



“Sometimes it’s good to go wild,” says makeup artist François Nars. Silk-wool-and-fox-fur coat with plastic appliqués by Dolce & Gabbana. Necklace by Robert Lee Morris. Makeup colors: Duo Eyeshadow in Brumes, Eyeliner Pencil in Black Moon, Velvet Matte Lip Pencil in Cruella, and Nail Polish in Tokaido Express by Nars. These pages: Makeup, François Nars; hair, Oribe of Oribe Salon Miami Beach; manicure, Jin Soon Choi of the Jin Soon Natural Hand & Foot Spa. Prop stylist: Tom Bell. Model: Viktoriya Sasonkina. Fashion editor: Paul Cavaco. Details, see Credits page.

Behind the Makeup

Flawless colors and Orgasms are what François Nars is best known for. His illustrious career. By Lindsay Van Gelder

The word “genius” is flung around the fashion world like confetti at a parade, usually as an adjective (as in “*J’adore* that genius lipstick”). But if there’s anyone who deserves the noun form, it’s François Nars.

Younger fans of Nars’s 15-year-old cosmetics line might be forgiven for not having realized that there is indeed a man behind the compacts. “I don’t like to make too many appearances or talk too much to people,” Nars acknowledges. Somewhat reclusive for the past decade,

he leaped back onto the fashion-genius radar earlier this year with his work at the Marc Jacobs fall and spring shows.

The real genius, though, according to Nars, was his mother. “She was my PR,” he laughs. Growing up in the ’70s in a small rural town in southwestern France, where his father owned a pork-products factory, Nars loved nothing better than to do makeup on the women in his family. He was a sensitive, opera-loving boy who mostly lived in his own little world: “At ten, I was already obsessed with fashion.” He knew he wanted to be a makeup artist after he finished

school, but “I had no connections, and the fashion world was a closed elite.” So his mother made herself appointments for makeup applications with three top Paris artists and used the opportunities to tell them about her creative son. “She was so beautiful and elegant that they must have figured that maybe her son had taste,” he says. One of them offered him a job as an assistant, and within two years Nars was working for the magazines he had devoured as a child.

His mother also inspired the style of makeup that turned Nars into a star. “She had beautiful skin and hated feel-

PHOTOGRAPHED BY MICHAEL THOMPSON

ing like she had a mask on her face,” he says. “I would do strong eye makeup on her, but fresh skin.” That look was radical 30 years ago, and the photographers Nars was working with loved the way it looked. Former *Allure* creative director Polly Mellen, then with *Vogue*, was so intrigued with his transparent makeup that she booked him for a shoot with Brooke Shields in 1984, and his career took off. For the next 15 years, he was makeup’s golden boy, sought after for the runway, magazine spreads, and music videos (including Madonna’s).

Then, in 1994, Nars decided “out of the blue that it would be fun to have a makeup line with my name on it.” He borrowed money from his parents to start a line of 12 lipsticks. In addition to overseeing the colors and textures of the products, he took up photography so he could shoot the ads himself. “We would have loved to hire someone like Richard Avedon or Steven Meisel,” he explains, “but we didn’t have the budget.” (He took so well to his new craft

that he has since published several books of photography.) His cosmetics line, meanwhile, grew into a worldwide makeup and skin-care company that in 2000 was acquired by Shiseido.

In 2002, Nars bought an island near Tahiti. “The older you get, the more time you want to spend in nature,” says Nars, who lives there about five months a year. But the fact that he ventured back to the runway last February makes one wonder what’s next. He says he misses Paris and has been thinking of spending more time there—but not necessarily in its most famous industry. “I was lucky to be starting out in the ’80s. Linda Evangelista was obsessed with makeup—we would spend two hours plucking her eyebrows. There was a passion for the camera. Today, the girls seem not to care what you do.”

For Nars, beauty now comes more from the blues of the ocean or pinks of orchids, where he finds inspiration for the colors of eye shadows and lipsticks. “At this point in my life, I try to do only the things that I love,” he says. ♦

His Picks

These are the products that Nars says are his own personal bests.

- 1 **The Multiples**, Nars’s line of multiuse color sticks. “It’s such an easy product to have with you in your bag, because it gives you three possibilities, for lips, cheeks, and eyes.”
- 2 **Body Glow**, his glimmery, cocoa-colored oil. “I love the fragrance: It reminds me of gardenias in Tahiti. And it’s got a great texture.”
- 3 **Orgasm Blush**. Aside from the notorious name, this blush “looks good on practically everybody.”
- 4 **Shanghai Express, Jungle Red, and Red Lizard Lipsticks**. “So many reds are too blue or too greasy or never quite the right shade, but I have really good reds. Every woman should have one—it’s like a little black dress.”
- 5 **All About Eve and Taiga Duo Eyeshadows**. These are neutral eye shadows that are “not too yellow, not too brown.”
- 6 **Nars 15 X 15 (Chandelier Creative)**. This limited-edition book for the company’s 15th anniversary contains Nars’s photographs of Amber Valletta, Isabella Rossellini, and others. “All the proceeds go to the charity of the participants’ choice.”

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HIGH POINTS From the ’80s to the present, Nars has worked with every leading model, fashion magazine, and photographer, including Irving Penn, Richard Avedon, and Steven Meisel.



FRANÇOIS NARS, 2004
The makeup artist with one of his dogs, Max, “a stray we found in Tahiti.”



PAULINA PORIZKOVA, 1986
“She had perfect features.”



STEPHANIE SEYMOUR, 1998
Nars photographed Seymour without any makeup for *Allure*.

KATE MOSS, 1996
This combination of voluptuous red lips and fresh skin was a Nars trademark from day one.



MADONNA, 1991
“I know every inch of her body from applying makeup.”



SHANA, 1992
Steven Meisel took this. “It was a fabulous time.”



AMBER VALLETTA, 2009
For his new ad campaign, Nars transformed Valletta into a Deneuve lookalike.

THIS PAGE, CLOCKWISE FROM LEFT: PATRICK DEMARCHELIER; RICHARD AVEDON; FRANÇOIS NARS; MICHAEL THOMPSON; COURTESY OF NARS COSMETICS; STEVEN MEISEL (2)



For this look, Nars used nothing but foundation on the model's lips and dabbed intense red and black on her eyes: "You need the black to frame and set off the red." Wool cape jacket and scarf hat by Marc Jacobs. Makeup colors: Blush in Exhibit A (used as eye shadow), Soft Touch Shadow Pencil in Aigle Noir, and Eyeliner Pencil in Black Moon by Nars. Details, see Credits page.