

PEOPLE | THE CREATIVE CLASS

The Creative Class | Vincent Darré, Artistic Director and Interior Designer

BY JULIEN NEUVILLE 8 JULY, 2013

PARIS, France — “I’m very linked to the surrealist and Dadaist universes, it’s what I love. The surrealists were the first punks, they didn’t have any boundaries.” So says Vincent Darré, a true Parisian eccentric and fashion’s favourite punk polymath. “I do furniture, I love it. I do interior design, I love it. I do magazine editing, I love it.”

The witty and whimsical Darré has worked alongside Karl Lagerfeld at Fendi; served as artistic director of Emanuel Ungaro and Moschino; contributed to the French and Italian editions of *Vogue*; designed sets for the theatre; decorated André Saraiva’s nightclubs; and created his own surrealist furniture — all with a unique blend of intellect, humour and child-like fantasy.

“I just want work to be about fun, not about money,” he says. “Money isn’t my motivation, my motivation is realising everything I’ve been dreaming about since I was a kid.”

Darré, who once described himself as “an anarchist of taste,” comes from a family of leftist Parisian intellectuals. His mother worked in publishing; his father was a sociologist. He attended the elite Ecole Alsacienne, followed by boarding school, but acquired an equally powerful education at the famous Paris nightclub The Palace (frequented by the likes of Andy Warhol, Roland Barthes, Karl Lagerfeld and Mick Jagger) where he was an under-age regular along with Eva Ionesco, Christian Louboutin, Farida Khelfa, and Cyril and Olivia Putman.

“We were punks. Really. We were awful with people, we were crashing parties, we just didn’t care about anything in the world,” he recalls, without a hint of remorse. “At the beginning, I was more into costume and set designs, then the Palace came along and I started to have fun putting together [looks]. It was a time where there were huge parties, costume balls, and everyone would to dress up in a very creative way. We didn’t have any money, so we had to improvise outfits.”

Darré attended the Ecole de la Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture, but only stayed three months before decamping to Studio Berçot. After graduating, he went to work at Yves Saint Laurent, but it didn’t last long. “I was going out everyday, getting to work late, dressed in the most outrageous clothes.”

After Saint Laurent, Darré hopped around, taking a series of jobs — at Claude Montana, Blumarine, Prada and the French editions of *Glamour* and *Vogue* — before landing a position at Fendi, where he worked for six years alongside Karl Lagerfeld.

“I never laughed as much with anyone else. It was the best time,” he remembers. “But I was working hard, I was handling all the licenses: footwear, denim, swimwear, scarves, watches, eyewear, aside from the ready-to-wear and giving advice on accessories.”

He learned a lot from Lagerfeld. “What really helped me for the future was [seeing Lagerfeld's] ability to always bounce back. If you were showing him something that was a problem, he would just twist it and turn it into a strength.”

After things “got complicated” at Fendi, Darré took up the position of creative director at Moschino. “I always loved to stage things, to build sets, to make a statement. Franco Moschino always had a very revolutionary spirit, very political. I was a punk, so I loved it there.”

But he never forgot Lagerfeld’s knack for turning a problem into a strength.

“One day I was having lunch with Karl [Lagerfeld] and Silvia [Venturini Fendi] and all of sudden Karl decided that they had to do the fittings,” Darré remembers. “I told him I couldn’t go with them to a Fendi fitting now that I was at Moschino and he said, ‘It doesn’t matter, Moschino doesn’t have style anyway, it’s a pastiche.’ I thought it was brilliant and I asked him to write it and sign it on a piece of paper. In the next [Moschino] show, I made a t-shirt out of it and I sent Inès de la Fressange [down the runway] wearing it.”

“Still today, I always ask myself: ‘How can I make a problem a strength?’”

After Moschino, Darré went to work at Emanuel Ungaro. “All good things come to an end... and this one was tragic,” he says. Ambition had gotten the better of him. “I wanted to become a bigshot creative director. Someone introduced me to Ungaro. It wasn’t the right fit for me at all, but I took it anyway.”

After several mistakes and two badly reviewed collections, which he admits were “a fiasco,” Darré was fired.

“At first I was very hurt, I didn’t want to admit that I was fired, I made up excuses,” he says. “Everything went wrong when I thought I needed to have a career.”

The misadventure, along with a changed industry, have left Darré with something of a bitter taste for fashion. “Now that I see what fashion has turned into, I’m happy to be out of the system. It’s mainly a thing of big groups. It’s an industry where people can lose their souls. Fashion doesn’t allow you to think. The rhythm is so fast now that designers don’t have time to stop, look back and think about what they have done and what they want to do.”

After Ungaro, Darré began designing furniture and consulting on interiors. He opened Maison Darré, a store-cum-studio on rue du Mont Thabor. At first, the concept was to include clothing, but Darré soon realised he was having more fun creating furniture. “With furniture, I felt like I still had some freshness, a certain type of innocence that could bring a new perspective. I had become too cynical [about fashion] and the idea of launching myself into something completely unknown was much more appealing.”

But Darré isn't finished with fashion just yet. Last month, *L'Officiel* announced that it had tapped the designer to “curate” four issues of the magazine. “I told *L'Officiel*, I wanted to have *carte blanche*. At my age I don't want to compromise. The only thing I'm keeping is the *L'Officiel* sign on the cover,” explains Darré, who plans to get rid of the magazine's entire front of book. “I want people to understand from the very first pages of the issue that the magazine has changed — that it is more artistic, less commercial. I see the magazine like a Parisian literary salon, where I invite all the people whose work I like to come together.”

“My creative process is very hard for other people to understand,” says Darré. “What I like is doing everything people offer me in the most absurd way. I have a very specific universe and I want to explore it in all the different ways I can. Diversity and difficulty is what drive me.”

Darré is also hard at work on what, given his surrealist bent, seems like the perfect project: designing the new headquarters of Schiaparelli, the namesake house of the surrealist couturier Elsa Schiaparelli that's in the process of being relaunched by Tod's president and chief executive Diego Della Valle. “I was honoured to be part of the project. I knew Marisa Berenson's mother — Elsa Schiaparelli's daughter — very well. I used to have dinner at her house every Sunday and all of Schiap's furniture was still there, so I knew all about it,” says Darré.

With an enviable list of projects up his sleeve, what advice does fashion's surrealist, punk polymath have for those aspiring to follow in his footsteps?

“I've learned you just have to do what you want,” he says. “Be open to anything that might fall in your lap and just follow your instincts.”
