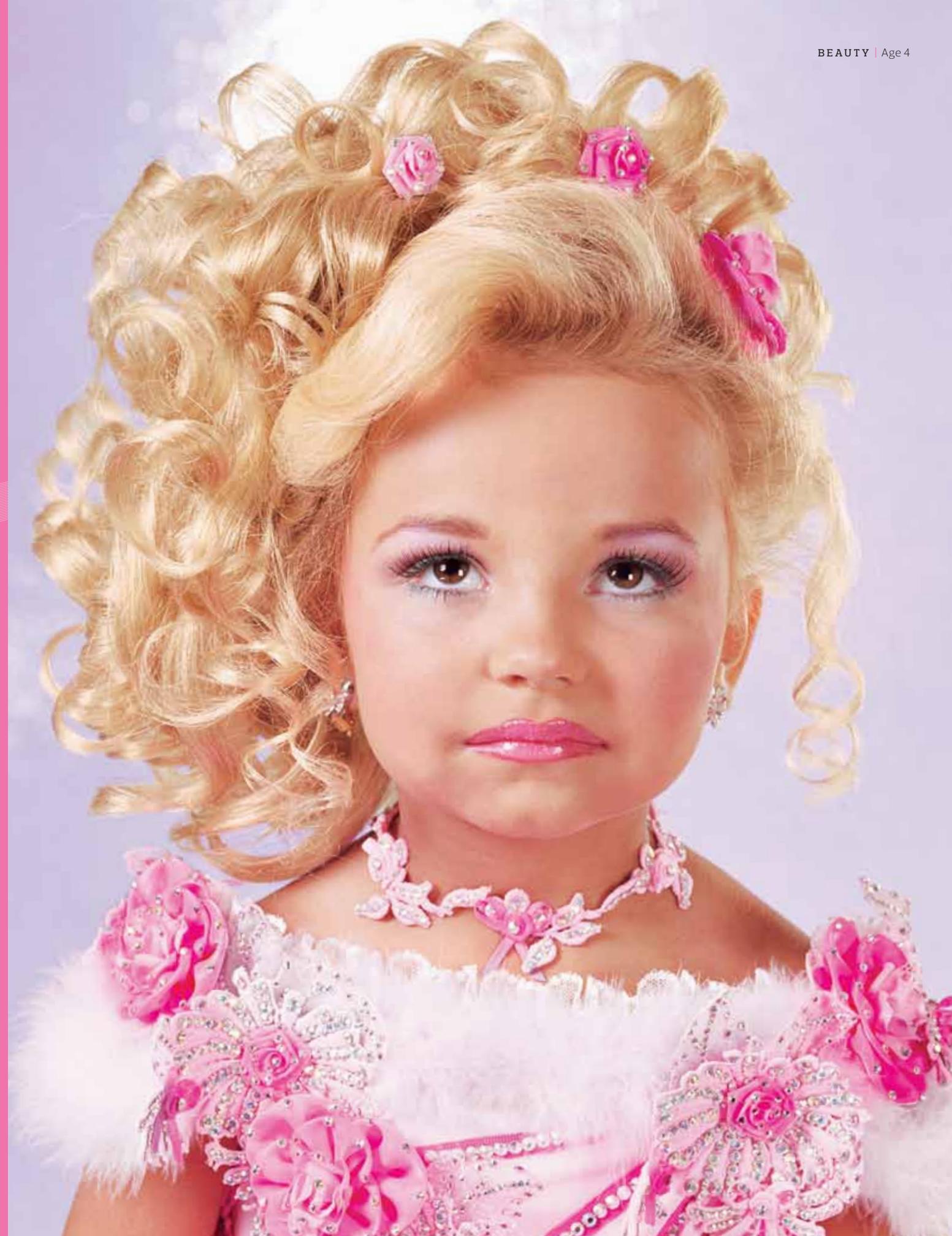


Portfolio by
SUSAN ANDERSON

Princess Princess

↳ Child beauty pageants evoke many emotions, ranging from "Isn't she cute?" to "What were they thinking?" Photographer Susan Anderson has spent the last few years documenting the phenomenon to reveal a fantasy world of miniature grown-ups



WHEN SUSAN ANDERSON visited her first "high glitz" pageant in 2005, she found the contestants—with their sculpted hair, lavish costumes, false eyelashes, and shiny lips—transfixing. "Everyone in L.A. wants to look younger—plumping up their lips, injecting collagen in their cheeks," says Anderson, an L.A.-based commercial and fine art photographer. But in this, the most over-the-top of all child pageant subgenres, girls between age one and ten were being coached to look far older than their years. Anderson has collected these portraits in her new book, *High Glitz: The Extravagant World of Child Beauty Pageants* (powerHouse Books, 144 pages, \$39.95). // **AMY WALLACE**

DANICA | Age 5



ASHLEY | Age 8



KATY | Age 5



ALEX | Age 7



KATARINA | Age 5

Model Behavior

➔ Anderson got the idea to shoot children's pageants after seeing a 2002 documentary on PBS about the history of the Miss America Pageant. When she researched the subject further, she stumbled upon the Universal Royalty Beauty Pageant in Austin, Texas, and decided to attend. Some of the girls there reminded her of porcelain dolls, others of Malibu Barbie or the figures in a Botticelli painting. One she photographed resembled a wee Claudia Schiffer; another had the sass of Nancy Sinatra. Though for many, child beauty contests conjure the now-infamous images of JonBenét Ramsey, Anderson says her interest was sparked by something else: the pageants' candy-coated aesthetic. It seemed drawn from fairy tales and from the classic celebrity portraiture of the 1940s and '50s, such as the works of the late Paul Hesse and Wallace Seawell, who was a friend of Anderson's.



JACLYN | Age 7

Camera Ready

➔ Pageants are an expensive undertaking. The entry fee, an average of \$600 to \$800 for each child, is just the beginning. Contestants' families pay for travel, hotels, custom costumes, professional hair and makeup artists, head shots, and even coaches. Anderson traveled to pageants in cities as far-flung as Santa Ana, Las Vegas, and Nashville. "Coaches will tell you what clothes to wear, which people to buy clothes from or have clothes made from. They coach all your talent routines," one parent told Anderson. "And you know, while they are your best friend, they are also making a buck off of you." Tiaras captivated the photographer. "They were like skyscrapers or monuments," she says. "Some of them are 16 inches tall or taller." Girls can use elaborate hairpieces, fake fingernails, and "flippers"—false front-teeth veneers that assure a flawless smile.



SAVANHA | Age 2

Sugar and Spice

➔ The pictures may look highly posed, but in fact Anderson strove to be a documentarian. After setting up her mini studio in the hotel where a pageant was being held, she would invite girls to have their portraits taken but give them very little direction. "My job is to record what I see," Anderson writes in her book. "The subjects have a self-awareness beyond their years and have been coached and trained for moments like this one in front of the camera." Ultimately children's pageants are about fantasy, she concluded. "They represent a strange microcosm of America itself," Anderson says. "Our own values of beauty, success, and glamour are reflected in the dreams of thousands of young girls." Anderson will be signing *High Glitz* at Book Soup in West Hollywood on September 26; a show of her images opens October 24 at the Kopeikin Gallery in West Hollywood.