

The first comprehensive overview of Prada's  
womenswear collections, from its 1988 debut to today,  
presented through original catwalk photography

# Prada: The Complete Collections

*Catwalk series*

Susannah Frankel

1,350 illustrations

27.7 x 19.0cm

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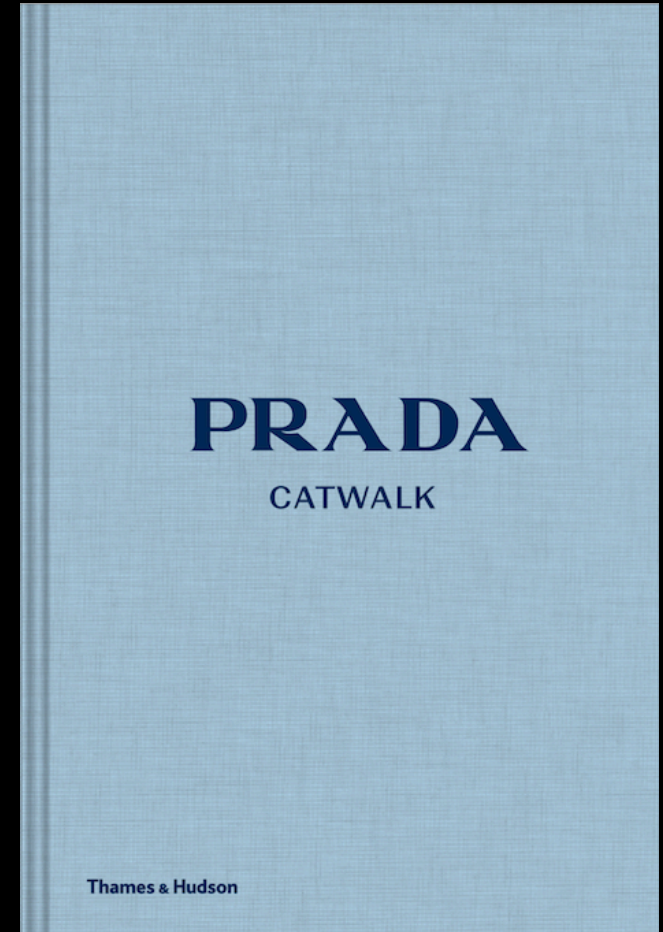
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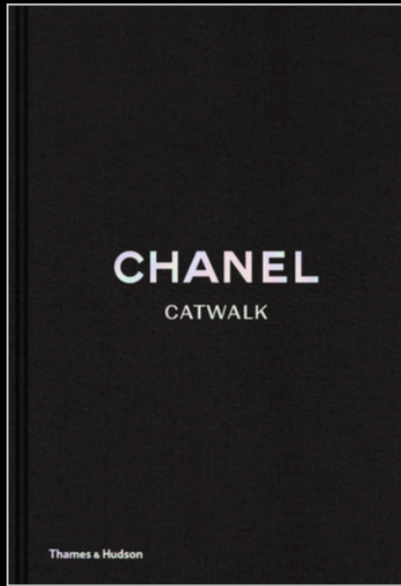
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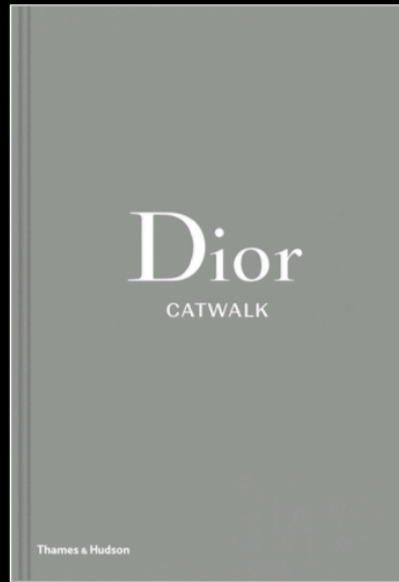
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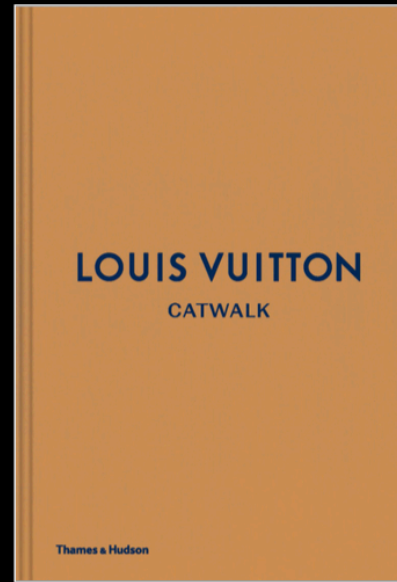
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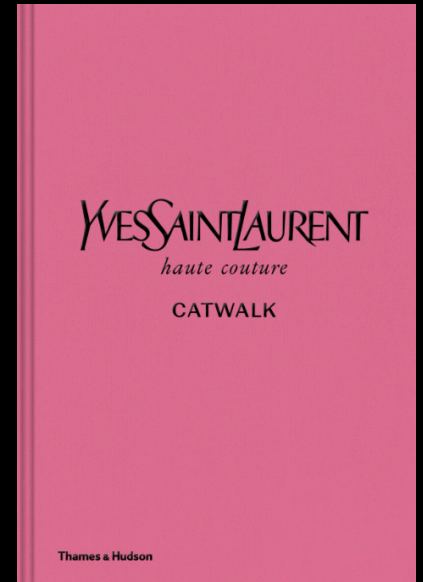
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## Key Sales Points

- Published in collaboration with Prada to celebrate over 30 years of trend-setting creations and written by one of fashion's most respected writers and former fashion director of *Grazia*, Susannah Frankel
- Discover or rediscover over sixty groundbreaking collections, from Prada's first catwalk show in 1988 to today
- Features over 1,200 looks as they originally appeared in Prada's iconic fashion shows, styled as the designer intended (from hair and make-up to jewelry and accessories) and sported by the world's top models
- After Chanel (978 0 500 518366), Dior (978 0 500 519349), Louis Vuitton (978 0 500 519943) and Yves Saint Laurent (978 0 500 022399), Prada is the fifth in the Catwalk series

Prada's final spring collection of the millennium saw the launch of the Prada Linea Rossa women's collection on the runway, although the line had been introduced six months earlier, following the announcement in 1997 of the Prada Challenge 2000. Spurred on by Patrizio Bertelli's passion for sailing, this was the Italian entry to the forthcoming America's Cup, for which Italy's competitors would be decked out in Prada. The red Linea Rossa logo was reminiscent of the lettering on the Luna Rossa boat.

There was more to this move than that, however. Designer sportswear was a new and quickly expanding commodity across the board, and Prada, with its luxe-industrial and pioneering heritage, was well placed to capitalize on that. The clothes in question looked every bit as desirable as might be expected: clean shapes in technologically advanced fabrics, with equally practical shoes and bags – from pouches to fanny packs.

That was only one half of the story, however. The Prada paradox here lay in the contrast between this and the main-line collection with its romantic full canvas skirts and coats with broad pleated-ribbon edges, crumpled chiffon dresses, skirts and knickerbockers in tea-stained shades and more in coated paper, and richly coloured crocodile skirts and jackets. More than a few of these designs were embellished with circular mirror embroideries the size of small saucers that reflected light as models walked (see p. 200).

In a bid both to cater to the real and ignite the fairytale in the modern woman's life, here was a magnificent display of the functional and the fantastic rolled into one.



'Sincere chic' read the show notes on this occasion, and not since her Spring/Summer 1996 so-called 'ugly chic' collection (see p. 134) had Miuccia Prada made such waves. If a radical conservatism had been part of her story even in the early days, here the fact that, as a fully signed up member of the Italian Communist Party, she had worn Yves Saint Laurent's Rive Gauche ready-to-wear to feminist rallies in the 1970s rang out loud and clear. 'I was a Communist but being left wing was fashionable then,' she told the *Independent*. 'I was no different from thousands of middle-class kids.'

Backstage, after the show, she told *Women's Wear Daily*, 'This was the only new thing possible. Super chic, very ladylike. In the past I've done so much experimentation but you can only go so far. I didn't want to push myself into being unnatural.'

And, for Miuccia Prada – who grew up surrounded by the best possible taste, but who, in the past, had explored and battled with that as if her existence depended upon it – this was, by contrast, the most natural thing in the world. Pussy-bow blouses, mouth and lipstick prints, little black dresses, tan and lavender ostrich leather suits, skinny sweaters over knee-length pleated chiffon skirts: all nodded to the master of late twentieth-century fashion's vocabulary, and to the wardrobe he created for Catherine Deneuve in the 1967 Luis Buñuel classic *Belle de Jour* in particular. Prada had long been an open admirer of Saint Laurent's work – after all, who in fashion isn't – but few have such a profound understanding of his aesthetic.

Of course, this was more than mere pastiche: proportions were discreetly new (those silk skirts were cut to be worn low-slung on the waist, for example), prints were sketchy or blurred (disorienting, and perhaps not so 'sincere' for that), and all of it was undercut by time-honoured Prada-isms – knitted playshorts and schoolboy Bermudas, lingerie-inspired chiffon dresses and more. Still, in the end, this was a brilliant tribute to the bourgeois French wardrobe, however twisted. With that in mind, fine-gauge knit cardigans were worn over models' shoulders, as were neat leather purses or bi-colour bowling bags; shoes included classic courts.

'I used to wear Saint Laurent all the time,' Prada told *Another Magazine* in 2017. 'I always liked the bourgeoisie. I was intrigued by the bourgeoisie. But mainly that was the culture of the Sixties and Seventies. Antonioni, Godard, Buñuel.'











In place of the vast open set that had come to be expected at Prada, guests this time filed through a series of interconnecting, salon-style spaces coloured sugar pink, mint green, apricot and primrose. If the intimacy of the mise en scène spoke of days gone by, that was offset by perforated silver metal panels suspended from the ceiling and more – perfectly square, oval, circular – placed on the floor that were modern-industrial in flavour.

The clothes were a similarly effortless fusion of the timelessly elegant and the innovative. They were also a little too picture perfect for comfort. 'What is real and what is fake?' the designer wondered in the *New York Times*. 'What does the confusion of the two mean for our understanding of beauty?'

Tailoring in what looked like scuba fabric – it was, in fact, a technical double-faced jersey – was neat and cut close to the body: a buttoned-up jacket with pointed lapels was worn with trousers, which kicked at the knee and were cropped at the ankle. Coats in herringbone tweed were similarly demure. References to mid-twentieth-century French couture came thick and fast, in the shape of swing-backs and balloon skirts and dresses.

If much of the above would not have seemed out of place at a debutantes' ball – or cocktail at least – the look was endlessly twisted. The colour palette was more jarring than ever: teal green, chartreuse, raspberry and plum; grey, camel, poppy red and flame. Equally bizarre was fabrication – that spongy weave; real ostrich alongside a molecule print and ornamentation; rectangular strips of fur where epaulettes might be; jewelled flowers scattered asymmetrically across the surfaces of clothing, and larger, stranger blooms crafted in plastic. Even models' up-dos were pulled to one side: askew.

Finally, leather sock boots with chunky rubber soles in surgical shades were so awkward they doubtless made even the woman who designed them proud.



The backdrop this season comprised comic-strip images of women, drawn by women – ‘more Angela Davis than Wonder Woman’, Miuccia Prada told AnOthermag.com. The designer’s research team gathered together the work of female artists from the 1930s to the present day, and Prada edited them down to just eight contemporary names – Brigid Elva, Joëlle Jones, Stellar Leuna, Giuliana Maldini, Natsume Ono, Emma Ríos, Trina Robbins and Fiona Staples – and additionally pulled from the archive of Tarpe Mills. ‘I chose the ones that fit my ideas of what a young, combative, militant woman should be. I wanted multiple personalities and to see the human side, the simple side, the underestimated side of women. I chose women who were real, more normal, maybe not beautiful, not superheroes,’ the designer elaborated.

There was a youthfulness to this collection that suggested rites of passage and an exploration of gender identity. The masculinity of striped schoolboy shorts and knitted tank tops in violent shades of green, lemon and flame and crawling with insects was undercut by a pink and gold brocade bustier wrapped around a shirt, say (opposite, right), or that same rich, rosy fabric flouncing at the hem of an animal and graphic print dress with a neat white collar. In place of the previous seasons’ feathers came heavy metal studs, across accessories and masculine leather jackets and coats. Further embellishment included messy clusters of brightly coloured stones and paillettes and cut-out, pieced and patched illustrations of women.

Prints comprised more comic strips and a warped herringbone design. In a world where digital technology dominates, at Prada garments were screen-printed flat in their entirety, meaning that any creasing resulted in negative space, a disruption that was deliberately difficult to read. A large part of the collection, Prada explained, was designed in the first place in white: ‘On the white canvas we printed my ideas, the clothes were a canvas for thought,’ she said.

On models’ feet were flat studded sandals, neoprene rubber-soled slippers in sporty primary shades or printed kitten-heeled courts sprouting polka-dotted silk or blue-and-white-striped cotton bows and more shiny stones, many of them worn with knee-high socks first seen in the Cruise 2017–2018 collection (pp. 570–74). Round models’ necks were enamelled crucifixes, bananas and baubles, from spooky to sweet.

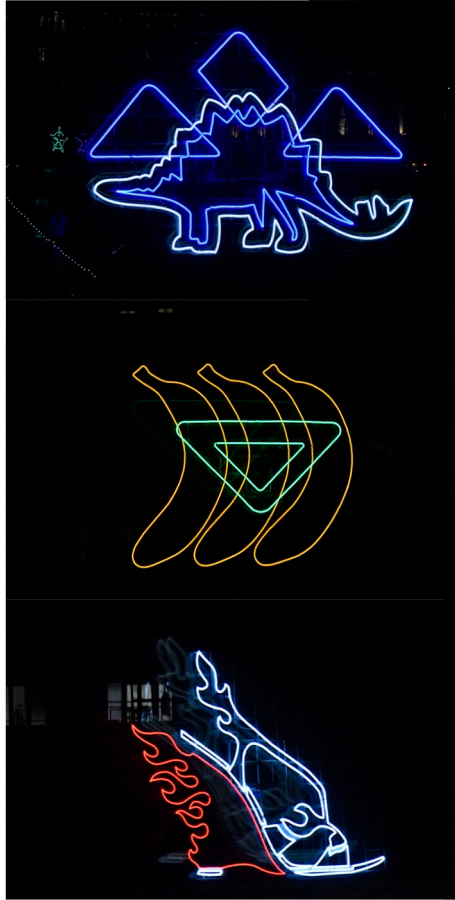


'If ever a designer was made for the MeToo moment, it would seemingly be Miuccia Prada, a woman who has spent her career exploring the shifting, often uncomfortable balance between femininity and force,' wrote Vanessa Friedman in the *New York Times* after this show. It was certainly a prime example of that.

Presented on different storeys of the recently opened Rem Koolhaas-designed tower in Milan, an extension of the Fondazione Prada, the new collection was sent out onto a disorienting black mirrored runway against a backdrop of floor-to-ceiling windows and a dark sky cityscape lit up by neon Prada signs: a bunch of bananas, a monkey, a spider, a dinosaur, a flaming-heeled shoe.

Once again the story was built upon extreme paradox: strength and vulnerability, masculinity and femininity, the utilitarian and the decorative. The list goes on. Oversized padded outerwear in fluoro shades was layered over and under tulle, sometimes plain, sometimes embroidered with jewels and stylized flowers. Rubber rain-boots had high block heels and drawstring nylon tops; pleather coats dwarfed the models wearing them and had faux fur cuffs. Huge Fair Isle-style knits were worn over tweedy knee-length skirts and under even huger plaid jackets, their colours and cuffs edged with more nylon. Warped.

As the show drew to a close the outerwear returned, this time paired with rectilinear plastic sequinned shift dresses in violent pink, orange and lime. In cloche hats or with giant bows tied in their hair, models looked as fabulous as they did fierce. Prada wanted 'any woman to be able to walk on the street late at night and be super sexy without being afraid,' she said. 'The whole point of my job is trying to understand how women can be powerful but also feminine, and be believed and stay respected when everyone assumes those things mean you don't care about clothes.'



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