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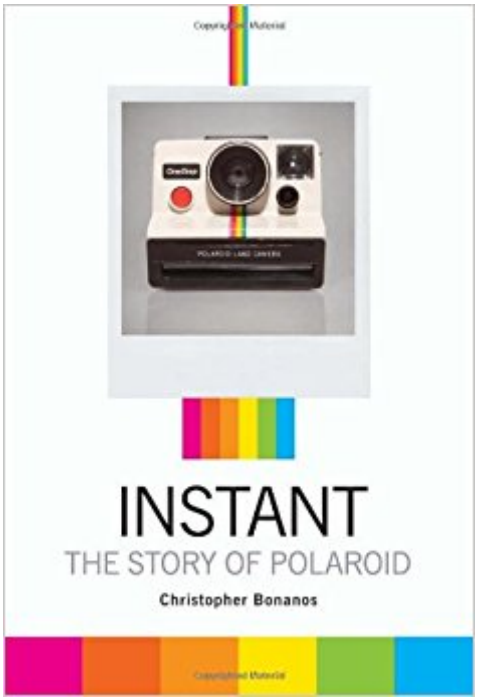
Instant: The Story Of Polaroid



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Synopsis

"Instant photography at the push of a button!" During the 1960s and ’70s, Polaroid was the coolest technology company on earth. Like Apple, it was an innovation machine that cranked out one must-have product after another. Led by its own visionary genius founder, Edwin Land, Polaroid grew from a 1937 garage start-up into a billion-dollar pop-culture phenomenon. Instant tells the remarkable tale of Land’s one-of-a-kind invention-from Polaroid’s first instant camera to hit the market in 1948, to its meteoric rise in popularity and adoption by artists such as Ansel Adams, Andy Warhol, and Chuck Close, to the company’s dramatic decline into bankruptcy in the late ’90s and its unlikely resurrection in the digital age. Instant is both an inspiring tale of American ingenuity and a cautionary business tale about the perils of companies that lose their creative edge.

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Customer Reviews

"Offers up a concise and in-depth cultural history of Polaroid and its brilliant and charismatic leader, Edwin Land. Amidst its carefully constructed narrative of Polaroid’s rise, demise, and renaissance.... Land and Polaroid’s story are remarkable." --Publishers Weekly, 9/3/2012"Instant: The Story of Polaroid clocks in at a slim 192 pages, but it manages to be three books in one: a thoroughly charming, fact-filled stroll through the life and times of Edwin Land and the incredible company he built; a brief, poignant recap of Polaroid’s plunge from the heights into not one but two wrenching bankruptcies; and a small but lovely collection of Polaroid images taken by well-known artists. Christopher Bonanos’s well-researched and well-written book features a terrific Andy Warhol photo

of Liza Minnelli, self-portraits by Chuck Close and Robert Mapplethorpe, and a David Hockney collage, along with photos by Walker Evans, Andre Kertesz, and William Wegman. It also includes several photos by Ansel Adams, who signed on as a $100-a-month Polaroid consultant in 1949, when the company made its first move into photography." -- Fortune.com"When I was little, long before personal computers, let alone Instagram-enabled digital camera-phones, Arthur C. Clarke wrote that advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic. By far the most uncanny, sexy, insanely great piece of technological magic in our household was my parents' Polaroid. Chris Bonanos' smart, thoughtful, charming chronicle of that iconic invention and its remarkable inventor is a delight." -- Kurt Andersen, author of True Believers and Heyday, host of public radio's Studio 360"This cultural history of the eccentric camera company-which has fair claim to being the Apple of the '60s-is simultaneously breezy and deeply researched, making it the perfect compulsive reading for design enthusiasts and Instagram addicts alike." -- Details.com"Tells the story of the forgotten genius who turned Polaroid into a cultural phenomenon." -- Washington Post"Reading Instant: The Story of Polaroid by Christopher Bonanos rekindled memories of Polaroid cameras for me. And I think it will do the same for legions of others who were also mesmerized back in the day by this cool gizmo, one of America's greatest inventions." -- San Jose Mercury News"A fascinating tale of rapid rise, catastrophic collapse, and the riveting ride between the two, at once told like never before and strangely familiar in its allegorical quality... brimming with lessons for modern tech mavericks." -- Brain Pickings"Edwin Land was one of Steve Jobs's first heroes, and this book shows why. He created a startup in a garage that grew into a company that stood at the intersection of creativity and technology. This is a fascinating saga, both inspiring and cautionary, about innovation and visionary leadership." -- Walter Isaacson, author of Steve Jobs"Christopher Bonanos tells Polaroid's story with fluid, energetic prose that mirrors the thrilling arc of the company's story, twining together technology, fine art, business, design and pop culture into a 175-page powerhouse. Whether you pick it up because you loved your old Polaroid camera or because you want to find out why Steve Jobs modeled Apple after the Polaroid company, you'll be delighted by this pithy snapshot of a true American icon." -- NPR.org"A sympathetic and beautifully told history of Polaroid and Edwin Land, the visionary who was the company's founder and presiding genius. It is the rare design-subject book with a truly dramatic arc, and storytelling that lives up to it." -- Design Observer

INSTANT: THE STORY OF POLAROID is a book about a very unusual company. In the 1960s and 1970s, Polaroid was what Apple is today: the coolest technology company on earth, the one with irresistible products, the one whose stock kept climbing way past the point of logic. In its heyday,

Polaroid was an absolute innovation machine--a scientific think tank that periodically kicked out a fantastically profitable, covetable product. In fact, the late Steve Jobs expressly said that he modeled his company to a great extent after Polaroid.Instant is a business story, about what happens when a company loses its innovative spark. It is a fine-arts story, showcasing the amazing things photographers (from Ansel Adams to Andy Warhol to Chuck Close) did with Polaroid film. It is a technology story, of a company that created and maintained a niche all its own for 60 years. And it is a pop-culture history, of a friendly product that millions of people absolutely adored. I like to think that it also tells a larger story, about the rise and fall of American invention and manufacturing.

As an instant film and Polaroid enthusiast, I was pretty pumped about getting this book. I was even more delighted when it showed up though. It’s fun to read, I knocked the whole thing down on a long day of travel, and I couldn’t have been happier with it. It’s a great story of the inner workings of a company and a man who had an impossible idea that he made real through with little more than genius and determination.The book also offers many full-color photo reproductions and impressive illustrations. Whoever art-directed the book gets a high-five from me. It’s beautiful.Folks who like to read about Steve Jobs and crazy CEO-types need to get on the Edwin Land bus. That guy was the OG super controlling genius boss.

This was an excellent book. I am an aficionado of Polaroid photography, and it was nice to learn about the history of the company, and of Edwin H. Land. The final chapters of the book remind me very much of reading about the making of "Let It Be," and the challenges The Beatles faced near the end of their run. I know that’s a bit random, but the creativity, tenacity, and the rise of Polaroid, the incredible popularity, the changes and eventual ending...in my mind it parallels. A must read for anyone interested in instant photography, entrepreneurs, inventors, and history. It’s all there, and packed with great Polaroid photos as well.

I am also reading "A Triumph of Genius" great book, this book though is more of an overview. Hard to put down. I spent years shooting commercial work for Polaroid, heard lots of stories, gossip, rumors, had met Dr. Land, even had two cameras signed by him (still have)...but this book lays it out and constantly shows me how much of the linear path I never knew the details of.....highly recommended.

This was a great little book. Finished it within a week (i read slow). Being a huge fan of Steve Jobs,

and having read almost everything there is about the man and apple, the rise of Polaroid is SO very similar to apple its not even funny. Quotes spoken often by Steve Jobs are basically Edwin Land’s quotes, but worded slightly different. Even the video Polaroid did for the SX-70 mentioned in the book, which can be found on youtube, contains extraordinary similarities with apple’s product launch videos. It’s no joke when the author stated that Steve modelled apple after polaroid.One thing that couldn’t have been copied, but again, strikingly similar between both Land and Jobs was the fact of their super-human visions of the future. Land predicted what today’s smartphone cameras would be like back in the days when instant film photography intrigued people beyond their wildest imagination. Similar visions can be found with Jobs, who predicted the rise of personal computer, the wide adoption of graphical user interface, and futuristic mobile devices such as the ipad.It’s definitely a great read. I only gave it 4 instead of 5 stars because the video in the descriptions almost spoiled a little too much about the book... It basically summarized the entire the book, so i wouldn’t suggest watching it before reading.

Looking for an addictive and breezy little non-fiction book that you can polish off on a round trip plane flight? "Instant" is your ticket. This slim little volume covering the history of one of the most recognizable names in corporate America--and purveyors of one of the world’s most memorable products--is written in a friendly, conversational style that really pulled me along.Everyone except the very youngest among us fondly remember the pre-digital thrill of snapping a photo and seeing the results just seconds later. In a time when amateur photographers dropped their film cassette off at the nearest Foto Hut and waited a week for the prints to come back from the lab, Polaroid’s instant print was rather magical.Steve Jobs has often been compared to the father of instant film and co-founder of Polaroid, Edwin Land. They shared the common trait of being passionate visionaries who built a cult-like following of true believers who wanted to work for them. They ran companies that certainly wanted to make money, but that were first and foremost dedicated to the dream of their magical product. Both men were unshakable in their own self-confidence and their unwavering belief in the righteousness of their cause. Land, a fascinating character who has already inspired books covering his life in detail, gets less attention in "Instant" than one might want, but the nature of this book is to be brief. If you’re interested in following up for more, you certainly have that option elsewhere.Part biography of Edwin Land and part company history, "Instant" also reviews the technical challenges of creating a self-contained, portable photo developing system, highlighting both its successes and notable shortcomings. (Various early incarnations of instant prints curled, discolored or required the application of an inconvenient liquid fixitive following printing.) It was a full

twenty years after the debut of instant black-and-white Polaroid film that the familiar color prints with their large, white bottom border appeared in the early 70s."Instant" also covers a little-known aspect of the Polaroid story: the small band of artists who were some of the product's biggest fans. (Did you know that none other than visual perfectionist Ansel Adams had a decades-long association with Polaroid?) Other prominent big names who were advocates of Polaroid film included Chuck Close and Andy Worhol, among others. This is perhaps one of the more surprising aspects of the story. Polaroid was often regarded by connoisseurs as a synonym for inferior photographs meant strictly for the amateur who didn't mind things like soft focus or less than accurate color saturation. But Polaroid produced a number of other far lesser-known instant-film products dedicated to professional applications. In fact, they produced super large format studio cameras capable of delivering superior quality prints that could compete with the finest equipment.Alas, despite the successes of Polaroid and its visionary leader who gave the world a magical product, it became a victim of its devotion to the very product that inspired it. The tragedy of Polaroid is that it was generally well positioned to take advantage of the digital revolution but it failed--for a complex number of reasons--to do so. For those of us who remember the joy of watching photos resolve into existence from the gray-green haze of a Polaroid frame, the final chapters of "Instant" leave us with a wistful feeling.

I read "Instant" in an instant...at least it felt that way. The book is a very enjoyable introduction and overview of the history of Polaroid and Edwin Land. However, after recently reading such excellent historical books like "The Idea Factory/Bell Labs" by Jon Gertner or "Steve Jobs" by Walter Isaacson, "Instant" feels like it has the depth of an extended magazine article. I was particularly hoping for far more depth regarding Edwin Land himself. And it seems like that information is readily available, if the author had chosen to include it: The book makes several repeated references to older, out-of-print biographical books about Land, which unfortunately makes me feel like I should have just read those, instead.

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