

FALL WINTER 2010/2011 — VOL. III, ISSUE 14 — FR €17,50 | USA \$35

PURPLE FASHION *magazine*

FEATURING **Chloë Sevigny**⁶⁸, **Mark Ronson**¹⁷², **Alain Badiou**¹⁶⁰,
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If a single person incarnates the true French spirit, it's VINCENT DARRÉ. Ever since Vincent's first nights at Le Palace — at the age of 17! — le tout Paris has adored him, even if he's remained relatively unknown internationally. Vincent is both a true eccentric and what French esthetes call an "exquisite personality." Intelligence, facility, fantasy, and humor are the hallmarks of his approach to life — and to his work, be it for Prada, Moschino, or Fendi. His latest and perhaps most ambitious project is La Maison Darré, a boutique-cum-atelier in which this normally reserved connoisseur gathers his friends for an open-house showing of his creations, his furnishings, and his phantasmagoric vision of life.

interview and photographs by OLIVIER ZAHM

Vincent Darré with a *Poisson* bookshelf in wood from the new Maison Darré collection

OLIVIER ZAHM — *Who is Vincent Darré, exactly? Your brilliant, dilettante one-man orchestral aspects can be somewhat disconcerting...* — VINCENT DARRÉ — That's my thing. I'm an eccentric. Or maybe I'm just an anarchist of taste — but then anarchists are so frowned upon these days. — *Being an eccentric is more cosmopolitan.* — Since I'm not political, I can't claim to be an anarchist. An anarchist is too political, so that would make me an old cosmopolitan punk. — *Anarchists have always tried to keep a fierce grip on their freedom.* — And on their independence. There's nothing worse than being dependent, whether it's on rich people, success, or a job. My latest project, La Maison Darré, is all about independence. It's unrestricted and unconditional. I did it with friends who trust me. They helped me make a dream come true — one I've had for over 20 years.

SAINT-GERMAIN-DES-PRÉS — *Are you originally from Paris?* — My family has lived in Paris for several generations. — *Are your parents in the arts?* — They're intellectuals. My father was a journalist who later became a sociologist. My mother worked in publishing, mostly with Maspero, the book company. — *Sounds very Saint-Germain-des-Prés.* — Absolutely — '50s Saint-Germain-des-Prés! My mother was the Queen of Saint-Germain-des-Prés, with Boris Vian and that gang at the Tabou jazz club. My mother's sister married the great writer Jorge Semprun, who was the Spanish Minister of Culture. He worked with Costa Gavras on the films *Z* and *The Confession*. — *So you're a child of the Parisian intellectual Left.* — The Left, but not the Radical Left. My grandfather sent his daughters to Communist Youth meetings. My entire family belonged to the Party. That was when Saint-Germain-des-Prés was very communist. But during the Algerian War and again after May 1968

people began leaving the Party. Little by little they all became Socialists. — *You were born in 1959 and so as a boy you knew the pre-'68 intellectual atmosphere of Paris. Was it a privileged bohemian universe?* — We were from the 14th arrondissement. Every Sunday we'd go to Montparnasse for dinner at La Coupole or La Closerie des Lilas. And I was enrolled in the École Alsacienne. — *An elite school.* — It eventually became super-chic, but it used to be where they sent problem kids. I could have learned a lot there but May '68 happened. Things at home were very free, very politicized. Everyone came to the house. My parents' friends would come over after their parties. Or after the demonstrations against the war in Algeria or during the events of May '68 — they would come in all cut up, blood everywhere, having been severely beaten. The only problem was that my parents were flat broke. We were always dealing with the bailiffs kicking in our doors and seizing our stuff. My parents were not really interested in money. I'm proud of them for that. — *So it was an anti-authoritarian education.* — My education was not about getting money or power, but about learning to respect others. Though I'd rather be the son of a Catholic than the son of a Communist — I'd have fewer scruples to contend with in my dealings with the business world. — *Did you have a happy Parisian childhood?* — I had a strange childhood. And after May '68, when my father took off with my mother's best friend, it became even stranger. I had to go and live with them in the Lubéron, during that whole hippie period, which was all about discovering the countryside. We spent our vacations in Ibiza and Formentera. So after the École Alsacienne, I went to an all-boys boarding school in Apt, which was horrible. I showed up there a spoiled kid in a little flowered shirt. All the peasants jumped me, wearing those giant





From left to right: An Italian vase from the '60s, *écorchés* from the Medical Collection, and a portrait of Vincent Darré by Vedovamazzei

bell-bottoms with the tight-fitting crotches. I was eleven. But that boarding school was a revelation, with my being in a dorm with the other guys. It was what I wanted. I was in 6th grade and the 9th graders were all after me like I was Brigitte Bardot. Older guys courted me. — *You discovered your sexuality there.* — Yes, but I hated boarding school and I suffered a lot, coming from Paris and suddenly finding myself way out in the sticks with nothing to do — so bored, and having to repeat academic years. I was 18 when I finally made it to the 10th grade. — *Did you want to go back to Paris?* — Happily, I left my father and went back to live my mother. I had been living a nightmare — a real *Viper in the Fist* thing. My stepmother was a horrible beast and my father wouldn't defend me. After living with my father for two years, I ran away to live with my mother in Montpellier, where she had opened a bookstore for Maspero. It was the beginning of the French Women's Liberation Movement and abortion rights. I had a lot of fun with my mother. She would march me around with a sign that read, "I'm a child who was *wanted*." She performed illegal abortions at our house. She had lesbian and homosexual friends. And she smoked weed. I did drag shows with a girl friend. It was way more fun than with my father. — *Did your mother become a lesbian?* — No, but she took care of a lot of gay men friends who had problems at home. They'd come to our house to have sex with other men. — *Were you especially close to your mother?* — I'm a lot like her. My mother was really free. Even when she was with my father she had lovers. I know that one of her best friends fell in love with her lover and that she didn't care. And when that friend left my mother's ex, we all went away on vacation together to Portugal. This was during the time of the Carnation Revolution. She would take me

to see theatre at the Avignon Festival. I saw the first plays directed by Alfredo Arias and Robert Wilson there, which affected me very strongly. My mother also encouraged me to perform. Sometimes during her political or feminist meetings her friends would be sniping at each other and she'd say, "Vincent, why don't you put on a dress and perform for us. Let's change the ambience in here."

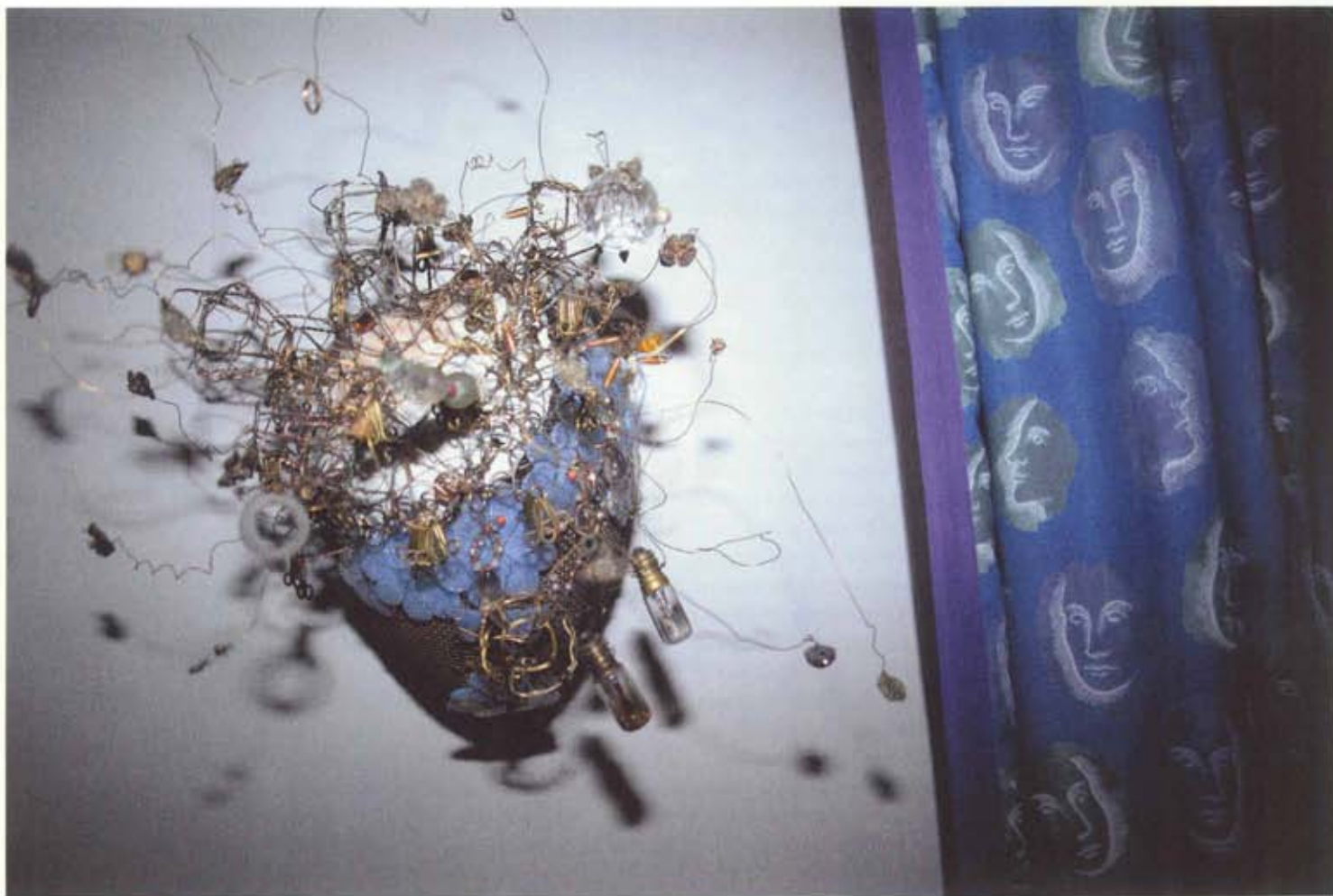
ADOLESCENCE — *Why do you think you didn't do better at school?* — I was more interested in being noticed than in working, which of course is the stupidest thing in the world. I was good at drawing and French — except for spelling, because I'm completely dyslexic. I sucked at everything else, but the teachers loved me because I was witty. — *Were you always drawn to the theater?* — I always wanted to work in the performing arts. At first I wanted to do sets and costumes for theater and cinema. I was wild about film because my brother was a film buff. My parents were intellectuals but my own culture was much more cinematographic and visual. From the start I felt like a character in a film, that my life was more like a story in a movie than real life. — *Did you want to become an actor?* — Everyone said I should be one — even the director Philippe Garrel said that quite recently. But no, I think it must be the worst profession in the world. I'm friendly with a lot of actresses but, really, acting is the last thing I want to do. I like to invent myself, whereas actors are always waiting on the commands of others. Waiting is the worst thing. I did act in a film by Philippe Garrel, *L'Enfant secret*. If you look for it on YouTube, an excerpt from it that comes up has me and Elli Medeiros in it. It's very pretty. But I've never seen the film in its entirety. — *Who were your first friends?* — In Paris my first friends



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were the children of the writer Paul Nizet. I wanted to pretend I was in love with my friend. I discovered my homosexuality when I was 17. I was so I thought maybe it wasn't true. I pre-gay friend. We'd skip school and dress up in drag so we'd dress in drag and go cruising at night. — in fact I've never slept with a woman. I had a lot of friends of mine, but nothing more. There were a few. I might be able to have sex with a girl, but I never did. We both began to cry. A lot of women have always been able to get away.

PARIS LA FÊTE — *I've seen photos of you when you were young. You look like you're about 12 years old.* — Well, I was already 17, but I looked younger than I was. I was 14. Fabrice Emaer, the impresario of the New Wave, gave us permission to let us in. We were all under 18. In my group we had Evie, Farida Khelifa, Pauline Boer, Justin Putman. All the others, Edwige at the time, and the journalist Pacadis were at the time. We were new, with impossible looks. But I was 17, on rue Saint Anne, which was an address. — *What brought all of you together?* — We had a common appearance — how we should dress, what we should wear. — *Was there a bit of a desire to be seen?* — Yes, all driven to make the snide comeback



A crystal *Insectes* wall sconce by Grazia Eminente for La Maison Darré and *Apparition* curtain fabric by Pierre Le-Tan for La Maison Darré

were the children of the writer Paul Nizan, and in Montpellier I used to pretend I was in love with my friend Zaza Temple. The shock of discovering my homosexuality when I was eleven. I was precocious, so I thought maybe it wasn't true. I pretended a girl I knew was my girlfriend. We'd skip school and dress up in drag. She was a real tomboy so we'd dress in drag and go cruising at night. I never slept with her — in fact I've never slept with a woman. I've shared beds with female friends of mine, but nothing more. There was one time when I thought I might be able to have sex with a girl, but she was as scared as I was and we both began to cry. A lot of women have tried to seduce me, but I've always been able to get away.

PARIS LA FÊTE — *I've seen photos of you at the Palace and at parties. You look like you're about 12 years old.* — When I was going to the Palace I was already 17, but I looked younger than my age. My friends were 13 or 14. Fabrice Emaer, the impresario of the Palace, asked our parents permission to let us in. We were all under age. People sarcastically called us The New Wave. In my group we had Eva Ionesco, Christian Louboutin, Farida Khelfa, Pauline Boer, Justin Roy, and Cyril and Olivia Putman. All the others, Edwige at the door of the Palace, Paquita Paquin, and the journalist Pacadis were at least ten years older than us. We were new, with impossible looks. But before The Palace we went to Sept, on rue Saint Anne, which was an amazing place with neon lights. — *What brought all of you together?* — We had the same ideas about our appearance — how we should dress, what we should wear — and the same desire to be seen. — *Was there a bit of snobbism involved?* — We were all driven to make the snide comeback — that nasty '80s humor.

We were mean to each other, constantly insulting each other. It was our way of revisiting an 18th century style of conversation — *salon repartee* — but it was less subtle and more cynical. We'd say horribly cruel things to make the others laugh — destroying some poor guy or girl who didn't see it coming. Our so-called *joie de vivre*, based on alcohol and drugs, was viciously superficial. But that nastiness stopped with AIDS. That's when we stopped being so cynical and superficial. Catherine Baba talked like that. We gave each other silly nicknames, too. Loulou de la Falaise was Loulou de la Crevasse. We made up idiotic slogans like "Everything is wired, everything is tired, except at the Palace." And we were so impressed by Godard's *Pierrot le fou* and *Breathless* that we thought we would only live to be 30 — so we thought we'd better do it all before we got old. But in reality we lived on almost nothing, grabbing food at gallery openings and parties, stealing stuff from rich people's apartments, and taking drugs — we did it all. We were sort of homeless, living wherever we could, sleeping in each other's beds, exchanging clothes. We had no particular wardrobes. We'd change at someone's house because we'd been out to a nightclub and leave wearing their clothes. Girls wore clothes inside out. The game was to make it look like what you were wearing was new. — *Were you all having a lot of sex?* — The funny thing was that the whole time was so sexual, but we never saw it because we were so naive. I mean, at the end of the night people would fuck a little between friends. But it was like having a *croissant* in the morning. We weren't obsessed with it — we were like children. — *Do you mean that you were more obsessed with your looks and your narcissism?* — Yes, and in doing things no one else dared to. We wanted to scandalize people. Eva Ionesco was the most scandalous of us.

She never wore underwear and she would lift her skirt and piss right in front of the Café de Flore, with her feet spread apart. And she was ravishingly beautiful — an apparition. — *This was after the punk era. Was it a reaction to the hippie years that you spent with your family?* — Yes. It was the complete opposite of the hippie style. Fashions lasted for a month or two, max. — *Did you keep changing your look so people wouldn't copy you?* — We thought we were the kings of the world. The press called us *les branchés* (the hipsters). We abhorred copying. We treated people who dared to copy us like dogs, ripping off their clothes for having dared to imitate us. We were aggressive and so pretentious. — *Was life always a party for you?* — It was extraordinary. Everyone talks about The Palace but there was also the Main Bleue, which was a new nightclub in Montreuil, decorated by Philippe Starck. There were metal towers with half-naked girls dancing on them. Only the punks, the blacks, and the disco freaks went there. The music was funk — James Brown all the time. We'd never been to New York but we thought that's where we were. — *That club wasn't that well known.* — It closed very quickly because of the famous *Macabre* evening that Karl Lagerfeld organized, which was allegedly S&M. I was still in school, of course, but I went to that party wearing a collar and a leash and I had little baby blue hands painted all over my body. My friend Justine wore satin shorts and held my leash. You can say we were chic but we were really walking trashcans. When we got there everyone was completely drugged out. There were transvestites, people dressed as Nazis, people in black lace. Onstage there were old transvestites doing a striptease. The writer Popescu danced wearing a tutu — everyone was throwing bottles at him. At the end, when I was leaving, people were sodomizing each other on pinball machines. It turned into a giant orgy. We left because it was too much. I thought that if Paris is like this every night, we're definitely not going to be bored. — *These days partying seems to be a lost art.* — People think about their careers now, but we didn't think about that. We thought about living as much as we could in a short period of time. We dreamed of running into Loulou de la Falaise or Saint Laurent — and other such girlish dreams. We were insufferable. We thought Andy Warhol was out of date. I remember that for a fantasy *soirée* I dressed as a cowboy, wearing pistols, and my friend Pauline went as Barbarella, with those long sexy legs. I pretended to shoot people, pissing them all off. Warhol was there and he was completely blitzed by Pauline's costume. He said, "Oh, I want to do a happening with you. Go out in the garden in the middle of the smoke machines." I said to her, "Are you kidding? He's a loser. You can't do it. It'll be awful. We'll look ridiculous." Joël Lebon had brought us there. He was a great friend of Pierre Bergé. All he did was get high and bring society people together — the punks and the hipsters. He loved going to the Palace. He adored us all and he tried to introduce me to some rich people. We were outlaws and gatecrashers. We called it the "crash plan." We were never invited anywhere. We were parasites. If they let one of us in, in two minutes there'd be four of us inside, latching on. It was like that for the opening night of The Palace — my friend Philippe Morillon did the posters and the invitations and we managed to get one invitation, but we all glommed on to go to the opening. Alain Pacadis did most of the crash plans. He was a journalist, so we'd follow him and he'd get us in. Then Pacadis would write about it the next day in his column in *Libération*. He'd talk about us. We were famous. "I spent the evening with Vincent and he was wearing such-and-such. Eva was dressed like this. We went to so-and-so's. They shot up, etc." People began to ask, "Who are these people Pacadis is talking about?" — *So Pacadis became your columnist. Did you get along well with him?* — Yes, but he was disgusting — so dirty! With Pacadis it was always a hassle. He had this habit of taking a drink from your glass. He didn't have teeth, just these horrible stumps, so you'd be disgusted and leave him your glass. His hair was gross and he was scruffy — like an old squid. One evening we went to his house. He'd taken in a guy who was

just out of prison and who wanted to kill himself. When we got there the guy had locked himself in the bathroom and was going to drown himself in the tub. There was water everywhere. Poor Pauline had to sponge it all up. She got red blotches all over her skin because it was so dirty and greasy everywhere. Another time we took Pacadis home. We'd all gotten high — but he had pretty much OD'd. We called a doctor who told us to hold his tongue so he wouldn't suffocate. But he disgusted us so much we held it with a little spoon so we didn't have to touch him — when he was lying there dying. We laughed more than anything. Then the doctor arrived and saved him. He told Pacadis that after five overdoses he would die, but Pacadis said that it was about his 30th.

Parties today are about "gravy" — there's not much whimsy or extravagance. — Back then there was much more money. Parties didn't have to be sponsored by brands. Rich people had lots of money and advertising people gave very fancy parties. Fabrice Emaer of The Palace would give free parties even though he was in debt up to his neck. I remember going to see him one evening — I was just a kid — and I said to him, "There's a whole group of us who adore The Palace, but we don't have any money, so we can't get in." Fabrice took us by the hand, presented us to the guys at the door, and said, "These people don't have to pay. Let them in free whenever they want." — *Did you get free drinks, too?* — No, we had to pay for our drinks. So the girls would flirt with the waiters, or sometimes Pacadis would get us drinks. Usually we had to wait a long time before someone would buy us a drink. — *Was heroin the drug of choice back then?* — Heroin and speed. We called the combination of the two *fringanores*, because the effect was like cocaine. Then there was mandrax and quaaludes, which were like strong sleeping pills, but if you mixed them with alcohol you thought you were in a kind of sexodrome. You'd jump on anyone who walked by. It was a horror, a complete loss of inhibition. And people would give us hallucinogenic mushrooms. In any case, we took whatever they gave us because we didn't give a fuck. We weren't afraid of death — or of anything. That was the '80s. Then everything stopped. Le Privilège closed, the Palace closed, and AIDS arrived. — *How did you all contact one another? Did you have specific rituals for getting together?* — We'd talk on the phone for hours. And then everyone would go to someone's house to get dressed. We didn't do anything during the day. We'd get up really late, dress up, and figure out a "crash plan" for the evening. It was an anarchist way of doing things. I hated the *bourgeoisie*. We hated conventions. When we went to a fancy party, we'd pee on the curtains or mess stuff up. It was the only thing we enjoyed. Of course, there were rock bands and hard-core punks back then and next to them we were *operetta* punks. — *You hated middle-class conventions.* — Yes, but at the same time we admired high society, which was disappearing. We loved hearing about the parties Charles de Beistegui threw at his Venetian palace.

Were your parties more about dressing up than about having sex? — We loved dressing up. Fabrice Emaer was always organizing these giant balls, and we'd take two weeks to get our costumes together, using whatever was lying around. We would go through the garbage and steal fabric from the Marché Saint-Pierre. We had terrible taste — the '80s was a hideous period. That's what was funny about the time — people didn't care. Now people are afraid of bad taste. I remember one night I was convinced that I had the perfect look — and it was horrendous: a terry cloth coat with a Cubist print and a belt, an apple green corset, yellow shoes, and a purple hat. And on top of that, I strung old Christmas decorations I'd picked out of the garbage around myself. I was sure that look was genius. I saw Loulou de la Falaise at the bar. She was peeing herself laughing. We were somewhere between being clowns and being hip and trendy. — *What did the sexual revolution mean to you and your friends?*



Vincent Darré with the new Maison Darré Collection, *Allium* table in silver leaf fish headshell, an *Corvina* column with gold leaf drawers, a *Grenouille* night table in silver leaf, and a *Urolophus* sea horse with gold leaf drawers





A *Pagode* lamp by Grazia Eminente and *Elephant'os* lacquered box by La Maison Darré
 Opposite page: *Table Pas Gigogne* in lacquer with aluminum legs by Maison Darré, a funeral lamp by Grazia Eminente,
 and a *L'Amant dans le Placard* armoire in lacquer with aluminum legs by La Maison Darré

— It scared us. It was like a ghost train. We'd go there for fun, to scare ourselves a little, but we were really outside all of that. Our vision was much more cinematographic. We were totally naive. When everyone would start fucking everyone else we'd make fun of it. I realized later that during that entire period I was a total romantic. I was waiting for my Prince Charming — The One. I wasn't particularly promiscuous. Maybe now it looks like I was, but compared to what other people were doing it was nothing. — *You were very Parisian. Didn't you ever want to go to London or New York?* — New York scared us. People would go there full of ambition and come crawling back in terrible shape. New York has always been about money. It's a jungle. Whereas Paris is still a little bit provincial — it's about hanging out with your pals. — *Did you pick up on any political effervescence during those nights? What about the mixing of Right and Left?* — It was strange and amusing, because everyone went to The Palace. There was a Leftist group and a group of upper-class people who were much more to the Right — people like the Rothschilds, Charlotte Aillaud, and the Contesse de Ribes. Back then they still went out and they would mix with people from the Far Left, with the punks, with designers like Montana, Mugler, and Gaultier, and with actors like Depardieu and Adjani. These people attacked each other in the day and came together at night, because they loved to dance, to get high, and to do naughty things. Everyone wanted to play. Even writers like Roland Barthes went out. At the end of a party at The Palace one night in 1981 Fabrice said, "Vote for Mitterrand," and half the room emptied out. I wasn't paying attention. I'm from a Leftist family. But what I liked best was pissing off the Leftists. I'd say things like, "Mitterrand is a terrible dresser. I prefer Giscard d'Estaing because

he's more chic." God, we were so superficial. — *It sounds superficial to say things like that, but wasn't it also intelligent?* — Yes, but it wasn't at all political. We were scandalous. We lived at a time when everything was freer. And there was lots of money. It was a time of immense vulgarity. — *You were celebrating superficiality, playing games. And it was after the '70s, the failure of the '70s — talk about cynicism.* — For us, politics were secondary. We admired painters, filmmakers, and writers.

LES ANNÉES MODE — *What about work? You said you'd always wanted to create sets and to stage plays.* — Since I thought I was going to be a set or costume designer I took drawing classes after high school, at Roederer, a preparatory school for studies in the Decorative Arts. Then when I started making dresses for the Palace parties everybody said I should be doing that. But I didn't want to go to the Studio Berçot, because everyone there looked even more stoned than I did. So I went to the Chambre Syndicale of Fashion and Design. Then I met Marie Rucki at the Palace. She'd been at the Studio Berçot for a long time. So I went to the Studio Berçot. My father, the sociologist, said, "I'll only pay for three years of your studies." I'd already done one preparatory year for the Decorative Arts, one at the Chambre Syndicale, and one at the Studio Berçot. After my first year at Berçot I said to Marie, "My father is cutting me off. I *have* to work." So the next year I became a teacher at the Studio Berçot. I lived with Marie Rucki because I had nowhere else to live. Marie became my second family. — *So you were a teacher.* — Well, for about two minutes. The students bored me so I bailed out. I went to Saint-Laurent and then to Montana. — *What did you do at Saint-Laurent?* — I was a junior assistant. I didn't stay long



Disparition headboard by Pierre Le-Tan for La Maison Darré and *Ecrevisse* column with gold leaf drawers from the new Maison Darré collection

because Thierry Ardisson was doing his show, *Façade*, and our fantasy was to create stuff for that show. When I arrived at Saint-Laurent I was wearing a blue t-shirt and a giant pair of pants tied with a string. They could see I wasn't going to stay there for long. I left after a few months. I may work in fashion but I'm not all that passionate about fashion itself — it's more about what goes with it, what's around it. So I started working with terra cotta. — *Recalling your days in Provence, in the Lubéron?* — Yes, but it was terra cotta à la Cocteau. That's why Arielle Dombasle calls me "the Cocteau of 2000." But I needed to work and Claude Montana offered me a place in his studio. At first I wasn't very enthusiastic. I found Montana's clothes horribly unwearable — all that hideous padding and purple leather. — *But the videos of Montana's shows look amazing!* — Yes, we liked Thierry Mugler's Hollywood-inspired fashion shows. We wanted to live as if we were in movies, like my favorite musicals. Montana was a little too vulgar. We thought Yves Saint-Laurent was very chic. We also liked Jean-Paul Gaultier, but he came along later. He was close to us and was very inspired by people's nighttime and street looks, so we were less surprised by what he was coming out with. — *Did you stay with Montana long?* — A year. I actually enjoyed it. I always told him exactly what I thought. I said that all the padding, the purple leather, and the eagles and all that didn't really work. So he did some collections that were a bit subtler. But I'm not saying it was all because of me — maybe things were changing everywhere. — *Why did you leave Montana?* — There was a party organized by Philip Treacy in Paris and Christian Louboutin said, "We're all going to this party in drag and you must go as Tina Turner." So I stole a dress from Montana for it. But I didn't know it was the dress Claude made for Sigourney Weaver,

the one she'd just worn at the Cannes Film Festival. It was black velvet with red satin and it was just spectacular. At the party I hogged the champagne and got totally wasted. I broke things and the dress got trashed, all torn up. So it was time for me to leave Montana. — *The only ones left out of that whole '80s generation are Jean-Paul Gaultier and Alaïa.* — Because they're the best! Alaïa's work is timeless and stunning. And Gaultier, even after all these years, is extraordinary and inventive. Each one of his fashion shows is a complete rethinking of the process. — *Did you like going to fashion shows?* — We didn't get invited — we had to sneak in and hide backstage. I remember hiding under an editor's coat once — and getting in! They must've thought he was a camel or something. Andrée Putman would get us in everywhere, too. She protected us. She'd say, "Take my arm, one on each side," and we'd push our way in. — *Why is Andrée Putman so important to you?* — Andrée Putman was fearless. You'd see her at a totally chic place and then at a punk *fête* or a concert. She was always there, with her long, perfect silhouette. She was the opposite of *bourgeoisie*. She had a magnificent and totally non-conformist vocabulary, an absurd way of expressing herself, and she was curious about everything. If she liked you she put you on a pedestal. She was the first woman who asked me to make a dress for her, for a party. She asked all the designers to make her something. There were two unknowns on her list, Azzedine Alaïa and myself. Of course, Alaïa has done a lot better than I have. — *Didn't you ever have the ambition to be a designer, to get your name out there?* — I should have had more ambition. But I did the first Prada collections in Italy. Miuccia Prada and Patrizio had amazing success with their bags and wanted to do clothing collections. They said they'd never be able to work with a



Collection of plaster sculptures from the '50s by an unknown artist, a wooden bust by Akis, and an oversized lightbulb

stylist. But I'm not a stylist — they thought of me as a crazy person rather than as a stylist. I said OK, but that I wouldn't work in a factory or at an office. I said, "I prefer to work at your house," which made them laugh. We lived at their house. They were just starting Prada — not at all what they are now. — *What happened after you left Prada?* — After Prada I did a lot of consulting in Italy for Blumarine, Mario Valentino, and others. I've spent half my life in Italy. I feel like I'm half-Italian. I have many friends there. I adore Italy — Italian cinema, Italian songs, the culture, the life style, how people dress, that they're superficial. If you're handsome, people tell you so. No one does that in Paris. I look at photos of myself and go, "Damn, I was good-looking." But no one ever told me. — *So you were working in Italy. Was the partying over by that time?* — Yes. I was asking myself what I was really going to do. Fashion had always interested me, and at the time it wasn't the cutthroat business that it is now. Everyone was cobbling their first collections together. Montana, for example, was all very well done, but it was also partly improvised, with last minute changes, even for the shows. Back then there was a sense of theater, a *joie de vivre*, and the desire to do new things. — *Tell me about meeting Karl Lagerfeld, in '95-'96.* — My first meeting with Karl took place at his *bôtel particulier* at 51 rue de l'Université. I was terrified. He made us wait for hours — typically. Then he came in and I was intimidated. It was 4:00 PM. He asked, "Would you like to drink something?" I wanted a drink to relax a little, but at 4:00 PM? I said to myself, "I won't ask for vodka." So I asked for a beer. He thought I was trying to kiss up to his German side and went, "I never drink beer, but maybe there's one in the fridge." I'm thinking that this is not going well. But after ten minutes we adored

each other. He never even looked at a sketch of mine. He accepted me right away. I've never laughed so much working with anyone. First he took me to work for Chloé, but I'm not good at working in offices or going in every day to work. I suffocate. So he offered to send me to Fendi. He said, "It's perfect for you. You speak Italian." Plus, I got along well with Sylvia Fendi. But I loved working with Karl. I could have stayed with him a long time. — *Why did you stop working for him?* — Because I was almost 40 and I was thinking about what I'd done with my life and what I still needed to do. I thought, "Okay, if I'm going to do something under my own name, it's now or never." So I went to Moschino. — *Was Karl upset with you?* — Not at all. But Karl doesn't like being betrayed, so I told him myself that I wanted to try something new. If you talk to him about what's going on, he accepts it, but if he hears about it from someone else, he'll absolutely cut your head off. That's why I still have mine.

AMOUR/AIDS — *After the '80s you disappeared for a few years. You went through a painful period with your friend who had AIDS.* — Yes. He refused to face the fact that he was afraid of dying. I had to make him believe he had something other than AIDS, that he was depressed, that he had encephalitis. I had to hide it from him, and take care of him for six years, without his knowing it. I'd make stuff up just to reassure him. That's why I cut him off from the rest of the world — so that no one would see how he looked, or what meds he was taking, or even that he was sick. I was living on Avenue Frochot and I stayed in with him for many years. — *Was he someone we knew?* — No. His name was Akis. He was a beautiful Greek boy I met at The Palace. I was waiting for

my Prince Charming and I saw Akis. He was like a Hollywood actor — magnificent. He didn't seem to be the least bit gay and I fell totally in love with him. He didn't speak French or English and I didn't speak Italian yet — that's why I learned Italian. — *How long did your relationship last?* — Thirteen years. — *How did you react to Akis's death?* — I started going out every night. I was drinking like a fish. I have some photos from that time and my eyes are puffy from alcohol. It was horrible. I had to find a new family of friends. The first was Valérie Lemercier. We were both on the Avenue Frochot, in an artists' workshop in Pigalle. That's where Gaultier lives now, in a private impasse. I was always running into Valérie and I thought she was super-chic. Friendship and my families of friends are the most important things for me. When I was little I had the Nizan family, then later the Marie Rucki family. There was also the Hébey family, the Levy family, and the Silvagni family. My life can be remembered in terms of the different families of friends I've had. — *You seem to have been an intimate friend of all the great French actresses.* — Yes, probably because I'm a wannabe actor. They see me as a reflection of themselves. Maybe they see in me the same fragility they're trying to hide. I reassure them about their demons. But I have the same relationship with my famous female actress friends I have with my other friends. I don't change the way I talk for anyone. I say what I think. I'm a real friend, not a kiss-ass or a flunky. In any friendship I ask for the same thing I give: total sincerity and being ready to do anything for someone if they need it. Of course, I'm often disappointed and I can become angry but it doesn't last long. But I prefer to remember people as my friends instead of being bitter.

AUJOURD'HUI — *How have partying and the whole nightlife scene changed?* — People don't mix as much, and there are gaps between the generations that weren't there before. Now there are the very young kids in the clubs and the old people in the chic restaurants. The rich high-society people used to go out and have fun with young people. They'd have fun buying broke people drinks. Youth and beauty: you have to honor that. It was the custom back then to invite the younger set because they were well dressed and they had a sense of humor. — *There's less freedom these days.* — It's all branding and sponsoring, and it's a lot less free. There are no free parties. If you go to a party it's probably sponsored — unless it's a birthday party — and you have to let them take your picture. People pay attention. So it really isn't partying any more, unless you go to cause a ruckus. [Laughs] Andrée is one of the few people who still remembers that whole easygoing spirit. But every era has its charm. I don't want to dwell on the past. The young people of today want to have as much fun as we did. — *You don't think that things are a bit sad nowadays?* — There was more hope back then. I was a post-'68 person, so I didn't have to deal with the whole *bourgeois* thing. There was an intelligentsia of the Left, which was pretty sharp. Nothing like that exists now. Back then people were candid. They still believed that political change was possible. What's sad now is that it's difficult to believe in anything. Everything is rotten, on the Left and on the Right. — *Is there any hope?* — What was touching about my parents is that they believed in the Communist Party. After that they believed in Socialism, and after that, nothing. I think we're living in a totally Puritan time. Look what happened to Polanski. You turn on the television and you see horrible things — programs that are trash, violence of all kinds. Everyone watches it and thinks it's perfectly normal. Then they go after a genius filmmaker who happens to have slept with a minor a couple of decades ago. We're living in an era that's falsely liberal and Puritan. The worst thing is the hypocrisy of the politically correct. — *Do you think it's an illusion that everything is permitted, that in reality you can't smoke, drive fast, or go out late?* — In Paris the cops will arrest you. There are a lot fewer black people in the clubs. Back then, at The Palace or the Main Bleue, there was an ethnic mix. Not any more. Now there are

three black guys, max, and often they're all working the door. — *But you never lost your party mojo. As soon as you arrive, things start happening.* — It's because I'm so happy. If I'm in a bad mood, I stay home. But when I go out I have three little drinks — I don't really need much, I'm pretty economical — and I'm happy. — *You don't do anything else?* — I used to take a lot of drugs. I tried everything, and then I stopped. It's great to take drugs when you're young and you don't know what you're doing. Later, when you're more lucid, when you're facing your demons, drugs accentuate the shadow zones. I think the last drug I took was ecstasy, and that was a long time ago. — *So you're not depressed by the way things have changed in Paris.* — I love Paris. I couldn't live anywhere else. In any case, I live my life as if it's a film and Paris is the perfect setting for any film. Paris is still a little provincial. You have your old friends and your new friends, rich and poor. You can hang out with anyone. It doesn't work that way in New York or London. If you haven't made it by a certain time, they cast you aside.

LA MAISON DARRÉ — *Let's talk about your newest project, La Maison Darré. You've always paid a lot of attention to your house, to your apartment. What made you want to do this?* — My house is like a set in which I'm ready to receive guests. My boyfriend Elie Top is always telling me that half the house never gets used, because there are two *salons* I never go to — they're only to receive friends in, to have fun in. This isn't to give the impression that I live in a palace, because it's hardly a palace — it's a *concierger's loge* in the 7th *arrondissement* of Paris. — *You don't separate the idea of decoration from the idea of receiving people, do you?* — It's sad to make a place just for yourself. A lot of people have stayed the night and some people have even lived with me. I love that. I love it when you can run around and play in a house. I don't like to think about growing old, which is maybe the reason I do this. I'm sort of a pathetic Peter Pan. I like working as if I could stay young forever, not having to think about problems of career or profession. That may be why I launched the Maison Darré project. Maybe it comes from the feelings we had at The Palace when we were a gang of friends. I'm always trying to recreate that feeling of groups of friends getting back together. There's your gang with Camille and all the people I like in fashion and then there's the actresses. — *Is fashion no longer fun for you?* — I began to think about what I really wanted to do. I realized that deep down I'm pretentious and demanding. I always thought I was different, that I should be doing something special, just for me. I stopped thinking I needed to become the artistic director of one of the big French fashion houses in order to be someone. It was silly to keep on playing inside the system. In fact, it wasn't fun for me at all. — *So you returned to your childhood dreams.* — When I was little I wanted to design sets for theater and films. But what I really enjoyed, and still do, is staging. Making an object is great, but you need to know how to stage it. The theatrical or cinematographic aspect is important. What I enjoy doing is placing the right object in the right setting. — *Is it a Surrealist obsession?* — I relate to both Surrealism and Dadaism. The artists of those movements were the punks of the beginning of the changes in painting, those away from Cubism. It's a poetic way of mocking what you do. I don't like people who don't have a poetic side, especially those who take themselves too seriously. I try not to take myself seriously, which is sometimes dangerous, because then people don't take your work seriously. But for the moment I'm doing OK. People see me as someone who's just different. — *La Maison Darré does seem somewhat out of step with the current trends in contemporary design.* — Everything today is sanitized, futuristic, and people are on a quest for new synthetic materials. Or it's organic, another buzzword for today. For me it's all actually pretty old, all from Kubrick's *2001: A Space Odyssey*. It's not horrible, but it's just not me. They like perfection and I like imperfection. They like purity and light, whereas I like disorder, incoherence, and obscure phenomena. They like things



A yellow Italian sofa from the 18th century, a *Fall-mir* mirror in melted aluminum by Maison Darré, a golden wood column from the 18th century, and a zodiac lamp from the '50s



Apparition fabric by Pierre Le-Tan for La Maison Darré and *ABC'Os* pillows by La Maison Darré
 Opposite page: *Hippocampe* dressing table in wood and marble, birds by Arielle Dombasle, and in the crystal case,
 a hand given to Vincent by his paternal grandfather

that are flat, curved, and empty. I love things that turn, twist, fill, and annoy. I like messy, unfinished things. They bother us with minimalism, which actually bothers me, too. — *You are against the mainstream?* — Yes, and I'm fine with being that way. I would hate to be in tune with the times. I think I've always been like this. — *You have an obscure yet joyous relationship with your own era. You're a bit like the writer Jean-Jacques Schuhl. You include laughter, the macabre, dance, and a mortuary in your vision. You're a lover of ghosts and creatures, in the way Tim Burton is, without succumbing to the whole Gothic cliché.* — When we were talking about the project Jean-Jacques Schuhl asked me, "What will it be, this Maison Darré?" I told him it would be somewhere between *The Cabinet of Doctor Caligari* and all that German expressionist stuff. And Jean-Jacques leaped in before I could finish, saying, "And a mix of Minnelli and Technicolor colors." And that's exactly what it is. I love things that are macabre and straight, and at the same time I love trying to outdo myself when it comes to bad taste. Andrée Putman was a genius because she had a proper black-and-white side. She also loved people's terrible mistakes in judgment, and she was always just a little off herself. — *Where did you acquire your taste for the macabre?* — I like the macabre side of the Italian Baroque. I used to live in Naples, which has the Church of San Severo, built by a decadent alchemist prince from the 18th century. He hoped by doing that he would redeem himself and buy his way into Paradise. There's a photo by Newton of two *écorchés* — anatomical models without skin — in the church, preserved in these odd Baroque *sarcophagi*. He injected fluorescent substances into their veins so that their circulatory systems stood out in, like, Yves Klein blue and blood red. But all the bones turned to dust — all that remained were the eyes, the heart, and all

the organs. It's like lace made from veins. It's extraordinary — like an allegory of religion reversed to reveal its diabolic and obscure underside. La Maison Darré is based on that. The staircase I made is like one descending into a crypt. The flooring is in black and white marble, like a labyrinth, leading to two statues that are covered with veils. One is the woman the prince dreamed of and the other is the prince as he leaves Hell. — *He built the church to redeem himself?* — Yes, because he was dying. The veiled woman is the princess — or countess — he wanted to marry. She refused him because she thought he was too decadent. In Naples people are obsessed by sex and death. — *La Maison Darré is growing. Are you looking for other artists?* — Yes, that's why it's so much fun. Pierre Le-Tan did the wallpapers, Yazbukey is doing some coasters, and Marcel Berro is going to create some jewelry. I am also collaborating with Marie Brandolini and Grazia Eminente. — *That's what you like: getting to work with your friends on another level of imagination.* — Yes, it's another way to get back to the spirit of those long-ago *salons* and getting people — writers, artists, and friends — all working together. It's a little pretentious, but of course since I'm not in the least bit pretentious... — *La Maison Darré really is like a salon, because people meet and talk there.* — Yes, that's also one of the ideas behind La Maison Darré. It's not just my studio or my boutique. It's a place where friends can meet. I bring people together, to meet and maybe do projects together. I like it when people get together — I like marriages, too.

END

