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'You can stop snapping at my heels now'



MICHAEL MOK AND HUBERT LE CAMPION

More often than not Photographer Hubert Le Campion and Correspondent Michael Mok are found where there is trouble. Le Campion, a Parisian, is a practiced parachutist. Mok has served two hitches in the U. S. Marines; he fought in Korea and has seen war in Vietnam and Biafra. The last time we mentioned them in this space they had both just been severely tear-gassed in the Paris riots of '68; together they have pursued assignments by canoe in equatorial Africa and by half-track in the Sinai desert. This spring they found themselves on gentler ground, but still in trouble. Mok was writing an article about Georges Simenon, the prolific French mystery writer. Simenon's hero, Inspector Maigret, is a Paris-based detective. It seemed essential to the story, which appears in this issue, to take a picture of Simenon in some of his hero's haunts. Simenon lives in Switzerland and hates to go to Paris—seeing the city upsets his image of it. Mok sent us a cable describing the interview:

"L'affaire Simenon began smoothly enough; Inspector Maigret's creator received us atop his private Alp and graciously endured everything from prying questions to photographs in the snow. It was only when the session was over and we were relaxing with a drink that the novelist dug in his heels. 'No, gentlemen, I am sorry,' he said, puffing thoughtfully at his pipe, 'I am not going to Paris, and that is that. My life now is there'—he pointed to the snowscape outside the window—'and there'—with a wave toward a library stacked from floor to rafters with books, all written by himself. 'It's been seven years since I went to Paris to be photographed.' He broke off with the shrug that Maigret uses for dismissing a case of no interest.

"Hubert and I exchanged a glance. We've been around a lot together, and were thinking, 'So the old fox won't come out of his lair? We shall see.' Le Campion began a long and passionate declaration on the use of photography to evoke mood and I knifed in from time to time with arguments that I thought Maigret would have used—like the need to return to the scene of the crime. After half an hour of this, Simenon put down his pipe and began to laugh. 'Okay,' he said, 'I enjoy any performance if it's sufficiently adept. You can stop snapping at my heels now—I've been herded.' He told one of his secretaries to order a limousine, two first-class air tickets for himself (he doesn't like people bending his ear on planes) and a suite in the George V. On his one-day visit to the city he found the new high-rise buildings and parking garages appalling—but he admitted he had enjoyed himself. 'All the same,' he said, tapping his forehead with the stem of his pipe, 'your Paris can't compare to the Paris I keep right here.'"

George P. Hunt
GEORGE P. HUNT, Managing Editor

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