Dior Creative Director of Makeup Peter Philips on Seville; respecting designer visions; lip gloss and being a feminist

By Godfrey Deeny  -  21 June 2022

Few makeup artists have had as much impact on makeup and their profession as Peter Philips, the creative and image director of makeup at Parfums Dior.

The quietly spoken Belgian joined in Dior in March 2014, initially working with Raf Simons, and latterly with Maria Grazia Chiuri. It was the latest step in an impressive career that included creating makeup for Chanel and working
with Karl Lagerfeld, no less.

Philips got his start early, working previously with Raf Simons and collaborating with greats like Alexander McQueen and Dries Van Noten.

Peter’s latest show was this month in Seville, for Chiuri’s spiritual cruise collection in the capital of Andalusia. A blend of equestrian style, Iberian-gothic detailing; and a multiplicity of hats.

So, just seconds before the cast marched out into the monumental splendor of the Plaza de España, we sat down with Philips to hear how he links up with Chiuri; avoiding makeup clichés; and how trashy can be chic.

Fashion Network: In this cruise collection how did you decide to interpret the themes that Maria Grazia had in mind?
Peter Philips: Well it’s a conversation, designing the look. Teamwork with Guido (Palau, hairstylist), me, the set design (Alexandre de Betak) and music (Michel Gaubert). We have to support her [Maria Grazia’s] vision. The make up for this show sort of grew. First, we wanted to do nothing and keep it fresh and glowy skin because the clothing is very much inspired by the Virgin Mary. The embroidery, the costume-ship, the hats. So, we wanted to keep it fresh and young.

But, in this big environment, this huge setting, an evening show, you kind of have to do something so that the girls don’t disappear. And we didn’t want to go for a red lip. We didn’t want to go for too much cliché. So, we actually played with shadow, a black smoky eye but not a traditional one.

The hats give a lot of shadow and grease. What I wanted was the eyeshadow starting to move a bit like when you’ve been dancing all night, as it becomes a bit sweaty. Not too trashy but to make it more luminous. Because in this heat, it’s actually also easier to do trashy than to do something perfect and let it be trashed by the climate.

FNW: What did you want to do with the lips?

PP: Just scrubbed them so there’s no dead skin and moisturized them with a lip balm. Rouge Dior lip balm. And on the darker-skinned girls we had tinted lip balms. They are very sheer but add just a bit of color on the lip. But it’s more about the shine than about the color.
FNW: What products of Dior have you been using to effect in this show?
PP: It started in the prep. I used the Capture Total skincare routine to make sure the skin [of the models] is nice and hydrated. I know it will give a good dewy shine under foundation. And then I use the face and body foundation which I know has a bit of a matte finish but combined with the Capture Total it ages nicely and it looks beautiful in a hot climate. It will be very dewy. It’s shiny without looking sweaty and that’s what I wanted for tonight. Then we just do the T-zone. We mattify…

FNW: The T-Zone?
PP: The parts of the face that where they sweat it’s not too flattering. Such as, the side of the nose, the forehead, the hairline and the chin. And we used “Powder no Powder” which is kind of an amazing product because there is no talc. It’s pure pigment and it has a finish in it which is a little bit luminous. I have a bit on my arm here. You see, it has a nice glow but it’s not matte and there’s no talc. I put it on the side of the nose, and the forehead. It makes very dewy looking skin.

FNW: You were quite famous for your dramatic make up especially at Raf and Chanel. How have you tried to interpret your role at Dior?
PP: There are different paths at Dior. When I did the shows and when I worked for Raf it was helping to project his vision. With Maria Grazia, it’s her vision. With Karl it’s what he wanted. With McQueen it’s what he wanted. I adapt myself to support their vision and my creativity and my vision. Sometimes I do both and sometimes I hold back. It’s a balance game. Maria Grazia tends not to like to do too much make up. But I actually have done bold make-up for her. Always focusing on the eyes. It’s always black.

FNW: A bit like Maria Grazia, right?
PP: Exactly, a bit like her. It affects what she wants, her vision.
FNW: She is often regarded as a feminist designer. Does that feed into what you are doing?
PP: Well, I also see myself as a feminist. Maybe not as radical as Maria Grazia. She’s a feminist from a woman’s point of view. I’m a feminist in the sense that I view men and women as equal. That’s my point of view of being feminist but I don’t know what women go through to become so rebellious and I don’t have the same statements to make. I think we’re a force to work together because I was already at Dior.

FNW: How long have you been at Dior?
PP: Eight years already. It goes by fast. She knows my portfolio so she knows what I’ve done. From day one, I told her, 'I am at your service. Whatever you want. If you want something bold I can give it to. And if you want nothing I don’t mind.' I think she respected that a lot. In the beginning she was a bit defensive which is understandable but after a few shows I think she realized I’m very truthful in what I say and what I do. When she wants something I deliver.

I’ve done some bold looks. In Greece (Dior cruise 2021), I put pearls around the eyes. This is not a natural look. And once for a haute couture show with Stephen Jones, who does amazing masks, we did spikey eyeliners. I have become an expert in eyeliner variations. I’ve done so many now I could do a book about eyeliners. At some point, professionally the feminist instinct falls away because it doesn’t matter if I’m a man or a woman. I’m fair in the way that I treat everyone equally.
FNW: As creative director, what are you most excited about now?
PP: I’m very excited about the Backstage line. It was something we launched seven years ago. It was one of my first projects with the rise of millennials, and Dior as a luxury brand was like, “How can we reach that young audience?” I came up with the concept of the Backstage Line. I was like, ‘Okay, we need somebody young as the campaign star.’ Plus, most millennials don’t go to perfumeries, they go to Sephora. We had a few products at Sephora that we used in Backstage like the nail [polish] line and lip maximizers. I said, ‘Why don’t we develop a line that is pure basics, easy to wear, easy to apply, and not intimidating?’ It’s a younger, more neutral placement that will attract young people. At the same time that doesn’t scare our loyal clients. It’s been a huge success. We’re number one now in almost every region in luxury brands.

FNW: In that case, I hope Bernard (Arnault, patron of Dior) pays you well?
PP: Yeah, I mean, I don’t complain. (Major laughs together). Because Dior is a rollercoaster. It’s a totally different mechanism than Chanel.

FNW: In what way?
Peter: I had a great time at Chanel and had a good time with Karl. But it’s a very private company. The mechanism is different. It is not marketing driven. My creative studio was a huge studio, now I have a small team. It’s a marketing machine at Dior. And I realized I am more of a commercial creative. I like when women wear my lipsticks and my eyeshadows. In that way you also have to be respectful to them and in that way you’re commercial. In that way you can guarantee a quality and something that’s not too intimidating but at the same time launch things that are exciting.

FNW: What’s your next big launch?
PP: We have an amazing lipstick coming up this September. A fantastic formula. Totally transfer-proof, long-lasting, and we changed the packaging for a classic lipstick matte. I did a matte one, finally. I’m very excited about that.

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