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Wednesday, April 27, 2011

CAMERA READY

Professional Photographers, Hip Children's Clothing And A Candy-Coated Backdrop Make PhotoOp A Picture-Perfect Destination For Families
By *Alessandra Hickson*

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The glam dressing room, with its lightbulb-framed vanity mirror and mound of beauty products, is fit for a celebrity. But it's not starlets who will be playing dress-up here—it's New York City kids.

Welcome to **PhotoOp**, the new Upper West Side portrait studio that turns out cool, elegant photos of the whole family. Kids of all ages (even newborns) are given star treatment here, injecting the typical portrait experience with pizzazz. The end result? Fun, modern, professional portraits that showcase each child's personality and sense of style.

"The goal is fabulous pictures in a stress-free environment," says Nathan Gindi, a father of three and creator of PhotoOp, which opened in February. Gindi, formerly a partner at a Manhattan law firm, always loved taking pictures of his children. But when it came time to find a portrait studio that offered professional images of five-year-old Lynn, three-year-old Sam and four-month-old Hannah, Gindi couldn't find a fit. So he turned to family friend and renowned photographer Brian Marcus and pitched the idea of a portrait studio for this untapped market.

"There was nothing offering that," says Gindi. And the few studios that did charged well into the thousands for a few snapshots. "My kids change every three months...I want to be able to do this every year and not feel that it's going to cost me

three or four thousand dollars."

At PhotoOp, a basic package starts at \$99, with add-ons running a shoot up to \$450 or more. If that still sounds pricy, remember: this isn't a trip to the local mall's portrait studio. This is an all-inclusive, 45-minute photo shoot with experienced photographers, many with backgrounds at top magazines and newspapers.

PhotoOp offers trendy wears and accessories from [Crewcuts](#) and [Zara Kids](#), your pick of costume jewelry and lighting, as well as colorful backdrops like a candy dot wall made from edible sweets. On top of the set-up, PhotoOp and its photographers also retouch and edit their photos on site.

"A lot of places you go to say, 'We don't retouch because they're babies.' That's cockamamie," says Gindi, citing drool as one aspect of baby photography that's rarely desired. The end products are put online in a private album for immediate viewing and parents can come in and pick their favorites.

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Families can also choose from a wide array of gifts with high-quality printed photos: special bags from London, trays, make-up bags and more. You can even buy Plexiglas prints for the grandparents!

As for the response to the store, Gindi says it's been "fabulous!" Photos on display in the windows draw their fair share of admiring glances from those passing the Columbus Avenue storefront.

In addition to portraiture, PhotoOp offers birthday parties. Ten kids get two hours in the studio to either strike a model-esque pose or have an exclusive dance class with a professional instructor. Both events include a party hostess and a stylist who bring clothing for the party guests and a special outfit for the birthday kid. You can also bring in an iPod to rock out to your favorite tunes.



The added bonus of the birthday event is that parents don't have to take photos—it's already been done for you. "They get their hair done, they get their make-up done, we pull down the seamless paper and just shoot fabulous photos of eight or nine or ten girls having a blast," says Gindi.

Currently Gindi and crew are booked solid with shoots on weekends, doing anywhere between six and eight sessions per day. During the week, they take three or four shoots a day and spend the rest of their time editing and covering events.

"We always want to be out there showing people that this is not a mall shoot. When we're not shooting you, we're shooting Fendi's fashion show," says Gindi. And it's true. Not only is PhotoOp covering Fendi's Kids' Fashion Show but they recently shot Stuart Weitzman's Columbus Circle Grand Opening Party with Moms and the City, which included uniquely-designed photo strips.

In the fall, families can expect an East Side PhotoOp. Other future plans include a downtown store and even one in Brooklyn.



When Gindi isn't working at the studio, he's enjoying his own photography collection. His tastes lie with photos of Frank Sinatra and Ella Fitzgerald by late jazz photographer Herman Leonard. And of course Gindi busies himself in his all-important role as "the fun daddy."

"I love being a parent. I love being in the city," says Gindi. Though he admits shuttling his three kids around can be difficult for him and his wife. "You try going down Lexington Avenue at 3 o'clock in the afternoon to get to class. It's wild!"

But he loves that Lynn gets to visit the city's numerous museums to see the paintings from her storybooks. And that Sam is singing songs

about taxis.

One of Gindi's favorite pictures was taken by a PhotoOp photographer. It's a sunny day in the park with his family. In the snapshot, his son is smiling and running at full speed, while Gindi is in the background holding his daughter. The photo could be featured in any art magazine, but it's still natural and fun.

Fine art meets fresh creativity is one way to describe PhotoOp. Another is with Gindi's own words: "I wake up in the morning and say, 'Everything in here, it's all fabulous!'"

PhotoOp, 442 Columbus Avenue (at 82nd Street), 212-362-1911, photoopnyc.com

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