

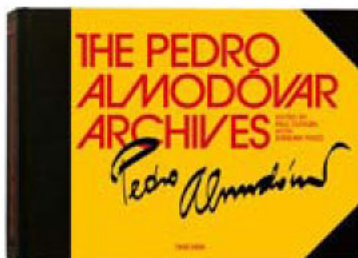
Almodóvar on Almodóvar - NYTimes.com



Mimmo

Cattarinich/El Deseo Pedro Almodóvar on the set of "High Heels" (1991) goofing off while Victoria Abril and Marisa Paredes rehearse.

Pedro Almodóvar had put on his sunglasses, even though we were in a basement office. "There's too much light," he said of the fluorescents. "I work with light, but I don't like too much." Almodóvar appears just as you imagine him, like a stubby human exclamation point, inverted in the Spanish style, topped with a porcupine poof of gray-white hair. He's charming. "Don't worry," he whispered when a publicist indicated that our time was already running short. "I'm the boss here."



Almodóvar came to the Taschen boutique on Greene Street last night to promote "The Pedro Almodóvar Archives," his forthcoming book. And before participating in an interview with Kim Hastreiter of Paper Magazine in front of a hermetically packed crowd, the famous director set aside 15 minutes for The Moment.

An exhaustive survey of his 18 feature films, Almodóvar's book begins in 1980 with "Pepi, Luci, Bom" and ends with "The Skin I Live In," his latest, which Manohla Dargis described as "an existential mystery, a melodramatic thriller, a medical horror film or just a polymorphous extravaganza." Almodóvar wrote much of this book himself and, ever the genre bender, he contributes not just essays but reflections from the perspective of some of his film characters. In other chapters, he asks himself questions and answers them. (One begins: "Has anyone ever told you that you're more interesting in the interviews you write yourself?") "I think it's essential in life to find good counterparts," he joked. "I ask myself questions that journalists don't dare to ask or don't know how to ask."

Almodóvar hired an interpreter for the evening — a dashing young man from the United Nations who had worked for him in Madrid — but made limited use of him, relying instead on his perfectly serviceable English. Almodóvar is nevertheless attuned to the possibility of being lost in translation; he writes in the book that he's shocked his films are so popular abroad since so much of the dialogue is untranslatable. "The funniest lines almost disappear with the subtitles," Almodóvar said, citing the character of Candela from "Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown" as one that was "incredibly successful in Spain but almost lost elsewhere." At least his movies aren't dubbed. "Fellini and Bergman had that problem," he added.

The book is riddled with interesting observations — some fresh, others culled from decades-old press clippings. Almodóvar admits that the totally irreverent 1993 film "Kika" was too jarring and a critical failure (although he notes that the Coen brothers are still fans). Meanwhile, he lists "Dark Habits," made in 1983, as the film with which he was "most satisfied." But in our interview he allowed that he's not so sure. "It's very difficult for me to make a choice," he said. "That film was very transgressive for the time. I don't understand why we didn't run into more trouble with the Vatican and the Catholic Church."

Almodóvar can be blunt and hilarious, as when he proclaims himself in the book to be "a self-made man," before noting that "there's nothing more boring." He also writes that he wants to be "tall and black like Michael Jordan." "It's true," he said at the store. "Transsexual people feel that they don't identify with their nature. Similarly, I feel very tall. I think there is a tall guy inside of me."

"The Pedro Almodóvar Archives" will be on sale next month for \$200. Go to taschen.com.