

# WWD

HONORS  
2021

Fashion. Beauty. Business.



## MIUCCIA, THE THINKER

Throughout her career, Miuccia Prada has used her endless curiosity to bring an intellectual approach to fashion that has not only proven continually unpredictable, but also changed the way women and men dress, from minimalism to “ugly chic.” She even shocked the industry by bringing on another famed designer, Raf Simons, as co-creative director, and the two have created some of the most exciting collections of the last year. For that and more, Prada is this year’s recipient of WWD’s John B. Fairchild Honor for Lifetime Achievement. But the shy Prada keeps it all in low-key perspective. “In my work, I have tried to give my contribution, to introduce something else in a world that conceived beauty as an end in itself,” she told WWD. *For more on Prada, and the other WWD Honors recipients, see pages 5 to 29.*

ILLUSTRATION BY ALVARO TAPIA

# WWD HONORS 2021

**HONORS**  
2021

**Miuccia Prada**

John B. Fairchild  
Honor



# WWD HONORS 2021

## Miuccia Prada On What Makes Her Tick

The Italian designer speaks with WWD ahead of being recognized with the John B. Fairchild Honor, celebrating her enduring influence on fashion.

BY LUISA ZARGANI  
ILLUSTRATION BY ALVARO TAPIA

**MILAN** – Curiosity fuels Miuccia Prada’s creative power, whether she turns her attention to fashion, the arts, science, architecture or religion – no subject is off the table.

Her thirst for knowledge and strong interest in what happens around the world have long motivated the Italian designer and surely contributed to her enduring influence on fashion.

Prada knows her own mind and has constantly dared to experiment with new and trailblazing collections every season, while maintaining her unmistakable aesthetic.

Her designs have often been pigeon-holed in categories, from minimalist to “ugly-chic” or “vintage-lady chic,” despite her continuous swings into new territory with each unpredictable and uncompromising collection. She generated a “retro revolution” with her nostalgic schoolgirl looks and was a pioneer in exploring sportswear in luxury. She added inventive holographic patterns or kitschy touches to her bourgeois looks and played with tropical prints of bananas and monkeys, as well as the concept of uniforms.

Her lipstick-print skirt was paired with Elsa Schiaparelli’s matchstick-motif dress and a sequin Prada ensemble resembling fish scales was teamed with a projection of a Schiaparelli dress with a lobster motif at the Costume Institute’s “Schiaparelli and Prada: Impossible Conversations” exhibit back in 2012, shining the light on Prada’s quirky undertones and irony.

Examples of her far-reaching and thought-provoking scope range from a 2012 show dedicated to power and how fashion can telegraph authority and supremacy, embodied in the finale by actors Willem Dafoe, Tim Roth, Adrien Brody and Gary Oldman, to a 2016 collection that alluded to wars and upheavals that destroy or displace millions of people – both with clothes that wowed because her priority is always to deliver great fashion. Then there are the accessories – a core business for the Prada Group, from the ‘80s Nylon backpack to the signature Flame Wedge shoes.

Prada has long relied on Rem Koolhaas and the AMO agency to provide impactful backdrop for her ideas, from the murals of Mars in February 2004, which she said at the time reminded her of the inspirational 19th-century German painter Caspar David Friedrich, to the undulating wooden partitions, benches and beds with posters and signage of women in various capacities that covered the walls at the fall 2017 presentation.



Miuccia Prada takes her bow at the end of the “Multiple Views” spring 2021 digital show.

The designer also unleashes her creativity on the Miu Miu brand, named after her nickname, which was launched in 1993. Over time the label has grown into a kind of manifesto for diversity and inclusion and women’s empowerment, touting individuality and relying on a sort of cult following. Exemplifying the brand’s multifaceted customers, the holiday 2020 ad campaign, called Miu Miu Icons, was fronted by seven diverse artists who

embody women’s polyhedric personalities and talents. Photographed by Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott, the campaign was fronted by the likes of Oscar-winning actress Kim Basinger; cult indie actress and director Chloë Sevigny; Chinese actress, model and former ballet dancer Du Juan, and British actress Raffey Cassidy as well as Emma Corrin, Storm Reid, and musician and actor Jordan Kristine Seamón.

For years, the series of Miu Miu

Women’s Tales, a collection of short films by international female directors, followed by conversations and panels related to the films and the role of women in cinema, for example, have been screened around the world.

To further differentiate the brand from the Prada label, which shows in Milan, Miu Miu has typically held runways shows in Paris – except of course for the digital presentations conceived during the COVID-19 pandemic. ►

**PLAID REPORTEDLY COMES UP WITH THE GOODS IN BID FOR GFT/2**

Women's Wear Daily • The Retailers' Daily Newspaper • October 7, 1994 Vol. 168, No. 69 \$1.25

**WWD FRIDAY**  
Beauty

# Prada's Restraining Order

MILAN — In a spring collection that was all about purity and subtlety, Miuccia Prada created a whole new breed of sweater girls. They may be sweet, but they're also chic — from their tiny belted waists to their New Length skirts. Here, the sheer, ribbed navy pullover and white pleated skirt. Now just watch everyone get out their sketch pads. For more on Thursday's shows, see page 9.

## CK One Dominates Fragrance Launches, Shatters Projections

By Julie L. Belcove

NEW YORK — Calvin Klein has done it again.

CK One, his latest fragrance, roared into stores last week, crushing sales projections and generating the kind of retailer comment that most companies would kill for.

"It's the biggest runaway success I've ever encountered," said Margo Scavarda, senior vice president at Broadway Stores, Los Angeles.

Other retailers are calling Calvin Klein's much talked-about "shared fragrance" for men and women "the

See **CK**, Page 4

PHOTO BY STEFANO PERILZI

A fashion hit, as reflected on a WWD cover from October 1994.

Despite her success, Prada has succeeded in remaining quite private. Reserved and press-shy, few personal details emerge — apart from, for example, her passion for vintage jewelry. In the mid-'70s, she began to work on the accessories at her family's company, first set up by her grandfather Mario Prada as a luggage and accessories firm in 1913 — and the flagship in Milan's luxury shopping arcade Galleria Vittorio Emanuele II remains as a reminder of those early days, with its original mahogany shelving units and early 20th-century flavor.

She earned a doctorate in political science from the University of Milan, and in the mid-'70s studied mime at the city's Piccolo Teatro under the late legendary director Giorgio Strehler. Throughout the political upheavals of the '70s she was a member of the *Unione Donne Italiane* [Union of Italian Women] and engaged in campaigning, distributing leaflets while wearing Yves Saint Laurent. She met her husband, Patrizio

Bertelli, who also had a leather goods business, at a trade show, and she has often said it was thanks to him that she ventured into apparel. Prada's first women's show bowed for fall/winter 1988.

The couple share the co-chief executive officer's role and together they have built a fashion company that last year reached sales of 2.42 billion euros and that has been listed on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange since 2011. A strong performance in its retail business, a triple-digit percentage growth in its online channel, and solid gains in the Asia-Pacific and U.S. markets helped the company return to the black in the first half of the year and see a 60 percent jump in revenues compared with the first half of 2020, impacted by the global COVID-19 pandemic.

Their eldest son Lorenzo, who joined the company in 2017, has been increasingly active, rising to become head of marketing and corporate social responsibility.

During an interview with WWD ahead of being recognized with WWD's John B. Fairchild Honor for lifetime achievement, Prada, wearing a blue V-necked sweater over a white T-shirt and one of her signature pleated knee-length skirts in gray, didn't hold back, responding quickly but thoughtfully to the questions, at times breaking up with a chuckle. Her inquisitive mind was reflected in her pensive responses.

She was considerate of Raf Simons, who joined her as co-creative director of the Prada brand in 2020, willing to talk about herself and her relationship with the Belgian designer but demurring from discussing the brand's more recent shows, since she contended he should also have a say on this topic.

The designer easily steered the conversation toward one of her main interests, the *Fondazione Prada*, first established in 1993 with her husband, and

which counts headquarters in Milan and Venice. Prada surrounds herself with a close-knit group of friends, artists, directors, and architects, including Koolhaas. Her passion for contemporary art is reflected in her office in a stately building on Milan's Via Bergamo, with the now iconic steel and polycarbonate tube slide by Carsten Höller that leads into the courtyard, and artworks by the likes of Lucio Fontana and Gerhard Richter, among others.

Here, Prada opens up about changing her mind about digital technology, the role of fashion in her life and, despite her intellectual musings, her practical take on things and connection to the world — after all, as she said, she doesn't want to travel to the Moon.

**WWD: What are the cornerstones of your style and those you would like to be recognized for? I read that you design what you personally like without thinking of the end customer, or of an ideal woman, disliking the concept of an icon. Does this still stand?**

**Miuccia Prada:** Yes, it's true, I don't have icons, because in theory I like all women and I have always avoided clichés. An icon is the idea of something unreachable, beyond yourself. I have always dreamed of things that I can do. If I dream something I try to do it, I am not interested in the impossible, or the dream as a form of evasion from reality. I have a dream if I think I can reach it.

I don't want to be a populist, but I work for everyone and I think of myself when I design. If I am in contact with reality, automatically I do something that is relevant and that makes sense for other people, so in this sense I don't think of the end customer, I think of people in general. If I am in touch with people, what I think is probably what others think, too.

In my work, I have tried to give my contribution, to introduce something else in a world that conceived beauty as an end in itself.

I don't compare myself to an artist. A designer is creative, but not an artist. We work on applied art, for companies that have to sell clothes. If you detach yourself from reality, it's a disassociation that distorts the true nature of things.

**WWD: The pandemic and an increasingly stronger attention to sustainability and the planet have challenged and questioned consumerism, the pace of fashion and the amount of clothes produced. How do you feel about these issues?**

**M.P.:** It's clear that in an ideal world, consuming less would be better to improve the state of things, but then people want to work, we have people knocking at our door for jobs, so are we ready to have less jobs and less wealth? It's a very complex political talk and easier said than done. There are many contradictions, but at the same time sustainability becomes really relevant. Until five years ago, if you looked for recycled fabrics, it was strange. Now you can find anything that is recyclable. Sure, it's more expensive, but you can do it. If you steadily pursue sustainability, you can improve things, but you cannot do miracles. This is a goal for us, we are working on sustainability in each single part of the company. It's a huge job, but we are in the process of utilizing all possible sustainable materials in each department and step.

**WWD: What role does fashion play in all this and in your life and, looking back, what are you especially proud of?**

**M.P.:** I don't like to take fashion out of the world, it's not a fantasy world. I live in the world, I read, study, learn, I have other activities, the *Fondazione*, in all of that I place fashion.

I like fashion very much but it's part of ►

# WWD HONORS 2021

a much bigger whole. What I did, at the beginning, the ugly chic, it was simply the introduction of reality and life in fashion. Life was in the arts, cinema and literature, but maybe not in fashion. After all, abstract beauty is not very democratic. If I have a merit, perhaps it's that I introduced reality and I was not only thinking of rich, well-dressed women.

Given my cultural background, my studies at the Piccolo Teatro, my interest in politics, when I chose to design clothes, at the time it was embarrassing for me, but I enjoyed it so much that I never stopped. Then we developed the Fondazione, because of our other, cultural interests.

My husband and I are proactive, when we are interested, we get engaged. He likes boats, and he does not limit himself to only sponsor or watch them. The same with art, we don't sponsor the exhibits, we created the Fondazione Prada. We dream of what we can try to do, as I said before. In the early days, everyone criticized me. [In 1990] WWD said my fashion was "The Flintstones Meet The Jetsons" as a negative critique. For me, it was a compliment, I loved it [smiling].

**WWD: Do you read reviews? How do you feel about them, do you ever worry?**

**M.P.:** I read them and think about them, I am interested and I am upset if they are negative for a day and a half, then I get over it. When I am criticized, I try to understand if there is some truth to the words. I always say to the journalists, "you judge us but know that we do the same." We are not the only ones judged.

**WWD: Is it true that you design a collection starting with fashion in mind, and not from a specific inspiration?**

**M.P.:** True, it's work in progress. If you are in touch with reality, you instinctively go toward what you think makes sense. Before, when I worked alone, I asked myself what I was doing, rationalizing everything a few days before the show. I used to try and understand if it made sense. Now with Raf it's more or less the same, but we are two, and he also tends to work instinctively. But when you try to understand why you did what you did, you always realize there was a reason.

**WWD: Did you ever change your mind about a collection at the last minute? Have you ever really overturned a lineup?**

**M.P.:** I cut back, I never really revolutionized a collection. It's a process that goes from maybe 20 ideas to fewer. I never really thought it was all wrong. I am usually quite sure, maybe it's all awful [laughing], but I am convinced it works.

**WWD: You have never been uneasy about change, from one season to the next.**

**M.P.:** Exactly because the world is big, with so many differences, in the end every show is a small piece of life. I could do 100 shows, on one subject or another since there are so many around us. Collections are like a collage of pieces of life.

**WWD: You and your husband were skeptical about the potential of e-commerce in luxury but he has now embraced it, with investments in digital sales, communication and marketing, which have contributed to gains in company revenues. Have you also changed your opinion on the opportunities offered by the online channel?**

**M.P.:** Yes, we changed our mind on many things. If before there were stores and now there is the online, you must use them both. My relation with technology changed entirely during the pandemic. While I was skeptical before, the pandemic made me change my point of view completely. I think

technology is there, it's a real revolution and I think it's very useful so I will try to embrace it, actually I already started using it to spread ideas. Surely it's an incredible tool, and as all vehicles, I try to use it well for my objectives, both commercial and not – for what I believe in, for my vision, to carry my thoughts forward. That's why the [spring 2022] show [was also staged and presented concurrently in Shanghai]. The world is big, it's out there, how do you relate with it?

**WWD: In fact, much is said now about building communities around the world and many luxury brands have heavily invested to this end.**

**M.P.:** Very often it seems like an opportunistic trick. Community is a term that is trendy now, but it sounds a bit commercial. What I think is it's right to discuss ideas, expand our points of view and communicate with others – if you want to call this [building a] community, it's fine, but I am allergic to words that are in fashion, although I agree with the meaning.

**WWD: With Miu Miu, you have presented films for years, you have a screening theater at the Fondazione Prada, you have dressed many actors on the red carpet, and you recently created looks for "The United States vs. Billie Holiday" movie. What is your relationship with Hollywood and the film world?**

**M.P.:** I have many friends who are film directors. I am more interested in the thoughts and the content of films, rather than the red carpet.

**WWD: What movies do you like to watch, any secret you can reveal?**

**M.P.:** If it's too secret I won't say [laughing]. I like everything, it's not that I don't want to respond, I like all movies, except for violent ones – I have a hard time watching those. I am lucky that I am curious and I seek ideas, in cinema, in the arts, where I can learn something, where I see ideas that advance content and that make sense in this moment.

**WWD: You have succeeded in making the Fondazione Prada a must-see venue in Milan. What other projects do you have in mind and what would you like to achieve with it?**

**M.P.:** I try to do all that I want to do. Now we are planning an exhibition on science which is very important and very challenging. We've been working on it for three years. It will debut in the spring/summer in Venice, then the next one will be in Milan next year. It's on neuroscience and the brain and it's been really challenging. I had been thinking about it for 10 years, then one day I woke up and decided I should go for it and I called two or three people and now the most important centers of neuroscience in the world are involved. The problem is not having relevant ideas in this particular historical moment. I want the Fondazione to be useful and try to give answers to relevant questions that we all feel unanswered. If I don't have an answer, I guess others don't either. I wanted to do exhibitions on religion, for example, on topics that touch people, that make sense and are useful and science is increasingly more relevant. This is a difficult moment, it's a very important moment and we should channel all our efforts into doing something useful and meaningful – including clothes that are useful.

I was preparing an exhibition on feminism with [the late writer and editor] Ingrid Sischy, but then she died. In some cases, it's difficult because I don't know who to ask. You must be sure of what you do and say when you deal with certain issues and you can't make mistakes and be superficial.



**ROMAN HOLIDAY**  
MILAN—"Oh, yawn. Need some breakfast to get going again." She put on a fresh face, grabbed her bag and walked into the dawn.

PRADA brown leather handbag with gold handle, GIANNI VERSACE multicolor wool, silk and Lurex metallic scarf.

In Milan, inspired elegance is key for holiday, from pastel pearls to multicolor stones.

Shapes range from dangling spheres to gold hearts embossed with multicolor stones or with dangling pearls and crystals.

Family crests embellish jewelry, with lots of lions, eagles and dragons in heavy gold.

Bags are small cushion shapes in bottle green, royal blue, violet and black velvet or suede. Satin or leather belts are encrusted with crystal spheres.

A Prada bag, as highlighted in WWD.

**WWD: Would you say you follow your instinct in life and in designing your collections?**

**M.P.:** I always say that instinct is the final act of a lot of thinking done beforehand. When women are insulted because they are described as instinctive, I think it's a compliment. They are like computers that analyze, analyze, analyze and then give a response that is not just thrown out there.

**WWD: You have achieved so much, but do you have any regrets?**

**M.P.:** I don't have regrets, I always tried to do what I wanted to do, for better or for worse. Maybe because I try to do things that are possible, I don't want to travel to the Moon.

**WWD: Would you reach out to Elon Musk or Richard Branson to go into space?**

**M.P.:** No, never ever, I would be dead scared [laughing].

**WWD: In February, during the post-show conversation with Raf Simons, Marc Jacobs said you embodied the term "Pradanness."**

**M.P.:** [Chuckling] Perhaps because I have been a catalyst for many people, creating and promoting relationships, working with people. Perhaps it's a way of thinking and I understand that people recognize that I represent and stimulate this "Pradanness," but I like the sound of it.

**WWD: Speaking of definitions, your style at some point has also been identified as minimalist.**

**M.P.:** I don't know if I was characterized as minimal, but architect Koolhaas said once that Prada is not minimal, it's Baroque. I am not one thing only, I did shows that were more than Baroque. If minimal is the common denominator of a simple fashion with rich content that is not redundant, so yes, I can be defined

as minimal, in the sense because I don't like excesses. I like to clean up a concept, avoid anything that is useless. Even if it's Baroque, I simplify it.

**WWD: Your husband has been vocal that the company is not for sale and your son Lorenzo has been increasingly involved in the management.**

**M.P.:** I am very, very happy to see my son bringing forward what we have started and we are trying to accompany him in this path.

**WWD: Do you talk about fashion with him?**

**M.P.:** Like his father, he is on top of everything. He is interested in everything. He understands that it is hard work to be more knowledgeable than others and to know how to surround yourself with talented people that can advise you – but I don't want to sound like I am talking up my son.

**WWD: How would you differentiate the Prada and Miu Miu labels?**

**M.P.:** Now with Raf, Miu Miu will become more independent. Prada is my more rational side, it's more thought-out and Miu Miu is lighter, but I do not really distinguish them. I have fun playing within the same system, I do what should be Prada for Miu Miu and vice versa. I censor myself much less with Miu Miu.

**WWD: You made news when you decided to start working with Simons.**

**M.P.:** I am very happy, I have fun, with Raf in this intimate confrontation, it's all new. I asked if he could come and he wanted to come. We are two designers that respected and admired one another even before, so it's very easy, and I can never remember who decided to do what [in a collection]. We work to do something beautiful together, I imagine it's the same for him. ■