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# Henri Cartier-Bresson: The Decisive Moment



## Synopsis

"Within the canon of European photography books it would be difficult to find one more famous, revered and influential as Henri Cartier-Bresson's *The Decisive Moment*," wrote Jeffrey Ladd in *Time LightBox*, in a feature on Steidl's new edition of this ultimate photobook classic. Originally published in 1952, this collection of Cartier-Bresson's best work from his early years was embellished with a collage cover by Henri Matisse. The book has since influenced generations of photographers, while its English title defined the notion of the famous peak in which all elements in the photographic frame accumulate to form the perfect image – not the moment of the height of the action, necessarily, but the formal, visual peak. This new publication – the first and only reprint since the original 1952 edition – is a meticulous facsimile of the original book that launched the artist to international fame, with an additional booklet on the history of *The Decisive Moment* by Centre Pompidou curator Clément Châroux. Henri Cartier-Bresson (1908 – 2004) was born in Chantelou-en-Brie, France. He initially studied painting and began photographing in the 1930s. Cartier-Bresson cofounded Magnum in 1947. In the late 1960s he returned to his original passion, drawing. In 2003 Cartier-Bresson established the Fondation Henri Cartier-Bresson in Paris, one year before his death.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Cartier-Bresson's concept of the "decisive moment" – a split second that reveals the larger truth of a situation – shaped modern street photography and

set the stage for hundreds of photojournalists to bring the world into living rooms through magazines. (James Estrin The New York Times Online) A decisively beautiful object that belongs in the library of anyone who cares about photography... From editing and sequencing to packaging, it's a masterpiece. (Pat Padua Spectrum Culture) Reprinted to the exact specification of the original, including Henri Matisse's collage cover design, Steidl's care and craftsmanship is astounding. At 11.5" by 15", it's actually too large for my bookshelf. The spreads are sized according to the dimensions of the framelines of Cartier-Bresson's beloved Leica camera, allowing for a single large image, two vertical images, or four smaller horizontal images to fit on each spread. The sequencing is seamless and affecting—it is one of the most immersive experiences I have ever had with a book. The book's physical presence and high image quality demands not only respect for the work inside, but for it to be treated as a work of art in and of itself. (Evan Paul Laudenslager theartblog.org) It's immediately obvious that The Decisive Moment is a hedonistic delight, at least if your idea of hedonism is flexible enough to extend to the tactile and visual pleasure of a photography book. (Gary Cockburn One Thousand Words) Diligently reproduced to the finest detail, Steidl seems to have resisted the urge to over embellish the new edition with unnecessary addendums. Cartier-Bresson likely would have dismissed an elaborate reconstruction of his book as crass and egregious. The Decisive Moment is about the aesthetics of coincidence, and the faith to follow intuition. Like every brilliant unexpected moment, things can never be truly recreated, but only faithfully retold. (Krystal Grow Wired) With the winter months slowly waning away, what better time is there to grab a good book, a hot beverage, and lounge in bed on a chilly and blustery evening? Luckily for you, we went ahead and picked the most enticing coffee table books that will be released this month, which can be viewed in the slideshow above. (Devon Ivie Interview) More than ten years after his passing, the renowned street and social documentary photographer Henri Cartier-Bresson—who so famously coined the term "the decisive moment," or the second when all of the compositional elements of a scene come into harmony—continues to charm, fascinate and inspire photographers worldwide. The Decisive Moment (Steidl), Cartier-Bresson's book that was first published in 1952 by Simon and Schuster, is reentering the market. This latest edition, which will also be covered in Matisse cutouts like the original, highlights the photographer's revered early work, and it will come with a booklet of an essay on the history of The Decisive Moment by Clement Chouh, the Centre Pompidou curator. (Libby Peterson Rangefinder) Henri Cartier-Bresson's iconic photography book, "The Decisive Moment," has been republished, 62 years after

the highly influential collection of his early work was first released. (Aurelien Breeden The New York Times Arts Beat)The Decisive Moment has finally been republished. Sixty-two years on, it still carries the weight of its initial importance – even if the notion of the decisive moment no longer holds sway as it once did; staged photography, conceptual strategies and digitally manipulated images have all but rendered it old-fashioned except to purists, photojournalists and street photographers. (Sean O’Hagan The Guardian)One of the most influential (and yet hardest to find) photobooks in print gets the Steidl gold-standard reprint treatment here. Available for the first time in sixty years, Henri Cartier-Bresson’s Decisive Moment still sizzles with taut, kinetic energy. From the Matisse-designed cover through the tightly edited image selection, it’s a brilliant mix of street photography and reportage, photos that, despite being perfectly composed, feel very alive. Many of them have evolved from classics to cultural wallpaper. The book reminds us of Cartier-Bresson’s genius – just in case you needed a reminder. (Mark Murrmann Mother Jones)Within the canon of European photography books it would be difficult to find one more famous, revered and influential as Henri Cartier-Bresson’s Images a la Sauvette or, as the American edition is titled, The Decisive Moment. Its value as an out-of-print collectable has risen over the past few decades resulting in keeping this masterpiece out of the hands of many younger photographers. Finally, after 62 years, it is again seeing the light of day this December with a gorgeous facsimile from the German publishing house Steidl. (Jeffrey Ladd TIME Lightbox)Within the canon of European photography books it would be difficult to find one more famous, revered and influential as Henri Cartier-Bresson’s Images a la Sauvette or, as the American edition is titled, The Decisive Moment. For new generations of photographers and artists who have missed out on experiencing many of the world’s important books first hand, it cannot be stressed enough how important this new edition of The Decisive Moment is for a contemporary audience. “Robert Frank’s The Americans and Cartier-Bresson’s The Decisive Moment were published within a few years of each other in the 1950s and both books have since become the blueprint for the modern photography book,” Steidl says. “When you look at them, the design, the sequencing of the photos and the printing are – even 60 years later – much better than most of the printed books on the market today. My intention in reprinting both has been to analyze the contents of the books, the intention of the photographers, and to print them in exactly the same way, so the next generation can see how these fine books were made and secure the future of photography publishing.” (Jeffrey Ladd Time Lightbox)

I have an original photograph by Cartier Bresson and it is in this book. I think that this classic book

has many of his greatest photographs. His essay in this book can be found in a few other books about photography. One needs to shop around for the best price for this book. It still is not cheap. This is the greatest photography book that I own. I had a chance to check out the original book in a library many years ago.

I read these reviews lamenting the horrible print quality while waiting for my pre-ordered copy to be delivered and expected to be terribly disappointed. They were so negative I was ready to return the book without opening it. Reviewers claim that the photos look like copies of copies and that HCB never would have let his work be presented this way. Because of these reviews, I thought the Steidl facsimile of the original must have been blundered somehow. It was only at my fiancée's insistence that I even bothered unwrapping the book to take a look at it (she knew how excited I was about the book coming out and even offered to pay for it if I didn't like the edition). I just took my copy out of the shrink wrap, and couldn't be more pleased. I am Thrilled with this book. Here is some background that may be helpful. Several months ago, when I heard this book was being reprinted, I decided to see if my university's interlibrary loan service could track down a copy of the rare, valuable, original for me to borrow, to see if I wanted to buy the Steidl edition when released. I figured it was a longshot since a book this rare and valuable is risky to lend out. But the library was able to get it for me and I can tell you that Steidl did a PERFECT job reproducing it. It is literally as though you are holding a brand new copy of the original in your hands (except better, because the photos haven't faded over 50 years and had hundreds of students' hands on the pages- they look fresh as they should). So I have to admit, I'm really baffled by the negative reviews, especially one that claims to have seen the original. If people think the photos look like copies of copies, well, that's what you would have thought of the original too. Yeah, they're not hyperglossy, but neither was the original book. End of story. It's EXACTLY what the version of the original edition I had looked like (but, again, only better: because it's new, not missing the dust jacket, and comes in a nice slipcase). I can tell you as someone serious about photography books (and ones from Steidl as well: I've spent lots of \$ on Steidl's gorgeous editions of William Eggleston's work) and street photography itself, you should not let these negative reviews of the print quality dissuade you. The content, of course, speaks for itself: the book is an absolute masterpiece. So I would really advise you just see for yourself what you think. You may be disappointed if you think they will look like digital photos. But they are not now, and they never were. What they are is faithful to HCB's vision for the book.

I would like to second Kevin's comments on the excellent quality of the Steidl reproduction. I have the original TDM and side-by-side comparison makes clear that Steidl has done an excellent job of reproducing the original gravure print quality. The blacks are slightly darker in the original, thanks to the ability of the gravure process to lay down ink, and the original has a slightly different quality to the varnish on each image (a slight bit more gloss with the original). The Steidl edition paper is similar to the original in weight and feel (and a bit brighter than my aging original), and contrary to comments from some reviewers the 'sharpness' is fully comparable to the original (and I've never thought sharp was a big thing for HCB). Overall the reproduction yields images that look very much like those in the original. The real issue here for many reviewers may simply be a lack of familiarity with gravure reproduction. If one can get over the fact that it doesn't look like today's (truly excellent) high-end lithographic reproduction, it's possible to appreciate the subtle beauty of the result. For other examples of great gravure, see Paul Strand's *La France de Profil* or Robert Doisneau's *La Banlieue de Paris*, both of which are lovely in a way that's totally different from the printing of today's high-end photo books. Steidl's version of *The Americans* also does a nice job of capturing the quality of the gravure first editions. It's all a bit like arguments over whether inkjet printing looks better on matte or baryta paper. Both can be beautiful but represent different aesthetics. So don't buy this book if you don't like gravure. But if you do, or at least want an edition that is very faithful to the original, the Steidl is it.

A classic that I didn't want to miss. Great, beautiful images. The book has two sets of photos. The first set from before Magnum agency (1947) and the other from there to the first years of 1950 (the book was first published in 1952). You will miss some of the most remembered photos of Cartier-Bresson: the man in the bicycle and the spiral stairs, the two *«voyeurs»*... But there is a lot to be amazed. The big format really does merit the quality of the content. It's a shame that my book apparently felt during delivery, and has a little bend in one of the outer corners, although it didn't affect the pictures. I'm thinking to buy another one for my collection.

Thank you for an excellent reproduction of Cartier Bresson's book "The Decisive Moment" ! I had bought the original in 1955 when I could barely afford the \$12.00 as a proverbially penniless student, and I had it signed by HCB later on when I met him at a presentation during a photographic conference in New York City. I am pleased to use the reprint in order to preserve the original. Thank you.

Great, great book!!! This book gets A+ for facsimile and verity of the original - it is most enjoyable, creatively satisfying and an important book to have been republished. The printing however leaves something to be desired, especially when compared to the original which was a masterpiece not only as the best work around at the time but for its incredible reproduction. I found problems in the shadow and dark areas of the printing of the current version which, in this age of technology is curious and should not have happened. Nonetheless I am extremely happy to have a copy of it.

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