Chanel haute couture: 1930s for today

By Godfrey Deeny - 6 July 2022

Back to the '30s at Chanel haute couture, albeit with a youthful take on couture with a cool Western and equestrian twist inside the Etrier de Paris private riding club on a sunny Tuesday morning.

A show whose connecting thread was the homage to the 1932 Bijoux de Diamants jewelry collection of Coco Chanel, currently being feted with a six-day pop-up exhibition inside the Grand Palais Ephemere.

A seven- or eight-figure show, seeing as there were tens of millions of euros worth of fine jewelry on the cast. Presented inside the latest set by artist Xavier Veilhan, for the house’s latest equestrian moment, as the models marched inside the paddock, deep in the Bois de Boulogne.

Veilhan’s giant faux clocks, medicinal pills and Zeppelins greeting guests as the marched over freshly installed white sand into the show. A suitable scene for star-studded front rows at the two morning shows of Sigourney Weaver, Soo Joo Park, Elsa Zylberstein, Marion Cotillard, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Keira Knightley and Anna Mouglalis.

Back to the '30s in the proportions, with skirts that ended well down the calf, and square-backed jackets with collars, cut not too close to the torso and often worn unbuttoned. Featuring classic bouclé wools but freshened up in sandy beige, dark raspberry, vibrant lime, Castleton green, and shiny oatmeal. Like a wonderful suit composed of slanted four-pocket jacket and jodhpurs worn without boots; around the neck a double-winged necklace.
A middle section lagged as the sheer density of the horizontally striped coats weighed down the models. With so many of the cast wearing slant-heel cowboy boots and floppy ten-galloon hats one almost felt like extras in Dallas.

Before suddenly springing back to life with super shiny and iridescent skirts; a cut-out dusty pink wool coat crocheted to perfection, and one marvelous Eisenhower jacket in Chanel bouclé cut with billowing sleeves.

And then going into over-drive with a series of cocktail dresses in black chiffon, the sort of hyper classy looks one only ever can buy in Paris couture. Accessorized with diamond half-moon pendants; slinky bracelets and a remarkable shooting star necklace that twisted twice around the neck – culled from the 90th anniversary Bijoux de Diamants exhibition.

"It was a busy morning, as they only sent over the jewelry two hours before the show," mock grimaced Chanel creative director Virginie Viard, as she greeted guests on the sunny roof of the paddock.

Pre-show, she released a Veilhan-directed teaser shot in and around the riding club, starring her favorite musician Sébastien Tellier, ambassadress Charlotte Casiraghi and model Vivienne Rohner interacting with the real and virtual landscape.
“My starting point was 1932, and that epoch. In part because its graphic and constructivist elements work very well with Chanel. In terms of colors I’ve always adored green, so we shot the whole film with a green background, but all faux. The models were inside what looked like a car, but wasn’t,” smiled Viard.

Above all, no matter one’s preference, every passage looked like Chanel, Viard correctly calculating that today’s client wants to buy clothes that say unmistakably that they are made by Chanel - with a smart soupcon of youthfulness. Plus it’s a strategy that clearly finds an audience – since Chanel revenues grew almost 50% in 2021 to $15.6 billion.

That said, it was hard to understand what role Pharrell Williams had in the overall theme. As he opened the show on a giant screen with an extended mash-up video drum solo. Except perhaps that Pharrell always did love jewelry?

Before everything came together at the finale, as the choral soundtrack that included Lucid Morto by Pan Daijing rose to a climax, and curvy Dutch model Jill Kortleve marched out in the most relaxed of wedding dresses. Hands in her pockets and accompanied by a delicately embroidered laced ecru shawl.
The 1930s - defined by a global economic crisis, gritty heroines and visionary literature – alive, but far happier today.

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