Richard Avedons In the American West is widely regarded as a landmark project in photographic history and a definitive expression of the power of photographic art. First published by Abrams in 1985 in conjunction with an exhibition at the Amon Carter Museum in Fort Worth, Texas, the book is being reissued to accompany a 20th-anniversary re-showing of the exhibition at the same museum.

Avedon, who died in 2004, was the greatest American photographer of his generation. For In the American West, he traveled throughout five years, meeting and photographing the plain people of the West: ranch workers, roustabouts, bar girls, drifters, and gamblers. The resulting book includes 120 exquisitely printed black-and-white photographs, an essay by Avedon on his working methods and portrait philosophy, a journal of the project by
Laura Wilson, and a new foreword by John Rohrbach. The reissuing of this legendary book, out of print for more than a decade, is a major event in the photography world.

**Personal Review: In The American West by John Rohrbach**

I remember seeing this book on its release in the 1980s. I couldn't afford it at the time, but I never forgot those images. Looking at them again, I can see the re-release of this group of Richard Avedon's work was fully justified.

These portraits are raw - each man, woman and child is exposed. Avedon recognised that each of the individuals in these portraits were an entity unto themselves. Their lives are in their faces; there is no need for props or pictorial backgrounds. Everyone was photographed against a simple sheet of white paper - a groundbreaking approach for this genre at the time. No staging, nothing concealed, nothing enhanced and there is no evidence of tweaking.

These photos distressed the romantic notion of 'the west' that prevailed until the late 1980s, and in turn contributed to its redefinition in popular culture. I still find myself looking at these pictures over and over again, wondering about the fate of some of these folks. This is another benefit of a book like this - it poses questions which cannot be easily answered - what happened to these people?

I'm so very thankful I got myself a copy. If you, like myself, are working on building a photography book collection, then this is an essential addition.

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