



An interview with Miuccia Prada

# **LA FEMME PRADA L'HOMME PRADA**

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Miuccia Prada has never given an interview about Prada fragrances before – this is the first time. That’s because, for Prada, perfumes are never an afterthought. Instead, the world of perfume is a life-long passion that is both personal and profound. Working alongside ‘nose’ Daniela Andrier and Fabio Zambernardi – Prada’s Design Director – through Prada fragrances she explores and extends her vision for women and men to encompass a whole olfactory world. For Prada, “fragrance is pure instinct.” And with the launch of La Femme Prada and L’Homme Prada, the quintessential Prada fragrances, Miuccia Prada has broken her silence on the personal meaning of perfumes for her, the distinctly human and highly crafted approach she attaches to them, and the place they occupy in the ‘Pradasphere.’

**How did your work with fragrances begin?**

“I love perfumes very, very much. I can distinguish quality in a second. For instance, even though I drink wine, I am never able to really understand a wine. But with perfume, I get it immediately. It is very instinctive for me. I remember being about sixteen and the mother of a friend of mine had this really incredible perfume. I was obsessed with this perfume. I would go to her home and smell it in the bathroom. It was from a little artisanal shop on Madison Avenue that no longer exists called Shelley Marks. I had other perfumes, but with that one I really fell in love. It was a total obsession. I used to go to New York and buy the perfume from the shop; this little shop, always with an old man who only used to

make perfumes in the summer with a few students. At some point it closed down. And then I felt really bad; for me this was kind of a disaster. This for sure represented something particular for me. Of course, I liked other perfumes, but this was a very special moment.”

**It was an attraction, a love story...**

“So the first perfume I tried was based on this one. I went to a man with a piece of the bottle and told him what I remembered about it, what was in my imagination. I tried to translate the memory of that perfume. And actually that was my first fragrance: Prada Amber. And now with Daniela Andrier, she does this with me a lot of the time. A few years ago she said to me, ‘January, February, March...’ She had made versions of that perfume. The last one she gave to me, I am wearing today and I really like it. Still, I am in that.”

**So, in a sense, you wear a version of a memory. Do you feel that fragrance has become part of you?**

“I don’t know what makes me so attracted to it... We have a very strong relationship to fragrance. Sometimes it’s about the fantasy, but for me, it is something really physical and totally instinctive.”

**Is instinct what ultimately defines your attraction to a fragrance? People see you as very ideas driven, but it always seems that instinct comes first with you – and then you justify the instinct with ideas.**

“Absolutely.”

**So how does this work with La Femme Prada and L'Homme Prada?**

“Ultimately, I have tried to do something of a very high quality – and I think we have succeeded in this. What I think is most difficult – and it’s why at the beginning of my career I didn’t want to do perfume – is that I was afraid of the advertising. That’s because you have to reduce the whole fantasy of the perfume; you reduce this abstract thought, which is really like music mainly, down to an image. To define it in such a way is really difficult. In fashion, it is about this person, somebody who might change and who you can change very often. But with perfume you have to give the impression of a whole world. And that is nearly impossible. So now, on the occasion of launching the new perfume for men and women, of course, I still worry about the advertising. It is usual to represent one woman and one man generically, and we decided we wanted more than one woman and one man. There is the idea of La Femme Prada and L’Homme Prada, but actually they don’t exist; there are many. So we have two actresses and actors that play three or four roles each. Ideally, this is the main concept: that there isn’t a single icon representing the dream of a woman or a man. It is actually the opposite, that these people represent the reality, the differences and so on.”

**Then there is the slipperiness of identity generally, and especially when you are dealing with a brand and the brand has your name on it...**

“That’s why whenever I have to talk about perfume I become very nervous! Everything is about defining and having some

kind of rhetoric, when actually, I believe in the opposite. And that's as much as I love perfumes – and really, I love perfumes. It's an occasion to put the accent on feelings, irrationality, and instinct.”

**I suppose because it is very difficult to define why you like a perfume; it's more of a feeling. You either like it or you don't...**

“Or it touches you or it doesn't. It is a bit like music, I would say: abstract and very spiritual of course.”

**How did you want to explore the world of women and men through the fragrances? In your fashion, I often think you experiment with the men and present something quite raw and confrontational, then those ideas are refined and given different layers of complexity for women.**

“First of all, I wanted to present these fragrances together, with the same concept, with the same photographer [Steven Meisel], so that they are really interchangeable – I like that. Also, personally, I would say that I nearly always love men's perfume when it is a little more exotic and feminine. In general, I have found I am attracted to men's perfume that has various feminine notes.”

**When La Femme Prada and L'Homme Prada perfumes are worn and fade, the scent of each grows closer together. They smell similar in the end. I suppose that is a reflection of nature.**

“There is not a masculine and a feminine flower that smells differently. And they don't have masculine names and feminine names – there are not flowers for men and flowers for women.”

**Identity and memory are very important in these fragrances...**

“And instinct for sure, and how you do not quite know what moves you. It is the same when you are attracted to a person – there is no reason. What perfume covers are unknown things, mysteries, and instinct. Perfume is not logical, that’s for sure.”

**But often people think that you are very logical and rational...**

“I am much more human and instinctive than rational. I also have that part, but the most prominent part is the other.”

**Did you have particular women and men in mind when you were making the fragrances?**

“No, not really. I believe in individuality and I never had an icon that was a woman. I like many different men and women, but an icon of style? No, never. Actually, I hate the idea.”

**There is a certain classical focus in the imagery for the perfume. Something simplified with a concentration on portraiture, on character, on an individual.**

“In this campaign, even if the figure is more naked or more covered, we wanted to look at the different aspects of a personality, but always within that portrait framework. We wanted to say, ‘You are who you are and what you want to be.’”

**Is that also how you feel about the people who wear your clothes?**

“I always thought that people are good when they are happy

in what they are wearing. Everyone is fine as long as they are enjoying their thoughts and themselves. A person like this is rarer. It implies a lot of confidence, or a will, an idea about who they are. A woman with a will, it's not about being powerful, it's about somebody who wants to enjoy her own life."

**In what you do generally there is always an idea of quality and craftsmanship. But there is also the sense of the craftsmanship of ideas and experiences.**

"In general, I like strong fragrances. And the quality has to be good. There is an element of no compromise. In perfume, quality is particularly important. Because it's that smell, or it just doesn't work."

**In the new perfumes, there does seem a sense of tradition with something slightly off. What is the inspiration?**

"We have a base that is slightly exotic but clean at the same time – this is something I like in general. This was always the starting point."

**Many things seem to be read on two levels in what you do. In your fashion, people can read things as pretty when they are often perverse. But you can't play those games with perfume; it comes from the heart. It's emotional.**

"Yes, and when you wear it, it is a lot about pleasure. When you put the perfume on, it is a moment of pleasure for sure. And then if you really like it, it's more than pleasure. It's like eating a cake that you like."

**So there is a purity of pleasure and sensuality for you in perfume, without intellectual games.**

“It is not playing a game. That is why perfume is so much more difficult because it obliges you to be even more honest. In fashion, you can play because you have so many more occasions and a variety of ways to express. With perfume, I have discovered why I become so nervous about it: you can’t play. You can’t be smart or funny; it is what it is. You have to go to the core.”

**Well, it’s what you said about that first fragrance. It’s like being in love.**

“You can’t play at being in love; you either are or you aren’t. Here we come to the truth.”

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