Few fabrics are as closely associated with a great French fashion house brand as tweed is with Chanel, whose latest show on Tuesday was almost entirely made with the rough yet luxurious material.

Founder Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel fell in love with the fabric over 100 years ago, allegedly when she began wearing the tweed jackets of her lover, the Duke of Westminster, immediately admiring the fabric's durability and unique colors.
So does her successor Virginie Viard, whose invitation to the Chanel catwalk event on the final day of Paris Fashion Week was made of tweed. In multiple shades like moody mauve, earthy red, metallic blue.

Coco began using a Scottish factory back in 1924 to source the tweed, sometimes walking the banks of the River Tweed, searching for suitable Border-region hues. Gathering wild flowers, earth, ferns and leaves to inspire artisans to develop new colors.

Along with the invitation, Viard attached a charming lookbook shot by Inez Van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin, along the banks of the Tweed, one of the great salmon fishing rivers of Europe. On each guest’s seat was a gift of a Chanel scent named Paris-Edinburgh.

Presented inside the Grand Palais Éphémère, a temporary show-space built in front of the École Militaire, with walls made in hand-painted black and white tweed; the cushioned seats in rose and ivory tweed.

The show opened with model Vivienne Rohner in an utterly charming watermelon and fuchsia belted tweed coat seen in the lookbook. But Viard’s vision had nothing retro about it, as she mixed up great coral and ginger check redingotes with the footwear of the season – the mega thigh boot. Though in Chanel’s case this came not in leather but green rubber – Scottish lake fisherman style.
Her other eccentric trick was dressing a good third of the cast with thick wool granny stockings – made in mat colors, they were a smart contrast with the shiny hues of many tweeds. While the classic Chanel four-pocket jacket was made over in Norfolk and safari versions. Over a score of the bags were made in tweed too, from mini shoulder bags in the same hues as some invitations; or oatmeal totes.

“Devoting the entire collection to tweed is a tribute. We followed in the footsteps of Gabrielle Chanel along the River Tweed, to imagine tweeds in the colors of this landscape. Like that of a long pink coat mottled with blue and purple, or a burgundy suit with a delicate gold shimmer,” explained Viard.

Coco herself eventually began making her own tweeds in France, reimagining the material by adding silks, cottons and even cellophane. Making them lighter, brighter and more luxuriously couture.

And there was a psychedelic twist to the color scheme in this autumn 2022 collection, with silvery takes on purple, crimson and seafoam. Often the clothes looking most dramatic on models of color, or a group of red-haired runway gals, in another Celtic reference.

Viard also mixed in some great leather looks; from a jaunty olive spy coat to a pair of perfectly cut lambskin sheathes. And added an unexpected twist with a color scheme she said was inspired by 1960s English album covers, their punchy palette seen in the Chanel brand name at the runway entrance. Echoed too in the soundtrack, a full rendition of John Lennon singing that ironic ’60s classic of The Beatles, A Day in the Life.

A poignant moment in a display that was not perhaps a legendary show. Nonetheless one that did boast a really great wardrobe of options and clothes and accessories. And, one suspects, a collection that Coco would have enjoyed a great deal.

By Godfrey Deeny