

# *timelessly* MODERN

As its centennial approaches, Chanel remains a symbol of sophistication and sexiness—not to mention one of the most recognizable fashion brands in the world.

BY LOIS ELFMAN



**THERE ARE FEW ITEMS OF CLOTHING AS UNIVERSALLY** known as the Chanel suit and few fragrances as familiar to the senses as Chanel No. 5. No other fashion brands have transcended age and style so timelessly and unadulterated than the House of Chanel.

Next year will mark 100 years since Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel opened a boutique in Deauville, France, to sell her jersey creations, and women around the world are still craving the brilliant combination of chic and functionality that she made famous.

When movie star Drew Barrymore married Will Kopelman on June 2, she was clad in Chanel—from her unique Karl Lagerfeld-designed wedding dress (with an accompanying black Chanel tweed jacket for later in the evening) to her Fil de Camélia earrings and vintage diamond Eventail cuff. Barrymore showed the world that Chanel is not only a brand rich with history but also ripe with contemporary relevance.

## **Fashion Revolutionary**

“Chanel burst onto the scene at that moment in the early 1920s when the ‘new woman’ had emerged from the ashes of World War I,” says Jonathan Walford, curatorial director of the Fashion History Museum in Cambridge, Ontario, Canada. “Western women were seeking independence—they were now voting, working, smoking in public and wearing skirts above their ankles.”

Hersha Steinbock, fashion merchandising instructor at Academy of Art University in San Francisco, says Chanel changed the culture by envisioning and designing clothing for a woman who was liberated from the constraints of corsetry. “She challenged and redefined the prevailing dress codes of the time by creating a new relationship between the female form and cloth.”



Model Alice Dellal is the face of the Chanel Boy campaign.

A daring woman who survived a bleak childhood, it could be said that Chanel's greatest design was herself. Raised in an orphanage after her mother's death, she was taught to sew by the nuns. After a brief career as a singer, she found her calling in fashion with backing from two wealthy admirers. Fragrances, cosmetics and jewelry followed.

"Chanel redefined the look of femininity," Steinbock continues. "The modern woman needed new adjectives to describe her new role in the modern world, and Chanel created clothes that supplied those adjectives—chic, confident, elegant and sexy."

By the late 1920s, the Chanel brand was decidedly international with presences in Europe, North America and Asia. Fragrance helped propel the universality of Chanel's appeal. Walford says the early backers understood the power of branding at a time when it was a very new concept.

"Chanel No. 5 could be bought anywhere in the world, and it would always have the same crisp, contemporary scent," he notes.

As World War II took hold of Europe, Chanel stepped away from fashion but returned with some of her most masterful creations in the 1950s: a re-envisioned Chanel suit that offered comfort and unrestricted movement, the quilted leather handbag, new fragrances (including for men) and contemporary jewelry. The black Chanel tweed jacket—like the one Barrymore wore over her wedding dress—became a permanent fixture. To this day, each season Chanel presents a version of the black jacket.

In 1971 Coco Chanel died at age 87 in Paris, leaving a standard of quality and elegance that forever changed the way women dress.

#### Must-Have Accessories

Chanel purses have been staples in many wardrobes, and with exquisite craftsmanship these pieces can last for decades.

The hot, new accessory from Chanel is the Boy handbag that debuted with the fall/winter 2011 collection. Although classic in essence, this line of





White and purple leather Boy Chanel bag



Boy Chanel bag with metal strap



Chanel wristwatch

bags features a new “constructivist” Chanel clasp, a new style of chain and adjustable leather strap and is available in various fabrics and colors. Musician and model Alice Dellal is the face of the Chanel Boy campaign.

“Chanel is always surprising us each season,” fashion stylist Alexis Honce ([alexishonce.com](http://alexishonce.com)) says, noting that Dellal is a perfect fit, combining Chanel sensibility with a bit of punk rock. Honce’s must-have style suggestions are the all-white Boy bag and the smaller alligator skin version in gold and black.

Chanel also produces beautiful shoes, and each season Honce eagerly anticipates the new styles. “They’re the perfect finishing touch to a look,” she says.

For those who want to constantly change up their Chanel look, or find the perfect accessory and/or jewelry for a special occasion, the website [bagborroworsteal.com](http://bagborroworsteal.com) offers a vast selection for short-term rental. Fashion director Tiffany Ullian says they maintain a wide-range of inventory, but the classic handbags are the most sought-after items.

“One of the consistent messages we hear from customers is that they love the quality and versatility of Chanel,” Ullian says. “When it comes to quality, everything from the leather to the

hardware is impeccably executed, and customers feel this difference when they hold a Chanel bag in their hands.

“Karl Lagerfeld carefully balances heritage craftsmanship with new technology, infusing the two to create unique attributes such as exceptional fabrics or brilliant colors exclusive to Chanel. When one carries a Chanel bag, it is like carrying a treasured piece of art that has been mastered over decades.”

### Revered Jewelry

Coco Chanel was also an innovator in jewelry, making it modern, fun and suitable for wearing day or night. The Maltese cross cuffs, created in collaboration with Fulco di Verdura, are among the most revered and copied pieces in jewelry. Multiple strands of pearls, the iconic interlocked CC earrings and intricate flower designs are also Chanel trademarks.

“Mademoiselle [Coco Chanel] was a woman of liberation,” says Helena Krodell, director of Studio PR, a fine jewelry and trends expert. “The designs she created 80 years ago are not overtly feminine or girly. Instead, they are clever, witty, slightly sexy and empowering. These qualities make the jewelry feminine when worn.

“The House of Chanel has done a pristine job



of maintaining the integrity of the brand,” she adds. “Monsieur Lagerfeld continues to channel Chanel and her iconic symbols in the fine jewelry collections of today. Just like back in 1932, one will see: the rose, in the Camélia collection; the stars, in the Comète collection; and the chain link, in the Baroque and Ultra collections. Modern interpretations of these symbols make consumers feel part of a rich history of fashion.

“Classic Chanel pieces that will always make women swoon include the Camélia diamond and white agate earrings, or any one of the many diamond cocktail rings shaped into the iconic Chanel flower,” Krodel continues.

Fashion and jewelry stylist Cynthia Bussey finds the fine jewelry to be dazzling. “Each one is a piece of art that showcases the intricate craftsmanship in such a magical way,” she notes. “The CC earrings are a distinct symbol that signifies beauty and the epitome of style and class worldwide.”

The Chanel wristwatch division was established in 1987, but it was the launch of the Chanel J12 line of unisex watches in 2000 that propelled watches into must-have status. The latest in that line, the Chromatic, utilizes decidedly 21st century material, titanium ceramic.

### Classic Meets Current

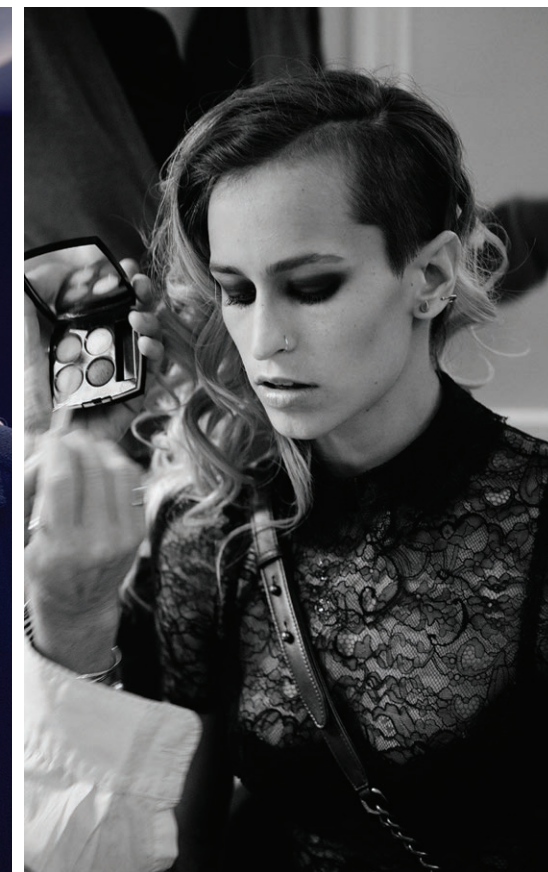
Next year will also be a milestone anniversary for designer Karl Lagerfeld, who was appointed artistic director of Chanel haute couture, ready-to-wear and accessories in 1983. In the past three decades, he has made his own imprint on Chanel while also paying homage to the brand’s origins.



Karl Lagerfeld

“Lagerfeld rekindled the spark of Coco in his first collections for her label and turned Chanel into a more successful company than it ever was,” Walford says. “Lagerfeld keeps Chanel contemporary and in the spirit of Coco while also referring to her historic styling—the black-and-white palettes, the Camélia, the striped jersey sweaters and sailor’s trousers of sportswear, the black tulle and jersey evening gowns and the tweed day clothes.”

As Lagerfeld’s career at Chanel has unfolded, his name has become synonymous with the brand. “The impact of the brand has been sustained because it changes with the times, reflects the



zeitgeist rather than challenging it; moves with the culture—slightly ahead but always resonating,” Steinbock says.

Lagerfeld has long said he is inspired by the blend of old and new. That concept is clearly seen in cruise collection 2012/13, which was unveiled on May 14 at a lavish fashion show at the Bosquet des Trois Fontaines at the Chateau de Versailles in France and is available in boutiques in November.

“It is Coco rock, French rock with a very 18th century frivolity, one that’s been updated with new materials and new proportions,” Lagerfeld says of the line. “Modernity and classical beauty can be combined and mixed up at Chanel.”

### NEW THIS FALL

Karl Lagerfeld, artistic director of Chanel, celebrates Chanel history in his new book, “The Little Black Jacket: Chanel’s Classic Revisited” by Karl Lagerfeld and Carine Roitfeld. More than 100 photographs illustrate the modernity of this iconic piece.

Chanel introduced new cosmetic and fragrance items in September, including Les Exclusifs fresh body cream, which is part of the 13 exquisite fragrances of the Les Exclusifs collection, and Le Blanc targeted brightening spot corrector TXC. Coming in October is the anti-aging Sublimage La Crème Yeux.

Les Essentiels de Chanel makeup collection adds beautiful fall 2012 items, including Lumière D’Artifices Beiges illuminating powder with shimmer, which Peter Philips, creative director of Chanel Makeup, says was inspired by Chanel classics like the little black dress, the quilted handbag and the two-toned shoe. There are also new eye shadows, blushes, lip colors and nails colors available in beautiful ranges for autumn.







2012-13 Cruise ready-to-wear collection

Celebrity stylist Nicole Chavez works with Chanel on an ongoing basis. She often dresses celebrity clients in Chanel, and the brand is a special favorite of actress Rachel Bilson, who Chavez styles.

"I love putting my clients in Chanel for the red carpet," says Chavez, who selected a balletic Chanel from spring 2012 for Bilson to wear at the Art of Elysium gala in Los Angeles. "Karl's designs are always unique and have a strong perspective. The garments are never anything short of pure fantasy and fun. The tailoring and craftsmanship in each piece is exquisite. I always refer to Chanel



as wearable art."

On the other hand, Honce also takes non-celebrity clients to Chanel to shop for their everyday wardrobes. "Chanel is ageless," Honce says. "Everyone can own pieces of the collection, and it effortlessly works for their lifestyle."

She adds that the magic of Lagerfeld is his talent of pairing fashion-forward collections with pieces that always remain classic. "He opens our eyes to new possibilities from items that we have been wearing forever ... Nothing is more modern than reworking the old into the new, and Karl does this seamlessly each collection he debuts.

"Some of my favorite looks were the floral print silk dresses that were accessorized with denim platform creepers and a choker to remind us of his rebellious inspiration," Honce says.

Shattering the myth that Chanel is demure, Bussey doesn't hesitate to pair a Chanel jacket with jeans, or put a long, white Chanel jacket over a black T-shirt. She understands the versatility of the brand and says that personal style depends on the lifestyle of the wearer. "I personally like to dress my clients in Chanel with a twist," Bussey says.

While adjectives like "classic" and "ladylike" are still accurate, Lagerfeld allows those who wear Chanel to show their conservative or completely non-traditional sides. There is something for just about everyone at Chanel—whether it be sedate or electric, spicy or sweet, black and white or vibrant and colorful.

"Chanel has become a touchstone which other fashions are held up to," Walford says. "Is something as elegant as a Chanel or as well-made as a Chanel or as classic as a Chanel?" 🧐