

GABRIELLE CHANEL. FASHION MANIFESTO

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Fashion manifesto

Gabrielle Chanel devoted her life to creating, perfecting and promoting a new type of feminine elegance. She designed for an active and emancipated woman, like herself, according to principles of comfort, simplicity and ease of movement. Chanel rewrote fashion conventions with personal conviction, transforming women's wardrobes with her innovative ideas, pioneering approach to fabric and construction, and utmost consideration of the female form.

For Chanel, haute couture was both an area of experimentation – she worked directly on the mannequin, never sketching first – and a creative space, fuelled by her interactions with the artistic, intellectual and literary circles of her time. The strength and timelessness of her creations arose from an ability to harmonise function and form, marrying her design instinct with the quest for a new ideal grounded in the reality of women's lives.

Throughout her career, Chanel's design style became a template for modern living. She remade the ordinary as elegant, combined masculine and feminine, real and imitation, austerity and excess. Against the short-lived novelty of contemporary trends, Chanel remained consistent and assured of the continuing relevance of her aesthetic, revealing the flexibility and force of a singular style.

Towards a new elegance

Gabrielle Chanel began her career as a milliner, before opening boutiques in the French coastal resort towns of Deauville (1912) and Biarritz (1915), where she was inspired by the sense of liberty that characterised upper-class social life. The first to wear her own creations, Chanel produced designs that reflected her personal circumstances, taste and ambition. Loose slipovers, chemise dresses and sports clothes formed a *gamine* style that countered the restrictive fashions of the previous century with their stiff fabrics and complicated undergarments.

The hallmarks of Chanel's style were simplicity, practicality and a relaxed elegance. Rejecting any superfluous ornamentation, Chanel designed balanced, straight forms that respected women's bodies and allowed them to move with ease. She introduced an aesthetic of streamlined modernity to fashion that resonated with the dramatic changes to women's social roles following the First World War. Chanel's youthful designs, in fluid supple materials such as machine-made jersey, were characterised by a surprising blend of minimalism and precision, laying the foundations for a new form of elegance that she defended throughout her career.

Gabrielle Chanel (attributed to)

1883–1971

Slip-over blouse

c. 1916

silk jersey, wood, metal

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with funds donated by Mrs Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM in memory of Mr Harold Campbell-Pretty, 2015

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In 1912, Chanel opened a shop in the fashionable seaside resort of Deauville, followed three years later by her first couture house in Biarritz. She catered to a wealthy and elegant clientele, selling relaxed and functional daywear inspired by her own aspirations in dress. Dating from this time, this slip-over blouse is now one of her most iconic pieces. Light and comfortable and made from fine silk jersey, a material previously reserved for sports and underwear, the simplified cut, lack of fastenings and loose hang combined notions of elegance and ease, principles at the heart of Chanel's radically modern style.

Hat

spring–summer 1917

silk chenille, silk satin

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Gabrielle Chanel began her career as a milliner in 1908, in a studio at 160 Boulevard Malesherbes, Paris. Making hats that combined sobriety and simplicity, her work was in marked contrast to the voluminous hairstyles of the day, laden with ornaments and flowers. From 1910 onwards, fashion magazines *Comœdia Illustré* and *Les Modes* featured Chanel's hats modelled by celebrated and influential theatre actresses. In May 1911, *Comœdia* wrote, 'Gabrielle Chanel's stylish designs are increasingly sought after by pretty women both in the theatre and in town'.

The emergence of a style

In the 1920s and 1930s, Chanel staunchly affirmed her own aesthetic choices and personal conception of fashion. Exhibiting a refined elegance, her designs were uncluttered, the materials fluid, lightweight and often monochrome. Her palette was subtle, and while black, white and beige dominated, occasionally more vivid tones such as midnight blue and fiery red appeared.

In her quest for simplicity, Chanel's use of printed or embroidered decorations and patterns, was measured and restrained. Flowers, however, were an exception to the rule. Whether a single fabric bloom or fluttering petals, cut out and inlaid by hand, Chanel's flowers conveyed an idea of natural youthfulness that was unanimously acclaimed by the press. Delicate chiffons and silk voiles printed with small or abstract floral motifs were produced by the Tissus Chanel factory, which the couturière established in the late 1920s.

Chanel's suits and coats of the period were inspired by sportswear and borrowed from codes of male elegance and dandyism. Transforming techniques and materials previously foreign to haute couture, Chanel created casual outfits from common fabrics such as wool and tweed. Her garments were radical in their practicality, but

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also highly refined, with distinctive cut and proportions. From this tenuous equilibrium, Chanel developed a signature style that was immediately identifiable.

Sports ensemble: blouse, skirt and belt

spring–summer 1927

silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Unlike today, in the 1920s, notions of youthfulness and comfort in fashion were not paramount. Chanel's collections, however, were consistently praised for these qualities. Her streamlined designs were unencumbered by stiff fabrics and restrictive undergarments, promoting movement and agility. This ensemble, modelled on a tennis dress, reveals the increasing popularity of sportswear for daywear. The slender, straight fit and raised hemline also speak to the fashionable ideal known as the *garçonne* look. The name derived from Victor Marguerite's 1922 novel of female emancipation, *La Garçonne (The Bachelor Girl)* and symbolised youthful self-determination.

Day suit: jacket, dress and belt

c. 1926–27

silk, silk satin

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Chanel sought balance and ease in dress with her two-piece suits designed for every hour of the day. Inspired by menswear codes, she composed a sober, refined silhouette that extolled an image of female elegance based on a slim boyish figure, much like her own. Like the nineteenth-century dandy, Chanel rejected ostentatious style in favour of austerity, individuality, and well-chosen details. She embraced soft tailoring, in the form of fluid, unstructured shapes, supple materials and neutral colours, such as this raw silk. For this suit, the crenellated cut of the collar and cuffs are the only decorations.

Dress

between 1930 and 1939
printed silk surah

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Day ensemble: dress and coat

c. 1927–28

printed silk twill, silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit

1930

wool jacquard knit, galalith, silk pongee lining

Museum für Kunst und Gewerbe Hamburg.

Property of the Stiftung Hamburger Kunstsammlungen

Day ensemble: dress and jacket

between 1925 and 1929

wool jersey, jacquard knit

Mint Museum, Charlotte, North Carolina, gift of Mrs Mildred Taylor Cook

Based on the principle of a three-piece suit in knit fabric, this daytime ensemble, with the lining in the same print as the blouse, prefigures Chanel's iconic tweed suits of the 1950s and 1960s. It reflects a balance between the relaxed form, the elongated silhouette and graphic patterns. For Gabrielle Chanel, the motifs – rarely figurative – are about rhythm and are integrated into the cut. These patterns also anticipate her collaboration with the avant-garde Georgian artist Ilia Zdanevich, known as Iliazd, whom she hired as a designer when she created her knitwear company, Tricots Chanel, in 1927.

Day dress

1935

wool jersey, ribbed Albène knit

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of the heirs of Mr Henry Viguier

Chanel used permutations of knitted jersey consistently throughout her career, updating and adapting it continually. Valuing its suppleness and elasticity in comparison with traditionally woven fabrics, Chanel utilised it for day dresses, sweaters, tunics and unicolour capes, exploiting the different weights and yarns.

While silk jersey was initially used in its natural cream colour, wool jersey was produced in restrained coloured combinations such as this. The couturière did also respond, however, to the demands of the American and Spanish markets by creating brighter colours.

Jacket

between 1928 and 1930

wool jersey, jacquard knit, silk crêpe

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of the heirs of Mr Henry Viguier

Coat

autumn–winter 1933–34

wool tweed, silk pongee, galalith

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Ensemble: dress and cape

autumn–winter 1935–36

printed wool muslin, suede, cotton piqué

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of the heirs of Henry Viguier

Introducing tweed into the world of haute couture was a deliberate act by Chanel. In this ensemble, however, the tweed is only an illusion. A brown print on an ivory woollen fabric, it plays on the aesthetic appeal of this robust material, initially reserved for men's clothing. By using wool muslin, Chanel gives the ensemble a lightness and relaxed fluidity, with the print a quotation of her earlier innovations of the 1920s. In a further nod to a male wardrobe, a trompe l'oeil vest in white cotton piqué has been added.

Afternoon dress

spring–summer 1930

printed and appliquéd silk chiffon

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of Mrs Bertin

In the 1920s Chanel established an embroidery workshop and opened her own factory, Tricots Chanel, to produce exclusive wool and cotton jersey fabrics for her collections. By 1928, the company, renamed Tissus Chanel, was also producing graphic printed silks. Each design was produced in several fabrics and colourways, with abstract and naturalistic flowers a common theme. Here, the unity between fabric and form is evident in the way the cut of the flounces and hemline follows the outline of the floral blooms to bring a sprightliness to the design.

Dress with bolero and belt

spring–summer 1930

printed silk chiffon, tulle

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Dress

spring–summer 1930

printed and appliquéd silk chiffon

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of Mrs Bertin

The cut of this printed silk chiffon reveals a unique technique, created to enhance the floating, three-dimensional character of the flowers. Motifs have been cut and inlaid, with the leaves and petals accentuated, although they barely touch the base fabric. This labour-intensive process – expressing a youthful, naïve charm imbued with poetry, as the magazine *La Mode Chic* emphasised on 1 January 1932 – differentiates the qualities associated with high-end haute couture from tailoring. At the time this work was made, Chanel employed more than 2400 staff across twenty-six workrooms.

Evening dress

spring–summer 1939

printed and appliquéd silk voile, dyed ostrich feathers

Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, Sydney. Purchased 1996

Large printed and inlaid feather motifs and unfurled feathers adorn this silk voile evening dress, creating the impression of lightness that Gabrielle Chanel sought to convey through her designs. In segments of the archival film, *Chronique Féminine*, 1939, displayed nearby, seamstresses can be seen oversewing and attaching the hand-cut silk feathers to the printed fabric. Later, Chanel is seen with the head of the dressmaking atelier making alterations to the design, modelled by the house mannequin. The film also shows Chanel removing the ostrich feather trim, which has been retained in this version, presumably at the request of the client who ordered it.

The invisible accessory of the modern woman

In name, design and scent, CHANEL N°5 was a radical departure from convention. Created in 1921 for Chanel by perfumer Ernest Beaux, the abstract and mysterious scent differed from available fragrances, which often sought to emulate a single floral scent. A composite fragrance, Chanel N°5 contained no less than eighty ingredients. The alliance of flowers, including ylang-ylang, jasmine, *rose de mai* (*R. x centifolia*) and notes of wood and spice, accentuated by aldehydes – synthetic compounds used for the first time in large quantities – made for an indefinable formula.

Named after Chanel's lucky number, its presentation was equally innovative. Contrasting the ornate decorative styles typical of the era, Chanel made use of a clear square bottle with sober, angular lines and simple typography. Enclosed within a minimalist white cardboard box with black contours, the graphic design possessed a revolutionary purity.

Designed as an extension of her clothing and echoing her vision of modernity, Chanel made N°5 the signature of her fashion house. Immediately successful, it soon became the world's bestselling perfume. By the 1950s, a simple sentence – in the guise of an intimate confession from Marilyn Monroe – increased its renown and turned it into an iconic scent.

Sem (Georges Goursat)

French 1863–1934

CHANEL N°5 Paris, from the album *White Bottoms*

1927

chromolithograph

Musée Carnavalet, Paris

CHANEL N°5 was initially only available to clients through Chanel's boutiques. After forming Les Parfums CHANEL in 1924 with Paul and Pierre Wertheimer, owners of one of the largest fragrance companies in France, Chanel was able to produce the scent in quantities necessary for international distribution. This illustration by the artist and satirist Georges Goursat, known as Sem, is an early tribute to the spirit of freedom and enigmatic sensuality that the inscrutable scent inspired.

CHANEL N°5 perfume and travel case

1924

glass, nickel chrome, cotton, wax, paper

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 travel soap

1930s

bakelite, soap

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 perfume for handbag

1930s

glass, silver-plated metal, jersey, cardboard, paper

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 lotion

1930s

glass, bakelite, paper

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

***Cuir de Russie* travel spray and case**

1936

undyed leather, suedette, glass, fabric, bakelite, paper,
silver-plated metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

***Bois des Iles* soap box**

1926

cedar

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

***Bois des Iles* powder box**

1926

cedar

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Lipstick

1929

bakelite, enameled metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Gabrielle Chanel viewed the world of perfume and cosmetics as an extension of her fashion. Like all her creations, it was an integral part of her vision of the modern woman. In 1924, she created her first lipsticks, available in three shades, including this brilliant red hue – a colour found throughout Chanel's fashion collections. She also developed a make-up line that included blush and loose powders. Some of these items were scented with CHANEL N°5 and released in smaller formats, labelled '*Pour le Week-end*' ('for the weekend'), encapsulating an aspiration for freedom and leisure within her beauty products.

Lipstick scented with CHANEL N°5

1930

nickel chrome metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Lipstick

1938

plastic

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Compact blusher

1924

enamelled metal, mirror, fabric powder puff

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Loose powder scented with **CHANEL N°5**

1930s

glass, enamelled metal, cardboard, paper,
fabric powder puff

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 perfume

1921

glass, cotton, wax, paper

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Beauty cream

1928

glass, silver-plated metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

In 1927, Chanel launched a range of fifteen skincare products. The sober, graphic packaging selected reflected the codes and nuances of her pared-back style and was an extension of the visual language she had introduced with the first bottle of CHANEL N°5. The double C logo, seen on this lid, was also first used for the perfume.

Beauty cream, travel size

1929

opaline glass, bakelite, cardboard, cellophane

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Beauty cream, travel size

1929

glass, enameled metal, paper, cardboard, cellophane

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Nourishing cream

1930

glass, plastic, cardboard, paper, opaline glass

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Nourishing cream

1930

painted metal, plastic, cardboard

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Lotion with fruits

between 1930 and 1939

glass, bakelite, printed paper

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Jasmine massage oil

1930s

glass, leather, cotton, wax, cardboard

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Tanning powder from the *Pour l'Été* (for summer) collection

summer 1932

glass, printed paper, bakelite

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Tanning liquid from the *Pour l'Été* (for summer) collection

summer 1932

glass, printed paper, bakelite

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

During the 1920s, a growing interest in the therapeutic benefits of sunshine, an increased popularity of outdoor sports, such as swimming and tennis, and a vogue for seaside holidaying ushered in a trend for sunbathing and tanning. Along the French Riviera in particular, sun-bronzed skin was symbolic of youth, leisure and wealth. In 1932, Chanel released the *Pour l'Été* collection, a range of three sun products intended to aid the acquisition of bronzed skin.

Tanning oil from the *Pour l'Été* (for summer) collection

summer 1932

glass, printed paper, bakelite

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 eau de toilette

1947–67

glass, bakelite, paper, perfume

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 eau de cologne

1950

glass, bakelite, printed paper, printed cardboard, perfume

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 lotion

1950

glass, bakelite, printed paper, perfume

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Brilliantine scented with CHANEL N°5

1950

glass, bakelite, cardboard, printed paper, brilliantine

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Sun oil scented with CHANEL N°5 and box

between 1957 and 1959

glass, bakelite, paper, cardboard, sun oil

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 perfume

between 1950 and 1959

glass, cotton, wax, paper, cardboard

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL luxury make-up set with refillable compact and lipstick

1950s

leather, fabric, lacquered metal, mirror

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°5 for the handbag

1950

metal, cardboard

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL N°19 perfume

1970

glass, leather, cotton wax, paper, cardboard, perfume

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Around 1952–54, Henri Robert was appointed to the position of chief perfumer at the House of Chanel. Robert and Chanel created the company's first men's fragrance, titled *Pour monsieur*. In 1970, they launched CHANEL N°19, a fragrance named after Chanel's date of birth – 19 August 1883. CHANEL N°19 was the last perfume to be released during the designer's lifetime and was also presented in the same bottle design as was used for CHANEL N°5.

Modernity and chic

In October 1926, Chanel's simple black, calf-length *crêpe de chine* dress caused US *Vogue* to declare the arrival of, 'a sort of uniform for all women of taste, from all backgrounds regardless of their walk of life'. Dubbed the 'Ford of Fashion', after the popular American motor vehicle, Chanel's little black dress, as it became known, was as universal in its appeal as it was transformative.

As early as 1919, Chanel had recast black as a stylish option for women that could be worn from afternoon through to early evening. Freeing it from an association with shop assistants and service, and earlier connections to mourning dress, Chanel promoted black as the ultimate symbol of modernity. Stripped of ornamentation, the colour drew attention to the line.

Although not the only designer to use black, Chanel employed it in an endless variety of forms throughout the 1920s and 1930s, and again in the 1960s. In line with her credo of minimalist simplicity, Chanel helped to equate black with elegance and understatement. Yet it was an understated luxury – differentiated by hand-sewn finishes, superior fabrics and construction techniques specific to haute couture. Today, the little black dress remains an archetype and one of Chanel's major legacies.

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1939–40

cotton, silk

Kunstmuseum Den Haag, Netherlands

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1933–34

rayon, silk organza

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

In keeping with the House of Chanel's two-tone colour code, this dress with a train and plunging neckline reflects the sophistication of her work in the 1930s. As silhouettes became more sinuous, Chanel stripped her evening wear of all adornment, in order to emphasise the graphic line and draw attention to the material qualities of the fabric. Her radical modernity is accentuated here by the use of rayon, an artificial silk that had only recently appeared on the market and which, until this point, had rarely been used in haute couture.

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1933–34

silk velvet

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

1932–34

silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

In the 1930s, Gabrielle Chanel directed her designs towards more womanly and sophisticated silhouettes, as can be seen in the shape of this dress. The square cut exposing the back is unusually sensual for Chanel's work, while the interplay of austerity, in the matt black silk crêpe, and the deep neckline that reveals the décolletage, reinforces the dress's seductive allure.

Evening dress

spring–summer 1937

silk taffeta

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

between 1920 and 1925

silk crêpe, lace, silk tulle embroidered with glass beads

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Movement is one of the fundamental principles of Gabrielle Chanel's style. She applied the idea to daywear as well as to evening dresses. Here, the subtle network of lace on the bodice, animated by swirling rhythms and strands of beadwork, is designed to catch the light when worn. Elaborate embellishments such as this were realised by skilled embroiderers using a tambour hook. Working from a design drawn on the reverse side, the embroiderer punched the hook through fabric stretched over a frame, catching and securing a finely beaded strand, in a continuous chain-like stitch.

Evening dress

between 1917 and 1919

silk and silk tulle, embroidered with bead and tubes,
silk pongee, lace

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

This beaded evening dress prefigures the celebrated little black dress beatified by the press, notably by French *Vogue*, on 15 April 1926. At the end of the nineteenth century, black was a colour most closely associated with mourning or servitude. Although Chanel was not the first or only designer to use black, her contribution was to recast it as the colour of modernity, applying it to dresses, suits and coats.

Evening dress

spring–summer 1926

silk crêpe embroidered with sequins

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

The little black dress became an exercise in style that Chanel continually reinvented. Its sobriety, practicality and elegance for any time of day, and its universal appeal, saw US *Vogue* term it the ‘Chanel “Ford”’, after the popular motor car. In the 1920s, the little black dress was sometimes embellished with beads, fringing, embroidery or simply a chiffon rose on the shoulder or hem. A version of this work was photographed by Edward Steichen for *Vogue* in 1926, worn by influential celebrity model, Marion Morehouse.

Expression of stark luxury

In the 1930s, Chanel's focus on 'line' reached its peak. Her dresses discreetly accentuated the female form through harmonising proportions and materials. Motivated by sentiments of elegance and freedom, as well as her quest for simplicity, Chanel's designs expressed the tension between garment and body, described in French as the 'allure'.

Chanel's evening wear demonstrated a subtle mix of inventiveness and classicism. She created fluid and romantic lace and chiffon dresses, with inlaid decorations inserted into the cut to better emphasise form. Without ever disrupting the line, she experimented with asymmetry, enveloping volumes, uneven lengths and, daringly, transparency – drawing from lingerie conventions. Chanel's designs were seductive but never superfluous; frills were only slightly gathered, folds barely sketched, and swathes of fabric remained light and floating.

Chanel also utilised a unique array of embellishment techniques to imbue her designs with a stark luxury. In a gesture at once reductive and all-encompassing, she covered the entire surface of sheer fabrics with beads or sequins, employing a monochrome palette to emphasise the austerity of the line. Earlier, this interplay between

...continued overleaf

restraint and profusion was expressed via unicolour embroideries, feathers and fringing, but also in the nuance of hand-sewn details and specialist couture finishes.

Evening dress

spring–summer 1933

silk tulle, silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

spring–summer 1933

embroidered organdie, silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

spring–summer 1930

silk tulle, insertions of lace and tulle, satin crêpe, silk chiffon

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

This pale pink tulle dress, inlaid with machine lace, embodies the quest for lightness that underpinned Chanel's style. Working with lace and tulle in the 1930s, the designer favoured the inlay technique seen here, as it gave complexity without weighing down the fall of the garment. The appliqué was executed before construction, so that the decoration would be worked naturally into the cut, allowing Chanel to play with placement and the effects of transparency.

Dress

c. 1939

silk lace

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Dress

spring–summer 1930

cotton chiffon, broderie anglaise

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of Mrs Bertin

Evening dress

1930

cotton muslin with lace inlay

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of Mrs Bertin

The effortless simplicity of this dress is characteristic of Chanel's work. The straight line belies the luxury of the details and finishes. 'Examining what appear to be the simplest skirts, a jigsaw of cuts and seams are revealed', reported *Vogue* in October 1929. Here, the cut and assembly consists of numerous inlaid yokes, ribs and lightly pleated flounces, constituting a sophisticated, infinitely precise, garment.

Dress

spring–summer 1925

silk guipure lace, silk organza

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Dress

spring–summer 1925

machine silk lace, silk canvas, silk pongee slip

Palais Galliera, Paris

Dress

spring–summer 1933

embroidered cotton organdie, silk satin

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Purchased with the funds donated by Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift Program, 2021

Evening dress

1935–39

Chantilly lace, Moroccan crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

c. 1933

cotton lace, silk tulle, lace, horsehair

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

The gentle volume created around the hemline of this evening dress is made possible by structural insertions of crin (horsehair) between each of the lace bands. Chanel modernised a nineteenth-century technique used for underpinnings to imbue her designs with a romantic sensibility. Here, the fabric floats away from the body, while the intricate interplay between sheer and opaque is orchestrated to allow for subtle and sensuous glimpses of the body beneath.

Evening dress

spring–summer 1930

Chantilly lace, silk chiffon

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

The lace flounces placed on the oblique of this evening dress create the impression of lightness and movement in an atypical way. No longer fixed with gathers, the flounces spiral around the body distributing fullness before ending in an asymmetrical hemline.

Evening dress

spring–summer 1938

silk lace, silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

1939

silk lace, silk tulle

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

In May 1933 British *Vogue* reported, 'Everything that Chanel designs for evening breathes enchantment, femininity and glamour ...'. This gown proposes a different configuration of lace and tulle that contrasts structure and fullness, and draws attention to the waist. In keeping with Chanel's tenets, the close-fitting bodice does not constrain due to the natural elasticity of lace while integrated bands of lace radiate vertically from the hipline, continuing the line of the silhouette.

Christian Bérard

French 1902–49

Fashion illustrations

autumn–winter 1937–38

watercolour, Indian ink

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of Mr Antonio Canovas del Castillo

Christian Bérard, an artist and stage designer who regularly collaborated with the Ballet Russes, was also much sought after as a fashion illustrator, with his work appearing in *Harper's Bazaar* and *Vogue*. In 1937, he drew these lyrical designs for Chanel's autumn–winter collection, which he left unsigned so that the designer herself could claim attribution. These drawings are visible in some of the photographs that François Kollar took of Chanel at the Ritz. The arrangement between Gabrielle Chanel and Bérard continued until June 1938, when the illustrator created one last anonymous work for the couturier.

Evening dress

1929–31

printed silk lace with gold-coloured thread, lamé,
silk crêpe, lace

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

c. 1931

silk satin

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Chanel's silk satin dresses expressed fluidity through the clever use of arced or spiralling pattern pieces that drew the eye around the figure. In more complex designs, she integrated trompe l'oeil bows at the décolletage or inserted crisscrossing panels. Here, the linear quality of the form is offset by tiers of soft drapery at the left hipline, and the overlapping and asymmetrical hang of the skirt.

Dress

c. 1923–26

silk crêpe, tube and diamanté embroidery, lamé,
tulle embroidered with gold-coloured thread

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress and jacket

1930–31

satin rayon

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

1926

silk net embroidered with paillettes

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Long before Chanel was invited to design costumes for Hollywood, her garments were worn by young American actor Ina Claire, both on and off the screen. An influential client, Claire was photographed by Edward Steichen for *US Vogue* in May 1926 in a version of this dress, imported by Fifth Avenue store Henri Bendel. The combination of celebrity and beauty saw the design featured twice, once from behind to emphasise the novel and daring low back, and once facing to camera to highlight the glittering beadwork characteristic of Chanel's evening wear in this period.

Coat

1920

silk satin, fur (beaver)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

As early as 1916, *Harper's Bazaar* was praising Chanel's coats, which, due to their comfort and simplicity, found success internationally. The designer was one of the first to use rabbit fur supplied by Heim Fourrures from the 1920s for her daywear. She later used other common furs, including coypu (rodent) and squirrel, though she also lined some of her coats with sable.

Coat

1918

silk satin, fur, silk-stitch embroidery

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

The embroidery on this coat was directly inspired by that of the *chyrpy*, a ceremonial robe worn by women in Turkmenistan. This Central Asian country is renowned for the quality of its embroidery, with the *chyrpy* traditionally enlivened by colourful needlework compositions combining geometric shapes and highly stylised flowers. Here, Chanel has kept the graphic effect of the traditional patterns, but her interpretation, in neutral tones, creates the distance and freedom necessary to assert her own style.

Dress

1922

silk chiffon embroidered with beads

Palais Galliera, Paris

Evening cape

between 1924 and 1926

silk velvet, crêpe georgette, marabou feathers

Promised gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM and Family in memory of Delphine Lévy through the Australian Government's Cultural Gift Program, 2021

For Chanel, luxury was in the details rather than ostentation. This ruby silk-velvet evening cape embodies the principle, lined and subtly trimmed with lustrous marabou feathers. In addition to the softening effect of the feathers, the chromatic effect of the red strikes a vibrant graphic note. Chanel signalled her love of this colour by presenting a red garment in each of her collections from the 1920s onwards, usually the fifth work to appear. It was also the signature colour of her lipsticks.

Cape

spring–summer 1925

silk crêpe, rooster feathers

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Cape

spring–summer 1925

silk crêpe, rooster feathers

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

As a milliner, Chanel had employed a wide variety of feathers such as egret, marabou and ostrich as delicate trims on her hats. In the early 1920s, she gradually introduced feathers to her monochrome evening and daywear in place of fur. Consistent with her approach to embellishment, feathers were matched to the colour of the garment – typically black, white, red or beige.

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1930–31

net, embroidered sequins, gold-coloured braid

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

c. 1930–31

ribbed chiffon, sequin embroidery, silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1938–39

silk tulle, sequin embroidery

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Sequin fabrics in solid shades of colour appeared in Chanel's designs around 1935. She was interested in texture more than pattern and used them as she would any fabric. The weight of the sequins ensured the silhouette's verticality, reinforcing the line through a monochromatic starkness. Here, Chanel uses the arrangement of the sequins to outline the soft curves of the bodice and extend the graceful line of the skirt, resulting in multiple reflections.

Evening dress

c. 1930–35

silk satin, net, gelatin sequin embroidery

National Gallery of Australia, Canberra

86.1234.1-2

Chanel's style, an almost austere simplicity, is built on extremely refined haute-couture techniques, including inlay, appliqué, embroidery and beadwork. In the early decades of her career, Gabrielle Chanel used these techniques both structurally and for aesthetic effect. In this entirely sequinned dress, accumulation and a monochrome palette negate the showy aspect of this decorative technique; instead, it is the silhouette and movement of the fabric over the body that is accentuated. The glamour of the sequins recedes and becomes secondary to the image of liquid desire.

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1926–27

georgette crêpe, silk fringing

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Though Gabrielle Chanel avoided superfluous adornment, preferring to focus her attention on fabrics, she nonetheless promoted fashions that gave women the freedom to act and to move, synchronous with the spirit of the Jazz Age. A version of this fringed dress was worn by the designer to a party at Eaton Hall (the Duke of Westminster's country house) and documented in a photo from 1926. At the time, this shade of deep royal blue was so closely identified with Chanel that American magazine *Women's Wear Daily* called it 'Chanel blue' in 1927.

Evening dress

c. 1927

silk chiffon, glass-bead embroidery

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

The Chanel suit

In 1954, aged seventy-one, Gabrielle Chanel reopened her fashion house. Repudiating the constraining 'New Look' style, she advocated for restrained chic and utility in clothing.

Chanel's post-war suit, a synthesis of the principles that contributed to her prewar success, was the culmination of her vision of modern femininity. All aspects of its construction were defined with the female body in mind – a perfect balance of silhouette, materials and purpose. In 1959, *Vogue Paris* announced: 'Every suit holds the secrets of Chanel luxury. And this luxury is in the details'.

The Chanel suit was the embodiment of freedom. Without padding, the lightweight jacket hung straight like a cardigan. The skirt, instead of hugging the waist, rested on the upper hips, tilting slightly backwards and hanging below the knee; it was comfortable, supple and allowed for greater ease of movement.

Fabric was also crucial. Tweed – plain and textured, or sometimes handwoven, was a hallmark, chosen for its luxurious feel and specially produced in a variety of shades. Trims and braids in contrasting colours added to the distinctiveness of the design and delineated the silhouette, while pockets, decorative and functional buttons, and a hidden gilt chain became further signatures.

Suit worn by Gabrielle Chanel

autumn–winter 1958–59

Lesur tweed, silk pongee, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

This ensemble embodies the numerous codes that characterise Chanel's suits of the post-war period. It demonstrates the designer's unwavering commitment to principles of comfort and functionality. The jacket is straight and deliberately unlined to soften the tweed and give it more flexibility. The high armholes, which Chanel developed in the 1930s, aid ease of movement. Buttons are functional and the fabric's selvedge – the narrow self-finished edge of a material usually hidden in the seams – is subversively transformed into a decorative braid. This combination of resourcefulness and innovation is essential to the iconography of the Chanel suit.

Suit

1960

Burg wool, wool braid, silk pongee, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Pockets, an essential element of men's suits, are also one of the distinctive characteristics of the Chanel suit. Whether two or the four seen here, they are integral to the harmony of the jacket and its proportions. They also play a decisive role in the arrangement of the braid work and the punctuation added by buttons. Whether flap, buttoned or simple patches, pockets also reflect a practical aspect and give the suit a relaxed and nonchalant look.

Suit: jacket and skirt

autumn–winter 1960–61

tweed, wool braid, silk pongee, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket and skirt

1967

tweed, wool braid, silk pongee, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket and skirt

spring–summer 1961

tweed, silk grosgrain, gilt metal, silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit

spring–summer 1961

tweed, silk grosgrain, gilt metal, silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Characteristic of Chanel's suits, covert details such as quilted linings and gilt-chain edging also contributed to the perfection of a garment's shape. Hand-stitched to the outer fabric in vertical bands running parallel to the grain, the lining acts to support the jacket so that it does not lose shape or sag. The gilt-metal chain, sewn to the jacket's hem, weighs the jacket down and preserves the hang, so that it falls impeccably from the shoulder. Other house signatures are also visible here: pleating 'for walking ease', and Chanel's post-war palette of red, navy blue and beige.

Suit: jacket and dress

autumn–winter 1964–65

tweed, crocheted wool braid, silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket and skirt

autumn–winter 1960–61

tweed, fringed wool braid, silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

By the early 1960s, Chanel's suits were widely feted as a fashion staple for affluent and influential women, such as Grace Kelly and Brigitte Bardot. Chic permutations featured on the covers of *Elle* and *Vogue* magazines with supporting fashion editorials inside. In line with the aesthetics of the period, Chanel, a superb colourist, deployed a wide variety of plain and textured fabrics, with braids, trims, grosgrains and plaits, in contrasting colours. In this design, the neutral tweed is offset by a graphic striped braid and large pompom. Somewhere between sweater and tunic, this sporty yet sophisticated version shows Chanel's commitment to relaxed elegance.

Suit: jacket and skirt

spring–summer 1971

silk shantung, silk grosgrain, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Coat-dress

autumn–winter 1964–65

chenille and cellophane tweed, silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket, belt and skirt

autumn–winter 1970–71

wool jersey, cotton, silk pongee, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

The use of contrasting white piqué collars and cuffs seen here was an aesthetic strategy employed by Chanel as early as 1922. *Women's Wear Daily* described it as a 'radical departure from the general trend toward formality and femininity'. In this suit, worn by the actress Marlene Dietrich, the whimsy of textured wool jersey and soft fringing contrasts with the implied masculinity of a military uniform. The white officer's collar, removable cuffs and gilt buttons all play on the association, creating a subtle harmony between the masculine and the feminine. Dietrich was well known for wearing menswear to create an androgynous style.

Suit

autumn–winter 1962–63

silk velour, satin ribbon, gilt metal, silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket and trousers

autumn–winter 1969–70

bouclé wool jersey

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Trousers are a symbol of Gabrielle Chanel's contradictions. While in the 1930s she was often seen wearing men's trousers, or soft trousers for resort wear, in the 1960s she claimed not to be interested in the aesthetics of dress trousers. For her, trousers were important to allow freedom for women's movement in everyday life. This design, from the 1969 autumn–winter collection, shows that Chanel did adapt trousers for her famous suit, always with the same stylistic integrity.

2.55 bag

between 1954 and 1971

quilted lambskin, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Ensemble: short jacket and pleated skirt

spring–summer 1962

silk shantung, silk twill

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Dress and wimple

1962

wool, cotton piqué, gilt metal

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of the Committee for the Development and Promotion of French Clothing

‘The male suit and the Chanel suit have a shared ideal: distinction.’

– Roland Barthes, *Marie Claire*, September 1963

As early as 1921, the combination of black and white appeared in Gabrielle Chanel’s ensembles. Throughout her career she developed this interplay of contrast, making it a basic style to be worn for any occasion. She also used white as a form of sartorial punctuation, with removable collars and cuffs, borrowed from men’s wardrobes.

Suit

spring–summer 1970

tweed, gilt metal

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Mavis Powell, 1986

CT9a-b-1986

Suit: jacket and skirt

spring–summer 1971

silk crêpe, galilith, gilt metal

Palais Galliera, Paris

Suit: jacket and skirt

1968

cotton piqué, silk pongee, gilt metal

Palais Galliera, Paris

Suit: jacket, skirt, blouse and cravat

spring–summer 1959

tweed, silk surah, silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket, skirt, blouse and cravat

autumn–winter 1962–63

wool tweed, silk shantung, galalith

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket and skirt

spring–summer 1966

rayon tweed, silk crêpe

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit comprising jacket, skirt and blouse

spring–summer 1966

overpainted wool, raw silk, gilt metal

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne.

Presented through The Art Foundation of Victoria by

Mrs Angela Wood, Member, 2000

2000.154.a-c

Although this suit looks like it was made from a woven tweed, the fabric is an illusion. In keeping with Chanel's radical approach to materials, the base material is an open weave slubbed wool, imitative of the texture of tweed, that has been overpainted with a dynamic fuchsia and raspberry pattern. The suit was owned by loyal Melbourne-based Chanel client Mrs Mavis Powell, who filled three wardrobes with her Chanel clothing over a period of forty years.

Coat

spring–summer 1961
tweed, silk shantung

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Coat

spring–summer 1967

tweed, wool, galalith, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket, blouse and skirt

spring–summer 1964

checked tweed, printed silk twill, gilt metal

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of the Société de l'Histoire du Costume

Throughout her career Gabrielle Chanel found inspiration in the form and fabrics associated with men's suiting. Reinterpreting their patterns – Scottish tartans, checks, plaids and woollen houndstooths – she created elegant counterparts for women to wear. Her suits were a cohesive uniform of contrasting colour and textures, seen here in navy and white. Buttons were also important to Chanel, who used them as understated decoration. Typically gilt metal, they featured a combination of symbolic and personal motifs, such as the interlocking CC monogram, lion's head, clover and camellia.

Dress with removable cuffs

1965

printed silk tussore, cotton piqué, printed silk pongee

Palais Galliera, Paris

Ensemble: jacket and dress

1964

cotton rayon satin, enamelled metal

Palais Galliera, Paris

Ensemble: coat and dress

spring–summer 1962

wool, silk shantung

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Ensemble: coat and dress

spring–summer 1962

Prince of Wales wool, silk shantung, gilt metal, silk
pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Ensemble: coat and dress

spring–summer 1962

tweed bouclé, silk crêpe, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit

autumn–winter 1965–66

tweed, silk cloqué, galalith, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Ensemble: coat and dress

autumn–winter 1965–66

tweed, wool canvas, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Coat

between 1961 and 1963

tweed, silk pongee, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Coat and dress

spring–summer 1962

wool, quilted silk taffeta

Palais Galliera, Paris, purchased by the Ville de Paris

Ensemble: dress and coat

1963

mohair tweed, printed silk twill

Palais Galliera, Paris, purchased by the Ville de Paris

Gabrielle Chanel was loyal to her fabric suppliers. For this ensemble, she used a mohair woven by the English house of Linton Tweeds, with whom she began collaborating in 1930. Chanel also remained true to her stylistic principles, such as matching a dress's fabric to the lining of the coat. Here, the printed paisley twill, woven through the mohair threads to adorn the collar, cuffs and pockets, can be seen even when the coat is closed.

The Chanel codes

Accessories were fundamental to Chanel's conception of a harmonious silhouette. They reflected her pragmatic vision of fashion and helped in the codification and unity of her style.

Launched in February 1955, the quilted 2.55 bag, was designed to be functional. Its chain link strap, often entwined with a leather band to avoid the jangling of metal, allowed it to be carried by hand or over the shoulder. The bag's interior, lined with red leather or grosgrain, included multiple pockets where various items could be stored, including a compartment for lipstick. Made of lambskin, jersey or silk satin, the 2.55 was also available in three sizes to suit the different activities of a woman's lifestyle.

From 1957 onwards, the two-tone slingback shoe completed the Chanel 'look' and added the ultimate touch of elegance to any outfit. After several trials with various shoemakers, Chanel adopted the model made by Raymond Massaro. A perfect balance of form and function, the shoe was made of beige leather, which had the effect of lengthening the leg, while its black satin ensured against wear and made the foot appear smaller. The elasticated strap and moderate heel guaranteed convenience and comfort.

2.55 bag

between 1954 and 1971

quilted lambskin, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

2.55 bag

between 1954 and 1971

quilted silk velvet, silk grosgrain, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Massaro

Prototype of two-tone slingback pump

1961

kidskin, silk satin

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

2.55 bag

between 1954 and 1971

quilted lambskin, gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

The sources of creation

To realise her creations, Gabrielle Chanel surrounded herself with talented jewellers whose innovation and skill matched her ambition. In 1924, she called upon the talents of Count Étienne de Beaumont to design her first costume pieces. Around 1933, she commissioned Fulco di Verdura to design gold jewellery with large-coloured cabochons that drew upon his Sicilian heritage and the splendour of Byzantine mosaics in Ravenna, Italy.

Working with Maison Gripoix in the 1930s, Gabrielle Chanel developed jewellery inspired by the world of botany. Flowers, leaves, acorns and other motifs were transcribed into multicoloured glass paste, both opaque and translucent, and set in metal. During the same period, goldsmith François Hugo produced jewellery and buttons from non-precious materials for Chanel.

The expression of historical influences culminated in opulent pieces designed for Chanel by goldsmith and jeweller Robert Goossens. During the 1960s, Goossens found inspiration in art from the ancient empires of Byzantium and Persia. Mixing precious and inexpensive stones, Goossens introduced rock-crystal and turquoise to Chanel's design vocabulary. Using the forms, materials and cloisonné settings of antique jewellery, he even produced replicas of a Byzantine reliquary cross and an eagle-shaped ornamental clasp from the sixth century.

In praise of adornment

As early as the 1920s, jewellery played a central role in Gabrielle Chanel's design lexicon and was in contrast to the austerity of her clothing designs. Combining real and faux gemstones, pearls and metals in a variety of forms, Chanel rejected fine jewellery conventions to give costume jewellery a new status. She played with the contrast between sobriety and excess, wearing accumulations of 'pearl' strands and glass and rock-crystal sautoirs in combination with earrings, bracelets and brooches, and encouraged others to do the same. Chanel also took liberties with placement, often pinning a brooch on the cuff of a sleeve, the hip or shoulder, or brim of a hat.

Chanel's design references ranged from the historical, religious and exotic to floral forms, as well as personal motifs taken from her own symbolic repertoire: the lion (she was a Leo), ears of wheat and stars. Jewellery helped to establish the Chanel house codes and extended to the use of gilt chains and buttons. From the 1950s onwards, Chanel also introduced lurex lamé, a new fabric imitating metal, into her cocktail and evening wear. These sparkling fabrics echoed the glittering embroidery of her clothing from the 1920s and 1930s, with the advantage of being both light and flexible.

CHANEL design made by Gripoix

Necklace

spring–summer 1938

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Gripoix

Parure, brooch and earrings

1938

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), diamantés

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by Gripoix

Brooch

1937

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

From 1937, Chanel and the House of Gripoix produced costume jewellery inspired by the botanical world. Flowers, leaves, acorns and other motifs were executed in multicoloured glass paste, both opaque and translucent, using a technique known as *pâte de verre*. Soldering the molten glass directly into the setting, rather than kiln-firing the material first, yielded a greater clarity of colour and iridescence. The camellia was a flower favoured by Chanel in the 1930s and remains a lasting symbol for the House today.

Bracelet

1930s

glass paste

metal, ~~glass beads~~

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by Gripoix

Necklace

c. 1930s

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Ring

1930s

yellow gold, emerald, rubies

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Bracelet

1934

18-carat yellow gold, emeralds, tourmalines,
pink sapphires

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

'Ravenna' brooch

between 1929 and 1934

yellow gold, emeralds, amethysts, tourmalines,
moonstones, rubies, sapphires, beryls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

'Theodora' brooch

between 1929 and 1934

yellow gold, sapphires, rubies, emeralds, tourmalines,
Madeira citrines, aquamarines, beryls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Gabrielle Chanel met the Sicilian aristocrat Fulco Santostefano della Cerda, Duke of Verdura, in Venice in 1926. First hired by Chanel as a textile designer, Verdura was soon charged with making jewellery, producing designs that drew inspiration from the Byzantine mosaics in the Italian city of Ravenna. This piece and the nearby 'Ravenna' brooch were formerly in the collection of fashion editor Diana Vreeland. Later, the gold and gemstone Maltese cross design was integrated into a pair of cuffs famously worn by Chanel herself.

Necklace and earrings

1928

silver, rock-crystal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Necklace

1930s

brass, crystal

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Bracelet

1930s

silver, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), diamantés

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Camelia necklace

1930s

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Necklace

1930s

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Necklace

autumn–winter 1937–38

gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Necklace

1938

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), imitation pearls

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

During the late 1930s, Chanel drew inspiration from sixteenth-century Mughal India for her jewellery collections. Mughal traditions and approaches to adornment, which encompassed various forms of bodily decoration, richly coloured gemstones and golden metals, resonated with Chanel's own dialectical aesthetic. Reinterpreting historical antecedents in pearls, rubies and emeralds in non-precious materials, as well as the suspended beadwork forms, imbued Chanel's jewellery designs with an aura of exoticism.

Necklace

1938

gilt metal, imitation pearls, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Necklace

autumn–winter 1939

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), glass (beads),
Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Gripoix

Brooch

autumn–winter 1938–39

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), imitation pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Brooch

1939

bronze, enamel

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Brooch

1938

gilt metal, glass

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Brooch

1938

gilt metal, glass

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Brooch

1938

gilt metal, glass

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by Gripoix

Necklace

c. 1938–39

gilt metal, glass beads

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Necklace

1930s

metal, glass beads

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by Gripoix

Necklace

1930s

silver, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Reliquary cross

9–11th century

bronze

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Chanel found inspiration in historical jewellery, which she saw during visits to galleries and museums, such as the Louvre Museum, Paris. She shared this passion with the young jeweller Robert Goossens, entrusting him with the creation of her jewellery designs from 1954, although they did not meet until 1961. Going further than inspiration, Goossens created replicas of ancient pieces, including this Byzantine reliquary cross, given to Chanel by Hélène Lazareff, founder and editor-in-chief of the magazine *Elle*, and a supporter of the designer since 1954.

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Crucifix pendant

1960s

gilt bronze

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Cross pendant

autumn–winter 1965–66

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Pendant

1960s

silver, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Cross pendant

autumn–winter 1969–70

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Cross pendant

1960s

gilt metal, imitation pearls, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace with cross pendant

spring–summer 1971

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace with cross pendant

spring–summer 1971

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace with cross pendant

1960s

gilt metal, imitation pearls, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Brooch

1960s

vermeil, tourmaline

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Chanel and Robert Goossens (1927–2016) looked for inspiration in the material culture of ancient civilisations, including the Byzantine and Persian empires, as well as the Baroque period of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. This brooch is based on an eagle-shaped fibula or clasp, covered with red crystals and cloisonné, held in the Musée de Cluny, Paris. Oval, rectangular, circular and marquise tourmalines set in bezels reflect this historic inspiration, dating from the sixth century.

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Cross pendant

1960s

18-carat yellow gold, rock-crystal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Brooch

1960s

vermeil, rock-crystal, tourmaline

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Cross pendant

1960s

18-carat yellow gold, rock-crystal, smoky quartz

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Pendant

1960

gilt metal, tourmalines

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Earrings

1960s

gilt metal, copper, Mallorca pearls, diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Parure (necklace and two brooches)

1960s

gilt metal, diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Earrings and brooch

c. 1960

gilt metal, Mallorca pearls, diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

autumn–winter 1967–68

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), Mallorca pearls,
diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

spring–summer 1970

gilt bronze, Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Belt

spring–summer 1971

gilt metal, glass, Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Belt

autumn–winter 1967–68
gilt metal, glass, elastic

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Belt

1960s

gilt metal, elastic

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Belt

spring–summer 1970
gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

spring–summer 1974

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

1960s

gilt metal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

1971

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

between 1960 and 1971

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

1960s

gilt metal, glass beads, Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

1960s

gilt metal, amethysts, glass beads, Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Collar

1960s

vermeil, rock-crystal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Chanel's life and work was informed by deeply personal symbols that included specific numbers, colours and flowers, and the symbols of stars, wheat and lions. Her zodiac sign, the lion's head, was embossed on buttons and medallions, while bronze and marble lions decorated her Paris apartment at Rue Cambon. This bib collar, inspired by ancient Egypt and made by Robert Goossens, features more than 110 individual plaques surrounding a central rock-crystal cross.

Bracelet

autumn–winter 1961–62

gilt metal, crystal

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Brooch

autumn–winter 1961–62

gilt metal, crystal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Brooch

autumn–winter 1959–60

gilt metal, diamantés, Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Brooch

spring–summer 1959

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Brooch

1965

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Necklace

autumn–winter 1969–70

gilt metal, glass, Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Earrings

1969

gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Bracelet

1960s

gilt metal, glass, Mallorca pearls

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Bracelet

1960s

vermeil, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Earrings

1955–65

silver, Mabé pearls, diamonds

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Earrings

1954–55

platinum, white gold, Mabé pearls, diamonds

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Pearls – whether natural, cultivated or imitation – hold a special place in Chanel’s lexicon. With their strong feminine symbolism, they appeared as necklaces, brooches, and as buttons on suits. In a 1927 portrait by the American photographer Berenice Abbott, Gabrielle Chanel’s face is illuminated by pearl earrings. Over time, they became genuine ‘sun jewels’ encircled by precious metals or diamonds, like this pair, and a hallmark of her identity.

Bracelet

between 1930 and 1936

yellow gold, silver, emeralds, rubies, sapphires

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Pendant

between 1950 and 1960

gold, silver, vermeil, diamonds, emeralds,
synthetic stones

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Cuff

1960s

bakelite, gilt metal, glass paste, diamantés

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Bracelet

1960s

resin, gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Bracelet

1960s

resin, gilt metal, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Brooch

1938

glass paste (*pâte de verre*), silver, imitation pearl

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Hair ornament

1939

bronze, glass paste (*pâte de verre*), foil

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

Hair ornament

1939

brass, glass paste (*pâte de verre*)

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by François Hugo

Bracelet

spring–summer 1938

gilt metal, cut glass

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

François Hugo (1899–1981) was goldsmith to many of the twentieth century's leading artists: Pablo Picasso, Jean Cocteau, André Derain, Jean Dubuffet and Max Ernst. He also worked for fashion designers, specifically Gabrielle Chanel from the late 1930s. Hugo made jewellery and buttons from non-precious materials, such as this bracelet, released in several colours, including a pair in citrine-coloured glass and another in ruby-red glass.

CHANEL design made by François Hugo

Bracelet

spring–summer 1938

gilt metal, glass

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by François Hugo

Bracelet

spring–summer 1938

gilt metal, glass

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

CHANEL design made by François Hugo

Bracelet

spring–summer 1938

gilt metal, cut glass

Mark Walsh Leslie Chin Collection. Vintage Luxury, New York

The revived allure

Just as the suit was Gabrielle Chanel's emblematic piece from 1954 onwards, the evening dress was her exercise in style. Chanel proposed a relaxed version of formal dress that was discreet and refined. Without ever straying from her principles, she revisited the foundations that had governed her aesthetic and punctuated her career.

In the 1960s, Chanel's cocktail dresses, a compromise between day and night, recalled the simplicity of her little black dresses of the 1920s, executed in lace, velvet and silk, as well as nylon and other synthetic fabrics. As before, she offset austerity by adding whimsical touches of ornamentation – a gilded metal belt, or jewel illuminated with coloured stones.

In this spirit of continuity, sequin embroidery was profuse and monochrome, echoing the 1930s, while the lightness of chiffon and tulle embodied the qualities of fluidity and motion she had sought early in her career. Faithful to her hallmark colours, Chanel also continued to utilise ivory and gold, vibrant reds and elegant black.

Until her final 1971 spring–summer collection, Gabrielle Chanel never stopped reinterpreting, updating and

...continued overleaf

perfecting her rules and principles. This consistency of vision, and her capacity to balance function, form and elegance, is what keeps her work timeless and relevant today.

Dress

spring–summer 1960

silk chiffon, silk crêpe, silk satin ribbon

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Cocktail dress

spring–summer 1959

silk chiffon, silk satin ribbon

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Brooch

spring–summer 1959

gilt metal, glass paste and diamantés

Patrimoine de CHANEL collection, Paris

The little black dress was a form that Chanel constantly reinvented. In the 1960s, her black cocktail dresses became a template for experimentation. Characteristic of Chanel's approach, the suggestion of simplicity is underwritten by meticulous couture details. Here, vertical pintucks, tightly anchored by rows of hand-stitching and banded by a satin cummerbund, create the hourglass line, and through release, the gentle floating hem. Continuing Chanel's use of costume jewellery, introduced in the 1920s to subvert the austere character of her outfits, this dress also features a large brooch in gilded metal and turquoise glass.

Dress

autumn–winter 1962–63

silk crêpe georgette, silk satin ribbon, silk moiré

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Dress

spring–summer 1955

Leavers lace, silk tulle, silk crêpe, silk satin

Cité de la mode et de la dentelle, Calais

Ensemble: tunic and skirt

spring–summer 1960

silk crêpe lamé lurex, silk cord, metal

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of the heirs of Mr Henry Viguier

Brooch

1960s

bronze, glass paste

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Suit: jacket, blouse and skirt

autumn–winter 1961–62

cellulose acetate velvet, silk satin, galalith

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of Mrs Nicole Alphan

Gabrielle Chanel loved to contrast materials. Here, she marries the luxury fabric, duchesse satin, with the modernity of synthetic velvet. This light, soft material, which catches the light, is perfect for an evening suit. The opposition is also highlighted by the use of black and white, another design signature that Chanel introduced in the 1920s.

Dress worn by Romy Schneider

autumn–winter 1963–64

silk embroidered with sequins

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

In 1958, Chanel began dressing the beautiful young stars of French New Wave films. She designed costumes for *Les Amantes* (*The Lovers*, 1958) starring Jeanne Moreau and supplied contemporary fashions for Delphine Seyrig in *Last Year at Marienbad* (1961). In 1962, after dressing twenty-four-year-old Romy Schneider for Luchino Visconti's *Boccaccio '70*, Chanel also assumed responsibility for the actor's off-screen image, making her the contemporary embodiment of the designer's elegant feminine ideal. Here, all-over sequins are used by Chanel in the same minimalist way as her evening gowns of the 1930s, to add a note of glamour.

Evening dress

spring–summer 1970

silk crêpe and cellophane, cotton

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of the House of CHANEL

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1970–71

silk chiffon, lamé

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Dress

spring–summer 1971

silk organza, lurex lamé

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of CHANEL

CHANEL design made by Goossens

Belt

spring–summer 1971

gilt metal and glass paste

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

This dress is from Chanel's last collection, presented only weeks after she died, and is notable for its extensive use of white, gold brocades, lurex lamé (a new fabric imitating metal) and flowing lines. It features a jewelled belt made by the House of Goossens, placed over the centre waist seam, to structure the silhouette. Here, contrasted against the Indian-inspired gold brocade, the belt's arabesque decorations and coloured 'gemstones' recall the historic Mughal sources that were an inspiration for Chanel's costume jewellery.

Ensemble: bolero and skirt

autumn–winter 1963–64

silk embroidered with pearlised sequins

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of Mrs Leonelli

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1965–66

silk embroidered with pearlised sequins

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Cocktail dress

1958

embroidered cotton, metal (fastenings)

National Gallery of Victoria, Melbourne. Gift of Krystyna Campbell-Pretty AM
and the Campbell-Pretty Family through the Cultural Gifts Program, 2019

2019.949

Dress

autumn–winter 1966–67

silk chiffon, appliquéd lace

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of CHANEL

Dress

between 1960 and 1969

silk organza embroidered with passementerie

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

spring–summer 1955

silk chiffon

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

From the very brightest shade to the most subtle cherry, red can be found throughout Gabrielle Chanel's collections. For daywear, it is associated with the softness of wool, while for evening it is found in sumptuous silk velvets, transparent chiffons and delicate laces. The designer included a red design in each of her runway shows, often in fifth position, her favourite number.

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1957–58

silk velvet, silk crêpe, chiffon

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1954–55

cotton velvet, silk taffeta

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Evening dress

c. 1950

silk gauze, silk velvet

Palais Galliera, Paris

Evening dress

between 1965 and 1970

silk satin, gilt metal

Palais Galliera, Paris

Ensemble: coat and dress

1967

lamé lurex, cloque

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of CHANEL

Dress

spring–summer 1960

embroidered cotton tulle, lamé, organdie, silk crêpe

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of CHANEL

The embroidery on this dress, of field flowers and a harvest of golden ears of wheat, recalls Gabrielle Chanel's love of signs and symbols. The lion, stars and wheat all featured in the decor of her rue Cambon apartment, her other homes and in each of her collections – including on jewellery, dresses and buttons. For Chanel, wheat was a talisman. She kept wheat sheaves in vases at her rue Cambon apartment. In 1947, Salvador Dalí gave her a painting of a sole ear of wheat and, in the 1950s, Chanel commissioned a pedestal table, with a wheat sheaf base of gilded metal, from Robert Goossens.

Evening dress

autumn–winter 1961–62

lamé cloque

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of CHANEL

Suit: jacket and dress

autumn–winter 1962–63

lamé, ottoman

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris

Ensemble: bolero, tunic and skirt

1964

lamé cloque, silk gauze, gilt metal

Palais Galliera, Paris

Ensemble: sweater and skirt

spring–summer 1970

crocheted wool and lurex, metal, cut glass

Palais Galliera, Paris, gift of CHANEL

This ensemble combines a sense of comfort with the textile innovations advocated by Chanel. The soft wool, crocheted in fan and treble stitch and blended with lurex, is subtly eye-catching, as is the cut-glass necklace. With its echo of costume jewellery, the designer is playing with her own ornamentation codes, which favoured imitation over authenticity, integrating a trompe l'oeil effect naturally into the sweater.

Dress and jacket

autumn–winter 1963–64

silk lurex lamé, cord, sequined braid, silk gauze, gilt metal

Palais Galliera, Paris, purchased by the Ville de Paris

Suit: jacket and dress

autumn–winter 1957–58

silk brocade, silk shantung, lamé lurex braid, silk pongee

Patrimoine de CHANEL, Paris