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20 ODD QUESTIONS

# Valentino's Pierpaolo Piccioli on 'The Devil Wears Prada' and Sneakers

Ahead of the Italian brand's womenswear show in Paris, the designer divulges his favorite films, artists, footwear and breakfast foods



BRAVO RAGAZZO Pierpaolo Piccioli in his Rome office.

PHOTO: DANILO SCARPATI FOR THE WALL STREET JOURNAL

*By Rory Satran*

Feb. 29, 2020 12:00 am ET

**THE CREATIVE** director of 60-year-old Italian brand Maison Valentino doesn't relish talking about himself. "Fashion is my voice," explained Pierpaolo Piccioli, "so I hope to deliver my thoughts and my values through fashion."

For the past 12 years that he's been at the helm of the luxury house (until 2016 with a partner, Maria Grazia Chiuri), Mr. Piccioli's designs have communicated loud and clear. From the flashy success of his streetwear-inspired sneakers to the museum-caliber couture gowns he creates, his work has a restless, perfectionist quality. In the lead-up to this weekend's womenswear show in Paris, he's been even busier than usual: sitting front row at the Prada show; dining with French President Emmanuel Macron; and launching Valentino's Le Blanc collection of customizable white poplin shirts in select stores.

In the midst of all this glamour and industriousness, he stays grounded thanks to his wife, Simona, and children: Benedetta, 23; Pietro, 21; and Stella, 14. They live in the coastal town, Nettuno, where he grew up, and he commutes each day to work in Rome. "I understand that

people look at me as the creative director of Valentino,” he said, “but I see myself as the same kid of long ago when I was by the seaside dreaming of fashion and everything was very far for me.”



Clockwise from left: A coat from Valentino's Fall 2019 collaboration with Undercover; orange jam; Jeanne Moreau in the 1961 film 'La Notte'; Valentino Climbers sneakers.

PHOTO: JEANNE MOREAU (EVERETT COLLECTION); MARMALADE (ALAMY); PAOLO DI PAOLO/ARCHIVIO FOTOGRAFICO PAOLO DI PAOLO

**When I begin a collection, I always:** look at the same books that I see in different ways: a collection of Piero della Francesca's paintings; one about the mathematicians of the Italian renaissance; books about London in the 1970s and the punk scene of that period; and "Lettere Luterane" by Pier Paolo Pasolini.

**I'm listening to:** Billie Eilish. I feel that she's a real talent. Sometimes in this moment everything is about fame and being famous. I think that being talented is the most important thing.

**I start each day with:** black espresso first, then a shower, but in the first hour I'm very silent. I have breakfast with my family before going out: one more coffee, a glass of cold milk, orange jam and a biscuit. I like homemade things. I don't like brands.

**My favorite restaurant in Rome is:** Pierluigi, which I like because of the fish, but also because it's intimate. I like places where I already know everyone and I feel like it's home.

**My wellness routine is to do:** SMS, a kind of gymnastics you do with your body weight. But I smoke—I try to balance my pack of cigarettes a day with my gym.

**I sketch my designs with:** very tough pencils, ivory watercolor paper and a glass of water. Sometimes I like to use water in my drawings. With a bit of cigarette ash it becomes gray, and I use that as a watercolor.

**The late Vogue Italia editor Franca Sozzani always told me:** if you work seriously, you don't need to take yourself seriously. And if you don't work seriously, you need to be serious.

**My most recent collaboration was with:** Paolo di Paolo, who is a 94-year-old photographer. He came to Paris to take a reportage of my collection, and he hadn't taken pictures for 50 years.

**The pictures on my office wall include:** one of David Bowie and John Lennon, men that changed the way of being men; pictures of Pier Paolo Pasolini taken by Paolo di Paolo; a painting by my friend, the Franciscan monk Sival Fila; a photo of Anna Magnani. There's a big neon with part of the poetry of [Pier] Paolo Pasolini which says "Non vogliamo essere subito già così senza sogni" [We don't want to be without dreams already].



Clockwise from left: Billie Eilish wearing Valentino in January; a 1960 photograph by Paolo di Paolo of film director and writer Pier Paolo Pasolini; a painting by Sival Fila.

PHOTO: BILLIE EILISH (GETTY IMAGES); PAOLO DI PAOLO/ARCHIVIO FOTOGRAFICO PAOLO DI PAOLO; PAINTING (SIDIVAL FILA)



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