and vulgar? Is that important for your clients, for your business model?

The line is pretty much drawn with the branding of Pajama Glamour. The website breaks down the types of images to Sweet, Sexy, and Seductive, allowing our clients to choose the look. There's a limit to what our vendors will print, too; it's a pretty awkward conversation when the lab calls and has to describe the offending material.

Tell us about separating the public face of your seniors business from Pajama Glamour; you have a website for each.

I separated Pajama Glamour from my high school senior work for a couple of reasons. Mainly, if somebody is visiting my website looking specifically for senior portraits or wedding information, they'd expect to see that type of work, not half-naked women. I

do have the websites linked. My portrait site has a list of frequently asked questions, one of which relates to boudoir photography and includes a link to Pajama Glamour.

What's the best thing about your job?

It's funny, most people figure that getting to photograph beautiful women all the time must be the best part about my job. I usually brush it off with a joke, but that assumption really [makes me angry]. I don't see it that way at all. If you do, you're in it for the wrong reasons. The best thing about doing what I do is being able to change the way people see themselves. ■

Keep up with Harnack, at www.pajamaglamour.com, or his main studio site, www.harnackstudios.com.

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