

Miuccia PRADA

“Mrs. Prada does not make trends with her work; she makes statements. In her design there is...a collision of the bold and the gentle, the hard and the soft. She understands that to be a woman in the modern world is to be more than one thing at once. So much so that we utter, ‘It’s simply Prada or nada!’”

—Lupita Nyong’o, actress and 2014 Woman of the Year

By Cindi Leive Photograph by Patrick Demarchelier

When I interviewed for my first editor-in-chief job years ago, a friend who worked in fashion took me aside to offer counsel on what to wear. “You’ll want a Prada suit,” he instructed. Not to worry, I told him, I had a few good suits. I was fine with suits. “No,” he said, looking exasperated. “A Prada suit. Do you understand?” Oh. I trotted uptown with some annoyance, but the second I walked into Prada’s mint green Fifth Avenue flagship, I understood. I had been wearing clothes. This was *fashion*. I tried on half the store, plunked down my cash for a cleverly designed boxy black nylon jacket and a sporty skirt—the look of the moment—and held my underpaid breath as I snipped off the tags.

I got the job, and I still have that suit. It was only years later, though, as I watched show after wildly creative show up close in Milan, that I understood where the magic of Prada comes from, which is, plain and simple, the curious, eclectic, independent, feminist brain of Miuccia Prada. Mrs. Prada, as she’s called, is not a showy, self-promoting type; blink and you’ll miss her runway bow. But almost 40 years into her career, she’s still the designer to beat in terms of consistent critical success, and a wonderful example of someone who has built an enormous business while still having—wait for it—fun. “Fun...should always be present when you work,” says Prada, 67, who’s been known to exit her Via Fogazzaro office by a three-story twisty slide built there for her by the artist Carsten Höller. “Until I am smiling, I know I am doing nothing good.”

And this has worked. Today Prada’s empire, cohelmed by her husband, Patrizio Bertelli, includes six Prada collections a year and four for sister line Miu Miu; the company has more than 600 stores worldwide. Last year Prada and Bertelli opened a groundbreaking Rem Koolhaas–designed headquarters for their Fondazione Prada in Milan. There, visitors find everything from a four-story gallery covered in gold leaf called the Haunted House to an extremely Instagrammable café conceived by the director

Wes Anderson. This year the brand also launched fragrances La Femme Prada and L’Homme Prada, a process the designer cheerfully describes as “a nightmare” because of her longtime conviction that “there is no one ‘Prada woman’” or, by extension, single Prada image or scent. “I have no ‘icon,’” she says. “I hate the idea! Women are what they are. I do what I think is right...and if people like it, I am happy.”

Once upon a time, though, she had zero interest in fashion as a career. Prada, whose grandfather Mario Prada founded the family’s leather-goods company in 1913, was more interested in theater (she trained as a mime) and politics. “There was a serious revolution going on; you really felt you could change something,” she says of the sixties. Working in fashion didn’t seem substantial in comparison. Even after she took over the label, creating its iconic nylon backpacks—even after she began producing women’s wear, 10 years in—she kept her designs restrained and minimal. “What I wanted at the beginning [was] to really hide who I was. I didn’t want to tell too much about myself,” she admits now. “I was refusing to be fully involved in the fashion world.... I had to go through all my passage through the Fondazione and the work in art to feel more happy in my own job.”

When she started bringing more of herself to her work in the early nineties, though, everything shifted. (Doesn’t it always?) For two decades now, Prada’s collections have lassoed the world’s attention without ever getting predictable. (Her shows are such draws for fashion lovers that once, when a normally levelheaded colleague of mine got the time wrong and missed one, she burst into tears.) “Every season is a new range of reference,” says her friend the artist Francesco Vezzoli. “And why is that? Because Mrs. Prada is not making fashion. She is ‘just thinking,’ and so her reflections surface on the garment she produces.”

There are, of course, some common denominators season to season: Prada’s repurposing of trappings of traditional femininity, from corsetry to crystal (continued on page 239)

The Power of Work

"You have to earn your own life if you want to be free," says Prada, photographed at the restaurant Lapérouse in Paris. "If you are independent you are...free."

Prada coat, shoes.



Zendaya

The Voice for Girls

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 216

that. I'm going to write something that's actually powerful."

Today Zendaya has emerged as a key voice of a generation pushing for change. "[Acting] has been my passion," she says. "But as I've started to understand the power and influence I have, I've realized it's really this avenue for me to do bigger, more meaningful things. For me to help somebody." Helping others, it seems, is in her DNA. At age eight, she asked friends to donate money to an animal shelter in lieu of giving her a birthday gift. At 18, she mobilized her fan base to benefit Convoy of Hope's feedONE initiative. At 19, she did the same for UNAIDS (the United Nations program that combats HIV/AIDS) and raised \$50,000—a lot of money considering it came mostly from her fans' allowances. "She is showing that young people are actors of change: supporting young girls, refusing to accept violence against women," says Michel Sidibé, executive director of UNAIDS. "Zendaya is a role model for that new activism."

Her platform will grow larger next year as she leaps into movies, with starring roles in *Spider-Man: Homecoming* and *The*

Greatest Showman, alongside Hugh Jackman. (Also slated: a fashion line, Daya by Zendaya; a second album; and Zendaya: The App, for fans to shop and connect with the star.) But if Zendaya is striving for a better future, she'd also like to see a better *now*. In September she took to Snapchat to suggest that racism had led a California supermarket clerk to treat her and a friend badly. The incident made waves, as she'd planned. "It's a discussion," she says. "It's like, 'Yo, I can't believe this happened to me. Does this happen to you guys? We should do something about it.'"

Her fans follow that lead. "I get picked on because I'm black! And because of you I stand up for myself," a fan tweeted her in August. That's the reaction Zendaya strives for. "You have to learn to appreciate yourself and the power you hold," she says. "Whatever is inside of you—your soul, your power—find it. See it. Respect it. Protect it. And *use it*." **G**

Alex Morris is a contributing editor at New York magazine.

Miuccia Prada

The Fashion Force

CONTINUED FROM PAGE 208

bedazzlement, and her refusal to make everything sweet and safe (spring 2017 features both seductive feathers and purposefully unpretty 1970s-inspired prints). "Miuccia explores ugliness," explains costume designer Catherine Martin, who collaborated with Prada on *The Great Gatsby*. "The ability to question conventional expectations and to clash them with the most traditional female foibles, like pink and glitter, is illustrative of [her] great humor, intelligence, and human understanding."

Make no mistake: Prada's clothes work on a superficial level too—the woman knows her way around the red carpet (see below)—but they always have a deeper meaning. "Years before anyone was talking about female empowerment through fashion, Miuccia was assiduously designing clothes that spoke to our need for beautiful things to wear, while simultaneously celebrating and confounding what it means to be a woman in today's world," says longtime friend Anna Wintour, the editor-in-chief of *Vogue*. "She makes the political personal for all of us, every single time we wear Prada." Simple prettiness, agrees *New York Times* fashion

critic Vanessa Friedman, is not the point. "What always strikes me about Miuccia Prada's work," she says, "is that every season she is effectively thinking out loud on the runway about women, their lives, their changing geopolitical status, their responsibilities and values. But instead of doing it in words, she's doing it in clothes."

For Prada, the joy is still in the process. "People ask me, 'How do you feel being famous?'" she says. "I say, 'I don't feel that.' It's not that I'm not happy that I am successful—actually, I am. But I never enjoy the *pleasure* of success." She feels happiest, she says, "when I can just work." (Love, she adds, is "super-fundamental" too: "You have to be lucky to have it.") But Prada is heated on the subject of how finding meaningful work is crucial. "I see so many young people, they don't have any excitement," she says. "It's so much easier if you do! And that is what I wish to everybody." And especially for women, work is independence, she believes. "If you are inde-

pendent, you...are free," says the free-thinking designer. "If you have to ask something [of] somebody else? No way—that is out of discussion. You have to earn your own life if you want to be free. It is the only thing to do." **G**

Cindi Leive is the editor-in-chief of *Glamour*.

The Thinking-Woman's Red Carpet

Uma Thurman (1995), Carey Mulligan (2012), Lena Dunham (2013), Lupita Nyong'o (2014), and Sarah Paulson (2016), all in Prada



PARTY LINES

Anna Wintour Joked About *The Devil Wears Prada* Last Night

By Lisa Butterworth

November 15, 2016
5:21 p.m. Share Tweet Share Pin It Email Comment Print

Anna Wintour. Photo: Stefanie Keenan/Getty Images for Glamour

Female empowerment wasn't the only thing on display at *Glamour's Women of the Year Awards* last night in Los Angeles. Friendship was also honored, especially the one between award recipient *Miuccia Prada* and *Anna Wintour*, who introduced the designer.

"Every season the day after her show, Miuccia and I have a standing lunch date in Milan," Wintour said. "Miuccia arrives promptly, always impeccably dressed with exceptional jewelry, and we discuss everything — art, politics, family, film, books, even fashion."

But apparently there was one thing the friends didn't talk about. "Many years ago, the *Prada* name and I were thrown together in the title of a book and then a movie," Wintour continued. "For a while it seemed that that association was the only flattering thing about the enterprise, and Miuccia and I never discussed it. Finally, at one of our lunches, she leaned across the table and she said, 'Anna, that book, it's good for both of us.' And the subject has never come up again."

Even the famously stoic editor couldn't make it through the introduction without getting emotional. "Miuccia was right of course, and I have taken inspiration from her calm confidence ever since. It is her extraordinary

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wide-ranging mind and her generous vision that we celebrate here tonight. It is with great pride and great love," she said, choking up, "that I present Mrs. **Prada**."

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