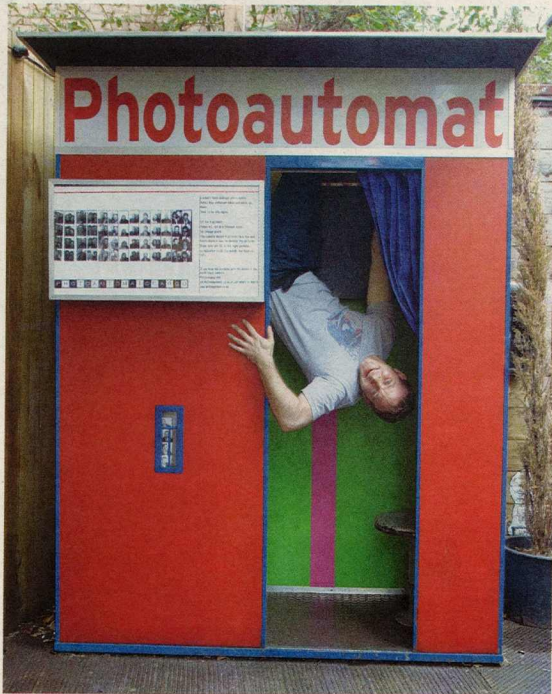


Report



← **Photoautomat** (left)
'The wait is part of the process,' says Alex Kokott (left and inset below). 'It's like when you're hungry and waiting for a meal. Sometimes the anticipation is better than the food'

→ **The Mighty Booth**
'Fancy dress was always part of the plan,' says Lee Stewart (left, with Thomas Matthey). 'When you shut that curtain, you go into your own little world for 20 seconds'

Camera obscurer

Remember when photo booths were fun places to pull a face, sit on laps and make memories, rather than just take passport shots? Kate Burt meets the enthusiasts determined to keep them alive

PHOTOGRAPHS BY JEAN GOLDSMITH

Perhaps you did it in the back of Woolworths. Or maybe in a corner of the Post Office, the shopping centre, or in the ticket hall of your local train station. Wherever the location, there was always a sense of excitement as you stepped behind that stiff, synthetic curtain, adjusted the height of the heavy stool and fed the slot with coins. Then, four flashes – followed by an impatient wait for the prize: a sticky little strip of photographs, each one different.

From the 1960s to the 1980s, we took the photo booth – in its analogue, old-school form – for granted. And, though they were widely used for passport

pictures, there was something special about the just-for-fun souvenirs that took their time to drop out of the booth's little slot, still wet and reeking of developing chemicals: a memento of that bad 1980s perm; an intense teenage friendship; kohl-eyed punk rebellion; your parents, young, giggly and wearing big hair.



But the history of the booth stretches back further than the 1960s. The invention of the "Photomaton" in 1925 is credited to Anatol Josepho, a Siberian immigrant living in New York – though his machine needed to be manned. The first self-service, automatic booth came about in 1946 in California, created by the American firm Auto Photo, which went on to set up a UK subsidiary in the →

