Photo Cameron Postforoosh, Style Haidee Findlay-Levin



Andie MacDowell

Erase and rewind

Long dress in georgette lingerie with cape-like effect and Black slingbacks FENDI

In *Melpomène,* Charlotte Dauphin's forthcoming film exploring the hidden scars of mental illness, Andie MacDowell retraces the threads of her own family history, reflecting on the invisible legacy it has left behind. From *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* to *Groundhog Day,* from Robert Altman to Wim Wenders, and from Saint Laurent to Bill Murray, the 68-year-old actress looks back with candor on the films, encounters and defining moments that have shaped a career spanning nearly five decades. Through it all, her passion for cinema has remained undiminished – as has her enduring affection for France. INTERVIEW ARMELLE LETURCQ PHOTO CAMERON POSTFOROOSH

ARMELLE LETURCQ You play a role in a new French film: *Melpomène*, by Charlotte Dauphin, a film about schizophrenia which will be released this fall. Can we talk about it?

ANDIE MC DOWELL That film, *Melpomène*, was a really interesting experience. It's always great to have the opportunity to work with a whole European team, a whole French team and these wonderful, very prestigious French actors. That was really unique and special and I just had the feeling that it was a little present that was given to me. They reached out to me, and it's interesting because I have a personal experience with schizophrenia. My mother was diagnosed with schizophrenia and given shock treatment when I was a baby, and there were so many unanswered questions. So when I read the script, I thought it was uncanny that they had come to me. I understood my character and the desire to understand what's happening and how it can affect you, because I've lived it. I know what that is. So I thought that it was a kind of a beautiful little present for me, to be given to me, to watch Charlotte Dauphin make a beautiful piece of art out of the mental suffering of a woman. And I've done a lot of therapy myself over the years, and so I understood what it is like and how women have been a lot of times misdiagnosed or not supported appropriately. Because people in the past always wanted to think that they were being overdramatic and they were always accused of being too emotional. And the diagnosis was always hard, like I wonder even with my mother at the time, because it would have been 1958, if it was some postpartum or hormonal problems, which at that time nobody was really studying those kinds of things, because they didn't understand. And it could have been similar because in the film, she was a baby when this happened to her mother. So I thought that was really interesting. You see one little flashback of the mother holding the baby and you can see the depth of depression in her mother. And at the same time she's holding this baby and it really hit me, because I don't know what my mother was like. I don't have the answers to what it was like for my mother to hold me when she was that depressed. And what was it like for her to leave me? Because she left and went to a hospital. So the story of *Melpomène* resonated with me, and I felt a very strong connection to it. And I love the way she tells it. I think it's a beautiful piece of art. It reminds me a little bit of the architectural pieces, like when you see the south of France with the architecture and the buildings and the rocks and how everything is done. A little bit of Wim Wenders, how her eye captures everything. And I love the colors that she wears. I just thought that her presence was beautifully designed, just to emphasize Charlotte's beauty, and then the bright colors within the starkness. I thought that was such a dramatic choice. And I really loved those choices. And her quietness, the intensity of her character, and the way she thinks, you can see her thinking. And you really take this trip with her and you see the suffering that comes to her. And I know what that feels like because when you come from something that mysterious, confusing and misunderstood, it makes you feel like, what about me? Is it in me? Is that a part of me? And I felt that the whole point of the story was how it was revealed in the story. It was beautifully done. Of course, not everything is answered, in the French way which I love. And it gives the audience the opportunity to think and to go on, more of an artistic type of a dream of a revealing story. And I love those kinds of movies. I think, and particularly for this subject, that it's really interesting because it is an internal, emotional trip that you're taking.

AL Can you talk about your character in the film?

AMD The interesting part for me was to be seen at the beginning, which is nice because you get that little taste of me in the beginning, of who my character is and how I think. And then you see me go, "Oh my gosh, it's her!" But you don't really know it until later. Until I give her some answers. My character is looking for answers, and not knowing can make you feel like you're losing your mind. Because of not having these answers. And also all the relationships coming to her, which are not really satisfying her. Or also putting herself in her mother's place, right? She's taking the journey of her mother, of what her mother went through. And I have thought about that, I think about it all the time. I remember watching Jane Campion's movie *An Angel at My Table*, and they were watching her get her shock treatment. I watched it alone in an art theater. And the feelings I had in the moment when she was getting her shock treatment were just indescribable. Because it's a time in your mother's life that you never will have the answers to. It's quite visceral. You feel it all over your body. And so this is what's happening to this young woman. She has all these unanswered questions. And I help her resolve it. And one of the things is the choices, obviously. I think it ended up happening that way because there is so much sadness and also unanswered questions. I feel like the ending, like when I came in with the laughter, I gave it levity because you can't suffer forever, right? At some point you have to put it down. Even if you don't have all the answers to all the questions, at some point you must put it down and be lifted out of it. And I feel like the whole ending with the statue, the laughter and the joy was a resolution to how much pain that she was carrying. This movie doesn't offer answers, but a human reflects on trauma, emotional inheritance and the cost of truth. And this is real perfection, and it resonates with me, because that's how I feel. There are so many unanswered questions about emotional inheritance. I know it's in my body and my DNA. So what is the cost of truth? It affects you for your entire life. It's always there, it doesn't go away. But at some point, like I said, you have to release it. And what I do, and I watch my siblings doing it too because they are carrying the same pain, is to take walks in the woods. I know it's emotional pain, and she's carrying so much. And for me, it's my art and my job. Because it gives me the opportunity to create and use whatever is inside of me for my characters. And whatever your art is, you can release it. And also, like my sisters, I love to walk in the woods. When you carry these kinds of unanswered questions and pain, you have to find some place to put it. So that you can enjoy life.

AL It's difficult to find explanations because in fact with mental health, most people don't know exactly what's happening.

AMD No, and their diagnosis is always difficult. They diagnosed my mother with schizophrenia and then she became an alcoholic. And I watched her, I was very close to her, I took care of her. So, I don't think it was a true diagnosis. I think she had a lot of hormonal problems. She was in a terrible marriage. And she was, like in Jungian perspectives, when they always thought that women needed to be at home. Because this was the message early on: women needed to be at home and take care of the family. And women were so repressed that they had nowhere to put their own personal power because they were diminished and told what to do, so it would quite often make them crazy. Especially women who had power inside of them or strength inside of them. Or the ones who had the desire to create. This really caused a lot of mental distress. And I think that's what happened with my mother. I don't think she was necessarily schizophrenic. I think she had a psychotic episode. I do believe that. And then she placated herself later, because she didn't get the proper care. And she was not able to have the strength of a powerful woman.

AL And sometimes doctors can give the wrong medicine, the wrong drugs for the wrong disease…

AMD Or no medicine at all. No medicine. That was the kind of thing they did. Just placate her, just push her down, and make her go back to her position.

AL Was it the first time that you played in a French movie?

AMD Yeah! And I hope it's not the last. I started to work on my French a little bit, like I always said I would! I knew I always wanted to do that, especially because America is pretty sick right now, but anyway I should dig deeper. But it's not that bad! I started to work on French a long time ago, and it's interesting how much I remember! Because I lived there when I was twenty. I still have memories and a foundation, but I need to devote myself to learning French. In a year, I'm sure I could be speaking it well enough. But never good enough for the French people.

AL I would like to go back and talk about the beginning of your career. You began as a model. So when did you decide to become an actress?

AMD Really early on. I had done theater in college. It had been a dream of mine since I was a child. That was my hope, but I just didn't know how to do it. I grew up in a little tiny town with nobody else doing that kind of thing. But it was something that I had wanted to do since I was a child. And I was extremely creative and I would go to the theater and it was in me. I just didn't know how to go about it. And then once I lived in Paris for like a year and a half, thank goodness. And then I moved back to New York. And one of the agents from the model agencies was working on commercials and she came up to me. And then I got my first job at 23. And it was great because in my 20s, I went to class. I devoted myself to class. I went to a lot of classes and I worked with really good coaches. But I had the support of modeling, which really was to my benefit. I didn't have to wait tables. I was lucky. I was one of the lucky ones. It really was a great support to be able to take care of myself, pay for everything I needed to pay for and study at the same time. So it ended up being a really nice balance for me. And then by the time I did *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*, I was able to just say "Okay, this is it". I'm a real actress now. This is it. But before that, it was questionable. I didn't know if it was going to work out.

AL *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* was your first film?

AMD Oh, no. My first film was *Greystoke*. And then I didn't work for a while. And then Joel Schumacher gave me *St. Elmo's Fire*, thank goodness. And here's a funny little story. For *St. Elmo's Fire*, I went out to audition and I was in acting class at the time. And in acting class, I did a scene, and usually we had like a fake bed, and usually there was a mattress on the bed, and in the scene I went up and hit the bed, boom, like this. But the mattress was not there, and I fractured my hand in class. So when I went out to do the audition, I wore a cast on my hand. But I met Joel and did my audition, and I got the job! And for me, it was such a necessary step because I was so insecure with myself. I didn't have a lot of confidence in myself. I was working hard towards something because I knew I wanted this, but I didn't know if it was going to happen. And then I got that job, and still after that one it took forever. I did another little TV show that was nothing, and I did *Secret of the Sahara* with really good actors. But it was an Italian movie, an Italian miniseries. And at that point, I really thought it was over. I thought I was never going to make it. And I started thinking of other things that I would do with my life. And then I got *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*. And, oh God! That just changed everything. Absolutely everything. Sadly, I didn't go to Cannes because I was pregnant.

AL Of course, the film won the Palme d'Or in Cannes Festival.

AMD Yes, and I didn't go. But it's remarkable because I think if I had gone, it would have made me realize what was happening. But I didn't even realize, because when you go to Cannes you get so much attention. Most of the time you don't get that kind of attention, but at that film festival you get a lot of attention. And I think in a way, maybe it preserved my innocence as to how my career was changing. And I just stayed super-focused and hard-working. Maybe it had a nice effect on me. I don't know. I'll never know.

AL And how did Steven Soderbergh choose you? There was a casting? How did it go?

AMD There was a casting and I read with him. It was interesting because nobody else was in the room with us. It was just him. I remember what I wore. I wore a little cashmere sweater, with a cardigan and pearls. And I was very prepared. I had worked on it really hard. So I went in and he liked what he saw. He told everybody: "Well I found her!" So I had to come back in and they put the camera up and I had to audition again and convince everybody else, the producers and the team, that I was the right person. I was so prepared. I was in class at the time and we working on stage and I did a scene from the film with other people in the class. I worked hard and I overanalyzed it completely. And then when I showed up, Soderbergh told me, "You can improv". I loved his words. His words were fantastic. I had a little improv here and there, and I suggested a scene. There was a scene with just me and my therapist at the end and I wanted there to be a resolution, a resolution with her sister. I wanted the audience to know that I forgave her, and he added that scene where I go to the bar. I learned a lot from watching myself in that, because a lot of times you make choices, at least I did on this film, I made choices. And then watching them was interesting because I could see just what a perfect choice it was. And I'm walking down the alley and I'm not talking, but you can just see the way I'm walking and looking and thinking. You can see what my purpose is, right? Like I'm on to do something. And the way I walk into the room with her and I take her to the plant. I don't know, I learned a lot from that movie and the work I did on that movie. And also when I watched it for the first time with an audience, because I played it so straight, which really helped me with *Groundhog Day*. I didn't realize how funny I was until I was in the audience. And then I was like, "Oh my God, I'm really funny". Because I wasn't trying to be funny. And that is my favorite kind of humor, when it's so well-written that you just play it straight, and it makes it funny. And that's what worked on *Groundhog Day* also. I was straight. I wasn't trying to be funny. And it really was a perfect balance for Bill Murray. And it gave him the opportunity to stretch as far as he wanted to, to be as outrageous as he wanted to, and I kept it real. I think it really works because of that.

AL *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* is such an iconic film. It had all the aesthetic of the 90s independent American movies. It was amazing. When we did our shoot together we tried to rebuild this same atmosphere. *Groundhog Day* is also a cult film that everybody remembers and it's this idea of a repetition, a remake: a day that's coming and going and coming again. What memories do you have from that film and the shoot?

AMD I was learning how important it is to work in companionship with your actor, to connect with the other actor, and to know what your participation is. I wasn't looking for attention. I gave the movie what it needed. And being a participant in the movie and knowing what your part is, is so important. And I knew what my job was. And I could just tell Harold Ramis was always happy. So I knew I was going down the correct road.

AL And how was it to work with Bill Murray?

AMD Bill's intense. He is a genius. He is really magical at what he does.

AL Amazing. And you also played in *Shortcuts* by Robert Altman, which is also an amazing and iconic film.

AMD Yes, and watching Robert Altman work was a gift as well, because he works really differently than anybody else I had ever worked with. Also with the crane shots, these long crane shots that he's famous for. And I got to be in one of the long crane shots in the back side of the house, and it encompassed a lot of different characters and went from side to side. And that was so much fun. And I had the same cinematographer on *Sex, Lies, and Videotape* and *Shortcuts:* Walt Lloyd. So I got to work with him again and that was really nice. And it was just a stunning cast. It was so nice to be part of that film. It was interesting because, like I said, before *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*, I didn't think I was going to make it. And then after *Sex, Lies, and Videotape*, I remember standing in a kitchen with a baby on my hip and getting a phone call, this is back when we had phones on the wall. And the phone rang, and it was Robert Altman. I was just like what just happened? It was amazing. It was like, do I want to work with him? Yes, yes I do. Yes, I do want to!

AL Yeah, of course.

AMD I know, it was crazy.

AL And did you continue to do modeling at that time or did you completely stop?

AMD I wasn't really modeling. People still perceive me as a model, but I haven't really modeled since my 20s. But I don't mind the perception. And I think so many actors would love to do campaigns, and it was fun. It was a great time of my life. It really helped me. I learned a lot from living in France. You have to understand, I came from a really small town in South Carolina. I had no exposure. I did not come from money. The only designers I knew about were Calvin Klein and Ralph Lauren. I had heard of Yves Saint Laurent because *Rive Gauche* was a famous perfume, and my sister wore it. But I didn't really know about him. And by living in France, I was exposed to so many incredible people. I went to museums a lot, and it was a great part of my education. And I had wonderful memories of working for Saint Laurent as a model. I did a Saint-Laurent Rive Gauche campaign and Helmut Newton was the photographer.

AL Amazing! You also worked with Wim Wenders?

AMD Oh yeah, that was fun. And I loved him. He's a beautiful man and that was a great experience. And I love his mind. He's brilliant and kind. It was a great experience. I really loved working with him.

AL And what do you think of movies today with all the platforms? Do you still believe in the big screen? What do you think about it all?

AMD I've had this fantasy of writing a movie about young people going to the movies and making it a really sexy, popular movie. Because it makes me sad that art films aren't as important. I loved the 90s because we had so many art theaters and everybody would go to the art theaters and then you would talk about the movies. And I don't know how to bring that passion back. I wish we could all, people in the business, we could all get together and think about it. How do we bring the passion back for art films and going to art theaters? I think there is a way. I just don't know if anybody's motivated to do it. I think most people are motivated by what's easy and simple and what's already there. And they don't contemplate things anymore.

AL It's true that going to the theaters was completely different back in those days. We used to really remember the movies that we saw.

AMD Absolutely. I remember that there was a little theater when I lived in Montana and my husband and I would go once a week and we would go to the art theater and eat dinner. And I just remember watching all these great movies, like *Babette's Feast*. That's where I saw the Jane Campion movies. That night I went by myself. But I just remember going to the theater and it being packed, a small theater being packed with these beautiful movies and people talking about them. And I really miss that. I wish we could make that a popular concept. And I think there is a way to bring it back. I think maybe incorporate it into a great television show that's really sexy and people are doing it, just to encourage people to see how important it is intellectually and creatively to go into a movie theater, sit down, watch it and then talk about it.

AL And the drive-in, when people in America could see movies from their cars! It was so great.

AMD Yes, it was! But I think that will be harder to bring back. That was important when I was a little girl, but I think it's much more important now to have art theaters and bring it back more. I've done the drive-in as well. It's kind of complicated to sit in the car.

AL I guess I'm a bit nostalgic! So now your daughter Margaret Qualley is an actress like you, and you played together in the series *Maid*. How was that?

AMD Yes, Margaret and I did *Maid* together. It was an interesting character for me because I found a lot of comic moments in it. Comedy is just something that is natural for me. It was a very serious subject matter, though I did find my comic moments.

AL And you played your own role in the series, the role of Margaret's mother?

AMD Yes, and she's bipolar. Margaret is the one who suggested me for the role, because she knew I had this experience with my mother, who was not really bipolar but suffered from mental illness. So I had a reservoir of knowledge to give to the character, which I did. I used a lot of what I had seen and then I reached out to the writer, the creator of the show and listened to her experiences because her mother was bipolar. And so it was a combination of different things that helped me build that character.

AL And how do you feel about your daughter becoming an actress? Does it also remind you about your own experience?

AMD Well, I think she's building her career in a very unique way, in her way. Her choices are her choices. She was a dancer at the beginning. But I think it was a natural choice for her. She had knee issues when she was a dancer, but I think dance really helped her to find who she was as a human being. And she can use that art form in her craft, and I think it made her much more in touch with her body. And I think it's beautiful. I see what she developed as a dancer, and how she is using it now with her acting. I was there for her all those years she was dancing, and she knows how much I love that. It was such a big part of her life when she was a child.

AL She really looks like you and has the same expressions sometimes.

AMD I know. I saw a picture one day where we really looked alike. I sent it to her and said, "Look at you!" And she said "Mom, that's you!" It was actually a picture of me from a long time ago. And I was like, "Oh my God, you're right!"

AL And what are your projects for this year? I have seen that you have a lot of things going on, right?

AMD I have been on a TV show for the last four years and I really love that, because of the consistency and also for being able to develop a character over time. I was thinking today about a fantasy when I was walking on the beach: I should develop something in France! I would definitely love to do that.

AL I'm sure you would have been great in the *White Lotus* series!

AMD Sure! I wish we could create another version of that, because I do love this show. It's so psychological. The writing was so good and you do play it straight. So maybe there would be something to create in France! ■



Shirt in taupe popeline, Pencil skirt in white popeline MIU MIU

"Chente Denim" jeans, "Os Cazador" shirt,
Woolen slim shirt WILLY CHAVARRIA
Pumps in leather PRADA

Silk floral blouse, Silk turban LORO PIANA

Makeup Mary Wiles, Hair Ben Skervin
Photo assistants Michael Stears & Meghann Herlihy
Style assistant Reinaldo Rivera Nunez
Studio The Hoax by Augustin Squassi
New York City



Top in Re-Nylon, Skirt in Re-Nylon with drawstrings, Embroidered stockings in cotton, Pumps in leather PRADA
Previous page: Long dress in georgette lingerie with cape-like effect and Black slingbacks FENDI
Right page: Top in pink silk, Sheer embellished top in tulle, Trousers in wool MIU MIU, Pumps in leather PRADA