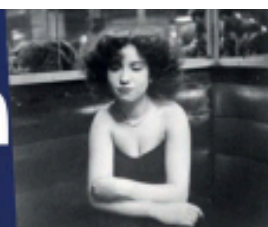


Tuesday 24 May 2022



Robert Doisneau
New insights into the legacy of the
street & documentary master

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Photo Stories

High street society

Peter Dench talks to photographer **Jim Grover** about his homage to the remarkable life of South London shop keeper **Maurice Dorfman**

One evening in 2016, social documentary photographer Jim Grover saw the faded facade of Jeannette Fashions. Intrigued, he went in. The smell was musty, jazz music played soulfully in the background. Harsh strip lights illuminated brown bare walls punctuated by bursts of colourful fabric. At the far end of the spacious shop stood a small man behind a tall cutting table. The man was Maurice 'Murray' Dorfman.

I told him I was studying Clapham High Street, and he said I must be mad, it's just a high street! He's quite a private guy, we chatted for a bit, not very much that first time. I got to know him and he started to show me old photographs of his National Service and press clippings of his yachting adventures. The best thing I did was get my iPhone out and press record. I recorded around 90 minutes over a few sessions of him talking. He's got a lovely voice. I had no idea one day I'd be telling his life story. I was just interested in him as a High Street trader, explains Jim.

From that first meeting, Jim would regularly drop in for a chat. When Maurice became very ill, with no family to care for him, Jim would visit him in hospital and spoon-feed him ice cream. When Maurice died on 18 February 2020 aged 87, to mark his passing, Jim displayed some of those 2016 High Street portraits in one window of Jeannette Fashions and some from the woodland burial of Maurice in the other, along with a note paying tribute to the longest trader on the High Street. 'It would be overstating to say it became a shrine but so many people stopped and talked about their experience and memories. I knew I had to do something more to mark and pay tribute to this man who's been serving this community for 60 years. He meant so much to people.'

Thinking it would be a relatively small project taking three months and ending with an exhibition at the shop, Jim raised £8,000 on Kickstarter and with the help of a

genealogist, began to trace back Maurice's story. 'The luckiest break I got was finding one of Maurice's old telephone books. I started calling anything that looked like a personal phone number. I cold-called 59 numbers that looked hopeful. 42 were no answers, long since expired.' Other numbers connected him to people who used to sail with Maurice back in the 1960s and '70s, and Barbara, who pointed him towards the daughter of his 1960s girlfriend, now a wedding photographer living in the States.

Jim began curating tableaux of Maurice's life. Using his upstairs spare room at home with three windows and a reflector, he diligently nudged everything into frame, composed against fabrics from Jeannette Fashions: old family photos, photographs of motorcycle trips, the OPEN door sign, tailoring shears, album covers and sailing trophies. Eighteen months later, his haul was complete: a 230-page book and exhibition at Clapham Library. Fifty contemporary photographs by Jim, including poignant scenes from Maurice's living space, hung alongside a presentation of Maurice's 8mm cine film home movies, 1960s Kodachrome slides and voice recordings.

'I am a firm believer, continually re-enforced through my photography practice, that everyone's life is extraordinary,' says Jim. 'We all have a story that will intrigue, engage, and perhaps even inspire, such is the human condition and the rich variety of our own experiences and lives. At one level, Maurice's life was ordinary and I feel sure that's how he would have described it. But no, Maurice's life was truly extraordinary and holds so much to admire.'

The book, *Behind The Shop Facade - The Life of Maurice Dorfman*, avoids being overwhelmed by nostalgia. It's an honest celebration of a life fully lived by a mostly kind, old-fashioned quirky shopkeeper. It's also a lesson in photographing locally - all you have to do is push open the door and who knows what will appear.



Clockwise from top right: Shop door sign; Satisfied customers; Maurice Dorfman; Shop drawers; Motorcycle photographs from the 1960s and '70s; Jeannette Fashions shop facade 2022 on Clapham High Street



For more about the project, and how to buy the book, visit: www.behindtheshopfacade.com