Reviewing Chanel

A Catalogue Raisonné and Critical Survey of the Dress Designs by Chanel Published in British and French *Vogue*, 1916-1929

Alexia Holt

Department of the History of Art, University of Glasgow, October 1997

Doctor of Philosophy

Volume One of Two

Abstract

Founded on the premise that the existing literature on Gabrielle 'Coco' Chanel does not give a comprehensive, balanced and objective survey of the dress designs produced by the house from 1916-1929, the thesis 'Reviewing Chanel' provides a catalogue raisonné of the designs shown in British and French *Vogue* during this period. This representative sample of Chanel's work facilitates the very necessary and overdue re-assesment of Chanel's early career and contribution to twentieth century fashion.

Part One of the Introduction includes a review of the existing literature on Chanel and explains the rationale behind the production of a catalogue of the dress designs reproduced in British and French *Vogue*. Part Two serves as the introduction to the twenty-eight essays which outline the principal developments in each of the dress design collections presented by the house between 1916-1929. Each essay provides an analytical summary of the key themes and developments of the collection and relates Chanel's work to that of the other leading houses in Paris during this period.

Contents

Acknowledgements

I would particularly like to thank my supervisor, Eleanor Gregh, of the History of Art Department, University of Glasgow, for her considerable support and assistance with this project, and Juliet Kinchin, of Glasgow School of Art, for her invaluable help and advice.

I would also like to thank Véronique De Pardieu and Pierre Buntz of the house of Chanel, Paris, and the following organisations and individuals:

Annie Barbera and the staff of the Musée de la Mode et du Costume, Palais Galliera, Paris
Véronique Belloir and the staff of the Musée des Arts de la Mode, Paris
The Bibliothèque Forney, Paris
Trevor Graham and the staff of Glasgow University Media Services and Photographic Unit
The History of Art Department, University of Glasgow
The House of Chanel, London
The Mitchell Library, Glasgow
Florence Muller, Nadine Gasc and the staff of the Union Française des Arts du Costume
The National Library of Scotland, Edinburgh
The Newspaper Division, The British Library, Colindale, London
Dennita Sewell, Collection Associate, The Costume Institute, The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York
Sotheby's (Collectors' Department), London
Spink and Son Ltd., London
The Victoria and Albert Museum

Emily Bates
Ross Birrell
Catherine Crawford
Moyra Hope
Susan McLay
Dr. Elizabeth Moignard

Introduction

Part One

A Review of the Literature on Chanel

Introduction
Part One

A Review of the Literature on Chanel

Valerie Steele begins her 1992 essay *Chanel In Context* with the comment: 'Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel is the most famous woman in the history of fashion, and one might legitimately wonder whether there is anything new to be said about her.'[1] In 1997, with at least fourteen publications on the designer already in print, it would seem that Steele has a point. However, central to Steele's essay and to this work on Chanel, is the belief that previous studies of the designer are unsatisfactory.

The extensive and continually growing library on Chanel reflects the international fame and status of both the designer and the present day house.[2] The range of published material includes biographies and monographs – the main focus of this survey – but also numerous essays, articles, sales catalogues, a video documentary and one title aimed at the juvenile market.[3] The majority of the more substantial publications are written in the form of straight biography: Claude Baillen's *Chanel Solitaire* of 1971; Marcel Haedrich's *Coco Chanel: Her Life, Her Secrets* of 1972; Pierre Galante's *Mademoiselle Chanel* of 1973; Edmonde Charles-Roux's *L'Irrégulière* of 1974 (published in English in 1976 as *Chanel*); Paul Morand's *L'Allure de Chanel* of 1976; Edmonde Charles-Roux's *Chanel and Her World* of 1979 (published in English in 1981); Francis Kennett's *Coco: The Life and Loves of Gabrielle Chanel* of 1989; Axel Madsen's *Coco Chanel: A Biography* and Lilou Marquand's *Chanel M'a Dit*, both of 1990. The majority of these books, which followed Chanel's death in January 1971 in rapid succession, were written by authors who, like Paul Morand, had either known Chanel personally or who, like Pierre Galante and Marcel Haedrich, were professional journalists who had interviewed her at length. Such testaments are invaluable as they provide numerous insights into Chanel's private life and career. The story of the designer's long, glamorous life is understandably newsworthy and certainly the title of Francis Kennett's publication indicates the level to which the more recent biographers have continued to concern themselves with all aspects of her life. Axel Madsen begins his biography with 'She made things up', and thus further explains the literary fascination with the designer: not only was she 'the illegitimate daughter of itinerant market traders... born in a poorhouse hospice', and thus suitable for a rags to riches

angle, but she made every effort to conceal the true facts of her origins.[4] The principal intention behind Madsen's book was, as the blurb states, to 'negotiate Chanel's smoke screens'. The desire to reveal the truth behind Chanel's often romanticized versions of her own past has been central to many of the more biographical texts.

The monographs include Jean Leymarie's *Chanel* of 1987; Alice Mackrell's *Coco Chanel* of 1992; Amy de la Haye and Shelley Tobin's *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* of 1994; and François Baudot's *Chanel* of 1996. The earliest of these texts opens with the statement:

> This book is in no way intended to supersede existing biographies, nor does it constitute the systematic and specialized study still to be written on the work of this legendary figure.[5]

Although Leymarie identified a crucial gap in the market, his goal was to provide 'an overview of... [Chanel's] creative work in relation to the art world of her time.'[6] Detailed attention is therefore given to Chanel's working relationships with Diaghilev and the Ballet Russes, Jean Cocteau and Picasso. At one point a comparison is made between the severely straight lines of the famous 'little black dresses' of 1926 and the work of the Cubist painter Léger: Leymarie, an art historian, argues that the 'purity' of the Chanel dress 'echoes the contemporary style of Léger in his mechanical phase.'[7] Despite such areas of study, a significant proportion of the text focuses on what Leymarie refers to as Chanel's 'unsettled and miserable childhood', and several photographs document the orphanage in which she lived. Such information does little to support or enhance the critic's interpretation of the designer's work. What Leymarie refers to as the more 'systematic' study of the designs would have provided a more informative foundation for his investigation.

It is undoubtedly the complexity and journalistic appeal of Chanel's life story, that has ensured that, even in many of the monographs, biographical detail often outweighs the discussion relating to her career. Baudot's more recent text also charts Chanel's already well-documented time at the orphanage, in the garrison town of Moulins and her early relationships with Etienne Balsan and Boy Capel: little commentary is devoted to her working life. Mackrell's book is more successful: biographical information does not outweigh or overshadow the relatively comprehensive discussion of the designer's work. The chapters are accordingly given titles which emphasize this concern with

career rather than biography: 'Classic Chic', 'Variations', 'Theatre and Films' and 'Comeback'. It was this attempt to balance life story with a more detailed study of the subject's work that led Barbara Burman, in her 1993 review of Mackrell's publication, to note that the preference given to biographical detail over that of information relating to the subject's career is typical of 'the conventional approach to fashion designer monographs.'[8] Clearly the practice of prioritizing the life story of the individual designer (the 'hero' of the text) is characteristic of traditional approaches to the writing of fashion history as a whole. It is perhaps unsurprising that the biographical form should be so readily and repeatedly adopted for studies of an industry that thrives on the cult of the individual designer.

There has been a backlash against the prevalence of biographical literature on Chanel, a backlash which challenges what Christopher Breward refers to as, 'the subjective, uncritically celebratory and elitist nature of many biographical texts.'[9] This is best represented by De La Haye and Tobin's *Chanel: The Couturière At Work* and Steele's essay *Chanel In Context*.[10] De La Haye and Tobin's stated intention was to shift the focus of study away from the designer's private life to a critical assessment of her working methods, techniques and to the actual dress designs themselves. The title of the book effectively serves to foreground the approach taken by its authors, an approach underlined by the omission of Kennett's 1989 publication, *Coco: The Life and Loves of Gabrielle Chanel*, from their extensive bibliography. For De La Haye and Tobin, the biographical form, which inherently prioritizes the life story of the subject and typically uses an inflexible narrative framework, was unsuitable for a serious study of the designer's work. Although the book does not ultimately provide the comprehensive and detailed survey called for by Leymarie (a point which is discussed below), their explicit rejection of more conventional approaches is important.

Steele similarly finds the biographical form inappropriate and restrictive: 'Even when scholars have attempted to separate fact from fiction, their essentially biographical approach has limited the nature of their inquiry.'[11] For Steele, the biographical obsession with Chanel amounts to a form of hagiography in which the designer, whose talent for self-promotion cannot be underestimated, willingly colluded. The acceptance of Chanel's numerous claims that she alone was responsible for all the major fashion innovations of the early twentieth century, a view that the very existence of such a comparatively large body of literature on her might, even today, help reinforce, leads to an oversimplified understanding of the history of fashion. Even a cursory study of

French fashion between 1916 and 1929, the period covered by the catalogue presented here, reveals that, far from being a sole innovator, Chanel was one of many successful haute couturiers producing radical designs. In an interview for the 1986 documentary *Chanel, Chanel*, Karl Lagerfeld (the present design director of the house) himself comments on the difficulty of telling a Chanel design of the period from a Lelong, Patou or Vionnet.[12] However, the notion that Chanel was the first to abandon the more rigid forms of the corset associated with Belle Epoque fashions, the first to borrow from men's clothing, the first to produce sportswear as part of a *haute couture* collection, the first to dramatically shorten skirts, the only house to employ jersey or tweed, and the chief exponent of the 'little black dress', are all statements which are continually repeated in the available literature on the designer. These statements are reinforced by the repeated use of quotations from the designer herself: 'If I invented sportswear, it was for myself'; 'In inventing the jersey I liberated the body, I eliminated the waistline... and created a new silhouette'; 'To the indignation of couturiers I shortened dresses'; 'I wonder why I went into this profession, and why I played a revolutionary role... I have been the instrument of fate for a necessary cleaning operation.'[13]

The relentless glorification of Chanel has meant that her name has unfairly overshadowed the contribution of other designers. This process is symptomatic of an approach to the writing of not only fashion, but also of art and design history in general, whereby it is reduced to the simple and manageable story of the chronological and linear succession of a few 'big names'. Steele's essay challenges the 'single strand' approach which ensures the neglect of equally important designers, and fails to consider the wider social, historical and cultural contexts. As Adrian Forty points out:

> It seems odd that the biographies of individuals should be considered a satisfactory means of explaining an activity that is by nature social and not purely personal.[14]

The work of De La Haye, Tobin and Steele is part of a wider critical reappraisal of the history of design, and more particularly the history of fashion, as a whole. As Elizabeth Wilson has noted, 'The serious study of fashion history has traditionally been a branch of art history.'[15] This is duly demonstrated by its engagement with issues of dating, attribution, provenance, authenticity and technique (all important factors at the salesroom). Wilson rightly acknowledges these as 'valid activities', but recognizes that

fashion history has 'too often been locked into the conservative ideologies of art history as a whole', with its concerns for connoisseurship, style, the individual artist and genius.[16] In the 1989 publication *Design History and the History of Design*, John A. Walker stated that, 'Since design history is such a young discipline, it necessarily depends upon other, more established ones for most of its basic concepts and methods.'[17] Architectural history provided an important precedent for the emergent discipline. Niklaus Pevsner's 1936 *Pioneers of Modern Design*, which aimed to 'establish an historical pedigree for Modern Movement architecture and design', was a crucial model.[18] Pevsner's methodology was founded on the belief that the history of architecture and design was essentially that of individuals: the history of the Modern Movement was linearly plotted from William Morris to Walter Gropius (paralleling the constructed development in fashion history from Charles Frederick Worth to Paul Poiret and Chanel). The design itself was understood purely in terms of the careers and testimonies of the individual designer.

As Clive Dilnot has shown, the Pevsnerian model of progression was challenged during the 1960s and 1970s: the focus shifted away from the history of 'great men', to the wider social, technological and economic factors, and the relationship of design to commerce and popular taste.[19] The 'rethinking' of modernism questioned the traditional hierarchies which emphasized architecture and the 'fine' arts above all other disciplines, and formulated a history in which the male designer was dominant. The myth of the avant-garde artist as a pioneering 'torch bearer' who functioned outwith of society was also challenged. In effect, this period saw a consolidation of the critical challenges to the traditional and accepted methodologies of art and design history, raising questions that were equally pertinent to the field of fashion history. In 1978, the art historian Nicos Hadjinicolaou questioned the suppositions that underlined the traditional biography or monograph: that individuals make history and that the history of art or design is the history of great artists or designers.[20] A. L. Rees and F. Borzello, in their introduction to the 1986 publication, *The New Art History*, referred to such challenges as, 'a new way of thinking, one which sees art as ultimately linked to the society which produces and consumes it, rather than something mysterious which happens as a result of the artist's genius.'[21]

New critical approaches to the writing of art and fashion history have, like that of design history, been founded on a concern for the social aspects of art and design production, coupled with an emphasis on the theoretical approaches offered by

Marxism, psychoanalysis, feminism and literary theory. However, as Rees and Borzello warn, the wholesale adoption of any one of these approaches may ultimately 'risk overlooking the art they are investigating.'[22] More recently, fashion historians such as Wilson (1986) and Breward (1995) have adopted a pluralist approach. Wilson has stated that:

> The attempt to view fashion through several different pairs of spectacles – of aesthetics, of social theory, of politics – may result in an obliquity of view, even an astigmatism or blurred vision, but it seems that we must attempt it.[23]

Far from denigrating the use of traditional art historical approaches, Wilson and Breward credit them with a relevance and status equal to those methodologies favoured in more recent years. I would agree with Breward when he states that, 'Rather than prioritize the benefits of one direction over another, it would seem more helpful if they could be used together to provide a more rigorous but essentially fluid framework for the study of fashion in its own right.'[24] While traditional methods of art historical research should not, therefore, be the sole route of inquiry into the field of fashion history (and are even inappropriate, for example, to a Marxist or feminist analysis), they can provide a valid foundation for other areas of research and investigation. For example, the catalogue raisonné, one such traditional art historical device, provides a detailed chronological survey of the artist or designer's work, giving vital information relating to the date, materials, provenance and location of each individual object. Such focused concentration on the product may seem an extreme response to Rees and Borzello's observation that recent critical approaches have risked overlooking the actual objects of study, but not if it is considered as a basic component of a wider process.

The Original and Final Research Projects

The original doctoral research project, *Chanel and the Parisian Avant-Garde, 1916-1929*, was the initial focus for this 'wider process'. Building on the work begun by Leymarie in *Chanel* of 1987, the intention was to document Chanel's contact and working relationships with members of the Parisian avant-garde during the period and to compare her approach, working methods and style to theirs. The first prerequisite was to have access to a representative sample of the designer's work 1916-1929; the second was to set this work within the wider context of contemporary dress design in

Paris, in order to evaluate the originality of Chanel, and to be in a position to assess the degree of her kinship with contemporary artists and designers in other fields.

However, the doctoral research over three years has been devoted entirely to meeting these initial requirements: first, to compiling a catalogue of a representative sample of Chanel's dress designs 1916-1929; second, to providing a detailed commentary on the development of her work as it was presented in the biannual collections within the immediate and continually evolving context of contemporary *haute couture* in Paris. The identification, collection and appropriate organisation of the significant body of material required to meet these objectives ultimately became a central focus of the research project.[25]

This process, founded upon a more detailed and rigorous analysis of the dress designs from the period and leading to a more comprehensive survey of the individual collections than has previously been carried out, opens the way to a re-assessment of Chanel's early work. As shown above, recent texts on Chanel, such as those by De La Haye and Tobin and Steele, have aimed to decisively shift the focus of study away from the designer's life and the myths that have surrounded it. However, as forthcoming sections will indicate, these aims have not been successfully met. The final research project – the development of the catalogue - represents a vital stage towards a full re-evaluation of Chanel's work and will ultimately enable a more critical assessment of her career within the wider social, historical and cultural contexts of the period.

The Criteria Governing the Selection of Dates for the Original and Final Research Projects

While the choice of dates, 1916-1929, belonged to the original research project, they also represent a convenient and coherent period in the development of both the House of Chanel and of Parisian *haute couture*. This period witnessed the establishment of the House of Chanel and its rise to the position of one of the most successful houses in Paris during the inter-war years; it also saw the rapid expansion of the French fashion industry itself.[26] Following the First World War, and despite the acute economic and social problems that ensued, the number of *haute couture* houses in the French capital rose considerably. The male monopoly was challenged as many of the

new houses were led by female designers. Paris consolidated its status as the fashion capital of the world and *haute couture*, with its numerous related and dependent trades, remained one of the most economically important of the French industries. The transformation of the structure of the *haute couture* industry after the war was paralleled by the more gradual transformation of French society itself. It is now a well-worn cliché to relate the development and form of early twentieth-century fashion to the so-called emancipation of women (a factor which is also used to explain the rise of the female dress designer during this period). However, during the war, women did play an active and vital role in the French workforce. The elaborate and corseted designs of the Belle Epoque, and the sumptuous and extravagant styles of Paul Poiret, were no longer appropriate. Women became used to the idea and experience of wearing comfortable, practical and 'sensible' clothing. Although reductive statements should be avoided, the importance of the increased personal and financial freedom experienced by some French women – primarily those who could afford to buy *haute couture* – cannot be underestimated. As the home market expanded, due in one respect to the growing prosperity of the middle-classes, so too did international trade: America became one of the most lucrative markets for *haute couture* during the 1920s. It was not until the Wall Street Crash of 1929, the final year to be covered by the catalogue, that the hedonistic, prosperous and experimental climate of the 1920s, as experienced by the wealthiest sections of society, was curtailed. Accordingly, 1929 marked the closure or merger of several of the period's oldest houses: Beer, Dœuillet, Doucet, Drécoll, Poiret and Redfern.

To summarize, 1916-1929 provides the backdrop to the launch of Chanel's career and the formation of a style and an approach to dress design that, in many respects, remained largely unchanged throughout her working life. It is also the period during which the House of Chanel, the status and importance of women dress designers, and the *haute couture* industry as a whole, was at its peak. If one of the aims of this project is to challenge the numerous claims and assumptions that have been made about Chanel: to question, on the one hand, the assertion that she was a sole innovator and, on the other, that she was merely one of many; to challenge the idea that the development of fashion is simply a designer-led process, rather than the result of the complex inter-play of social, economic and political factors; then it is appropriate to focus on a period during which both the house of Chanel and the French fashion industry itself, were at their height.

The Catalogue: The Published Designs in the Existing Literature on Chanel

Even the most recent and critical of the published texts on Chanel do not provide a comprehensive and systematic survey of the dress designs. Chanel's output was prolific: during the 1920s the house could produce on average between 300 and 400 designs for each of the biannual collections alone.[27] However, an extremely small percentage of those designs is actually reproduced and discussed in the available literature.

Clearly it is not the intention of the biographer to focus on the dress designs, and so many examples shown within this format are there merely as an acknowledgement of Chanel's profession. Charles-Roux's *Chanel and her World* does combine biographical information with representative photographic and illustrative documentation. Approximately forty-five of the illustrations are of dress designs from the 1916-1929 period. However, these are generally reproduced on a small scale (frequently much smaller than in the original source, such as fashion periodicals, therefore making them difficult to read) and are unaccompanied by any detailed information on the components of the design and the materials employed. Ultimately, biography remains the principal reason for publication.

Leymarie's text includes approximately twenty five designs from the period. These designs were clearly chosen for their capacity to underpin the main theme of the book. Sober-coloured, simple suits in wool jersey, trimmed with rabbit fur, were used to illustrate Leymarie's argument that, 'Chanel's consecration of humble fabrics and furs paralleled the poetics of Cubism, which rejected fine-arts painting in favour of commonplace materials.'[28] The designs presented do not, therefore, provide an objective survey of Chanel's practice.

De La Haye and Tobin, who aimed to concentrate more on the designs than on biography, do show approximately thirty-five models from the period. As their publication deals with Chanel's work up to 1971, and covers Lagerfeld's designs for the house up to 1994, they have given as full a survey as possible within the confines of their chosen format. The particular bias of the publication is towards a consideration of Chanel's working methods and techniques, and therefore De La Haye and Tobin have used photographs of surviving models whenever possible to reinforce the idea that the information given is based upon a working knowledge of the existing designs

themselves (the authors presumably had the opportunity to study the construction and fabric of certain examples at first hand). However, this rationale does not guarantee a representative cross section of the designer's work.[29]

Many of the illustrations in Baudot's much smaller publication are taken from Lagerfeld's sketches of Chanel's pre-Second World War designs. Although Lagerfeld undoubtedly has a thorough knowledge of the designer's working methods and techniques, the selection of designs presented here ultimately shed more light on his preoccupations than they do on the breadth and range of Chanel's dress design collections.

The need for a more representative and objective survey is further underlined by the fact that, in the existing published literature on Chanel, the same few examples tend to be used to illustrate her work. The group of three jersey suits shown in a July 1916 edition of the fashion periodical *Les Elégances Parisiennes* (catalogue numbers **2**, **5** and **6**) are shown in no less than seven of the publications listed in the Bibliography. Time after time, designs are chosen which serve to reinforce rather than challenge what are popularly accepted to be the key themes of Chanel's collections. In reproducing the three designs shown in *Les Elégances Parisienne*, the point was undoubtedly to establish that, from the outset, jersey was one of Chanel's most important fabrics. Nonetheless, it is perhaps not immediately clear why these authors have continued to limit themselves to the same illustrations, when other examples can be found in a wide range of secondary sources (see below). However, the exclusion of the jersey coat produced for the February 1918 collection (catalogue number **53**), for example, from the texts referred to, may be explained by the fact that it is quite lavishly trimmed with lace and makes no overt references to men's wear. In short, this design does not uphold the accepted view of Chanel as a designer who rejected ornamentation and assimilated ideas from traditionally non-*haute couture* sources. Again, the influence of a progressivist approach upon the writing of fashion history has meant that critics often choose to illustrate those models which seem to anticipate the most famous designs produced by Chanel during the late 1950s and 1960s: simple 'little black dresses', tweed suits, and anything in beige.

Furthermore, in the majority of the existing publications, information on the design itself is usually given a subordinate position: it is set aside from the main body of the text so as not to interrupt the narrative flow. In by far the majority of cases, data

relating to fabric type and construction is, at worst, entirely ignored or, at best, reduced to a few words. Little, if any, consideration is also given to the importance and role of the original captions and text that accompanied the designs in secondary sources such as fashion periodicals.[30] Founded on an awareness of the limitations of previous approaches towards the collation and presentation of examples of the designer's work, the development of a catalogue of Chanel's dress designs produced between 1916-1929 was intended primarily as a means of providing a more representative, informative and unbiased source of documentation and information. However, it is important to emphasise at this point that a catalogue raisonné can not, of course, be an entirely objective survey, particularly when the material included is by necessity derived from secondary sources.

The Absence of both a House Archive and a Comprehensive Collection of Surviving Dress Designs by Chanel

The production of a catalogue raisonné of Chanel's designs was made problematic by a number of factors. Firstly, no pre-1951 House of Chanel archives (including, for example, a significant body of original designs, documentation or business records) exist. During an extended interview in February 1996 at the House of Chanel, Véronique de Pardieu, Conservatoire de la Mode, confirmed that the archives were destroyed during the Second World War. This information was supported during research visits made to the *Union Française des Arts du Costume* and to the *Musée de la Mode et du Costume*, Paris. Furthermore, unlike her contemporary Madeleine Vionnet, Chanel did not photograph each design; nor did she produce preliminary sketches of her work.[31] Whilst, therefore, the existence of a house archive would be invaluable in terms of an understanding of the organisation and management of the business itself, it would not have provided a detailed or visual record of each design produced.

Secondly, there are very few surviving Chanel designs of the period available to see in public or private collection.[32] The appendix to Mackrell's *Coco Chanel* conveniently lists the museums with a collection of Chanel's designs.[33] The majority of the surviving examples are dated to the 1950s and 1960s; only twenty four are attributed to the 1920s. A first-hand study of those surviving designs in accessible collections was undertaken during this research project and contributed to an understanding of the

design process itself.[34] However, the complete lack of house documentation, and the existence of only a relatively few surviving original models, means that it is not possible to produce a catalogue of every Chanel dress design produced between 1916 and 1929. Nonetheless, even if documentation of the possible 300 to 400 designs from each collection was available, it would have been impossible to collate and analyse such material within the format of this research project. In these circumstances, it was necessary to generate a catalogue of a representative sample of the designs from the period as a means of initiating and facilitating further research. Indeed, it is the very lack of such an archive which underlines the importance of the creation of such a catalogue. Ultimately, in the absence of a house archive or a significant collection of surviving models, the designs included in the catalogue had to be drawn from contemporary fashion periodicals.

The Identification of Contemporary Sources

Prior to a consideration of the identification of secondary sources of designs for the catalogue, it is important to acknowledge recent critical debate concerning the use of fashion and women's magazines as a source for the study of twentieth century fashion. Breward, for example, has highlighted the often uncritical way in which fashion periodicals have been used in the past, the illustrations being given without question as representations of 'dress as worn, without regard for the literary context or wider iconographical implications of such images.'[35] However, far from making the assumption that fashion periodicals can be treated as an objective and unbiased source for this research project, the following sections of this introduction focus upon the editorial philosophy behind the key magazines chosen as the primary source for the catalogue, the illustrations used, the artists and journalists employed, the target markets, the potency of the fashion image and the importance of the related text as a recognised means of communicating the desirability of the product to the consumer.

The mid-nineteenth century saw the beginning of the rapid expansion in the number and variety of British and French fashion journals.[36] This growth continued into the twentieth century and embraced publications intended for both a general audience (including those more elitist periodicals that dealt primarily with *haute couture*) and a more specialist market, such as the *Drapers' Record* or *La Couturière: Organe Professionel des Couturiers et Confectionneuses Pour Dames et Enfants.*[37] Although

the market was large, the magazines referred to here represent a significant proportion of what are generally acknowledged to be the most important titles of the period.[38] To consider those key magazines that focused on haute-couture: the comparatively long-established *L'Art et la Mode* and *Femina* were supplemented by new journals such as *La Gazette du Bon Ton* and *Le Journal des Dames et des Modes*, which were launched immediately prior to the First World War.[39] During the war *Le Style Parisien* and *Les Elégances Parisiennes* were established with the aim of boosting morale and promoting the industry abroad.[40] The first edition of British *Vogue* was published in 1916 and the first French edition appeared in 1920.[41] As the 1920s progressed, other periodicals which reported the Paris collections such as *Art Goût Beauté*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Le Jardin des Modes*, *L'Officiel de la Couture et de la Mode* and *Minerva* were established.[42]

Despite the quantity, range and distribution of fashion periodicals produced during the 1916-1929 period, it is relatively difficult to locate complete runs and organise access to many of the leading publications of the time.[43] The inaccessibility of many of the most prominent American fashion periodicals in Britain (but more particularly in Scotland), and the comparative accessibility of contemporary British and French publications, immediately narrowed the field of appropriate sources.

The Criteria Governing the Selection of British and French *Vogue*

The main source for the catalogue was British *Vogue* supplemented by French *Vogue*. This choice was determined in critical response to a number of contingent factors. Certain leading periodicals of the time were immediately eliminated as sources for the catalogue because they did not publish designs by Chanel. The press coverage received by a particular house was inevitably dictated to a degree by issues such as advertising, business affiliation or sponsorship. For example, *La Gazette du Bon Ton* only featured the designs of its seven sponsors: Chéruit, Dœuillet, Doucet, Paquin, Poiret, Redfern and Worth.[44] The magazine *Art Gout Beauté* had as its brief the 'advancement and advertisement of French couture'; however the House of Chanel, along with those of Callot and Vionnet, is not covered.[45] In this case, editorial decision was probably governed by commercial interests: the sponsors and founders of the magazine were the textile firm of Albert Godde, Bedin and Company, and it can be presumed that they naturally favoured those houses with whom they had substantial business contracts.

These considerations apart, not all of the leading periodicals published between 1916-1929 gave a wide-ranging or comprehensive coverage of the work of the most successful houses: *L'Art et La Mode*, for example, reproduced very few Chanel designs.[46] Other periodicals, such as *La Couturière*, *Les Elégances Parisiennes*, *Good Housekeeping*, *Le Jardin des Modes*, *Les Journal des Dames et des Modes*, *L'Officiel* or *Minerva* were not continuously in print during this period. Unlike these examples, *Vogue* was continuously in print from 1916-1929 and gave extensive coverage to the work of the leading houses, including Chanel.

The American publisher Condé Nast acquired *Vogue* in 1909. The periodical originated in America in 1892 as a society and fashion journal aimed at wealthy New York women. Nast transformed the publication from what William Packer has described as a '...languishing parish journal of American east coast society', into a potent journal which combined high fashion, high society and the arts.[47] In 1912, and due to its growing success, distribution of the journal to London was organised. By 1914 it was selling between 3-4,000 copies in England. By 1916 sales had quadrupled but, due to the war, paper supplies in the USA were restricted and non-essential shipping to Britain was banned. Consequently, Nast launched a British version on 15 September 1916. The French edition, which was launched on 15 June 1920, was initially printed in London and distributed in France through Messageries Hachette.[48]

At first there was little difference between the American and British editions and a common pool of designs, articles and features were used. The editor-in-chief, Edna Woolman Chase commented that:

> In the beginning we shipped over mostly fashion material, the idea being that gradually we would insert local features – which would naturally be of greater interest to British readers.[49]

This practice was still in operation when the French edition was launched and Chase confirmed that, 'all three magazines used the same fashions and gradually we began inserting local features.'[50] Due entirely to difficulties concerning availability and access, American *Vogue* was not consulted in detail for this project.[51] However, given Chase's testimony, the use of the British and French editions have ensured access to the majority of the designs and articles that were included within it.

Vogue was not sponsored by a particular firm or group of designers: revenue was raised through advertising. Its brief was to report accurately and comprehensively the fashion news from Paris. As proprietor of *Vogue*, Nast was committed to providing the reader with the most informative and detailed accounts of current Paris fashions, accompanied by high quality illustrations. Importantly for the catalogue, Nast's mission was to:

> ... serve those one hundred and more thousands of women who were so literally interested in fashion that they wanted to see the mode thoroughly and faithfully reported.[52]

His editor-in-chief echoed this view, believing that fashion writing should be as detailed as possible and that it should describe everything relating to the illustrated design, 'even what the reader could not see.'[53]

Although the production of a fashion magazine is a collaborative process which brings together a number of different departments (such as art, editorial and advertising), it is ultimately, as Laird O'Shea Borrelli notes, the editor who defines and becomes the 'voice' of the magazine.[54] Editorial control of British and French *Vogue* remained by and large in the hands of Chase, editor-in-chief from 1914 to 1952. In her 1954 autobiography *Always In Vogue*, she states that, 'as Nast (Condé Nast, the proprietor) launched his English and French publications, I was to wield the chief editorial pencil over them.'[55] Although British and French *Vogue* both had their own, dedicated editors, it was undoubtedly Chase who had the greatest influence upon the direction, format and content of the magazines. The first Editor of British *Vogue* was Elspeth Champcommunal (from 1916–1922). Having been employed at the House of Worth, Champcommunal had a sound understanding of fashion, but little working knowledge of publishing. Consequently, Dorothy Todd, who had worked on the magazine for a brief period under Champcommunal, became its editor from 1922-1926.[56] Todd was closely involved with the Bloomsbury group and her influence on the magazine was marked by the inclusion of numerous articles written by the Sitwells and other English intellectuals such as Aldous Huxley. This was not approved of by Chase, particularly as Todd paid little or no attention to the fashion articles and advertising. Consequently, Harry Yoxall was appointed business manager in 1924. Although, by his own admission, he was not overly concerned with fashion, he was more willing to follow the dictates of Nast and Chase and keep an eye on Todd. However in 1926 Todd was

sacked and replaced by Alison Settle. Settle's impact was, like that of Champcommunal's, minimal: as a result of the Todd episode, the New York office kept a firm grip on the reins of British *Vogue*. Yoxall noted that, 'As the 1920s wore on our London office grew in status... but before the Second World War we were very much under the control of New York.'[57] Chase had the greatest say over the British edition and came to London in 1926 specifically to reorganize and monitor its publication. Importantly for this project, one of the results of Chase's intervention was that, from September 1927, British *Vogue* became a twenty six rather than a twenty four issue a year publication.[58]

The success of *Vogue*, and other leading fashion periodicals, must be attributed to the ways in which it employs text and image to articulate fashion and to construct fictions around it. The fashion image is a potent and immediate means of communicating information in a seductive and engaging form. However, it must be noted that the text which accompanies the image does not only simply illustrate the meaning of the object but works in parallel with it and provides the dominant narrative. Text impacts upon our reading of visual images to the extent that the text (or context) can actively produce or determine the meaning. For example, we know that the title of a painting or sculpture is not simply an irrelevant after-thought of the artist, but can offer the conceptual framework for the reading of the image or object and is thus an active agent in the production of meaning. Similarly, the artist's signature or the designer label serves to fix a particular sign value upon the image or object. With the fashion image, the textual commentary which accompanies the image on its publication can serve to contextualize the image for the reader in a way which articulates the ideal social context for the object (which reflects the social aspirations of its readers). In this way, the fashion designer and fashion magazine editor conspire to produce their consumer. The inter-relationship of fashion text and fashion image is, thus, a complex economy of desire: where text serves not only to contextualize the image but to articulate the fashion object as a commodity inscribed with a particular sign-value. The dominant scenes in which the dress designs appear in editions of *Vogue* throughout the 1920s promote a life-style characterised by youth, elegance, wealth, urbanity, independence, modernity, with the associated experiences of the modern woman of the upper middle-class: foreign travel, leisure and the pursuit of pleasure. Above all, the fashion object is articulated as a means of self-expression for the modern woman ('Youth Must Have Its Way', 'the new femininity', 'the feminine mode'). Further, as the dress designs are objects in which to 'be seen', the images frequently depict the dresses as vehicles for attracting

the male gaze, and although *Vogue* aimed to provide detailed, accurate and 'faithful' information on the designs themselves, the promotional language employed often resembles the flattery of the sales assistant: 'delightful', 'becoming', 'flattering', 'a slim and youthful silhouette'.

Vogue had an office in Paris and its representatives attended the openings of the collections from all the leading houses. Copy, illustrations and photographs were then wired to New York for the editorial attention of Chase. During the First World War, lengthy and detailed reports on the French collections were usually provided for British *Vogue* by Anna Van Campen Stewart (abbreviated to AS in the magazine); after the war, equally informative reports were supplied for both editions primarily by Jeanne Ramón Fernández (JRF) and Margaret Case Harriman (MH).[59] The reports and articles on the collections were, as described above, invariably positive and largely uncritical. It is difficult to distinguish between the literary style and the opinions of the various reporters (although they were undoubtedly in keeping with the views of the Editor-in-Chief); the commentaries and articles were not always credited to any one particular journalist and the emphasis was continually on relaying what were believed to be the key features of a designer's collection and the major developments of the season.

A great number of artists and photographers were commissioned to cater for all of the *Vogue* editions and, in the mid-1920s, the company established its own photographic studio to exclusively supply all of its editions with photographs of designs. Photography was provided mainly by Baron de Meyer up until 1922 and from that date by Edward Steichen. Those artists that appeared most frequently included Lee Creelman, Helen Dryden, Polly Tighe Francis, Harriet Meserole, Douglas Pollard, Leslie Saalburg and Porter Woodruff. Nast brought Georges Lepape, André Marty and Edouard Benito to *Vogue* following his 1925 purchase of *La Gazette du Bon Ton*. Packer described the qualifications for a *Vogue* artist in the following terms:

> The principal defining condition was only a demonstrable practical effectiveness, either in describing the close and characteristic details of the current mode, or in conveying that more general, encompassing and equally characteristic aura of refinement, elegance and chic. If the two approaches could somehow be combined, so much the better.[60]

Vogue artists did not illustrate designs in the rather picturesque, romantic style popular during the late nineteenth century. Nor did the magazine include the type of highly decorative, labour-intensive and hand-painted fashion plates, suitable only for limited-edition runs, featured in journals such as *La Gazette du Bon Ton*.[61] The illustrations were usually clear outline sketches in black and white (colour was only used on the covers, which were often designed by *La Gazette du Bon Ton* artists). As the 1920s progressed, many of the illustrators assimilated avant-garde painting styles, particularly Cubism, which informed the severe, straight lines and tubular appearance characteristic of *Vogue* illustrations of mid 1920s fashionable dress. Increasingly, the 'models' (invariably portraying very slim, tall and striking women) were featured against settings that included cars, planes and contemporary urban architecture, underlining the modernity of both the magazine and the designer's work, and their relevance to contemporary life. In 1925 Nast commissioned Benito to devise a new layout and typography for the magazine. The artist explained his approach by stating that, 'The setting up of a magazine page is a form of architecture, it must be simple, pure, clear, legible like a modern architect's plan.'[62]

However, despite Nast's claims for the clarity and objectivity of the designs included in the magazine, it must be remembered that *Vogue's* presentation of a designer's work was, in fact, always responsive: editorial approach, the relationship of the magazine with the house/designer and commercial pressures all had a significant role to play in the decisions over which designs were or were not included.

Editorial bias was a central factor in the selection of the designs shown in a magazine and *Vogue* was certainly predisposed towards the younger, less conservative houses such as Chanel, Patou, Schiaparelli and Vionnet. Importantly, Chase personally greatly admired Chanel, referring to her as 'one of the brightest stars the dressmaking world has ever known', and shared with the designer a strong dislike of the pre-First World War fashions of the Belle Epoque, as typified by Poiret, believing them to be overly complex and illogical.[63] *Vogue's* editorial bias was revealed in a transcription, published in a June 1927 edition of the magazine, of a lecture given by Chase in the same year at Harrods in London. The lecture, entitled *Good Taste in Dress*, referred to examples of Chanel models on sale in the store and defined the chief characteristic of successful contemporary fashion as being, 'an absolute avoidance of everything that is over-elaborate, fussy or meaningless.'[64] Clearly Chase was not predisposed to the work of the more conservative houses, which continued to design more extravagant and

ornamented clothes for older, less radical women. As the 1920s went on, Chanel's collections were discussed before, and more extensively than, those of houses such as Doucet, Lanvin and Poiret. The basic affinity between Chase and Chanel undoubtedly bolstered the coverage given to the house, a coverage which it did not receive in all the contemporary French fashion journals, and which reinforces the suitability of *Vogue* as a source for Chanel's designs.

However, the couturiers themselves also had a considerable say over the models used by a particular magazine. A 1933 letter from a rather disgruntled Michel de Brunhoff, the then editor of French *Vogue*, indicates the degree of control the most successful houses had:

> Again, I have unbelievable troubles with Chanel. After telling us she would give us all we wanted from the new collection she refused us our choice of models, saying that her day dresses... do not reflect the spirit of her collection... She wishes to release no models, however, unless they are shown alone on a page, the facing page not containing models from any other houses, and she thinks maybe she won't let us photograph them anyway, as she says she herself is organizing a Studio Rue Cambon.[65]

Chanel's awareness of the importance of a mutually beneficial engagement with the media, corresponding to the approach of contemporary architects and designers such as Adolf Loos and Le Corbusier, was one of the most crucial factors in her success.[66] Yoxall, a business manager of British *Vogue*, also commented on the nature of the relationship that Chanel had with the magazine, a relationship which was coloured by her determination to get the maximum coverage. Yoxall referred to Chanel as:

> ... the most difficult of them all; she hates organization and disregards release dates, but for that reason she is often generous to fashion editors since in favouring them she can annoy her competitors.[67]

This media-awareness certainly contributes to the relevance of a catalogue of the designs by Chanel published in a journal such as *Vogue*. Chanel's contemporary Patou was equally concerned with the media representation of his work. It is recorded that he counted the number of times his designs were illustrated or discussed in the editorials, and compared this to the coverage received by Chanel.[68] Patou preferred his designs

not to be printed next to those of his rival. The juxtaposition of work by different designers can, therefore, provide important information concerning possible affiliations within the design community, or, at the very least, editorial perceptions of the relationships between the designers' work. It is, for example, interesting that Chanel designs were most frequently shown next to those by Lelong, Patou, Renée and Vionnet. In fact on several occasions British *Vogue* illustrated garments by Chanel worn on the same model in combination with clothes by Vionnet.[69]

The choice of designs presented by *Vogue* was indicative of its own commercial priorities and those of the houses with which the magazine worked. For example, in 1927, the editorial team responsible for British *Vogue* was forced to respond to the growing competition presented by other UK distributed fashion magazines. This resulted in the move to increase the publication of British *Vogue* by two issues per year (as discussed above). In 1927 the House of Chanel also opened a branch in London. Consequently, the commercial interests of both *Vogue* and Chanel converged: both oragnisations had a vested interest in engaging with and appealing to a British clientele. As a result, an increased number of Chanel designs aimed specifically at a British audience were shown in the periodical: for example, sports wear suitable for country sports in Scotland (catalogue number **364**), dresses deemed appropriate for Ascot (**375** and **376**) and court gowns for débutantes (**385** and **386**) were all illustrated.

Despite the magazine's editorial bias and its apparently close relationship with Chanel (to some extent, even because of them), British and French *Vogue* seemed the most appropriate sources for the catalogue designs. Together they cover the entire 1916-1929 period and provide a regular, wide-ranging and detailed coverage of Chanel and the other leading houses. This emphasis on the detailed coverage of *all* the Paris collections, the high standard and legibility of the illustrations, the informative commentaries, and the continuous and extensive coverage of Chanel's work, are the factors which recommended *Vogue* as the best source for compiling a representative sample of models by the designer between 1916-1929. As far as possible every Chanel design published in the British and French editions during the period has been included.

One of *Vogue's* main competitors was the American magazine *Harper's Bazaar*.[70] A complete run of the periodical is not readily accessible in Britain and it was therefore not suitable as a main source of Chanel's designs. Fortunately, from June 1923,

Femina had an exclusive contract with the magazine for the joint reproduction of photographs by Baron Gayne de Meyer; the numerous photographs of Chanel designs by the photographer in the French periodical were subtitled 'by courtesy of *Harpers' Bazaar.*'[71] As *Femina* is comparatively accessible, it was possible to see a representative cross-section of the designs shown in the American periodical. *Femina* has consequently proved the second most important source for illustrations of Chanel designs from the period.

Contents and Organization of the Catalogue

The catalogue provides a more detailed and representative survey of Chanel's design production from 1916-1929 than has been previously available. It comprises 490 designs taken from British and French *Vogue* with an average of 18 designs representing each collection of the period.[72] Of those designs, 440 were reproduced from the British edition, and 50 from the French edition. Of the 440 designs shown in British *Vogue*, 133 were also shown in French *Vogue* (the date of the design's appearance in the French edition is noted in the **Biography** field of the catalogue entry). The lower number of designs (183 in total) from the French publication reflects the fact, referred to above, that it was launched four years after the British edition and that it was a monthly, rather than a bimonthly magazine. It may also be symptomatic of the fact that there were a greater number of fashion journals covering the *haute couture* collections in France than in Britain: French *Vogue* had to measure closely its coverage of a particular house against that given by its numerous competitors. As the decade went on, French *Vogue* became a little more autonomous and less reliant on material from the British edition. There is little difference between the type of designs represented by the two magazines, although British *Vogue* does feature clothes intended specifically for the English market (country sports, débutante ball gowns), and French *Vogue* illustrates a slightly higher proportion of evening designs.

Rival periodicals such as *Les Elégances Parisiennes* or *Femina* often presented different Chanel designs to those shown in *Vogue*. However, the majority of the models are simply versions (perhaps, for example, in a different colour) of those shown in the catalogue and as such serve only to reinforce the developments in Chanel's work followed by *Vogue*. It would only have been relevant, within the context and format of this project, to include those designs from other periodicals which differ

significantly from those shown in *Vogue*, and represent new directions or tendencies in her work. More usually, these sources have informed the summaries of the dress design collections by Chanel, 1916-1929. An exception was made in the case of 1916: as British *Vogue* was launched in the autumn of its first year, reproductions were necessarily included from other sources to provide a survey of the designs intended for the spring/summer season.

The organization of the catalogue entries does not necessarily follow the chronological sequence of the appearance of the designs in *Vogue*. Instead, the designs are grouped according to the collection in which they were first shown: February (spring/summer) and August (autumn/winter). Within this framework the designs are ordered according to categories: morning/street wear, sports, afternoon and evening wear. This, as subsequent sections of this Introduction will show, reflects the general order of the presentation of the designs at a *haute couture* collection from the period.

The format of each individual entry contains a minimum of 6 and a maximum of 9 fields. The fields are presented in the format illustrated on page 24:

Cat. No.: Catalogue Number.

Collection: The collection (month) and year in which the design was shown.

House No.: The number of the design given by the house (if stated).

House Title: The title of the design given by the house (if stated).

Source: The title, date and page number of the periodical or publication from which the catalogue reproduction of the design was taken.

Presentation: The location of the original reproduction of the design on the page in relation to other designs by Chanel; the form of presentation: artist's sketch or photograph; the name of the artist or photographer when known; the setting used (interior or exterior); the scale in centimetres of the height of the model (or of the design if no model is used).

Materials: The material type and colour when known (excluding accessories).[73]

Description: The category to which the design belongs.
Note of the accessories worn with the design.
Description of the total ensemble and notes on the individual elements such as sleeve or collar type and trimming.

Bibliography: Title, author (when applicable), date and page number of texts where the design is reproduced or discussed, other than that of the primary source of reproduction.

Notes: The present day location of the design (if it is an existing model); the original owner/owners of the design (identified as the wearer/sitter in the caption to the photograph/ illustration or in the main body of the text);[74] the names of shops where the designs were first sold (if stated).

The purpose of the majority of these fields is self-explanatory. As the catalogue photographs do not always show the design's original setting on the page, information relating to its original context has been given in the **Presentation** field. The chosen setting for the illustration can provide important information relating to the intended purpose of the design: a costume intended for a particular sport may show the model participating in this activity and an informal afternoon dress is more likely to be shown in a domestic interior setting. As the designs reproduced in *Vogue* are in black and white, the colours, and indeed the particular materials used, can only be identified if they have been listed in the caption to the illustration or in the general text. The degree of technical information (relating to cut and construction) given as part of the **Description** is similarly dependent on the level provided by *Vogue* and on the clarity of the illustration.[75] If no information concerning **House Title, House Number** or **Bibliography** is known, or if no information relevant to **Notes** is given, these fields are not shown in the entry.

Although this catalogue represents a selection of the designs by Chanel published in the fashion press, and particularly British and French *Vogue*, during 1916-1929, it has been produced with the intention that designs illustrated in other periodicals, other secondary sources, the surviving designs held in both public and private collections, and those designs produced by Chanel from 1930-1939 and from 1954-1971, can be included at a later date. This would necessitate the transferal of the catalogue from its present format to a more sophisticated form of database or CD-ROM, and ensure its relevance and accessibility to a wider audience. This resource would provide the foundation required for further study into Chanel's career and dress design production in particular, and into the history of *haute couture* during the twentieth century in general.

[1] Valerie Steele, 'Chanel In Context', in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader* (London 1992), p. 118

[2] The foundation and organisation of the house is outlined in later sections of the Introduction. Chanel closed the business in 1939, as a result of the Second World War, but re-opened in 1954 at the age of 71. She rebuilt the reputation of the house and continued to produce successful collections until her death, aged 88, in 1971. From 1971 to 1983 the house produced Chanel 'classics' that, in the main, appealed only to a conservative, middle-aged clientele. Karl Lagerfeld joined the house in 1983 and began the rejuvenation of the label by reinterpreting the Chanel style in more contemporary terms. The house has since regained its original status and international importance.

[3] The video: Elia Hershon and Roberto Guerra, *Chanel, Chanel* (R. M. Arts 1986); the juvenile title: David Bond, *Coco Chanel and Chanel* (London 1994).

[4] Axel Madsen, *Coco Chanel: A Biography* (London 1990), p. 3

[5] Jean Leymarie, *Chanel* (New York 1987), p. 7

[6] Ibid.

[7] Ibid. p. 103

[8] Barbara Burman in *Journal of Design History*, 1993, Volume 6 no. 3, pp. 220-222

[9] Christopher Breward, *The Culture of Fashion* (Manchester 1995), p. 197

[10] Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton's essay, 'Chanel: The New Woman as Dandy', in *Women and Fashion: A New Look* (London 1989), is an equally important work, considering as it does the designer's contribution to women's fashion in terms of masculine dress.

[11] Steele, op. cit. p. 118

[12] Hershan and Guerra, op. cit.

[13] Chanel quoted in Leymarie, op. cit.

[14] Adrian Forty, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* (London 1992), p. 239

[15] Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams: Fashion and Modernity* (London 1987), p. 48

[16] Ibid.

[17] John A. Walker, *Design History and the History of Design* (London 1989), p. 17

[18] Forty, op. cit. p. 239

[19] Clive Dilnot, 'The State of Design History: Part I – Mapping the Field', in Victor Margolin, *Design Discourse: History, Theory and Criticism* (The University of Chicago 1989), pp. 213-232

[20] Nicos Hadjinicolaou, *Art History and Class Struggle* (London 1978)

[21] A.L. Rees and F. Borzello, *The New Art History* (London 1986), p4

[22] Ibid. p. 8

[23] Wilson, op. cit. p. 11

[24] Breward, op. cit. p. 3

[25] Further sections of this introduction will highlight the criteria governing the identification and selection of material for the catalogue and the various obstacles and difficulties that were encountered. It is also important to note that the lack of any comparative models for such a catalogue, with accompanying critical summaries of the individual collections in which the designs were presented, in the arena of the history of dress design meant that a lengthy period of research over the most appropriate forms and means of organising the catalogue had to be undertaken. The task of accumulating and organising the material itself was, in turn, a lengthy process in terms of the overall timescale of the research project.

[26] The history and structure of *haute couture* in Paris, 1858–1929, and the history of fashionable dress prior to 1916, is documented in many publications and will not, therefore, be rehearsed at length within the context of this thesis (see Bibliography).

[27] See Part Two of this Introduction for further information on the organisation and presentation of the *haute couture* collections in Paris at this period.

[28] Leymarie, op. cit. p. 57

[29] As later sections of this Introduction explain, very few dress designs by Chanel from this period have survived.

[30] See the section of this Introduction on the content and organisation of the catalogue entries and Appendix I: Captions to the Dress Designs by Chanel as Reproduced in British and French *Vogue*, 1916-1929. Through these means, the catalogue can give equal weighting to the image as reproduced in the secondary source and to the accompanying text, and allows for a consideration of the importance of the text as an intermediary between the world of *haute couture* and the public. See below.

[31] The Vionnet archive was donated by the designer in 1952 to the Union Française des Arts du Costume and consists of seventy five copyright albums (Vionnet's working

practice is discussed in later sections of this introduction). Other designers, such as Jeanne Lanvin, also kept detailed archives of their work and business during the 1920s.

[32] The lack of surviving dress designs, not only by Chanel but also by other key Parisian houses, from the 1916-1929 period, has been attributed to the fact that many examples (particularly evening wear) were made from extremely fine, lightweight and delicate fabrics. It is also the case that, due to shortages and rationing, women were forced to 'recycle' inherited or old clothing during the Second World War.

[33] Op. Cit., 1992, pp. 91-94

[34] The designs consulted are held at *The Victoria and Albert Museum* and the *Union Française des Arts et du Costume*. The examples held at *The Victoria and Albert Museum* are: Evening dress, sleeveless, white chiffon tunic, 1919 (T.85&A-1974); Evening dress, black beaded, c. 1922 (T.86-1974); Pajamas, purple/pink georgette, c. 1925 (T.259&A-1967). The examples held at the *Union Française des Arts et du Costume* are: Day wear coat (no exact date provided) 78.39.1; Red, lace evening dress (no exact date provided) 49.16.12; White beaded evening dress (no exact date provided) 72.18.1; Black lace evening dress (no exact date provided) 86.07.38.

[35] Op. cit. 1995, pp. 196-197

[36] It has been noted that, 'From 1840 to 1870 over one hundred new (fashion) magazines appeared in England, Germany, and America as well as France.' JoAnne Olian, *Authentic French Fashions of the Twenties: 413 Costume Designs from L'Art et La Mode* (New York 1990), p. iii.

[37] The *Drapers' Record* (hereafter referred to as *DR*) was launched in 1887 and is still in publication today. *La Couturière* was published bimonthly in Paris between 1895 and 1914.

[38] Fashion periodicals were consulted at the *Mitchell Library*, Glasgow; the *British Library* (Newspaper Division), London; The *National Art Library* (*Victoria and Albert Museum*), London; *Bibliothèque Forney*, Paris; the *Bibilothèque des Arts Décoratifs*, Paris. Contemporary sources were identified by consulting library catalogues and fashion bibliographies.

[39] *L'Art et la Mode* was founded in 1880 and published weekly and then bimonthly until 1967; *Femina* was launched in 1901 and ceased publication in 1956 (British editions were published but it was a French periodical); *La Gazette du Bon Ton* appeared monthly between 1912 and 1915, and then irregularly until 1925 (when it merged with *Vogue*); *Le Journal des Dames et des Modes* was launched in 1912.

[40] *Le Style Parisien* lasted from July 1915 to February 1916; *Les Elégances Parisiennes* was published between 1916 and 1924.

[41] Subsequent sections of this Introduction discuss the launch of the American, British and French editions of *Vogue*.

[42] *Art, Goût, Beauté* was published monthly between 1920 and 1933 (it became *Voici la Mode: art,* gout, *beauté* until 1936); *Le Jardins des Modes* was launched in 1922; *Good Housekeeping* in 1923; *L'Officiel* in 1924; *Minerva* in 1925.

[43] Research into contemporary fashion periodicals was undertaken at the *National Library of Scotland*, Edinburgh; the Library of the University of Glasgow; the *Mitchell Library*, Glasgow; the *British Library* (and the Newspaper Division, Colindale), London; the *National Art Library*, (*Victoria and Albert Museum*), London; *Bath Museums Service*; the *Royal College of Art*, London; the *Bibliothèque Forney*, Paris; the libraries of the *Musée de la Mode et du Costume* and *the Union Française des Arts et du Costume*, Paris; and the *Musée des Arts de la Mode*, Paris. Please see endnote 51 below for details on access and availability of American, British and French *Vogue*.

[44] This particular magazine aimed to unite the work of couturiers and artists; its proprietor, Lucien Vogel, commissioned the work of Georges Barbier and Georges Lepape amongst others and many of the plates showed imaginary designs created by the artists.

[45] Madeleine Ginsburg, *Paris Fashions: The Art Deco Style of the 1920s* (London 1989), p. 11

[46] During the period from 3 January 1920 to 31 December 1921, for example, only five Chanel designs were reproduced in *L'Art et la Mode*.

[47] William Packer, *Fashion Drawing in Vogue* (London 1983), p. 34

[48] The French edition was initially edited by Cosette Vogel (wife of Lucien Vogel), and then by her brother Michel de Brunhoff. In 1927 Mainbocher (Main Rousseau Bocher), who had been fashion editor for several years, became editor.

[49] Edna Woolman Chase and Ilka Chase, *Always In Vogue* (London 1954), p. 130

[50] Ibid. p. 140

[51] Access to a full run of British *Vogue* was possible in the UK (on microfiche at the *Mitchell Library*, Glasgow) and in the original at the *British Library* (Newspaper Division), Colindale, London. Access to a full run of French *Vogue* was much more difficult in the UK and therefore all research was undertaken at libraries in Paris (see endnote 43). However, I was not able to locate a full run of American *Vogue* in the UK.

The only archive to hold a full run was Vogue House (Condé Nast Publications Ltd.), London. I made two attempts to gain access to this archive (which was, at one time, accessible to the public on an appointment basis) during this research project. However, I was denied access on both occasions and, in a letter dates 6 June, 1994, Ingrid Nilsson, Librarian, explained that 'the library is having to remain closed to the public due to lack of space and damage to material'.

[52] Nast cited in Caroline Seebohm, *The Man Who Was Vogue: The Life and Times of Condé Nast* (London 1982), p. 177

[53] Chase, op. cit. p. 89

[54] Laird O'Shea Borrelli, *Dressing Up and Talking About It: Fashion Writing In Vogue from 1968 to 1993*, in 'Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress. Body and Culture, Volume 1 Issue 3, September 1997, p. 249.

[55] Chase, op. cit. p. 61

[56] Nast employed women (at all levels and in all departments) whenever possible, believing they were far better qualified to work on a fashion magazine.

[57] H. W. Yoxall, *A Fashion of Life* (London 1966), p. 130

[58] This move was designed to ensure British *Vogue* (hereafter referred to as *BV*) could compete against the weeklies *Tatler* and *Sketch.*

[59] Anna Van Campen Stewart was a frequent contributor to *Vogue* during the war. From 1922 she was employed as the Paris-based fashion correspondent by the new British periodical *Good Housekeeping* (the magazine had offices at 2 rue de la Paix). Madame Ramón Fernández was a permanent member of the French staff from about 1915-1916. She also wrote for the *Gazette des Beaux Arts*. Margaret Case Harriman wrote for both *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair.*

[60] William Packer, *Fashion Drawing in Vogue* (London 1983), p. 10

[61] Fashion illustrations in *La Gazette du Bon Ton* were produced by the *pochoir* method: a costly process in which the final image was built up through a series of hand-painted gouaches and metal stencils, creating an illustration in deep, intense colours.

[62] Seebohm, op. cit. p. 227

[63] Chase, op. cit. p. 158. It is important to note, however, that designers such as Poiret were given considerable coverage in *Vogue* throughout the 1916-1929 period.

[64] *BV* 5 June 1927, p. 65. This lecture coincided with *BV*'s coverage of the opening of Chanel's London house (see Critical Essay, February 1927).

[65] Michel de Brunhoff cited in Chase, op. cit. p. 229

[66] See Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (MIT Press 1996), and the review by Graham Bewley in *The Journal of Design History*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1997, pp. 99-101. Chanel's system of promotion is discussed in further detail in the second section of this Introduction.

[67] Yoxall, op. cit. p. 60

[68] In a similar vein, Lelong cancelled his advertising with *Vogue* in 1933, believing that Molyneux and Schiaparelli were receiving much more editorial space. In 1938 Chanel was one of several French-born couturiers who vehemently spoke out against what they regarded as the inappropriate amount of coverage given to non-French designers in French *Vogue* (hereafter referred to as *FV*). Several couturiers threatened to withdraw their advertising over this matter.

[69] For one example of this see *BV* 5 July 1925, p. 61 (Catalogue No. **266**: February 1925).

[70] *Harper's Bazaar* was launched as a weekly in America in 1867. From 1901 it was issued monthly. It was bought by William Randolph Hearst in 1912, and in 1929 the second 'a' was added to 'Bazar' when it launched its British edition.

[71] The 1 May 1923 edition of *Femina* (p. 5) announced its exclusive collaboration with *Harper's Bazaar* and the shared use of Baron de Meyer's photographs. Gayne de Meyer defected from *Vogue*, where he had worked from 1913 to 1921, to *Harper's Bazaar*, a move which consolidated the rivalry between the two publications.

[72] See Appendix III: Synoptic Table of Dress Designs by Chanel as Reproduced in British and French *Vogue*, 1916-1929, for a breakdown of the source and number of each design within the collections, 1916-1929.

[73] A glossary of materials has not been provided, as the information is available in many other secondary sources. See Bibliography.

[74] See Appendix II: Biographies of the Women Named as Wearing the Dress Designs by Chanel as Reproduced in British and French *Vogue*, 1916–1929. The inclusion of this Appendix underlines the importance that information on the consumers of Chanel's designs plays in an understanding of the social context of the history of fashion. However, within the context of this research project, it was not possible to provide a definitive biographical statement of each of the women named. The brief biographies are drawn from a range of secondary sources listed in the Bibliography and, within these necessary parameters, every attempt was made to confirm the correct

biography of the individual named. However, in the majority of examples this proved impossible, particularly in the cases where the individual is named only by the surname. The Appendix is therefore presented with full acknowledgement of its limitations in its present form and it serves therefore as an indication of the potential scope, importance and direction of such research.

[75] See Appendix I: Captions to the Dress Designs by Chanel as Reproduced in British and French *Vogue*, 1916-1929, for the full caption as printed in British and French *Vogue*. In terms of information relating to the design and construction of women's dress, I am indebted to the advice of Moyra Hope, who trained in dress design at Cumbria College of Art and Design (1952-1955), and worked as a student trainee with the designer Victor Stiebel in London.

Part Two

The House of Chanel in Context

Introduction
Part Two

The House of Chanel in Context

Although the catalogue provides a representative sample of Chanel's 1916-1929 dress designs, it cannot contribute fully to the re-assessment of her early work, and its originality in relation to the work of her peers, without parallel consideration of the contexts in which the designs were reproduced. The history of *haute couture*, from the launch of the house of Charles Frederick Worth in Paris in 1858, has been outlined in numerous publications. It would not, therefore, within the format and context of this thesis, be appropriate to rehearse this entire history in detail.[1] Instead, the following sections focus upon the founding of the House of Chanel and its development within the immediate context of the history and organisation of *haute couture* during the First World War and throughout the 1920s.

Haute Couture: 1900 - 1914

Between 1900 and 1914 a new generation of couturiers, who were to remain in business during the 1920s, began to challenge the monopoly of those houses which were established during the second half of the nineteenth century: most notably Worth, Doucet, Callot Sœurs, Boué Sœurs, Redfern, Paquin and Martial et Armand. This new generation included the comparatively minor houses (as they are now regarded) of Dœuillet, Chéruit, Beer, Drécoll, Lanvin, Jenny, Premet and Lucile.[2] It also included the more radical and influential houses of Paul Poiret and Madeleine Vionnet.[3]

Poiret was one of the leading designers prior to the First World War to assimilate the ideas of the aesthetic and dress reform movements.[4] This was characterised primarily by the rejection of the corset and Poiret was perhaps the most vociferous of the numerous designers, Vionnet and Chanel amongst them, who claimed to have revolutionized high fashion by abandoning this undergarment. Certainly, Poiret's early designs offered a dramatically different conception of the figure of the contemporary woman to that provided by many of his contemporaries. His wife Denise Boulet, whom

he had married in 1905, was slender and petite: her figure was the exact opposite of the matronly and voluptuous form demanded by fashionable dress. The simple, high-waisted empire-line designs produced by Poiret around 1906 flattered his wife's figure and made the hourglass style of corset redundant. Instead, the Directoire style of dress, as it became known, necessitated a longer corset which reduced the prominence of the hips and bottom to give the necessary slender line.[5] However, the long, slender line of the empire dress had, by 1910, developed into Poiret's much ridiculed hobble or tube skirt: the skirt was now so narrow that the woman had to shackle her legs with tapes to ensure that she took only small steps and did not rip the fabric.[6]

Importantly for the direction of early twentieth century fashion, Poiret drew inspiration from a wide range of non-European sources, rejected Belle Epoque pastels for bold, dazzling colours and employed artists for advertisement campaigns and the design of his fabrics.[7] An early example of Poiret's interest in orientalism was the design *Confucius*, a kimono-like coat produced by the designer while working for Worth.[8] This interest was spurred on by the arrival in Paris of the Ballets Russes. The sets and costumes designed for the company by Léon Bakst between 1909 and 1914 drew on Near Eastern influences and used brilliant, dazzling colours. The ballet *Shéhérazade*, which opened at the Paris Opéra in 1910, prompted Poiret to stage the party *La 1002ième Nuit* on 24 June 1911. Guests were asked to dress in oriental costume and Poiret and his wife appeared as the sultan and his consort: Madame Poiret was dressed in a gold lamé tunic wired around the hem (giving a lampshade-like silhouette) and worn over white and ochre chiffon pantaloons.[9]

Although Poiret's new, slender silhouettes had their own constrictive shackles and systems of corsetry, he did discard the traditional waist-clinching corset and reduced the number of underclothes and petticoats worn by the woman. By using smaller quantities of fabrics, a Poiret dress was significantly cheaper to those of the House of Worth, for example (another significant factor in his success).[10] Poiret also adopted a style of self-promotion which went way beyond the tactics of Worth and invite an interesting comparison with the system adopted by Chanel (see below). Like Worth, he believed he was a 'Great Artist' and not a mere dressmaker (the fashion press went along with this and, in 1920, British *Vogue* was to comment that, 'Poiret is an artist who happens to work in the medium of clothes').[11] His personal fame, and the international notoriety of his designs, was such that he embarked on a series of tours to promote his work. In 1912 he, and his mannequins, visited Berlin, Frankfurt, Potsdam, Vienna,

Brussels, Warsaw, Moscow, Budapest and St. Petersburg, giving women the opportunity to see actual *haute couture* models and to hear the designer discuss his work. In 1913 the Poiret road show visited New York, a trip which ignited one of the most important debates in early twentieth century *haute couture*, and one which is of particular relevance to the approaches of Vionnet and Chanel.

While in New York Poiret discovered that department stores were selling unlicensed copies of his designs with forged labels. Edna Woolman Chase, who was working for American *Vogue* at the time and attended a press conference held for him, recalls that imitation Poiret dresses were being sold 'for as little as fifteen dollars.'[12] A furious Poiret returned to Paris determined to halt such piracy. Philippe Oritz, a colleague and associate of Condé Nast, approached Poiret with the idea of creating a system for the protection of copyright. With Poiret's encouragement, Oritz raised further support at Callot Sœurs, Chéruit, Lanvin, Paquin, Worth and the textile manufacturers Rodier and Bianchini-Férier.[13] The result, *Le Syndicat de Défense de la Grande Couture Française*, was formed in June 1914 with Poiret as its President.[14] Its immediate aim was to restrict the visits of the commissioning agents to the collections and to launch a system of identity cards for the buyers. Not all the couturiers joined the association, some believing that, 'the organization would be the perfect channel through which their models could be copied by their French confrères as well as by the American pirates.'[15] Others, like Vionnet, devised their own approach to counter the growth in design theft.

After an initial apprenticeship followed by a period of employment as a dressmaker at the minor house of Vincent in Paris, Vionnet joined Callot Sœurs as head seamstress in 1900. From 1901 she was producing distinctive 'peignoirs' or tea-gowns, reflecting her preference for loose, flowing and unstructured clothes. By 1907 she was working as a dress designer for Doucet, who, in the face of Poiret's growing success, had employed Vionnet to help rejuvenate the image of his house. Vionnet claimed that she was the designer who had liberated women from the corset, which she referred to as 'une chose orthopédique'.[16] At Doucet, she insisted that the house models should wear her designs without corsets of any kind and produced fluid, supple dresses without boning or stiffened linings. The fact that she also asked the models to go barefoot suggests that she was influenced by the American dancer Isadora Duncan, who performed in Paris in 1907 corsetless, barefoot and wearing only a short, classically-inspired tunic. Vionnet's practice was not wholly appreciated at Doucet and she opened her own house in 1912. During the 1920s *Vogue* referred to the house as, 'the most

exclusive in Paris', which 'designs only for a private clientele of distinguished Parisiennes.'[17] Like Poiret, Vionnet became increasingly concerned with copyright protection and, by the 1920s, had devised her own system of defense: each design was photographed from the back, front and side beside a board showing the date and number of the design. In addition, the label of each garment came to be authorized with her own signature, a number and her fingerprint.

Fashionable dress in Paris immediately prior to the First World War was heavily influenced by Poiret. Between 1908 and 1914 many of the leading designers, such as Paquin, changed their approach to dress design. With the advent of the Directoire-inspired styles, the lacing of the corset was altered so as to compress the hips and widen the waist to give the desired, slender silhouette.[18] By 1909 the corset was straight all the way round, the bust-line was flattened and the fullness of the slightly shorter skirts was reduced. Colours were bold and bright; fabrics were luxurious and delicate. The impractical tube skirts of 1910 were superseded by the tunic dress: as a means of varying the long, slender line, tunics, which were nearly as long as the skirt and only a little wider, were worn over the foundation dress. Paquin reportedly created her own version of the 'hobble skirt' modified by hidden pleats to ensure that the woman could walk.

The industry continued to expand and in 1912 Jean Patou opened Maison Parry, a 'demi-couture' establishment which sold furs and provided a tailoring service. Patou's first designs combined the fashionable high waist, draping and second empire details.[19] In the same year Chéruit revived the idea of eighteenth century panniers, matching Poiret's innovation of the hooped tunic or Minaret line, as a means of reintroducing width to the silhouette.[20] Chéruit's panniers developed into the 'peg-top' silhouette where the mass of draped fabric at the top of the skirt contrasted with the slim-fitting skirt beneath. To ensure women could walk in such narrow designs, Callot Sœurs slashed their skirts at the ankles. In 1913 Poiret's Tangara silhouette was introduced: the slender line, with its narrow hemline, was modified by swathes of fabric draped and pulled up towards the front of the design. The spring 1914 collection showed that a new silhouette had emerged: the Minaret tunic was lengthened, becoming almost circular, and the waist was dropped. In some collections, shorter, fuller skirts were shown and the V-neckline, which was normally only seen in evening wear, controversially began to appear in day time clothing.

The War Years

The impact of the outbreak of war in August 1914 was immediate. Jean-Charles and Jacques Worth (who followed on from Gaston as business manager) both signed up, Poiret joined the French infantry, Dœuillet the Volunteers, and Patou the Zouaves, two days before he was to show his first full collection.[21] Many houses decided not to present autumn/winter collections and Vionnet temporarily closed down. In the face of rising paper costs *La Gazette du Bon Ton* temporarily ceased production. Nonetheless, *haute couture* and its many dependent trades continued to function, encouraged by a government which was acutely aware of the economic importance of such a large industry. In one defiant statement, reflecting the attitude of many, Chéruit announced that:

> Women must have clothes, war or no war, and those who make them must have a way to earn a living. We shall keep open and we shall make what we can.[22]

Women began working in jobs and industries that had hitherto been dominated by men. Although this was only ever intended to be a temporary measure (once the war was over women were supposed to return quietly to their homes), and they were paid less than the men, the experience had an immediate and irreversible effect. In terms of dress, women now required appropriate clothing for their new roles and those women working in factories or on the land adopted, as appropriate, men's boiler suits, trousers, jackets and jodhpurs. As the war progressed new collections were produced, despite the growing shortages of materials, labour, fuel, transportation and the effects of inflation. New fashion journals were launched, building on the success of those founded in 1912. *Le Style Parisien* and *Les Elégances Parisiennes* were, as indicated above, intended to promote the industry at home and abroad, and maintain the morale of both the industry and its customers during this national crisis.

At the first *haute couture* openings in 1915, designers introduced versions of the bustle, the hooped tunic and, from Premet in particular, the 1880s polonaise. Chéruit showed designs which were straight and wide at the waist, while Callot Sœurs presented some of the first versions of the soon-to-be-ubiquitous chemise: a straight, unbelted evening design of fine black net beaded with jet and worn over a straight, black satin foundation. However, the real success of these openings was a new

silhouette: a full, unstiffened, three metre wide skirt which was eight inches from the ground and occasionally trimmed at the hem with a band of fur. This style, which was seen at Paquin, Lanvin and Dœuillet, came to be known as the 'war crinoline', although shorter, fuller skirts had been seen in some of the 1914 collections. Skirts in general were shortened and widened, and jackets were modeled along military lines. These innovations were developed throughout the war and are followed in detail in the summaries on Chanel's collections from 1916-1918.

A New Generation

Although the First World War ended in November 1918 its impact reverberated throughout the 1920s. The war had accelerated the changes in fashionable dress that had slowly emerged prior to 1914. Although the industry had survived, and would flourish during the 1920s, its organization and structure had irreversibly changed. Poiret never regained the prominence and status he had enjoyed before the war.[23] Ultimately, Poiret was unable to adapt to new tastes and requirements: his first post-war collections continued with the exotic and oriental themes he had worked on in 1914.[24] The House of Worth also failed to regain its pre-war position. Jean-Charles was open to new ideas and more willing to adapt than Jean-Philippe or Poiret had been and, in an interview for British *Vogue* in 1921, he acknowledged the new situation in which the house was working:

> There are no longer queens enough to go round, and even the greatest ladies have few occasions on which to wear robes of ceremony. Therefore the modern designer must devote his greatest effort to the clothes for ordinary mortals to wear on ordinary occasions... Simplicity is praiseworthy and suitable to our present conditions of life.[25]

Nonetheless, for the new generation of *haute couture* customers, Worth was irreversibly associated with an old-fashioned, conservative approach to dress design.

A younger, and in comparison more dynamic, generation of couturiers, who were more responsive to the changing post-war situation, were now firmly established in Paris. Vionnet reopened her house in 1918 and, in 1923, moved to much larger premises. Patou returned to Paris in 1919 and presented his first full collection under his own

name.[26] The English designer Molyneux opened his first house in the same year.[27] After being invalided out of the army, Lucien Lelong opened his own house and quickly became one of the leading couturiers during the 1920s.[28] The house that would most effectively challenge these designers for supremacy in the 1920s was also established during this period: the House of Chanel.

The Founding of the House of Chanel: 1910 - 1918

Chanel did not train for her profession as Vionnet had done. She acquired basic skills as part of the education she received whilst in an orphanage in Aubazine and at a convent school in Moulins, skills which found her work in 1902 as a dressmaker for the Moulins-based House of Grampayre, which sold lingerie, linen and hosiery. Initially set on a stage-career, her enthusiasm for horse riding prompted her to seek alternative, practical clothing to the forms of dress currently available. It was during her time spent at the country estate of the aristocratic Etienne Balsan, around 1906, that Chanel began to create her own wardrobe from clothes borrowed from and inspired by those worn by Etienne and his sporting colleagues.

Chanel also turned her attention to hats, preferring to trim shop-bought straw hats than wear the elaborate and heavy designs worn by the majority of women. These simple models were adopted by friends and eventually, in about 1910, she opened a shop at 21 rue Cambon, Paris. The shop, Chanel Modes, was licensed only as a milliners, but its success, coupled with the positive press attention Chanel received, led to the rapid expansion of the business. Chanel was featured in the periodical *Comœdia Illustrée* wearing one of her own hats in the autumn of 1910 and her name became more widely known when a photograph of the actress Gabrielle Dorziat, wearing a Chanel hat, was shown in the 12 May 1912 edition of the *Journal Des Modes*.[29]

In 1913 a branch was opened in the fashionable beach resort of Deauville, where she developed and expanded her first sports wear range of simple sweaters and skirts in jersey (probably only as part of a ready-to-wear collection).[30] It was at Deauville that some of the first photographs of Chanel designs were taken. Chanel recognised the importance of having her designs associated with the most attractive and stylish young women. Consequently, her aunt and sister would parade through the town, clad in Chanel designs, with the aim of attracting envious glances and prompting visits to the

shop. As later sections will show, this approach to the advertisement of her work (one shared by many designers) was maintained and expanded upon throughout her career. The Biarritz house was opened in July 1915 as a fully blown 'maison de couture'. De La Haye and Tobin have noted that, at first, employees from the rue Cambon were drafted to the Biarritz branch and, with local help, the staff totaled 60.[31] Full *haute couture* collections, showing day, sports and evening designs, were launched at Biarritz in 1916 (and a representative survey of the earliest designs by Chanel to be reproduced in contemporary periodicals is given in the summaries of the February and August 1916 collections).[32]

Although the war was disastrous for Poiret, Chanel claimed that, 'the first war made me, in 1919 I woke up famous.'[33] Timing was crucial: just as women were seeking practical, low-maintenance alternatives to pre-war styles, Chanel was one of the new generation of designers providing simple, comfortable designs based on the models she herself was wearing. One photograph of the designer, taken just before the war, shows her in one such outfit: it comprised a sweater-like top with a deep V-neckline (so it could be put on by simply pulling it over the head), a wide buttoned belt, large patch pockets and a straight, plain ankle-length skirt.[34] The idea of the sweater itself, and elements such as patch pockets, had been derived from men's sporting wear. The designer thus aligned herself with the tradition of borrowing from men's clothing (particularly of the type of sports wear worn by the aristocracy) which had characterized the production of women's tailored suits since the nineteenth century.

However, many commentators suggest that Chanel took this practice one step further by using tricot: a hand-knitted woolen fabric that was normally used for men's under garments. Unlike the materials used by more traditional couturiers, this soft, loosely-knit and lightweight 'non-fashion' fabric was unsuitable for traditional *haute couture* techniques. The unrestrictive and unstructured form of the design was dictated by the nature of the fabric itself. Although Chanel was not the first designer to work with tricot or jersey, she became particularly associated with it. As the summaries of the collections show, this was due partly to the quantities of the fabric she purchased (in 1916 she bought an unsold stock of machine-knitted jersey from the textile manufacturer Rodier). Furthermore, from the outset Chanel rejected the type of elaborate decoration associated with the Belle Epoque and the bright, clashing colours favoured by Poiret: the frilly and the 'feminine' were replaced by the plain, the sober and the 'masculine'. Chanel's first designs guaranteed her position amongst a

generation of designers who had, during the years immediately prior to the war, begun to assimilate the ideas offered by the dress reform movements and men's wear into a new form of fashionable dress. Their success was to ensure the continued prosperity and growth of the *haute couture* industry as a whole.

The Organization of *Haute Couture*: 1918-1929

In 1923 British *Vogue* noted that:

> The great creators of Paris, now known collectively as the Grandes Maisons... are increasing every year in number and in size... The making of fashions has grown to an immense international industry running into millions of pounds annually, highly organized and absorbing the genius and labour of thousands of people.[35]

By 1927 the *haute couture* industry employed 250,000 employees in 2,000 workrooms, salons and shops.[36] The number of employees differed from house to house. From 1871 to 1896 the house of Worth employed 1,200 people and in 1900 Paquin employed 1,000. Prior to the war the staff at Poiret amounted to approximately 650. During the 1920s Vionnet employed around 1,200 members of staff, Lanvin 800 (not including the sales assistants), and Lelong extended his premises in 1925 to accommodate 3,000 workers.[37] In 1915 Chanel employed around 60 members of staff, by 1916 this number rose to 300 and by the late 1920s it had reached approximately 2,500. The majority of these highly populated and efficient Grandes Maisons were housed in palatial hôtels, large enough to accommodate both the workrooms (which ranged from those devoted to dressmaking to those for tailoring, embroidery and accessories), and the grand salons where the collections were shown. The hierarchical structure of the house rose upwards from the *arpette* or apprentice seamstress, to the *deuxième main qualifiée*, a qualified seamstress and assistant to the more experienced *première main qualifiée*. The *première main* directly assisted the fitter and head designer in the production of a dress for a particular client (designers such as Chanel, who, unlike Vionnet, had not undergone such a rigorous training, were dependent on the skills of such employees). Sales assistants known as *habilleuses* assisted the *vendeuse*, who dealt directly with the customers and oversaw the order from the time it was placed to its completion. The houses also employed models and buyers who

liaised between the house and its suppliers, ensuring it had all the materials required. The conditions and level of pay for the staff of a couture house were notoriously poor and strikes were a regular event. A designer such as Vionnet, who provided holiday pay, a staff refectory and a more comfortable working environment, was very much in the minority.[38]

Patterns of Production: The Seasons and their Collections

The presentation of collections was biannual: the leading houses showed spring/summer designs in February and autumn/winter designs in August. These openings were generally held during the first two weeks of the month: in 1923, for example, it was recorded that the February collections were shown between the first and the fifteenth and, in the same year, the Chanel collection was opened on 7 August. The collections were usually held over a few days: the Dœuillet autumn/winter 1923 collection was held from 7 to 10 of August. Throughout the 1920s Martial et Armand and Dœuillet were frequently amongst the first houses to open their doors. The day of the launch differed from year to year: Jenny preferred Monday and Chanel opened her 1923 spring/summer collection on a Sunday. Although Chanel would not normally make an appearance during the show (see below), other designers were directly involved in the presentation. Jenny always attended the openings and would often sit behind certain members of the audience to give a personal account of the designs as the house mannequins passed. Lanvin preferred to appear at the end of the show and Poiret oversaw the whole event, commenting on each design for the benefit of his entire audience.

The social season (the annual cycle of events, holidays and pastimes enjoyed by the aristocracy and upper classes) dictated the pattern of design production followed by a house. The first months of the year were generally spent at the Riviera, although the exodus from Paris could begin just before or immediately after Christmas. Consequently November and December were devoted to the production of clothes for the southern season. A report in a February 1921 edition of British *Vogue* noted that, 'It is already spring in Cannes and in the frocks worn there one may foresee the modes which spring will bring when it comes again to the north.'[39] The importance of the designs created for this season was further underlined in the following 1925 report:

> The summer mode for the country is an established fact long before the spring mode for town has been formally launched. For this summer mode has an advance presentation early in the year on the Riviera – a presentation during which the new summer fashions are tried and proved and the most popular are chosen.[40]

A large proportion of the clothes required for the southern winter season were sports models, particularly those appropriate for motoring and golf. As the 1920s progressed, and winter sports became increasingly fashionable, the designers began to produce ski wear.

Spring saw the return to Paris, with its round of trips to the theatre, opera or to formal state occasions, interspersed with holidays at Biarritz. Designs worn at Biarritz were taken as further indications of the coming summer fashions. The next major social event was the racing season in June at Longchamp and Auteuil, which required appropriate formal afternoon designs. Trips to the country, necessitating outfits for walking, hunting and shooting, were generally made in July and August. The creation of designs for the return to Biarritz in the early autumn, which pointed ahead to the fashions that would be worn a few months later at the Riviera, completed the cycle. Although based in Paris, the majority of the leading couturiers had branches in the most fashionable resorts as a means of securing trade during the entire social season. As international markets developed, houses produced specific ranges which catered for the particular customs and traditions of the country in which the branch was located.

Just as the date of the openings differed from year to year and from house to house, so too did the scale of individual collections. During the first half of the 1920s a larger show could consist of approximately 300 designs. In February 1920 Jenny, who was known for her particularly extensive and varied collections, was reported to have shown, 'One of the largest of all the spring collections', which included 350 designs.[41] By 1928 the smaller shows consisted of anything from 100 to 200 designs, and the larger of approximately 400 (although not every model was different, as one particular example might be presented in two or more alternative fabrics or colours).

In British *Vogue*'s account of the August 1920 openings it was recorded that Premet's presentation began with the tailleurs, 'as all well regulated collections are wont to do.'[42] The more informal designs for morning, street or sports wear were shown first,

followed by the afternoon and the evening wear models. In all categories the informal designs generally preceded the formal: a simple evening dress, intended for dinner at home, would be shown before a more elaborate evening gown intended for the opera, theatre or a state occasion. Although the fashionably dressed woman of the 1920s did not change her outfit as many times during the day as had a woman at the turn of the century, the ideal wardrobe was still very extensive. A British *Vogue* article in 1928 listed a few of the varieties of dress, outwith of the essential travel and sports wear outfits, that the modern woman should obtain:

> There are clothes for early morn, clothes for shopping, clothes for every type of luncheon party, the early afternoon or sitabout dress, the dress for receiving at home in the afternoon, and the dress for going out to tea... a little cocktail time dress, a little dinner dress... the quiet evening dress, the theatre dress and the full regal evening dress.[43]

The first showings were staged for foreign buyers (mostly American, British, Spanish, German and South American): representatives of large department stores or exclusive dress shops would officially purchase the 'toiles' of particular models from which they could then reproduce their own models (unofficially many copied designs without permission, sketching details in secret as the mannequins passed).[44] The leading textile manufacturers, such Bianchini-Férier and Rodier, held openings concurrently with those of the *haute couture* houses and their new fabrics were reported in the fashion press.[45] Entrance to the dress openings was by invitation only and seats were reserved: just as today, front row seats were allocated to the most important buyers and journalists. Patou launched the 'Répétition Générale' in 1923, an event which became increasingly popular and widespread as the decade progressed: on the night before the official opening the house would stage a preview for specially invited members of the press.

The number of mid-season collections, which were usually held in May and November and attended by the foreign buyers, rose significantly during the 1920s: in 1921 British *Vogue* noted that there had been more mid-season collections during this year than ever before. Jenny, who held four large collections each year, was a key figure in formalizing and promoting these shows. The designs that were produced for the mid-seasons were a development on those presented in either February or August: once the couturiers had seen the designs shown by their competitors, and established which of

their own models were proving the most popular, they could then develop a range which was sure to be favourably received.

The individual client did not see the collections at the same time as the buyers: those women who bought *haute couture* were, 'away in the country in August, and still wearing winter clothes in February.'[46] Once their clients had returned to Paris, in March or September, the houses staged appointment-only presentations in the mornings and afternoons. These presentations often featured different designs to those shown at the official launch:

> In some of the houses almost entirely new collections are presented... and in all of them important additions are made to the collections... Most of the most startling innovations are modified and the new models do not break so obviously with existing fashions.[47]

Clearly the main collections acted as something of a testing ground for new ideas and developments which, if not enthusiastically endorsed by the buyers, would be tempered and modified for the individual customers. This highlights the influence that commercial and economic factors had on the work of the couturiers: the creations of the designers were not, as Worth and Poiret might have had us believe, purely the result of some sort of divine inspiration.

When visiting a house, the customer was met at the door by her own personal vendeuse who knew her measurements, tastes and preferences. In 1920 the *Drapers' Record* described the presentations that would follow:

> The venue for the display often represents a handsome Louis XV, or Louis XVI, drawing room... A door in the rear opens, and the mannikins (sic) walk in one by one... They walk slowly across the room, hesitate, pause and turn in order to show off some particular part of the dress.[48]

The customer would give the vendeuse her order and approximately three fittings would be necessary to produce the finished design. The house could suddenly be faced with hundreds, and in many cases thousands, of similar orders. In 1923 British *Vogue* expressed its amazement that a house could execute so many designs in such a short space of time: '... ten days for non-embroidered and fifteen days for embroidered

models. Yet they do this twice a year, sometimes four times a year in the houses which make special mid-season collections.'[49]

Publicity

In a 1923 article on French *haute couture* British *Vogue* commented that:

> The unquestionable predominance of the Paris model is the more amazing since not half-a-dozen of the great French creators of modes spend even the traditional French sou in advertising.[50]

Designers such as Lucile, Paquin and Redfern did advertise regularly in journals such as *Vogue*. Others chose to advertise only at the time of the collections, as the coverage they received in the fashion reports was thought to be sufficient. The leading couturiers, Chanel amongst them, realized that the best publicity for the house was celebrity endorsement (see below): the success of houses such as Doucet, Poiret and Chanel was guaranteed once their designs had been adopted by the leading actresses of the day. The theatre was an excellent means of advertisement: if a house dressed a particular actress the designs were widely seen and given considerable press coverage.[51] Such designs influenced the fashions adopted by women in general, a fact recognized by a 1920 British *Vogue* article entitled, 'The French Theatre Serves The Mode: It Is Upon The Stage That New Fashions Are Launched.'[52] Aristocratic endorsement was equally important. Both Vionnet and Chanel profited from their association with the most fashionable women of the 1920s: wealthy and well-connected women such as Misia Sert, Cecile Sorel, the Princess de Polignac and the Comtesse de Beaumont. These women, and the clothes they wore, were regularly discussed in *Vogue*. Chanel, Chéruit, Jenny and Renée all wore their own designs and, as they themselves were considered to be rather chic, thus provided an effective means of self-advertisement. One report in July 1923 indicates how the fashion press monitored what the designers themselves were wearing:

> Mme. Jenny... has taken to wearing very simple, strictly tailored suits at the races. She declares that the tasteless overdressing indulged by so many women at Parisian racetracks has decided her to try and revive interest in the tailleur on these occasions by wearing it herself.[53]

Some designers exhibited their work at the many international fairs and exhibitions held during this period, although the problem of preventing piracy at such public occasions deterred many. Other couturiers chose to send employees in their latest designs to the most fashionable haunts. The annual *Bal de la Couture*, organized by the *Syndicat de la Couture* and given for the benefit of the apprentices and seamstresses, was another showcase venue: many of the large houses sent mannequins wearing their latest evening designs. Several houses produced designs specifically for the occasion, falling as it did just a few weeks before the February openings.

The Boom Years

The very numerous and diverse means of advertisement employed by the individual houses paid off, as the home and international markets for *haute couture* expanded steadily between 1918 and 1929. Although a dress of the 1920s was less expensive than the extravagant, heavily trimmed designs of the Belle Epoque, it was still only the wealthiest of women who could afford to buy *haute couture*. During the war, a Chanel design was priced anywhere between 3,000 to 7,000 francs.[54] Although Chanel models were particularly expensive, the house was not alone: one reporter, writing on French fashion for British *Vogue* in 1920, described the confusion surrounding the high costs charged for even the simplest of day dresses:

> And the prices that one is expected to pay! Said my friend Madeleine to me, "Yesterday I saw an ideal gown at Doucet's, a very simple serge frock with a little embroidery in front. Does it seem reasonable to give 1,700 francs for that?"[55]

Nonetheless, the industry flourished and, by 1927, 'the value of *haute couture* exports was 5,750,000 francs, equal to one tenth of total French world trade.'[56] As the 1920s progressed the leading houses, including Chanel (see below) all diversified into specialist and lucrative areas such as sports wear, accessories, beauty products and perfume. The importance of these additional ranges is underlined by the amount of space given to them in the showrooms: a September 1929 edition of British *Vogue* described the recently refurbished House of Chanel:

> Chanel's new big grey showrooms (are) approached by exquisite stairs lined with a decoration of overlapping mirror. Downstairs Chanel's is like a brilliant store selling woolen scarfs and berets and bags, scents and belts, handkerchiefs and gloves.[57]

Despite the fact that the House of Chanel continued to expand, the steady growth of the industry as a whole was eventually halted in 1929 by the Wall Street Crash, which resulted in the rapid decline of overseas trade (the American market was of particular importance to the French luxury goods industries) and a huge balance of payments deficit. 10,000 workers within *haute couture* and its related trades lost their jobs. Although the major houses survived, the Wall Street Crash closed one of the most successful and important chapters in the history of French *haute couture*.

The House of Chanel: 1919-1929

As noted earlier, in 1915 Chanel employed around 60 members of staff, by 1916 this number rose to 300. By the late 1920s this number had reached approximately 2,500.[58] Whereas prior to the war, a Chanel design would cost between approximately 3,000 to 7,000 francs (see above), by 1920 the average cost was approximately 9,000 francs. The annual turnover of the house in 1929 was 120 million francs. Between 1918 and 1929 the House of Chanel underwent a major period of expansion and growth. This economic growth was paralleled by the actual expansion of the shop premises themselves: in 1919 the house moved from 21 rue Cambon (where, as noted above, the designer had been registered since 1910 as a milliner) and expanded across 27, 29 and 31 rue Cambon. At 31 rue Cambon Chanel was officially registered as a couturière.

In 1921 the house launched its first perfume: *Chanel No. 5*.[59] The simple, square and unfussy bottle (marked only with the by now distinctive block capitals of the company's typeface) was designed by Chanel and served to reinforce the key elements of the house style.[60] Importantly, this was the first perfume produced by a house to bear the name of its actual designer. Chanel was undoubtedly aware of the role less expensive items could have as a means of disseminating the house brand and perpetuating the economy of desire: those women who were unable to afford *haute couture* could nonetheless buy into the lifestyle and image of the house by acquiring other Chanel products. *Chanel No. 5* was the first in a highly successful range of

Chanel perfumes and beauty products to be produced during the 1920s and sold, until 1924 (see below), through special departments within the Chanel shops.[61]

Chanel's association with millinery continued throughout the 1920s. Hats continued to be sold as part of an extensive range of accessories (including scarves, gloves, belts, shoes and bags) offered by the house which were developed and expanded in line with the dress design collections themselves. The production of the house also extended to lingerie. In a June 1921 edition of British *Vogue* a model is shown wearing a silk elastic corset and heavy tulle brassière; the caption notes that 'Chanel, who sponsors the wide waist, provides this silk elastic corset to create it.'[62]

The House of Chanel was not unique in providing accessories and undergarments to complement and enhance the total look of the dress designs themselves (and to maximise upon sales). However, Chanel did become particularly associated with the development of collections of costume jewellery. Although, as De La Haye and Tobin have noted, the designer was not the first couturière to diversify or to use artificial gemstones (Poiret, for example, also employed included jewellery in his collections), she was unique in her production of designs that were blatantly fake and exceptionally successful in her ability to sell such jewellery at comparatively high prices to women who owned the real thing.[63] The cachet of the House of Chanel gave such objects a level of significance beyond their actual value and their desirability was enhanced by the fact that Chanel herself wore a considerable amount of jewellery both during the day and in the evening (her own costume designs mixed with real gemstones). The jewellery collections were frequently influenced by the sources which inspired the dress collections: in 1922, following the opening of Tutankhamen's tomb, Egyptian designs were amongst several of the more exotic, historical sources that inspired both the jewellery and dress designs produced by the house. As a result of the growing success of this aspect of her work, Chanel opened her own jewellery workshop in 1924. The workshop was managed for Chanel by Comte Etienne de Beaumont and both she and the Comte produced designs for the range during the mid to late 1920s.[64]

Chanel's attention to every aspect of the lifestyle and wardrobe of the contemporary fashionable woman was paralleled by the control she exercised over the numerous trades related to the production of her dress design collections. Like the majority of her peers, Chanel purchased fabrics from such established companies as Rodier and Bianchini-Férier in France and (particularly for tweed fabrics) Courtauld and Ferguson

Brothers in England. However, in the early 1920s she established her own factory for the production of fabrics in Asnières. François Hugo, who was the factory's first Director, went on to produce jewellery designs for the house. The establishment of the factory was undoubtedly in response to her own extensive use of, and the consumer's growing demand for, wool and cotton jersey; the factory enabled Chanel to have total control over production and to ensure design exclusivity. By the late 1920s the factory was producing more than just jersey fabric and its name was changed to Tissus Chanel. From 1928 until 1933 she employed the Russian poet Iliazd – previously associated with the artist Sonia Delauney - to design a new range of textiles for the house.[65] Similarly, in 1921 Chanel founded an embroidery workshop which was managed for her by the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna and focused entirely during the first years of the 1920s on the embroidery of designs for the house.[66]

From 1923 the expansion of the House of Chanel was consolidated. In 1923, and as a result of her efforts to broaden the market for the Chanel range of perfumes, the designer handed over the production and distribution of the fragrances to Pierre and Paul Wertheimer, owners of one of France's largest cosmetic and fragrance companies, Les Parfumeries Bourjois.[67] In 1924, and in partnership with the Wertheimers, the company Parfums Chanel was launched. Chanel was President of this company and retained ten per cent of the total profits. The perfumes were now distributed throughout the world and Chanel was able to concentrate entirely on dress design. By 1929 the company could claim to produce the most famous and successful perfume in the world. In 1927 the House of Chanel opened a new branch in London, the first of the numerous international branches that were established during the designer's career.

As the catalogue and summaries of the individual collections will testify in detail, the coverage Chanel received in leading fashion periodicals, and in particular in *Vogue*, grew in parallel to the expansion of her business. However, before a consideration is made of the actual models shown in the catalogue and the collections in which they were shown, it is important to highlight the systems of promotion employed by the designer that were in operation during this period and which served to ensure the widespread exposure of the dress designs and reinforce their desirability to the consumer.

As earlier sections have shown, Chanel's own image was central to the communication and dissemination of her brand. As early as 1910, photographs of the designer wearing her own millinery creations were appearing in fashionable periodicals of the day. Chanel was, as De La Haye and Tobin have noted, the '...personification of the House style.'[68] This was reinforced by the fact that she tended only to employ models who had dark hair and resembled her own appearance. Throughout the 1920s Chanel was photographed wearing her own dress and accessory designs and these images were often used in the both the fashion and society pages of British and French *Vogue*. For example, in a May 1923 edition of British *Vogue* a photograph of Chanel wearing 'a grosgrain ribbon hat of her own design, together with a very smart brooch and earrings of beautiful pearls', is given the caption, 'Gabrielle Chanel whose Designs are as Youthful and Chic as Herself.'[69] This image accompanies two illustrations of current models by the house (catalogue numbers **183** and **185**). In a later edition of the periodical, on a society page entitled 'Cheerful New Year Snapshots', the designer is shown after a game of tennis in Biarritz, with Captain Jack Hillyard.[70] Clearly, Chanel operated simultaneously as a haute couturière and as a fashionable society figure. In fact, both roles were mutually supportive and beneficial. If this approach can be considered as a tactical means for the promotion of her business, then Chanel's relationship with periodicals such as *Vogue* takes on an increased significance.

However, another aspect of Chanel's approach may initially seem in complete opposition to her willingness to be photographed. Unlike Poiret (who took centre stage at all his openings), Chanel refused to make an appearance at the presentation of her collections. Following the refurbishment of the rue Cambon premises in 1929, the designer adopted the habit of positioning herself at the top of the now famous mirror-lined staircase in order that she could watch the models but keep away from the press and invited guests. This approach was in line with her frequent refusal to greet customers personally when they first came to the house. However, it could be argued that this was in fact perceived by the designer to be another means of creating interest and intrigue around her own personality.

Chanel, like many other designers, recognised the importance of harnessing the glamorous image and celebrity status of the famous. It has been shown that, prior to the War, photographs of actresses such as Gabrielle Dorziat, adorned in Chanel hats, were reproduced in a number of periodicals. This practice continued throughout the 1920s. Appendix II (*Biographies of the Women Named as Wearing the Dress*

Designs by Chanel as Reproduced in British and French Vogue, 1916 – 1929) shows that a significant number of the women portrayed in *Vogue* were actresses (and widely regarded as some of the most fashionable, beautiful women of the period): Cécile Sorel, Vera Sergine, Charlotte Lysèes, Ina Claire and Lady Iya Abdy are notable examples.[71] Inevitably, given the social status and advantageous financial position of many of these women, it is not surprising that they could afford to wear Chanel. However, as Madsen has noted, '...(Chanel) was not averse to subsidizing her celebrity by giving away dresses to highly visible women.'[72] This practice was not uncommon, but the frequency with which figures such as Sorel appear in the pages of *Vogue* during the first years of the 1920s would suggest that it was central to Chanel's system of promotion. A periodical such as *Vogue* was, of course, highly likely to comment upon a gown worn by a famous actress. Both the designer and *Vogue* recognised and exploited the power of celebrity to confirm and communicate the desirability of the product.

Chanel literally employed a number of other society women who were photographed wearing her designs and presented in the leading fashion periodicals. For example, Pauline de Saint-Sauveur, a devoted Chanel client during the War years, worked for the house during the 1920s and was 'in charge of perfumes, knick-knacks, and scarves.'[73] Saint-Sauveur, wearing Chanel, was shown in British *Vogue* on three occasions. In February 1922 British *Vogue* commented on the number of post-Revolution aristocratic Russian émigrés who were being employed at the House of Chanel.[74] As noted above, the embroidery workshop, established by Chanel in 1921, was managed for the designer by the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna. In this way, Chanel was able to utilise the knowledge of the émigrés on designs which included fashionable traditional Russian embroidery, and incorporate the prestige and distinction of the Russian nobility into her own brand.

Very few advertisements for the house were placed in fashion periodicals (one of the few published adverts for the House of Chanel appeared in the August 1923 edition of French *Vogue* announcing the forthcoming opening). Chanel, like the majority of her peers, recognised the much greater potency of other forms of advertisement within magazines such as *Vogue*. However, as earlier sections have demonstrated, the Chanel name and style was disseminated widely and successfully through a variety of other means.

The Summaries of the Dress Design Collections of Chanel, 1916-1929

The summaries of each of the collections represented in the catalogue seek to relate the work of Chanel in a much more detailed and specific way to the contemporary context. Each essay begins with a statement of the number of designs which represent the collection in the catalogue, a brief outline of the contemporary coverage Chanel received in *Vogue* around the time of the collection, and an account of the categories of dress to which the designs belonged. This is followed by a summary of the main points of the collection, and an analysis of individual designs, considering those models which represent the principal themes of the collection, those which perhaps differed significantly from the majority or introduced new themes, and including reference to designs by Chanel illustrated in other contemporary sources.[75] Furthermore, the thesis aims to question those historical claims surrounding Chanel's work (as noted in the Part One of this Introduction), which sought to isolate and aggrandise Chanel's importance as a designer, through the detailed analysis of the dress design collections, 1916-1929, in relation to those produced by the other leading houses.

Chanel's approach to her work throughout 1916-1929, an approach whereby certain themes, although modified to a greater or lesser extent each season, recurred from collection to collection, has meant that some repetition in these essays is inevitable. Although structured chronologically, the intention was that each essay should have a certain autonomy. This was to ensure that the reader with a specific interest in a particular collection, or group of collections, would not be compelled to begin at February 1916. The limited repetition of specific information, which serves to reinforce the fundamental continuity and coherence of Chanel's approach to fashion, is, therefore, a function of the potential role that the catalogue and the accompanying summaries can play in the study of the designer's work.

From this foundation, it is then possible to compare Chanel's work to that of her contemporaries in a more systematic way than has hitherto been possible, and to focus upon the wider contexts which affected and informed the production of *haute couture* at that time. The essays draw on the information in the catalogue and supplement it with material taken from a critical analysis of *Vogue* and other contemporary periodicals, including the *Drapers' Record* (which, as a specialist trade magazine, is at present an invaluable but underused source of information about the general fashion

context). By focusing on certain key periodicals throughout the essays, the reader is able to monitor changes in attitudes towards, and contrasting responses to, the collections as they were shown. The summaries are thus a means of studying the ways in which Chanel, her contemporaries and current fashion trends, were mediated through certain sections of the fashion press. This goes some way towards redressing the recent preoccupation with fashion images over fashion writing and journalism, and to acknowledge Borrelli's assertion that 'fashion is perpetuated by the fictions constructed around it.'[76]

These essays do not pretend to be a definitive picture of the context. Indeed, the material in the essays raises many diverse questions, to answer each of which would require more extensive research: for example, issues concerning the exact nature and form of French governmental intervention in the production of *haute couture*; the rationale behind the adoption of eclectic sources of inspiration during the period; the relationship with the contemporary Parisian avant-garde; the identity, role and influence of the patrons of *haute couture*; the importance of the American market; the impact of mass-production and Taylorism in relation to the notion of the 'fashion Ford'. Cumulatively, the summaries provide the in-depth account of Chanel's design work which was the prerequisite of the original research project, and which remains the prerequisite of serious investigation into any aspect of Chanel's work during this period.

---

[1] Relevant texts which focus on this subject are listed in the Bibliography.

[2] Monsieur Dœuillet (dates unknown) trained with the Callot Sœurs and acted as their manager. He launched his own house in 1900. Now regarded as a minor house, in 1919 *BV* noted that, 'Dœuillet is a follower of tradition. In the matter of frocks, he is like a sculptor who bases all his art on the classic tradition.' (*BV* 20 April 1919, p. 54). The house merged with Doucet in 1929. The houses of Chéruit, Beer and Drécoll were all founded in 1905. Madame Chéruit trained with, and then bought, the house of Raudnitz. The house of Chéruit (dates not provided within sources consulted – see Bibliography), which concentrated on walking suits and afternoon dresses, was

successful enough to survive her retirement in 1923 and remain in business until 1935. The house was situated at 21 Place Vendôme; Chéruit was one of the few designers to show an autumn collection following the outbreak of war in 1914. After her retirement, the business was maintained under her name by Madame Wormser and Madame Boulanger. Having initially worked in an umbrella shop, Monsieur Beer (dates not provided within sources consulted – see Bibliography) opened a house which was referred to as, 'The rendez-vous for women who prefer stately toilettes of a conservative elegance.' (*BV* 5 February 1923, p. 111). The house was located on the Avenue de l'Opéra prior to its move to Place Vendôme in 1905. The house of Drécoll (dates not provided within sources consulted – see Bibliography) remained in business until 1929 and was known primarily for elaborate, luxurious designs with 'light and airy effects.' The original house was founded in Vienna by Baron Christopher Drécoll. The Paris branch was launched by Besançon de Wagner and his wife (the designer) at the Place de l'Opéra. The daughter, Maggy Besançon de Wagner joined the firm as a sports wear designer and became a director in 1928. The house closed in 1929 (the daughter went on to form the house Maggy Rouff in the same year). Jeanne Lanvin (1897-1946) trained as a milliner during the 1880s and, prompted by the success of the designs she created for her own daughter, opened a full couture house in 1909. The house was based at 22, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré. She continued to produce designs for children throughout her career. Known primarily for her romantic, picturesque 'robe de style' (a full-skirted and hooped evening dress inspired by the styles of the eighteenth century), Lanvin was also associated with the development of the simpler chemise-style dress fashionable in the early 1920s. Nonetheless, in 1920, British *Vogue* was to comment that, 'Lanvin is an artist who never concerns herself with the mode as such.' (*BV* 20 April 1920, p. 90). Jenny was founded in 1909 by Jenny Sacerdote (dates not provided within sources consulted – see Bibliography). Her clothes were particularly popular with the American market and were represented consistently in the fashion magazines. The house was originally located at rue Castiglione and moved to 70 Avenue des Champs Elysées in 1914, and in 1938 merged with the house of Lucile Paray (established in 1938). Jenny had a brief apprenticeship as première vendeuse with Bechoff-David. She was dependent on her colleague Madame Cosme for technical expertise. Premet was founded in 1911 and, despite being regarded as a minor house, its founder Madame Premet (dates not provided within sources consulted – see Bibliography) was associated with the production of comfortable, practical designs and considered, 'an enthusiastic sponsor

of the short skirt which made its appearance on the eve of the war.' (*BV* 5 February 1923, p. 111). The house was located at 8 Place Vendôme. By 1923 Madame Premet had been replaced by Madame Lefranc, who in turn was replaced by Monsieur Winter and Madame Charlotte, the design director. Madame Renée, who was to establish her own house in about 1919, also worked as a designer for the house; Madame Grés served an apprenticeship there before opening her own establishment in 1934. The English designer Lucile opened her Paris house in 1911, but had been in business since the 1890s and, by 1909, was one of the most successful couturières of her day; like the Callot Sœurs, she produced romantic, heavily decorated designs to which she gave suitably twee names such as *Kiss Me Again*. Lucile's real name was Lucy Kennedy (1863-1935); after her marriage at the turn of the century she was known as Lady Duff Gordon. The Paris house was situated on rue Penthièvres; other branches were in New York and Chicago. Other minor designers who were to continue after the war, such as Nicole Groult, the sister of Poiret, made their first independent designs during this period. Nicole Groult's (dates not provided within sources consulted – see Bibliography) first designs were influenced by those of her brother, although, as the 1920s progressed, they became much simpler in comparison. In 1924 *BV* noted that Groult's designs, 'express the ideas of the artistic woman.' (5 April 1924, p. 96). Poiret's sister Germaine Bongard also opened a small salon de couture in 1911.

[3] Paul Poiret (1879-1944). During his apprenticeship to an umbrella maker, Poiret sold his first fashion designs to Madame Chéruit at Raudnitz. In 1898 Doucet offered him a position in his tailoring department and, following military service, he spent two years with Worth. The house of Poiret opened in circa 1904 with a staff of eight seamstresses and limited capital. However, dates for the opening of the house differ from text to text. For example, De Marly (op. cit. p. 82) claims it was in 1903, when Poiret was aged 24; Georgina O'Hara (*The Encyclopaedia of Fashion*, London 1986, p. 198), states that the house was opened in 1904; Elizabeth Wilson and Lou Taylor (*Through the Looking Glasss: A History of Dress From 1860 to the Present Day*, London 1989, p. 66), date it to 1906. The house was initially situated at 5, rue Auber.

[4] The Aesthetic and Dress Reform movements reacted against the very restrictive nature of fashionable dress during the second half of the nineteenth century (as typified by corsetry, boning, yards of heavy fabric, lining and abundant ornamentation). The call for dress reform came from a variety of groups in America, Britain and France that were concerned generally with the education and welfare of women. The movement is famously associated with the American feminist Amelia Bloomer, who advocated a

short, full-skirted dress worn over Turkish-style pantaloons. The Pre-Raphaelite movement of the late 1840s had similarly rejected current fashion and the movement continued into the 1880s and 1890s.

[5] The name of this style refers to the Directory period in France. The Directory was the executive body of the Revolutionary government of France from 1795 to 1799. De Marly, op. cit. plate 6.

[6] De Marly, op. cit. p. 89, fig. 50

[7] Raoul Dufy produced textile designs for Poiret. He was also employed by the French textile firm of Bianchini-Férier (see note 51).

[8] This coat was produced in garnet cloth and decorated with Chinese embroidery.

[9] De Marly, op. cit. p. 87, fig. 48

[10] It has been noted that a Worth dress could, immediately prior to the war, cost up to 5,000 French francs, while one by Poiret could cost only 700 French francs. Yvonne Deslandres, *Poiret: Paul Poiret: 1879-1944* (London 1987), p. 99

[11] *BV* 20 April 1920, p. 90

[12] Chase, op. cit. p. 92

[13] The textile firms of Rodier and Bianchini-Férier had offices in Paris (Rodier at 3 rue des Moulins, Bianchini at 24 Bis Avenue de l'Opéra); they held biannual collections in the manner of the couture houses, which were covered in periodicals such as *Vogue*.

[14] An article on *Le Syndicat* appeared in the 8 January 1916 edition of the *DR*. It lists its membership as: MM. Bianchini-Ferier, Callot Sœurs, Doucet, Jenny, Lanvin, Paquin, Poiret, Premet, Rodier, Vogel and Co. (Lucien Vogel, founder of *La Gazette du Bon Ton*), Wormser and Boulanger and Worth.

[15] Chase, op. cit. p. 92

[16] Vionnet quoted in 'Surviving in Style: Bruce Chatwin Visits Mme. Madeleine Vionnet and Mme. Sonia Delaunay - Two Parisian Pioneers', in *The Sunday Times Colour Supplement*, 4 March 1973, p. 47. No one designer can be credited with the banishment of the corset, and it must be remembered that the Italian designer Mariano Fortuny was showing his first Delphos dresses in Venice in 1907.

[17] *BV* 20 July 1920, p. 53. The house (222 rue de Rivoli) closed down temporarily in 1914. It moved to 50 Avenue de Montaigne in 1923. Vionnet (1876-1975) retired in 1939.

[18] Laver, op. cit. p. 225, fig. 255

[19] Maison Parry was a dressmaking and fur business. In 1913 Patou (1880-1936) sold an entire collection to an American buyer, cementing what would always be a valuable source of trade for the house throughout the 1920s.

[20] Poiret produced a version of the tunic worn by his wife at *La 1002ième Nuit* for the actress Madame Cora Laparcerie who was appearing in the play *Le Minaret.*

[21] Although Poiret was at war, his house did continue to function on a reduced scale (see endnote 24). A report in the 15 October 1916 edition of *BV* (p. 32) illustrates three Poiret designs and commented that, 'The charm of exclusiveness marks these three Poiret models because his entire collection this season consists of about twenty models.'

[22] Chéruit quoted by Seebhom, op. cit. p. 90

[23] What Ken Silver has referred to as the Poiret Affair, an episode in 1915 during which the couturier was accused by some of having 'boche' sympathies and being pro-German, inevitably damaged his career. Ken Silver, *Esprit De Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton University Press 1989), pp. 167-171. The accusations against Poiret were unfounded but stemmed from the fact that the designer was successful in Germany, openly admired pre-1914 German decorative arts, had close friendships with important German and Austrian figures such as Josef Hoffmann, Bruno Paul and Hermann Muthesius, and had been in Germany on business immediately prior to the war in July 1914. The Affair was symptomatic of the climate of nationalism in France during the war, and was identical in tone to the onslaught against Cubism.

[24] In the 5 September 1919 edition of *BV* (p. 72), Jeanne Ramón Fernández reported that she had recently been to see Poiret, 'as I knew that he was about to reopen after five years of mobilization' (however, his house clearly did function during the war on a reduced scale, see note 59). Poiret's first post-war designs would, therefore, have been intended for the autumn/winter season.

[25] *BV* 20 April 1921, p. 26

[26] Patou was located at 7, rue Florentin.

[27] Captain Edward Molyneux (1891-1974) trained with Lucile. He retired in 1950.

[28] Lelong (1889-1958) took over his father's small but successful dressmaking business in 1914, and prepared his first collection in August of that year (postponed due to his mobilization). Although I do not have the date of his first collection after leaving the army (it is not provided in any of the sources listed in the Bibliography), an

example of his work is shown in the 1 May 1916 edition of *Les Elégances Parisiennes* (p. 15). The house was situated at rue Matignon.

[29] Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), p. 10. Numerous illustrations of Chanel's early hats are reproduced in Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and Her World* (London 1981).

[30] The Deauville branch was situated on the rue Gontaut-Biron.

[31] De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit., p. 19

[32] Madsen, op. cit. p. 79, and De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit. p. 19, date the opening of the Biarritz house (rue Gardères) to July 1915; Steele, op. cit. p. 42, dates it to 1916. However, De La Haye and Tobin note that, 'Chanel showed her first complete couture collection in the Autumn of 1916 following the opening of her Biarritz house' (p. 14). See the summaries of the February and August 1916 collections for further clarification on the launch of the full collections.

[33] Chanel quoted in Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press 1988), p. 246.

[34] Charles-Roux, op. cit. p. 83. The fact that Chanel was photographed in this design from the side and the front would suggest that it was being documented as an example of a design being produced for sale.

[35] *BV* 5 February 1923, p. 62

[36] De Marly, op. cit. p. 111

[37] The report of Lelong's expansion featured in 5 November 1925 edition of *BV* (p. 98).

[38] By comparison, the staff at Chanel staged a major strike in 1936 over employment contracts, weekly salaries, limited working hours and paid holidays.

[39] *BV* 20 February 1921, p. 35

[40] *BV* 5 April 1925, p. 47

[41] *BV* 20 April 1920, p. 45

[42] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 57

[43] *BV* 17 October 1928, p. 41

[44] Licenced Chanel models sold at dress shops and department stores in London were illustrated in late 1920s editions of *BV*, with the name of the shop alongside (when this information is known, it is included in the **Notes** to the relevant catalogue entry).

[45] Rodier had its headquarters in Paris, but was based in Bohain, Picardy. It was run by Paul Rodier and his nephews Jacques Rodier and Henri Favier.

[46] *BV* 20 February 1920, p. 44

[47] *BV* 20 February 1920, p. 44

[48] *DR* 9 October 1920, p. 79

[49] *BV* 5 April 1923, p. 78

[50] *BV* 5 February 1923, p. 62

[51] Chanel took this contact with the theatre one step further and actually designed costumes for specific productions, such as Jean Cocteau's production of *Antigone* (1922), Serge Diaghilev's *Le Train Bleu* (for the Ballets Russes in 1924) and *Les Soirées de Paris* (1924). This aspect of Chanel's work is documented in many of the other existing texts on the designer's work.

[52] *BV* 20 February 1920, p. 44

[53] *BV* 20 July 1923, p. 22

[54] Steele, op. cit. 1992, p. 120, points out that a dress of 7,000 French francs would, 'in today's currency' be approximately £1,000.

[55] *BV* 5 June 1920, p. 87

[56] See De Marly, op. cit. p. 111, and the quotation from *La France Industrielle*, *L'Européen*, 28 May 1930.

[57] *BV* 4 September 1929, p. 88

[58] Information provided by the Press Office of the House of Chanel, Bond Street, London, states that by 1935 the business employed approximately 4,000 people and was producing up to 28,000 designs per year. As no business archives exist, it has no been possible to confirm these figures.

[59] The perfume was created for Chanel by the renowned French perfumer Ernest Beaux.

[60] A photograph of Chanel standing, with her sister Adrienne, outside the Deauville branch in 1913 (and shown in Charles-Roux, 1979, p. 84), shows that she had not yet adopted the bold, square typeface which was to become, and still is, associated with the house.

[61] Chanel No. 5 was followed by the perfumes No. 22 (in 1922), Cuir de Russie (1924), Bois de Ingles (1926) and Gardenia (1927).

[62] *BV* 1 June 1921, p. 43

[63] De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit., p. 51

[64] The majority of the jewellery designs were manufactured by the company Maison Gripoix: a husband and wife company famous since the 1900s for the production of costume jewellery. Gripoix had produced costume jewellery for Poiret.

[65] From 1931 the designer and illustrator Paul Iribe was also to work for Chanel as a textile designer.

[66] Many of the other leading couturiers were clients of the embroiderer Albert Lesage. Lesage had a studio in Paris during the 1920s and his clients included Worth, Vionnet, Paquin, Poiret and Schiaparelli. Prior to the establishment of the Chanel's embroidery workshop, a Madame Bataille worked on the embroidery for the house. According to Mackrell (op. cit., p. 41), the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna offered to produce the embroidery for less than Madame Bataille and the workshop was established as a result. By 1922/23, this workshop, 'Kitmir', employed approximately fifty women in its workrooms and a number of designers and technicians. The workshop produced the embroidery for the House of Chanel exclusively until about 1925 when it began to produce embroidery for other houses.

[67] The Wertheimers eventually came to own the entire business and continue to own the house today.

[68] De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit., p. 30

[69] *BV*15 May 1923, p. 25

[70] *BV* 8 January, 1930, p. 36

[71] See footnote 74 of Part One of this Introduction for an explanation of the development, function and role of Appendix II within the context of this thesis.

[72] Axel Madsen, London, 1990, p. 130

[73] Axel Madsen, London, 1990, p. 130

[74] See the summary of the collection February 1922.

[75] Restrictions of time and length have not permitted a detailed consideration of the accessories accompanying each design. Furthermore, although Chanel (like many of her contemporaries) produced hats, scarfs and jewellery during this period, the accessories shown with the design are not always definitely attributed to the house. It was therefore decided not to focus on accessories within the limits of this project.

[76] Laird O'Shea Borelli, 'Dressing Up and Talking About It: Fashion Writing in *Vogue* from 1968 to 1993', in *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, Volume 1 Issue 3, 1997

Summaries of the Dress Design Collections by Chanel

1916 - 1929

February 1916

The Waywardness of Fashion and the War Crinoline.

The first Chanel dress designs to be shown in the recently launched British *Vogue* appeared in its 1 October 1916 issue. Consequently, the seven models representative of Chanel's spring/summer 1916 collection were shown originally in *Harper's Bazaar* and *Les Elégances Parisiennes*. The example featured in *Harper's Bazaar* is frequently cited as being the first Chanel dress design to be illustrated in any periodical and it is reproduced in many of the published texts on the designer.[1] Those reproduced in the May edition of *Les Elégances Parisiennes* were the most prominent designs on the page, although they were illustrated alongside models by Berthe et Hermance, Chéruit and Lelong.[2] Those featured in the July edition were shown alone.[3] However, the fact that these designs were accredited to 'Channel' indicates that the house was not yet an established name.

The Collection

Four of the designs were appropriate for informal day or country/sports wear (**1 – 4**) and three for more formal morning or afternoon wear (**5 – 7**). No evening designs are included: this category was shown as part of Chanel's first full haute couture collection in August 1916.[4]

The emphasis on a simple and pared down approach to dress, coupled with a preference for jersey fabric, characterizes not only the pre-1916 dress designs worn and produced by Chanel, but also those created for the spring/summer of 1916. The collection is based upon variations of a simple theme: the loose-fitting jacket or slip-over top, with a wide (often sailor) collar, belted at the natural waist and worn with a relatively full, lower-calf-length skirt. The theme is stated in its basic form in **1**, where the deep revers of the safari-style jacket combine with the large buttoned patch pockets, a buttoned belt and small boater-style hat to produce a design derived from the assimilation and reworking of elements associated with traditional men's wear, and even the more specialist categories of military and riding wear.

The variations are wrought by using different materials, extending the length of the jacket or top to produce a coat or dress, and altering the design of such elements as the collar, belt and cuffs. Thus the more practical versions of the theme (**1 – 4**) generally

use more robust versions of jersey, neutral colours, and little or no trimming: details such as the curved cut of the pocket (**1**) or the contrast of colours (**3**) being the principal means of embellishment. The more formal, and, in traditional terms, more 'feminine', ensembles are in a finer cotton or silk jersey, in either impractical white or a bolder colour, decorated with fur trim or embroidery. The development of the original idea into **7** produces a chemise dress with a new, apparently slimmer silhouette, which looks forward to the next collection.

Context

Chanel was not, as the Introduction has outlined, the first to advocate loose, unrestrictive clothing, wider skirts, or to borrow heavily from men's dress. Tailored suits, as worn by women since the latter part of the nineteenth century, frequently included 'masculine' details; a Dœuillet suit of 1915 featured the deep collar, wide buckled belt and buttoned flap pockets seen on Chanel's **1**. Designs such as this appeared at all levels of the clothing industry. This can be underlined by comparing Chanel's earliest designs, as represented by those for Spring/Summer 1916, to the clothes worn by women for work and leisure during the First World War. A photograph from the archives of the Imperial War Museum, and reproduced in Prudence Glynn's *In Fashion: Dress In The Twentieth Century*, shows the uniform worn by the Women's Land Army.[5] The uniform is typical of those worn by women in Britain and France who, since the outbreak of the war, had played a more active and vital role in the workforce of their country. It comprises a loose-fitting jacket, fastened with a buttoned belt and large patch pockets with buttoned flaps, riding breeches and socks. The style of the jacket, its loose fit and the incorporation of details used traditionally on men's clothing, military and work wear, clearly make it an antecedent of **1**. Furthermore, a glance through the *Drapers' Record* reveals that many manufacturers were producing work, street and leisure wear for women that bears a striking resemblance to the designs produced by Chanel.[6] The *Franosa Sports Coat* of artificial silk, produced in Britain by Messrs. H. A. Francis Ltd. for their spring 1916 collection, has the same loose fit, deep collar, sash belt and large patch pockets found on many of Chanel's models. Similarly, M. Boyle and Co. of Glasgow ('The Exclusive Knitted Coat Specialists') advertised in June 1916 a black and white coat, for 21 shillings and 9 pence, based along the lines of a traditional male cardigan and including the sash belt and patch pockets that Chanel favoured. Just as new developments and

innovations in women's dress were not confined to the house of Chanel, so too were these trends evident outside Paris and in other levels of the fashion industry.

Chanel's comparatively short, wide skirts are similar to those of the tailored suits produced by Paquin, Lanvin and Dœuillet during the early part of 1914 and 1915. Skirts had continued to shorten during the war and were now set at mid to lower-calf-length. As if to compensate for this new brevity (and partly as a reaction against the pre-war narrow skirts sponsored by Poiret) skirts became much wider. This prompted one of the key debates in fashion periodicals of the time: the possible revival of the crinoline. One report in the *Drapers' Record* of March 1916 noted that, 'There is no doubt the latest silhouette is growing more extreme, for in every instance the new skirts are voluminous.'[7] The short, wide skirt was advocated for practical reasons: 'It is easy to get about in, either in the metro or on foot, which are the only ways one can go about Paris since the war.'[8] However, the concern was that if skirts continued to grow in width, and crinolines were re-introduced, the practicality of the new skirts would be negated. Furthermore, less extreme versions of the wider skirt required between two and a half to four yards of fabric, but the fully-blown crinoline silhouette would necessitate at least eight yards. Reflecting the concerns of many, the *Drapers' Record* commented that, 'At a time when dress materials are increasingly difficult to procure, it is just the waywardness of fashion that skirts should grow even wider.'[9] However, Chanel's designs were not as voluminous as those of some of her contemporaries, a fact which suggests that she was concerned with the practicality and comfort offered by such a style, rather than the sensationalism surrounding the possible revival of the crinoline.[10] The more elaborate skirts were generally confined to evening wear and many designers looked to historical precedents for the use of hooped devices. Evening dresses based on Louis XVI models were shown at some houses and Lanvin produced what was referred to as a 'Spanish' hooped skirt: wide at the sides and flat at the front and back.

The *Drapers' Record* of March 1916 saw a direct causal relationship between the war and contemporary women's fashion:

> The return of the pocket is heralded as a direct result of women "going to work"... Really useful pockets should appear in every coat, coat-dress and costume.[11]

As the Introduction has indicated, it is overly simplistic to see the development of women's fashion during the late teens as a direct result of the war. Nonetheless, fashion journalists at the time certainly believed this to be the case. *L'Art et la Mode* stated that, 'It is indisputable that the war is currently influencing fashions.'[12] In an article in the same periodical entitled 'The Fashion Market: A Coming Fundamental Change', one journalist commented that:

> The continuance of the war is effecting one change in the sartorial fashions of women so subtle and yet so radical... The causes lie in the absolute upheaval in the daily life of a very large number of women of the middle and upper classes of circumstances, whose daily life now consists of a regular spell of work... this is a great change, and it has had effects on clothing, one of which soon became at once marked... I allude, of course, to the wide extension of working clothes, and especially to the unprecedented prevalence of the coat and skirt suit.[13]

Chanel's designs for spring/summer 1916 should, therefore, be seen in terms of a wider process, not necessarily initiated but certainly accelerated by the war, which affected many areas of clothing production.

Despite the situation in France the haute couture industry continued to function. This was certainly due to what one commentator at the time referred to as the 'solid encouragement' given to it by the French government and the fashion press.[14] As Steele has pointed out, '... the French Government regarded the export of couture garments as an important part of the war effort.'[15] Meetings held by the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Française were held to discuss all aspects of the industry, particularly the threat to French fashion and the related industries posed by Germany: one article in *L'Art et la Mode* was entitled 'Contre La Couture Allemande.'[16]. Those who incited anti-German feeling in the fashion press harnessed the pre-war concern over the rapidly expanding and efficient German textile and clothing industries. The French government was, therefore, more than willing to bolster one of its country's most important industries and, although trade with Germany was halted and that from Britain reduced, trade with America was increasing. It was reported in July 1916 that:

> People who express amazement as to the active part which Paris still takes in the leading in of fashions... appear to overlook the position of

> the neutral countries. So much money has been made out of the war by some of the neutral states that their importance as buyers of luxuries has increased very largely... The result is that there still exists a foreign demand in Paris sufficient to keep a considerable proportion of her best workrooms and designers going.[17]

In 1916, Chanel purchased an unsold stock of machine-knitted jersey from the French textile manufacturer Rodier, marking the beginning of an important business relationship.[18] Until recently soft, loosely woven jersey had, like tricot, been restricted to underwear or men's sports wear. Chanel, undoubtedly keen not only on its physical properties, but also on its symbolic status as a fabric considered inappropriate for conventional women's fashions, was, in the space of a few seasons, to raise it to the level of an haute couture fabric and one of the most popular fabrics of the early twentieth century. The house became synonymous with jersey and Chanel's ability to produce successful designs with a fabric that was notoriously difficult to cut and unwilling to hold its final shape, would be widely applauded.[19] However, although Chanel can take considerable credit for popularizing jersey during the First World War, she was not the only designer to work successfully with it. Many leading houses, such as Jenny, Lanvin and Martial et Armand, were employing the fabric at this time.

The war may not have had quite the negative impact on haute couture that some commentators had predicted (although reports in trade journals were certainly informed by the desire to maintain morale), but it did cause considerable restrictions on the range of materials and trimmings available to designers. The growing difficulty of obtaining supplies was, after the loss of certain markets, the main problem for Paris-based designers during 1916. The fashion for jersey may have been prompted as much by its comparative availability and low cost than by any concern with its actual properties and appearance. As restrictions on fabrics such as serge became more widespread, alternatives such as jersey became increasingly important. By the summer of 1916 knitted silk jersey coats (see **4**) were in great demand at all levels of the fashion market. As one reporter for the *Drapers' Record* put it:

> There is an advancing esteem for what are called by some jersey materials, meaning cloths of a knitted appearance, but as silky as possible... I may mention that not only are jersey dresses actually in

> being, and for the summer, but inquiries are rife "from the best quarters" touching materials of this kind for next season.[20]

Accordingly, the lack of trimmings on Chanel's designs, as on the work of many of her contemporaries, seems inevitable in the face of the rising costs and the scarcity of many materials during 1916.

---

[1] Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and her World* (London 1981), p. 99, states that this was 'the first Chanel design ever published: a dress from the Biarritz collection.'

[2] I have no information on Berthe et Hermance. Although a relatively small house, it was featured regularly in fashion periodicals and was covered until at least 1920 by *BV*.

[3] The three designs taken from the July 1916 edition of *Les Elégances Parisiennes* (No. 4) are frequently cited in other texts as being from a March 1917 edition: see Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel* (London 1989), fig. 82; Alice Mackrell, *Coco Chanel* (London 1992), p. 24; Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), p. 18. I found that this was not the case. The edition in which **1**, **3** and **4** were shown is generally accepted as the May 1916 edition (number 2); the edition in which the designs in question were shown was number 4. If it had been March of 1917, as many authors have stated, the edition would have been number 12. Valerie Steele, *Women of Fashion: Twentieth Century Designers* (New York 1991), p. 42, also dates these models to 1916, and not 1917.

[4] See the Summary of the collection August 1916.

[5] Prudence Glynn, *In Fashion: Dress in the Twentieth Century* (London 1978), p. 61. The Women's Land Army was formed in 1917.

[6] The uniforms and work wear produced for women during the First World War were rarely shown in the pages of *Vogue* as they were not considered to belong to the realms of 'high' fashion.

[7] *DR* 18 March 1916, p. 513

[8] *DR* 17 June 1916, p. 512

[9] *DR* 18 March 1916, p. 513

[10] An illustration of suits by Paquin, Lanvin and Dœuillet, shown initially in *La Gazette du Bon Ton* in 1915, and reproduced in Valerie Steele, *Paris Fashion: A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press 1988), p. 238, shows examples of the 'war crinoline' silhouette. The skirts here, while allowing for the style of illustration, are considerably wider than those produced by Chanel.

[11] *DR* 18 March 1916, p. 533

[12] *L'Art et la Mode* 6 March 1915, p. 5

[13] *L'Art et la Mode* 3 June 1916, p. 415

[14] *DR* 18 March 1916, p. 529

[15] Steele, op. cit. 1988, p. 236

[16] *L'Art et la Mode* 13 March 1915, p. 24

[17] *L'Art et la Mode* July 15 1916, p. 109

[18] The firm of Rodier produced a fine-textured jersey, 'chanella', specifically for Chanel in 1917. See catalogue number **24**, for an example of a design in this fabric.

[19] See Summary of the collection August 1916.

[20] *DR* 1 July 1916, p. 27

August 1916

The Patriotic Chemise.

The August 1916 collection is represented by fourteen designs reproduced from editions of British *Vogue* published bimonthly between 1 October 1916 and 5 February 1917. Until early 1917, it is clear that the magazine did not consider the house of Chanel to be in the same league as those of Chéruit Dœuillet, Jenny, Lanvin, Paquin and Worth (those houses that were given the most substantial coverage). In British *Vogue*'s September 1916 'Forecast of Autumn Fashion Number', Chanel is only briefly mentioned after lengthy discussions of Worth, Lanvin, Paquin, Jenny, Premet, Dœuillet, Doucet and Martial et Armand. Although, in each of the 1 October and 1 November editions, the house was given two full pages devoted entirely to its designs, and by November was receiving more substantial reviews (written primarily by Anna Van Campen Stewart), yet in all the 1916 editions Chanel's work continued to be placed after that from the other major houses and, for the most part, alongside the less prominent houses of Berthe et Hermance, Margaine Lacroix and Marianne Buzenet.[1] In the 1 November 1917 edition, illustrations of Chanel designs were, for the first time, shown alongside those of the more prominent houses.

The Collection

Of the fourteen designs in the catalogue, six were intended for morning/street wear (**8 – 13**), one for sports wear (**14**), four for afternoon wear (**15 – 18**), and three for evening wear (**19 – 21**). This was the first full haute couture collection produced by the house: a report published in a November 1916 issue of British *Vogue* stated that, 'Gabrielle Chanel, who is known the world over for her sports frocks, is this season making evening gowns.'[2] This underlines the rapid growth of the business during 1915 and 1916: the opening of the Chanel *maison de couture* in Biarritz in July 1915 and the subsequent expansion of the rue Cambon premises.

Central to this collection is the uncomplicated, loose-fitting, calf-length garment, which was both simple to produce and comfortable to wear. It has the relatively straight silhouette foreshadowed in **7** (February 1916), close-fitting sleeves, tapering towards the wrist (turn-back cuffs are reserved for the jackets and coats), a V-neckline (often with a deep collar), and is fastened loosely at the natural waistline with a version of the tie-belt. The afternoon chemise dress **16** represents the most basic statement of this

theme. The dress worn with the manteau *Teheran* (**15**), with its wrap over bodice and wrap-over tie-belt, offers a more elaborate version of the idea. Despite these developments, the loose-fitting jacket, coat or slip-over top and relatively full, calf-length skirt, typical of the previous collection, continue to play an important role. The coat **8** features the wider sleeves, deep collar, V-opening, simple tie-belt, fur trimming and pockets which recur in numerous variations on other designs. Two models depart slightly from this rule: the unbelted and edge-to-edge jacket (**13**) and the evening coat (**21**). Importantly, the day, sports and evening designs do not differ significantly in form, a characteristic which unifies the entire collection and underlines the designer's concern to break down the once rigid divisions between categories of dress.[3] Nonetheless, the designs were distinguished by subtle variations of length, proportion, detail (particularly collars, belts and pockets) and trimming.

Chanel continued to borrow from men's wear. A new introduction was the tasseled frog fastening on the afternoon coat *Teheran* (**15**), derived once again from a military source.[4] Versatile, durable, affordable and easy to obtain materials, such as jersey and rabbit fur trim, are central to this collection. Not only was Chanel's continued support of jersey, despite its recent ubiquity, noted by the press, but her ability to cut and handle the fabric was also praised:

> It has been rumoured lately that women were growing tired of jersey, but Chanel is master of her art, and her jersey frocks are as complete and as daintily finished as frocks of more thoroughly patrician stuffs.[5]

In reference to **15** one reporter noted, 'To use jersey successfully in a manteau is a thing few designers could accomplish, yet here it is successfully done.'[6] The emphasis was on fabrics that were warm and soft: the house reportedly produced 'many fascinating cloaks', that were, 'furry, comfortable garments of velvets and soft woolen stuffs.'[7] Suede was also used in this collection. British *Vogue* noted that many models were 'recklessly' trimmed with fur and that, 'It is only by chance that the entire garment is not made of fur at Chanel's.'[8] Reference was also made to a design known as a 'chandail': a knee-length, slip-on jersey sweater for sports wear, which was 'banded for 16" at the bottom with grey rabbit... (and) finished with a deep sailor collar of grey fur.'[9] Different textures and sheens were juxtaposed to ensure variety: satin and fur, or jersey and taffeta. The colours for this collection (black, grey, deep reds, dark blue and yellow) were bolder and deeper than in February. Contrasting facings, in a plain (**15**)

or, new to this collection, checked (**14**) fabric, decorated the less formal designs. The use of checked and tartan fabrics was to become an important element in the February 1917 collection. Embroidery, particularly with a Japanese influence, was the principal trimming on the afternoon and evening models.[10] The influence of middle and far Eastern sources would continue to be felt in later collections.

Context

This collection mirrored those of many of the other leading houses. In September 1916, the *Drapers' Record* described the current trend for winter coats with relatively full skirts falling to approximately two inches above the hem of the dress, fur collars and cuffs. As in Chanel's collection, the collars were thought to '... play a very important part... this autumn, and a variety of novelties can be seen. The high muffler collar, usually composed of fur or velvet, leads the way.'[11] Chanel's continued preference for the V-neckline, a detail normally associated with evening wear, was also shared by many houses.

Nor was Chanel alone in her refusal to comply with the predicted return of the crinoline. In its inaugural issue British *Vogue* announced that, 'The first of the Paris openings makes it indubitably clear that the crinolines of last season have taken French leave.'[12] Although skirts remained relatively short, wide and full, this was achieved without the cumbersome and restrictive addition of the crinoline itself. As the 'war crinoline' lost favour, the chemise dress became increasingly popular. Hanging straight from the shoulders, loosely cut and girdled lightly at the waist (or a little above it), the chemise was initially thought to be part of the popular 'Moyen Age' revival. British *Vogue* claimed that Jenny had introduced the chemise in August 1915, although it was also shown by Chanel, Paquin and Worth. Lanvin was reported to be 'devoted to the straight chemise frock – straight from shoulder to hips, or at most only slightly curved to the figure.'[13] *L'Art et la Mode* also described the general move away from the exaggerated lines of the war crinoline towards the greater simplicity of the chemise: 'It is in the subtlety of detail that the new refinement of our wardrobes is revealed.'[14] The comparatively simple, straight and plain lines favoured by Chanel were, therefore, part of a larger trend in French haute couture at this time. Jenny's popular tailored costumes all emphasized the long, straight look, and Chanel's use of the simple tie-belt, Japanese-inspired embroidery, metallic thread embroidery, heavy satins and velvets, waistcoats and rabbit fur trimming were central to other collections. The use of intense and quite

bold colours was also widely seen: green was extensively employed by Chéruit and Premet and Bordeaux red, grey and dark blue were among the most popular colours of the season. The waistcoat, like that of Chanel's **12**, was one particularly popular device for introducing colour into an ensemble.

Although other designers included the straight, slender chemise in their collections, many also featured models which were wholly at odds with the underlying principles of such a design: simplicity, practicality, economy and adaptability. The unity and coherence of Chanel's work was not necessarily evident in the collections of some of her rivals. The chemise dresses produced by the house of Worth were generally much more splendid and ostentatious than those of Chanel: for example, British *Vogue* described one Worth model produced in white satin with bands of gold gauze ribbon.[15] This house was also associated with the current revival of Renaissance-style costumes and, as one commentator explained, 'This was a logical development, for there is about the costumes of the Renaissance a regal splendour quite in keeping with the Maison Worth.'[16] Jenny, the proclaimed originator of the chemise, was similarly producing designs that differed dramatically in conception and style. Many of Jenny's skirts had a puffed effect at the hem, anticipating the barrel silhouette of 1917 and creating a 'bouffant' silhouette: one report described the effect of such an evening design, '... the hem of which was caught to the legs of the wearer with satin ribbons.'[17] It is difficult to imagine such a design in a Chanel collection. While Chanel's work can be drawn in line with that of her competitors, the simple, straight lines of the fashionable chemise formed the backbone to her entire collection (including the recently introduced evening category), and not just one aspect of it.

In the context of the First World War, designs such as the chemise took on a particular meaning and role. Simple and unflamboyant, the chemise was seen as a wholly appropriate, almost patriotic garment. The *Drapers' Record* expressed this attitude in a January 1917 review of the season:

> Fashion... this season has had a special and important duty to perform whilst nations are battling for their lives... Never, perhaps, has she been in a more sensible mood... Exaggeration and extravagance are studiously avoided, whilst smart simplicity is everywhere apparent.[18]

The chemise was widely applauded by the fashion press as it was considered '... perfectly adaptable to the demands of modern life. It is comfortable, graceful and economical.'[19] At a time when materials were limited, economy was paramount, and the chemise not only required a relatively small amount of fabric, but was also comparatively simple to make, and was therefore seen as a 'labour saving' garment. This relevance was underlined by British *Vogue*; aware that many women no longer had the resources to afford original haute couture models, it praised the fashion for the imitable chemise:

> For the number of these simple frocks that are made in the seclusion of the sewing room to be worn later with the air of having issued from Les Grandes Maisons is one of the secrets of the age.[20]

This attitude contrasts dramatically with the fervent attempts undertaken by Poiret, and described in the Introduction, to halt design piracy. Accordingly, Poiret's collection amounted to only twenty designs this season: while this was partly due to his mobilization, it is also in keeping with his concern for exclusivity, the uniqueness of the individual design and its status as an original 'work of art'.

The simplicity of Chanel's evening wear may equally have been the result of the pervading social and political climate in Paris. The French government increasingly disapproved of overly flamboyant and decorative fashions as the war progressed. This led to a decree in January 1917 which stated that, '... evening dress will not be permitted at the Opéra, the Opéra-Comique, the Odèon, or the Comedie Française', and so, as British *Vogue* reported, '... the Parisienne is disconsolately stowing away her low cut gowns in the depths of her wardrobe.'[21]

Just as the production and reception of the chemise was conditioned by the circumstances of the time, so too was the so-called 'return to colour'. One journalist commented that, 'It is satisfactory to find that considerable improvements are now apparent in the dyeing of dress goods, in spite of the restrictions imposed on the use of the necessary chemicals.'[22] The increased number of colours available was the result of recent developments in dye production that allowed British and French manufacturers to overcome the restrictions placed on the industry since 1914.

[1] As yet, I have no information on these minor houses.

[2] *BV* 15 November 1916, p. 25

[3] Reviewing what was referred to as 'Chanel's New Role', *BV* (15 November 1916, p. 25) stated that, '... the Chanel evening gown is not an affair of tulle or chiffon, *comme les autres*.' Furthermore, the caption to **18** noted that, 'It is an evening frock – at least so its designer says.'

[4] Versions of this coat were reportedly produced in yellow jersey.

[5] *BV* 1 November 1917, p. 25

[6] *BV* 1 February 1917, p. 16

[7] *BV* 1 November 1916, p. 25

[8] *BV* 1 December 1916, p. 34

[9] *BV* 15 November 1916, p. 26. The description of the design noted that, 'Being a true chandail, it is drawn on over the head, opening in the front in a shallow V... Bands of rabbit finish the close of the sleeves and the chandail is tightened in a bit at the waist with a narrow belt of grey jersey. The skirt is a very smart but very simple affair of the grey tissue, pleated closely from a plain round yoke.'

[10] The evening dress **19** was described as being 'waist deep in gold embroidered irises' and **18** was trimmed with 'white cherry blossoms... on the basque... and on the back of the sailor collar.' (*BV* 15 November 1916, p. 29).

[11] *DR* 23 September 1916, p. 635

[12] *BV* 15 September 1916, p. 25

[13] *BV* 15 September 1916, p. 26

[14] *L'Art et la Mode*, 4 November 1916, p. 5

[15] *BV* 15 November 1916, p. 25

[16] *BV* 15 September 1916, p. 25

[17] *BV* 15 September 1916, p. 27

[18] *DR* 20 January 1917, p. 112

[19] *BV* 15 November 1916, p. 25

[20] *BV* 15 November 1916, p. 25

[21] *BV* 15 January 1917, p. 14

[22] *DR* 23 September 1916, p. 635

February 1917

The Barrel Holds Sway

This collection is represented by twenty two designs. 1917 was British *Vogue*'s first full year of publication and the coverage Chanel received was more comprehensive: twenty of the catalogue designs were reproduced from issues of the magazine published between 5 February and 5 August 1917. However, only the 20 May edition has a single page devoted to models from the house. Chanel is still shown alongside the smaller houses of Berthe et Hermance, Buzenet, Maupas and Peggy[1], but also with the more established names of Chéruit, Dœuillet, Doucet, Martial et Armand, Paquin, Premet and Redfern. The remaining two designs were reproduced from editions of *Femina* and *Les Elégances Parisiennes*. In the former journal the Chanel model was shown alone on the page; in the latter it was shown with designs from unspecified houses.

The Collection

Four models belong to the morning/street category (**22 – 25**: three suits and one coat); six were appropriate for sports wear (**26 – 31**: one cape-coat, two suits, and three sweater-top and skirt ensembles); ten were intended for more formal or afternoon wear (**32 – 41**: eight chemises or tunic-style dresses – one with a matching coat – and a coat); and two belonged to the evening wear category (**42** and **43**: two sleeveless dresses worn with guimpes).

Two principal themes, evident in all the categories, emerge in this collection. The first is the simple, straight and calf-length garment which, by virtue of elements such as the wrap-over or slip-over jacket, blouse, or loose-fitting sweater-top, and the pleated skirt, was both practical and comfortable to wear. It was reported that the straight skirts of some Chanel's suits were two metres wide and fell 'straight from the hips': ample quantities of fabric in pleats – box, inverted or knife – were used to ensure freedom of movement.[2] Typically, these designs have full-length sleeves (loosely cut at the armhole), a V-neckline (frequently collared), pockets, and a belt. The theme recurs throughout the collection: it is represented in its most basic form by the sports ensemble **29**, but also by the more elaborate afternoon model **34**, which includes a knee-length tunic dress, with side seam pockets, worn over a calf-length underskirt. Although the evening design **42** takes the form of a simple pinafore, it is related to

these designs by its basic shape, length, and the cut of the sleeves of its accompanying guimpe. Several devices were used to vary this basic theme (although more complicated forms were used only for the more formal designs): lengthening the jacket/top (ultimately to provide the full-length coat with attached cape **26**, or the one-piece dress **32**); lightly gathering the fabric into the neckline (**34**); using an uneven hemline (**36**) or a curving hip band (**38**).

The second theme is the 'barrel' or 'tonneau' line: the belted garment fits the waist neatly, rounds out noticeably over the hips, and narrows slightly towards its calf-length hem. The simplest expression of this theme is the coat **25**: the double attached belt lightly defines the waist, emphasising the comparative width of the hips, and the narrower hem is caught under and sewn into the lining. A more elaborate version of the idea is the suit **24**, which has a flaring and kilted overskirt sewn into the hem of a short-fronted, almost 'Eton-style' jacket. One British *Vogue* report on the 'wider-at-the-hips than hem' effect commented that, '... what makes it do so is the most puzzling of dressmaking secrets.'[3] The silhouette clearly necessitated a certain amount of technical skill, although one more straightforward technique involved the incorporation of two inverted pleats over the hips. Chanel, however, employed numerous devices to create and vary the silhouette (testifying to the considerable ingenuity and technical proficiency of the designer and/or her staff): the pleated hip-length overskirt (**24**), turning the hem of the coat under and attaching it to the lining (**25**), gathering the skirt into pockets positioned at hip level (**33**), and pleating and prominent side pockets (**40**).

Forms and elements of dress traditionally associated with men's wear continued to feature in the informal day and sports categories: the reference to the Eton-style jacket, sweater-like tops, the military-style attached cape (which, in **49**, would be further developed for the August 1917 collection), patch and breast pockets, deep turn-back cuffs and shirt-like collars. A Chanel sports suit shown in *Femina* included a shirt with a small collar and a mannish neck-tie.[4] The style and proportions of the collars, cuffs, pockets, necklines and belts were constantly modified, becoming more elaborate for the more formal categories: double or buttoned belts, V-necklines and patch pockets for morning/street wear; long or wide sashes, U-shaped, square, bateau or plunging V-necklines, and curving side-seam pockets for afternoon and evening.

The continuing association between Chanel and jersey fabric was remarked upon: 'This designer has made jersey what it is to-day – we hope she's satisfied it's almost as much

a part of our lives as blue serge is.'[5] Soft, lightweight jersey (wool or silk) was the most frequently employed fabric in the day and sports wear categories; new varieties such as 'chanella' (**24**) and 'djersa' were also included.[6] Tricotine (a twill-weave woolen fabric resembling gabardine) and satin were favoured for more formal day or afternoon models, and crêpe de Chine, tulle and mousseline were used for the evening designs. Homespun lined the coat **25**. Suede (used for the coat **13** of August 1916) is again employed this season for **22**. Dark or sombre colours such as black, grey, brown, beige and navy blue were the most common, although emerald green, black and white checked jersey, and 'Bordeaux' (a staple of the August 1916 collection) were also seen. Two or more fabrics were often incorporated into one garment and provided, in some cases, the only form of embellishment: the red and green tartan overskirt of **24**, and the wool jersey and silk jersey of **31**.[7] Few trimmings were seen in the less formal categories (the house was frequently noted for the 'severity' of its approach, a description which applied as much to the lack of decoration, as it did to the simplicity and straight lines of many designs). Pom-poms (**27**) and small bow fastenings (**32**) were occasionally seen, but the trimming was more often simply an extension of the construction of the design itself: the top stitching in a contrasting colour of **34**. When embroidery was used for informal day or sports wear it was relatively subdued and restrained (**22**). Although fur trimming is not seen on the catalogue models, one report referred to a jersey coat with a Kamchatka fur collar. [8] The more formal designs are decorated with soutache (a narrow braid); fringing or tassels (on the belts – recalling **15**, the *Teheran* manteau, of August 1916); more lavish embroidery in bands (**36**), or Far Eastern-derived patterns (**41**), in beige, red, green and gold; or what may be appliqued floral motifs (**42**).

Context

Although the house was acknowledged for its very distinctive collection (remaining faithful to jersey and stressing simplicity to the point of severity in all categories), there were many points of contact between Chanel's work and that of other leading designers. The 'barrel' silhouette, which British *Vogue* claimed was introduced by Callot Sœurs in August 1916, was featured at almost every house, and was particularly popular with the American market.[9] One headline announced that, 'In Frocks, Suits and Evening Gowns The Barrel Holds Sway.'[10] Chanel's **24** was shown on a page with similar *jupes tonneaux* by Chéruit and Dœuillet. Martial et Armand were reported to have shown almost no straight dresses: 'instead they give us the "peg-top", the "melon"

and the "hobble" skirt and a few Directoire models."[11] Although Chanel included the wide-at-the-hips silhouette, she did not feature the restrictive hobble skirt introduced by Poiret before the war. Its re-emergence was part of a general and, as many saw it, a welcome return of the longer and narrower skirt: one journalist remarked that the success of the long skirt would ensure that, 'we will be able to rest our eyes, so long tortured by the sight of so many unsightly ankles."[12] 'Apron frocks', which incorporated separate apron-like panels over the tops of the skirts, were found in most collections (most notably Dœuillet's). The chemise dress remained universally popular and, by the time of the mid-season collections, it was clear that the new silhouettes would not constitute any real threat to its status. Designers such as Jenny shared Chanel's preference for straight, narrow lines and some houses reportedly used only a metre and a half of fabric in their tailored suits. Paquin was also known for her Eton-style jackets. Waistlines were at no one set position and sleeves were thought to be shorter and close-fitting. Black, particularly embroidered with gold, was everywhere. Jersey, woollen fabrics, crêpe de Chine, satin and silks in black, grey, beige, reds and greens were all widely used. Lace was heralded as having made a triumphant return and top-stitching, as a form of decoration, was widely employed.

Despite the persistence of the simple, straight garment, the introduction of the 'barrel' silhouette into Chanel's work testifies to the fact that she did engage with, if not always totally adopt, current, popular trends initiated at other, often more conservative houses. Although such aspects of her early work are often overlooked, it is frequently within these areas that Chanel's technical ability is displayed.

By February 1917 France had been at war for almost four years. The continuation of the war brought further problems and difficulties: industrial resources were under an increasing strain and the country had to cope with unprecedented demands for munitions, skilled workers, raw materials and food. Although some undoubtedly made money out of the war (and thus bolstered the luxury industries to a degree), inflation and the high cost of living ensured considerable hardship. To compound such difficulties, petrol and coal became increasingly hard to obtain. The fuel shortage meant that Parisians were largely confined to the capital and forced to find new means of transport within the city itself (such as that employed by Hilda May whilst wearing the Chanel design **27**).

The conditions in France had an inevitable impact on haute couture. A successful strike for higher pay by Parisian seamstresses was held during the spring and, in a February forecast of the season ahead, it was reported that, 'More than ever this season has the war affected the modes.'[13] The scarcity of raw materials increasingly governed the types of fabrics that a designer could use. The market for new varieties of jersey was, as De La Haye and Tobin have stated, nurtured by the shortage and expense of serge, a material used for military uniforms. [14] The lack of some dyes (despite the recent efforts of the British and French dye manufacturers) was thought to have prompted the fashion for checked fabrics and '... as fine woollen stuffs are lacking, harsher fabrics must be used.'[15] The growing scarcity of good quality wool fabrics and their subsequent high cost led to the popularity of the comparatively affordable silks and satins. Furthermore, fur – even rabbit fur – was becoming increasingly difficult to obtain and designers were beginning to use alternatives such as rat. Fuel shortages and the severe winter of 1916 to 1917 meant that the warmth of a design was of crucial importance. Several houses, including Doucet, introduced indoor jackets into their collections. Just as the government had discouraged evening wear in Paris, so too was it now deemed inappropriate for a woman to wear jewellery in public. The production of some categories of dress were unaffected: although travel in France was now heavily restricted, couturiers such as Chanel and Paquin continued to create travel-wear ranges. British *Vogue* explained that this was because, 'Women travel now in the Americas', a reminder of the importance of the American market at the time.[16]

Many journalists believed that patriotism had influenced not only the colour, but also the cut of fashionable dress. In June 1917 a journalist wrote that, 'The general sympathy the nations all over the world have been showing for one another lately may account for the fact that a French slip-over sweater (Chanel, **29**) is of emerald green silk.'[17] As the numbers of men killed in action rose steadily, so the fashion press spoke of the 'dignity of black' in relation to its inevitable ubiquity, and bright, bold colours were deemed inappropriate. In British *Vogue*'s 'Limited Income Number' of April 1917, the new longer skirts were seen as a vital contribution to the war effort, 'Almost everywhere frocks are longer, a sign of patriotism, no doubt, as it enables us to cut several inches off the tops of our boots, and so economize leather.'[18] The *Drapers' Record*, in an article entitled 'War and the Fashions', drew a parallel between contemporary women's fashion and soldiers' dress, 'Since the autumn of 1914, fashion has been paying tribute to our allies and doing homage to our Army and Navy in all sorts of graceful ways.'[19] It was thought that the 'barrel' silhouette was directly inspired

by the dress of African and Indian soldiers which 'are considerably wider at the knees than at the waist and hem.'[20] The newly fashionable shorter sleeve was dubbed the 'munition sleeve' presumably because, as the *Drapers' Record* explained, '... it suggests the working sleeve apparel of girls on certain munition work. The decree is daring and it comes from Paris.'[21] Like the V-neckline, the fashion for the short sleeve could also be explained as a result of the Parisian woman's desire to introduce some elements of the banned category of evening wear into their daytime clothing. The stress on restraint, sobriety and economy, exemplified for many by the 'severity' of Chanel's designs, was seen as an important contribution to the war effort. As one commentator put it:

> The best form in dress will be that which saves labour for the national needs... plain clothes and plain sewing... compromises in dress; dress for dual and even all-round purposes. These are the lines of development.[22]

---

[1] Although these houses were featured frequently in *BV* at this time, there is little information available on them.

[2] *BV* 1 February 1917, p. 14

[3] *BV* 15 February 1917, p. 45

[4] See *Femina* 1 June 1917, p. 28, and Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and Her World* (London 1981), p.103. The suit, which was available in either sand-coloured gabardine or tricot, included a three-quarter-length jacket with a small standing collar, a deep belt, large patch pockets, and a calf-length pleated skirt.

[5] *BV* 1 April 1917, p. 35

[6] The name 'chanella' implies that the fabric was specifically produced for the house of Chanel by Rodier; it was described by *BV* as 'a jersey cloth of unbelievably fine texture' (15 February 1917, p. 45). The periodical also reported that, 'In the rue Cambon (home of the house of Chanel)... The new 'djersa' is widely employed. Smart new manteaux and tailored frocks are made of that beige variety, which, with its elusive white intermingling thread, so resembles covert cloth.' (1 February 1917, p. 14) Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), p, 24, refer to a new Rodier jersey discussed in *Les Elégances Parisiennes* and reportedly employed by Chanel called *djersabure* ('a thick and rough fabric with large stitches,

which draped beautifully into soft pleats). The authors state that this fabric was used, by March 1917, for sports coats; by September Rodier had produced a jersey fabric called *djersagolf*, a 'black and white plaid for sports wear'.

[7] It was reported that, 'One of the newest whims of Chanel is the combination of silk and wool jersey. Some of her newest models are quite untrimmed save for such varying of textures.'(*BV* 1 April 1917, p. 35).

[8] *BV* 1 February 1917, p. 15. The name of the fur relates to the Russian peninsula of the same name: the use of a material with Russian associations anticipates what has been referred to as the 'Russian' phase in Chanel's career: see the Summary of the collection February 1922.

[9] See De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit. pp. 16 and 22. The authors state that **24** was one Chanel model to be imported to America this season.

[10] *BV* 15 February 1917, p. 45

[11] *BV* 1 April 1917, p, 28

[12] *BV* 1 April 1917, p. 28

[13] *BV* 1 February 1917, p. 11

[14] De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit. p. 26

[15] *BV* 1 February 1917, pp. 12, 13

[16] *BV* 1 June 1917, p. 26

[17] *BV* 15 June 1917, p. 15

[18] *BV* 15 April 1917, p. 15

[19] *DR* 20 January 1917, p. 112

[20] *DR* 20 January 1917, p. 112

[21] *DR* 10 February 1917, p. 305

[22] *DR* 20 January 1917, p. 113

August 1917

The Straight Line Is Triumphant

This collection is represented by nine designs, reproduced from editions of British *Vogue* published between 20 August 1917 and 5 February 1918. No one page was devoted entirely to designs from the Chanel collection. Instead, the designer's work was shown next to that of the smaller houses such as Berthe et Hermance, and the more established firms of Beer, Lanvin, Lucile, Martial et Armand, Poiret and Premet.

The Collection

Six models were intended for morning/street wear (**44 – 49**: six coats – one with an attached cape; two for afternoon wear (**50** and **51**: two dresses); and one for evening wear (**52**: one cape).

These designs are developments on the themes of earlier collections: the relatively straight and loosely belted coat or cape-coat (some with front button fastening), with full-length sleeves and a high or wide collar; and the simple, calf-length chemise or tunic-style dress with full-length sleeves, a sash or belt at the natural waistline, and a simple neckline. The full 'barrel' silhouette, represented by **24** and **25** of February 1917, is no longer evident, and a much softer version (achieved through the addition of horizontal bands of fur over the hip area – **46** – or light gathers of fabric – **50**), is now seen. The majority of the coats are a little shorter than the calf-length skirts worn beneath (the exceptions being the three-quarter-length coat **46** and the lower-calf-length **47** and **52**). The coat **49**, with its attached shoulder cape, is a development on **26** of February 1917.[1] The evening cape is similar to **21** (August 1916), but has no half-belt. Variety, in all the categories, is once again ensured by the alteration of elements such as the belt, collar, neckline and cuffs, the materials and the trimmings. The simple tie-belt of **44** is replaced by the buttoned belt of **49**, and the two afternoon models **50** and **51** feature a fringed sash and a tasselled tie-belt respectively (recalling those of the similar models **32** and **43** of February 1917). The collars vary from the flat, to the high fur, and scarf; the V-shaped opening, the bateau, and U-shaped necklines continue to be seen; all the coats include wide, often turn-back cuffs (those on the dresses are less prominent). Pockets are less evident and gathering or ruching the fabric at the sides is used this season to give definition to models without a belt (**45**).

The fabrics for the coats and evening wrap include jersey, velvet, duvetyn; silk jersey, velvet and satin were used for the more formal models.[2] The cut of a Chanel design was informed by the nature of the materials themselves: consequently, simple, slim-fitting chemise-style dresses were frequently produced in lightweight, clingy jersey. This was noted by the *Vogue* reporter Anna Van Campen Stewart when she wrote that the chemise '... lends itself well to elastic tissues and to soft embroidered stuffs.'[3] Chanel's increased use of cotton velvet and satin for afternoon/evening designs was remarked upon by the press:

> Of late, a thin, firm quality of cotton velvet has been used by Chanel for cloaks and certain frocks: and she has made a great many afternoon and evening gowns of satin.[4]

Little distinction was made between the colours used for day or evening designs: black, grey, deer-brown, taupe, beige, red and dark blue were seen in all categories, although apricot and yellow may have been reserved for the less formal categories, and marron tended to be used for afternoon/evening. Combinations of two fabrics in a single design (**31** of February 1917), is again used to provide decoration on the simpler, untrimmed models (**44**). Kolinsky, castor, squirrel or grey rabbit fur (for the evening wrap) is used to cover the buttons and to trim the collar, cuffs, hemlines and skirts of the coats: horizontal bands appear on **46** and **47**, while the V-shaped bands of **48** recall the similar patterns or in-set panels of **31** and **36** of February 1917.[5] Like **4** (February 1916) the less formal afternoon model **50** is also decorated with a narrower band of fur on the skirt. Although in the catalogue embroidery is seen only on the more formal **51**, other successful Chanel designs in jersey were reportedly embroidered with white silk jersey. The press described embroidery from the house as being 'exceedingly rich and effective', and again dependent on oriental or 'barbaric' sources.

Context

In September 1917 *Femina* announced that 'The straight line is triumphant.'[6] In agreement, the *Drapers' Record* described the leading day-wear silhouette in the following terms:

> The dresses are all cut to show the line of the figure, and if the skirts are narrow, they are not sufficiently tight to be uncomfortable. Some of the jackets are made

> longer than at the beginning of the season, and narrower as they descend, which gives a slim look to the figure.[7]

The straight, simple and economical line, epitomized by the one-piece chemise, was featured in most collections. Indeed, an unprecedented unanimity was evident amongst the Parisian based designers. British *Vogue* commented that, 'All couturiers agree pretty generally on a straight, narrow silhouette... there is less variety in the mode than in former seasons.'[8] The *Drapers' Record* claimed that the chemise would peak in popularity this season. Mme. Renée, Premet's head designer, produced numerous chemise-style dresses, prompting British *Vogue* to comment that, 'The chemise frock is still perfectly at home in the maison Premet.'[9] Jenny was also known for her extremely simple and severe designs, while the 'straightness' of many of Lanvin's dresses was attributed to a Chinese influence. Chinese-style tunics and coats, which fell straight from the shoulders to the knees and featured kimono sleeves, were also identified as an emerging trend, in keeping with the general emphasis on neat, uncomplicated lines. The straight silhouette went hand in hand with the use of less fabric and trimmings. Skirts were frequently only a metre in width and some belts, such as those found at Premet, were less than an inch wide. The most fashionable chemises and tunics, with their indefinite waistlines, were all comparatively plain. Anticipating another harsh winter, the houses were producing more coat and dress ensembles than tailleurs and, in general, coats were longer and heavily trimmed with fur.

Jersey achieved the status of a 'classic' fabric and was widely employed by Martial et Armand and Berthe et Hermance, while soft velvets and satins appeared in practically every collection. Other popular fabrics included the woollens, serge, cheviot, velours, tussore and piqué; Lanvin was one of several houses that produced afternoon and evening designs in tulle and chiffon. Colours were dark and subdued: all shades of brown were used, as was black (on its own or in combination with white), grey, beige, and blue. Chanel's apricot jersey and yellow were more unusual. Dark furs were common and, alongside those favoured by Chanel, skunk, flying squirrel, beaver and seal were popular. Fur was applied to all categories of dress and British *Vogue* noted that, 'Not so long as the thermometer continues to drop and coal to soar will the Parisienne consider a costume without its complement of fur.'[10] Less embroidery was seen on afternoon and evening designs and one report stated that, 'It is remarkable that embroidery is disappearing, the newest frocks are quite undecorated with needlework.'[11]

Chanel was, therefore, one of several designers (most notably Jenny and Mme. Renée at Premet) to concentrate on the straight, simple and comparatively plain garment this season. She shared the general preoccupation with producing designs that were as economical and warm as possible. Although embroidery was not as prevalent during the August collections, Chanel did continue to decorate her designs with embroidered patterns derived from oriental sources. The inclusion of brighter, lighter shades of jersey may also have set her apart from many of the other houses.

The haute couture industry continued to operate despite the acceleration of the war:

> Although the autumn season is still young, it is very animated. There are any number of American buyers, and the Parisian couturiers are very busy in consequence, at one house alone I saw over fifty models.[12]

A September edition of the *Drapers' Record* noted that, 'Worth... shows a larger collection this year than usual.'[13] Such reports may give the impression that the industry was largely unaffected by the war. However, as *Vogue*'s Jeanne Ramón Fernández pointed out in November, even certain sections of Poiret's latest collection were tempered by the current situation:

> To see at Poiret's costumes which do not surprise by their audacity is, it must be admitted, something very new. But present conditions have a sobering influence too strong for even Poiret to escape... His winter collection contains not only pretty and practical models for the Parisienne herself, but other models of an elegance suited to the demands of countries not at war, costumes of a marvellous richness, yet always keeping a note of reserve. Indeed what country is there, even among the neutrals, which would permit at the present time the eccentricities of costume of the days before the war.[14]

In September 1917 both *Femina* and the *Drapers' Record* reported a decree announced by *Le Syndicat de la Couture*: 'Next winter, it has been decreed by the Dressmakers' Syndicate, that no woollen dresses shall contain more than four and a half metres of material.'[15] *Femina* devoted a lengthy article, '4 metres 50? 3 Metres 50? 2 Metres 50?' to the implications of the ruling, and noted that four and a half metres was an adequate amount of fabric for a dress, if the width of the cloth was no less than one and a half metres.[16] Those who made their own clothes, or employed a 'petite couturière' had, by

necessity *Femina* believed, been using this amount of cloth for some time; it was only the haute couturiers, who by habit would cut their fabric without any great concern for economy, that would be affected. The article went on to consider the impact any further restrictions on the use of fabric might have: reducing the amount allowed to two metres fifty would still allow for the Chinese-style tunics being worn this season. It is interesting that *Femina* does not view possible further restrictions in a negative manner. Instead, in the light of the success of the chemise and the tunic-style dress, the restrictions are not seen as an insurmountable or even unwelcome issue.

As woollens became increasingly scarce throughout 1917, velvets, satins and jersey became ever more important. British *Vogue* believed that the prevalence of grey was due to the fact that it '... takes less dye than any other shade and the matter of dyes continues to be of prime importance.'[17] Although fur was essential for warmth, the type of fur used was dictated by its availability and cost; by this stage in the war furs of a 'questionable pedigree' were becoming the norm.[18] The shortages of basic materials, and the precarious financial position of many of haute couture's traditional clients, resulted in the growing concern for simplicity, adaptability and economy.

At a time of unprecedented national crisis, it was considered inappropriate and morally reprehensible to flaunt wealth. The emphasis was on a restrained, sober and dignified approach to dress, and the wealthy woman was sternly advised:

> Never to attract attention to her clothes by the too lavish use of rich stuffs or too costly furs; never to obtrude her continued good fortune in her costume, at the expense of those whose expenditure is reduced to a minimum.[19]

As Ken Silver has shown, the French government continued to monitor all levels of the fashion industry and fashion consumption in 1917. A 'French national regime of fashion' was introduced during this year, and on 5 August a 'National Shoe' was introduced, 'in the hope that the ever-stylish French might forsake their sartorial preoccupations for the national cause and all agree to purchase the same dowdy brown Oxford.'[20] As economic conditions worsened, and social and behavioural patterns changed, one headline stated that, 'Paris Meets The Needs Of The Hour: Service Is Now Woman's First Thought, Social Life Her Second.'[21] Fashion editors prided themselves on the fact that even high fashion was responsive rather than capricious. Full evening wear continued to be frowned upon (which may account for the lack of such designs in

Chanel's collection, although many houses produced evening models for foreign markets), and pearls were the only acceptable form of jewellery. In this climate, the simple collections of Chanel, Jenny and Premet were greeted with considerable support and enthusiasm. Chanel's winter coats were acclaimed for their 'Simplicity modified by inexpensive, but effective, use of fur.'[22] Individual designs by Premet were lauded as, '... a success... which goes far to prove necessity again the mother of invention, or better, perhaps, that elaboration is the thief of chic.'[23]

---

[1] *BV* (5 October 1917, p. 28) noted that, 'The cape-coat model... originated last year', suggesting that Chanel was one of the first designers to produce such designs.

[2] Chanel continued to be associated with jersey. One report (*BV* 5 October 1917, p. 30) stated that, '... the Maison Chanel might be called the "Jersey House", for the creations of Mlle. Chanel have long been and long will be in jersey'.

[3] *BV* 5 October 1917, p. 30

[4] *BV* 5 October 1917, p. 30

[5] An almost identical version of **48** (shown in 5 September 1917 issue of *BV*), was reproduced in 6 October 1917 edition of the *Drapers' Record* (p. 8). The collar of this unattributed version is slightly wider, the band of fur at the hem is narrower, and it is reported as being in 'seal-brown pony cloth with velours cloth to match'; nonetheless, the illustration is very close to that shown in the catalogue, and even includes the distinctive velvet hat trimmed with three feather cockades.

[6] *Femina* 1 September 1917, p. 13

[7] *DR* 13 October 1917, p. 52

[8] *BV* 1 October 1917, p. 23

[9] *BV* 15 August 1917, p. 11

[10] *BV* 1 January 1918, p. 35

[11] *BV* 15 September 1917, p. 50

[12] *DR* 18 August 1917, p. 253

[13] *DR* 1 September 1917, p. 278

[14] *BV* 15 November 1917, p. 27

[15] *DR* 1 September 1917, p. 317. The restrictions only applied to woollen fabrics; silks and satins were still available in large quantities.

[16] *Femina* 1 September 1917, p. 49

[17] *BV* 15 December 1917, p. 31

[18] *BV* 1 January 1918, p. 30

[19] *BV* 1 January 1918, p. 30

[20] Ken Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton University Press 1989), p. 195

[21] *BV* 1 November 1917, p. 28

[22] *BV* 1 January 1918, p. 34

[23] *BV* 1 January 1918, p. 33

February 1918

The Three S's: Straight, Scant and Simple

The collection is represented by fourteen models, reproduced from editions of British *Vogue* published between 20 February and 20 August 1918. The journal's coverage of Chanel had increased noticeably since 1916. The house was now discussed in detail in the majority of the issues which concentrated on the haute couture collections. Reviews of the collections were, on the whole, organized hierarchically: the more established and, in British *Vogue*'s opinion, the more successful houses were discussed first and in more detail. In the magazine's 15 April review of the February openings Chanel is one of the first houses to be discussed: the lengthy appraisal of its collection comes after that of Jenny, Dœuillet and Chéruit, but before that of Poiret, Beer, Paquin, Martial et Armand, Premet and Doucet. Chanel's designs were most frequently illustrated next to those by Jenny, Lanvin, Paquin, and Premet.

The Collection

Four designs were intended for morning/street wear (**53 – 56**: four coats); two for sports or country wear (**57** and **58**: a coat and top and skirt); five for the afternoon (**59 – 63**: five dresses, one with a gilet and one with a matching wrap); and three for evening (**64 – 66**: three dresses).

This collection is centred around the theme of the simple, slim-fitting calf-length garment – typically a tunic-style dress or top coat – which, in the majority of cases, has full-length sleeves, a deep cuff, a V-neckline, and is loosely belted. The wide-at-the-hips-effect, or the 'softened' version of the 'barrel' silhouette (see February and August 1917), is not seen, and in general the silhouette is straighter and more tightly structured.[1] British *Vogue* said of **55** that 'No coat could be more unpretentious in line than this one.'[2] Furthermore, Chanel was admired for what was referred to as her 'straight, simple and scant designs', which supposedly contrasted with the 'full, fluffy and fancy' models of many pre-war collections.[3] The main theme of the collection is represented in its most basic form by the informal afternoon dress **59**, and is further developed in the afternoon/evening designs **63** and **64**. The country outfit **58** (the only example in the catalogue to include a hip-length top and calf-length skirt) is related to **59** and refers back to earlier versions of such ensembles: **2** of February 1916; **17** and

18 of August 1916; **29** of February 1917. Importantly, the models were constructed in a way that ensured they were simple to put on and comfortable to wear: **53** was described as a 'slip-on' coat, which, like the dresses, was put on by slipping it over the head and securing it in position with a tie-belt (no buttons or hidden fastenings were required)[4]; the coats **55 – 57** have wrap-fronts held in place by uncomplicated belts; the skirt of **58** is a wrap-over. This approach extends to the simple gilet worn with **61**, and the wrap worn with **62**.[5]

Once again, in terms of silhouette or basic construction, there is little to differentiate the informal day models from the afternoon or evening designs. Variety is provided in all categories by altering proportions and detail. Coats vary from knee to calf-length, and hemlines are either straight, curving and uneven (cf. **13** of August 1916, **36** of February 1917, and **72** of August 1918), or cut with a side split (**64**). The V-neckline appears frequently, but square and rounded are also seen. The sailor collar, a central feature of Chanel's earliest collections, is featured alongside the shawl, scarf and standing collar. Sleeves are either flaring, narrow or, in the case of one evening design, short; cuffs are narrow or dramatically wide. Numerous widths and varieties of belts are used: the simple tie-belt, the half or back belt, and the sash (particularly for more formal designs). Although many commentators believed they were an outmoded trend, Chanel continued to include pockets and it was reported that, 'Chanel sponsors the cause of pockets in the same staunch way she has upheld jersey.'[6] For the first time a small pocket is positioned in a waistband (**54**); neater side welt pockets (like those of **33**, February 1917, and in contrast to the loosely cut, deep patch pockets of similar models – cf. **29**) are used on **58**. The cross straps of the cape of **62** underlines the designer's continued concern with elements borrowed from men's clothing or military uniforms.

Jersey, which was ideally suited to the slim-fitting silhouette, is once again a key fabric, appearing in all categories of the collection. Silk and wool jersey were used along with velours, foulard, and satin; patterned fabrics, such as checked brown and white velours, brown foulard with a white pinstripe, or rose foulard dotted with white, were also important for day wear models. Marquisette (which one commentator described as being 'as thin as a handkerchief linen but more brilliant')[7], charmeuse, satin and silk were used for the more formal afternoon and evening designs. Black and brown (which is now employed more frequently than in any previous collection) were the most common colours in all categories, followed by grey, navy blue and rose. Few trimmings were used for the less formal designs, although a considerable quantity of

lace, albeit in the same colour as the base fabric, was overlaid on the coat **53**[8]. Checked velour was overlaid on the skirt of **54** (appearing as an apron-like panel); black and white tartan trimmed the cuffs, belt and hem of **56**; rabbit fur bordered the collar, cuffs and hem of **57**. The coat **55** is unusual in that it is heavily embroidered in brown, green and gold thread. Motifs were often derived from non-European sources: perhaps in reference to **55**, British *Vogue* reported that, 'Chanel is lavish with her Chinese and Indian embroideries... she favours, even for daytime manteaux, a touch of gold embroidery on a satin coat.'[9] Embroidery (in metallic threads, wools and bolder colours such as sapphire) and steel or jet beading was also used extensively in other categories. Fur (taupe and seal) and tasselled separate panels (**66**) provided decoration and a means of alleviating the slender silhouette on the more elaborate designs.

Context

The press generally agreed that no revolutionary change had taken place this season. Nonetheless, it was acknowledged that skirts were slightly narrower and longer in all categories, and that the slimmer-fit meant that the, 'lines of the body itself dictates the mode.'[10] The *Drapers' Record* saw the new, narrower silhouette as a return to pre-war fashions:

> In Paris it is freely foretold that, after the preliminary canter of the autumn, with its four and a half metre ordinance, the skirt form will now generally revert to something like the model of the spring of 1914.[11]

However, although skirts were narrower, they did not resemble the pre-war hobble-skirts introduced by Poiret.

Chanel's collection reflected the wider fashion for the top coat and dress in preference to the tailored suit. Although most top coats were slim-fitting, Dœuillet created one example in navy blue taffeta with the wide-at-the-hips effect of the 'barrel' silhouette.[12] The 'slip-on' coat and jacket (which was thought to have originated during the August 1917 season) were also produced by Paquin, Lanvin and Jenny. The uneven hemline was also shown by Paquin, who created the effect by tucking and draping the skirt up in front. The resulting 'full at the front' effect was identified as a key trend of the spring collections and was frequently associated with Bulloz.[13] The simple chemise or tunic-style dress was seen everywhere. British *Vogue* saw Chanel's **59** as representative of

fabrics in the one design and oriental embroideries. However, it is clear that her continuing insistence on the practical and functional elements of a design – particularly pockets – set her apart from many of her competitors.

By the late summer of 1918 it was incorrectly rumoured in some quarters that the leading houses were to close. One reporter in Paris, commenting on how a friend in New York had heard such a tale, wrote:

> At first I laughed at this news, but after a little reflection I began to ask myself if the idea were not rather more important than I had thought at first glance, being, as I am, on the spot. At a distance this false report might have serious consequences; credulous people might easily place faith in the *canard*, as we call such a rumour; and who knows whether, if it were circulated in the form of accredited news, the business de luxe of France might not suffer severely? But are we not to suspect in all these unfounded tales the inextinguishable fire of German propaganda?[18]

The rumour may have been perpetuated by those amazed that the industry had survived as long into the war as it had, and pessimistic as to its short term future while the war continued. As the quotation indicates, haute couture in 1918 was still a vital industry and any threat to its well being was treated accordingly. However, its status as an essential industry was juxtaposed to the belief that fashion was wholly inappropriate at such a time. British *Vogue* reported that:

> The high authorities have been trying, this season, to keep women from buying dresses. In newspaper articles full of hidden meanings, most influential French writers have asked French women not to buy anything more, on the grounds that there are barely ships enough to transport the American troops let alone (and severely alone) materials for extensive costuming.[19]

There was something of a moral backlash against fashion. Understandably, it was seen by some as a frivolous and unnecessary distraction at a time of national crisis. Fashion journalism tried to appease the industry's critics by continually highlighting the positive ways in which it was responding to the present climate: designers were working within the limitations imposed upon them and producing designs that respected both the economic conditions and the needs of their customers. Consequently, the new slim

the 'straight and narrow way that so many dresses follow this season.'[14] The *Drapers' Record* noted that the favourite model was still the chemise or tunic:

> ... for women, having become unaccustomed to a corset, refuse to wear anything else. This style of dress is so easy to slip on and off without a maid. When the dress is not of one piece, it takes the form of a floating tunic over a narrow foud, reminding one of the dress worn by the Chinese Mandarins.[15]

The chemise and tunic dress were seen in all categories, and at times it could be difficult to distinguish a day from an evening wear design. The Chinese influence (which was associated last season with Lanvin) was now found in almost every collection.

Although jersey was synonymous with Chanel, it was successfully used by many other designers. Jenny created a tailored suit in gold jersey and Lanvin produced a dress in blue and gold silk jersey.[16] The fabric was frequently used for evening wear and, in its 20 February edition, British *Vogue* predicted that one version of the fabric, 'jersoline' ('a lovely silvery tissue used for dance frocks') would be seen more and more. Homespun, tussore, foulard, velours, and taffeta along with satin and silk were also popular and black, greys, brown and dark blue were seen at every house.

The leading designers inexhaustibly varied the slim, straight silhouette through their use of details and trimmings. All forms of collars, sleeve-types (generally long), cuffs and belts were seen (although the tie-belt was less common than the sash). Pockets were less popular, despite Chanel's continued support, and those that were seen were set flat against the fabric. The combination of two or more different textiles, fur trimming and black and white checks continued to be fashionable. Oriental styles influenced both the slim silhouette and embroidery, particularly that produced by Lanvin and Paquin. Jenny was also known for the embroidery on her designs at a time when, 'Ruffles and trims are forbidden fruit... but we may have embroidery to our hearts content.'[17] For many designers embroidery was a means of introducing colour into a design and bright, often metallic threads, were frequently used.

Chanel was clearly not the only designer to be redefining the boundaries between the traditional categories of dress, by focusing on the simple, straight and largely undecorated chemise. Nor was she alone in her use combinations of two or more

silhouette, which required a small amount of fabric, prompted the headline: 'Frocks Which Follow in the Narrow Paths Prescribed by Paris and Patriotism.'[20] Furthermore, women were advised that,

> To be inconspicuous is the most desirable thing at present, when all the women, without exception, are wearing grey or brown or dark blue, the three dominant colours of the season.[21]

Just as the slim silhouette was partly prompted by the shortage of fabrics and the need to economize, so too was it informed by the types of fabrics available: soft jerseys and silks were suitable for 'figure-hugging' lines and not the highly structured and moulded fashions of the Belle Epoque. Silks were still available and produced in Lyon, but coal and labour shortages, coupled with transportation difficulties, ensured that all fabrics were in much shorter supply.

Problems which had affected the industry since the outbreak of the war were consolidated in the spring of 1918 when the French government introduced a tax on luxuries:

> Schedules have been drawn up, and numerous articles are declared to be luxuries, irrespective of price... It is stated that a woman's hat becomes a luxury if it costs more than £1.12s., the same figure being allowed for boots. The limit allowed for a costume is £10.[22]

Despite the war, the home and foreign market for French haute couture had survived, but this measure would inevitably have a detrimental effect. Nonetheless, the determination on the part of the designers, fashion journalists and customers to continue to support and promote the industry was inflexible: as the 5 August edition of British *Vogue* announced, 'The Boche Bomb Is Yet To Be Made That Can Destroy French Chic.'[23]

---

[1] Compare **29** of February 1917 to **58**: the later design is slimmer-fitting and neater. However, although the wide-at-the-hips-effect is not seen in this collection, it was to re-emerge in Chanel's August 1918 collection.

[2] *BV* 5 April 1918, p. 25

[3] *BV* 5 April 1918, p. 54. Although the simplicity of Chanel's designs was acknowledged, it was realized that they were in fact deceptively simple: the very high quality of the workmanship involved was noted and the caption to **65** stated that, 'It looks as though almost anyone could make it – that's what proves that the designer was an artist'. (*BV* 5 April 1918, p. 54)

[4] Although in theory the slip-on coat was easier to wear than traditional button fastened styles, *BV* commented that pulling the garment over one's head was 'a difficult and far from graceful performance', although it conceded that, 'the effect is quite charming' (15 February 1918, p. 44).

[5] Both the gilet, or waistcoat, and the wrap have appeared in earlier Chanel collections: cf. **12** (February 1916) and **52** (August 1917).

[6] *BV* 15 February 1918, p. 45

[7] *BV* 15 August 1918, p. 45. Many designs in this fabric were produced by Chanel; several versions of **60** were reportedly owned by Madame Henri Letellier.

[8] *BV* referred to this lace as 'a most unusual brown wool lace'. (15 February 1918, p. 44)

[9] *BV* 15 February 1918, p. 76

[10] *BV* 1 April 1918, p. 27

[11] *DR* 12 January 1918, p. 53

[12] *BV* 1 April 1918, p. 52

[13] A Bulloz dress, featured in the 15 February edition of *BV* (p. 45), illustrates the 'full at the front' silhouette. The fabric was gathered and tucked at the front but laid flat over the hips and back; the skirt was higher at the front and narrowed towards the hem.

[14] *BV* 15 July 1918, p. 38

[15] *DR* 17 August 1918, p. 160

[16] *BV* 15 February 1918, p. 44

[17] *BV* 1 April 1918, p. 54

[18] *BV* 15 July 1918, p. 36

[19] *BV* 15 April 1918, p. 27

[20] *BV* 1 April 1918, p. 54

[21] *BV* 15 August 1918, p. 57

[22] *DR* 16 March 1918, p. 423

[23] *BV* 1 August 1918, p. 36

August 1918

Paris States her Optimism in Terms of Clothes

The twelve designs which represent this collection were reproduced from editions of British *Vogue* published between 20 September 1918 and 20 February 1919. The majority of the designs were shown on pages devoted entirely to the house. On one occasion Chanel's work was shown alongside that of Dœuillet and Lanvin.

The Collection

Five of the designs were intended for morning/street wear (**67 – 71**: five coats); two for informal day/sports wear (**72** and **73**: one top and skirt, and one dress); three for afternoon wear (**74 – 76**: three dresses); and two for evening wear (**77** and **78**: two dresses).

The dominant theme of this collection is, like that of February 1918, the slender, slim-fitting and mid-calf-length garment, with narrow-fitting, full-length sleeves, a simple belt and, in the majority of cases, a V-neckline. The designs were comparatively short, prompting one commentator to note that, 'In all of Chanel's models the underskirts are very short, coming only about six inches below the tunic.'[1] Such designs, seen in each category, were invariably simple to put on and to fasten: it was noted that Chanel, '... is particularly successful in keeping her creations practical and adapting them to the times we live in.'[2] **72**, a hip-length top and skirt, represents the principal theme of the collection in its most basic form, and the continued development of this type of ensemble within Chanel's work as a whole. The dress **73** exemplifies the parallel development of the tunic-style dress (see **59**, February 1918). The day coat **71** recalls those coats with straight, narrow silhouettes produced for the equivalent category last season. A more elaborate version of this theme is **70**: this coat (possibly a version of the 'slip-on' coat seen last collection) shows a deep side split from the waist to the hem, recalling that of the evening design **64** (February 1918). A second, minor theme, largely confined to the morning/street category, refers to the softened barrel or wide-at-the-hips effect shown in the 1917 collections.[3] This is represented by the coats **67 – 69**: each model is styled in a manner which emphasizes the width of the hips. For example, the wrap-front coat **67** has a relatively full skirt gathered into a narrow belt, and, like **68** and **69**, loosely cut, hip level pockets.

While the slender silhouette dominates the collection, some differentiation between the categories does occur. The informal models **72** and **73** feature a simple, short tie-belt and a buttoned belt respectively; the more elaborate afternoon gown **74** is typical of its category as it has a much longer, wider and more flamboyant sash. The evening designs are sleeveless and the basic silhouette is modified by the addition of front apron panels (**77**) and a floor-length train (**78** – which recalls the evening model **43** of February 1917). Chanel further ensured variety by altering the proportions and details of individual designs: different widths and lengths of belt were used not only throughout the collection, but also within categories (the double or single belt, fastened at the side, front or back). The coats are knee-length, three-quarter-length or full-length; the V-neckline may be shallow and collared, or deep and collarless. The uneven hemline, seen last season, again appears on the top of **72**. A variety of pockets were used, ranging from the patch to the inset; scarf, muffler, tailored and flat collars were all evident. Elements traditionally associated with men's wear once again feature in this collection: the tailored collar, yoked bodice, buttoned placket and belt of **73**.

Silk and wool jersey, homespun (shown for the first time in the catalogue), charmeuse, and velvet, in black, brown and red, dominated the informal day wear categories.[4] Velvet, satin, Chantilly lace and tulle, in 'crow' blue and, in the majority of cases, black, were used for the afternoon and evening designs. As in previous seasons, fur ('Péruvienne', rabbit, and kolinsky) bands the collars, cuffs and hems of the less formal designs, and is often their only form of embellishment. The shaggy appearance of the monkey fur used on **70**, and the shaped and tapered line of the castor fur on **71** provide new effects. The 'coroso' buttons of **73**, in the same shade of brown as the fabric of the dress, form the only decoration on this design. The more formal models are embroidered in colours which include brown, orange, silver and gold. New to this collection is the combination of white angora and black bead embroidery (**75**), and the white silk chenille and black jet embroidery (**76**). The embroidery on both these designs is arranged in an abstract geometrical motif on the lower skirt. The evening designs are more extensively decorated: **77** is entirely covered in wood-coloured beading and its hem is edged with zibelinette fur[5]; the entire bodice and sash of **78** is trimmed with long stretches of jet fringing (recalling that used on **66** last season).

Context

In a forecast of autumn fashions, British *Vogue* noted that, 'The latest French creations are about equally divided between the barrel silhouette and the straight, narrow line, but all the skirts are tight and many of them hobble.'[6] The silhouettes seen at Chanel's were shown at almost every other house. However, although Chanel included the wide-at-the-hips silhouette, she did not revert to the fully blown barrel line of February 1917, nor did she feature the hobble skirt. Like Chanel, houses such as Doucet and Dœuillet introduced more tempered versions of these lines. Wide-at-the-hip effects were part of an attempt to add variety to what had, some believed, become a rather dull, unexciting fashion. One report noted that, 'The silhouette on the lines of a sack is quite done with. On the contrary, slimness is now sought for.'[7] Devices used by Chanel, such as the side split (Paquin also used deep side splits that opened from the waist to the hem on certain coats), the tapering or uneven hemline, and apron panels (or long panels like those of a redingote), were widely used to modify the straight line. It was reported that at the leading houses, 'There is not a single skirt in one piece.'[8] Draperies were also a means of avoiding monotony, and the train was a favourite device for adding interest to evening wear. Many Chanel designs were comparatively short and as such in keeping with a trend identified by the *Drapers' Record*: 'For the last few years dresses have been called short, but this time they are ridiculously so.'[9] Conversely, some designers were producing ankle-length designs and were applauded by the press for having taken into consideration the 'short-topped boot' regulations.[10] Sleeve type, collar, waistline, hemline and belts were all inexhaustibly varied, although most coats had high collars and many waistlines were higher at the front than at the back.

Designers continued to work with jersey, homespun, velvet, satin and silk. Combinations of fabrics in the one design remained popular. Castor and rabbit fur were seen everywhere and the emerging craze for monkey fur was sponsored by Paquin as well as Chanel. Fur was shown in all categories, and one reporter commented that, 'Never was so much fur seen.'[11] Colours remained sober and black was widely used. It was noted that some of the dresses shown in the August collections had no trimmings whatsoever (**73** reflects this trend). Embroidery, particularly in afternoon and evening wear, was the chief means of enlivening an otherwise simple design. Embroidered motifs were often on a large-scale: anticipating the radiating sun design which would appear on Chanel's **81** of February 1919, an unattributed black velvet design, worn by the Marquise de Chabannes, was decorated with a large motif in

silver thread based on the idea of a spider's web.[12] Metallic threads, steel beads (used by Lanvin), angora, oriental-style embroidery and jet were all fashionable.

Although Chanel was willing to introduce elements (such as the side split and monkey fur) that were widely used at the other houses, she did not comply with the fashion for the more extreme versions of the narrow skirt or the barrel silhouette. Her ongoing concern for practicality and economy led to the production of some of the shortest skirts in Paris, a factor which would continue to distinguish the house in subsequent seasons.

The August 1918 collections were the last to be produced during the First World War. In general, a positive attitude prevailed and in July it was noted that, 'All the dressmaking houses will remain open and during the month of August they will invite all the buyers to visit them and admire collections as numerous and varied as those of former years.'[13] Some designers, like Chanel, did seem to flourish: during 1918 the house of Lanvin expanded and took over the whole of the building in which it was based.[14] Nonetheless, over the last six months the situation in Paris had grown considerably worse. Mr. C. S. S. Guthrie, chair of the Parisian couture house Beer, stated at the sixteenth annual meeting of the company (held in Spring 1919) that a recent fall in business was entirely due to the war conditions. He described how the situation in Paris during 1917 and 1918 was 'rendered particularly difficult by the proximity of the German armies to Paris', and that, 'The August (1918) exhibition of new designs was spoilt by shells falling within a hundred yards of their building on the first day of the exhibition.'[15] Several of the couture houses were hit in the air raids (and the shelling by 'Big Bertha', a railway mounted gun described by McMillan as being of 'huge calibre')[16], leaving shop windows and façades in ruins. The German offensive in March 1918 and the bombardment of Paris prompted many wealthy Parisians to leave the city and take refuge in towns such as Deauville or Biarritz. The industry continued to operate despite shortages, lack of labour, transportation difficulties and government restrictions: a British *Vogue* headline of the 20 September 1918 edition stated that, 'While Beauty Lives, Lives Paris: Though Shops Have No Windows And Stocks Are Underground, Paris Shows That Her Supreme Creative Qualities Remain Quite Unimpaired.'[17]

The war devastated France. By the end of the war approximately 1,356,000 Frenchmen were dead; many cities, towns, public and private buildings were destroyed. Ken Silver

has written that, 'Faced with unprecedented physical destruction, France devised a program of reconstruction that was equally without precedent, and did so with an extraordinary speed.'[18] This immediate emphasis on reconstruction and collective action bolstered the optimism that the fashion journals had attempted to sustain during the war. The tone of the fashion reports inevitably changed with the signing of the Armistice. The 20 October edition of British *Vogue* had announced that, 'Paris Creations are Keyed to Victory.'[19] Although the industry was far from returning to its pre-war conditions, a November 1918 headline claimed that: 'Paris States Her Optimism in Terms of Clothes.'[20] In November the damaged windows and façades of the couture houses were all decorated with fabrics in the colours of the allies. The December 1918 edition of *Femina* talked of 'les robes de la victoire', and described designs in 'sumptuous fabrics' which were being created by nearly all the leading houses. British *Vogue* also described how the French woman, by February 1919, 'has almost entirely dropped her war garb.'[21] As soon as the war was over, Parisian social life began to return to something of its pre-war routine and the houses received more orders for evening designs. Considerable speculation surrounded how the return to what British *Vogue* referred to as 'the gorgeousness of peace' would manifest itself in the February 1919 collections. Certainly one journalist, writing in January 1919, anticipated a return to luxury and elegance in the forthcoming collections:

> Fashion seems to have taken a step forward, or many steps, towards the luxurious, the result of our victory, which invites us all to express our joy and happiness. After four years of misery and weary waiting, Paris evidently feels a desire to return once more to that elegance and taste for which her children seem to have been born, and without which they are not, and cannot be, themselves.[22]

---

[1] *BV*.1 February 1919, p. 29

[2] *BV* 15 September 1918, p. 86

[3] The wide-at-the-hips silhouette is also evident in the afternoon ensemble **74**, where the fabric of the skirt is gathered into the belt.

[4] Chanel's latest hat designs were also shown in *BV* this season (15 September 1918, p. 60). These models were produced in black velvet, navy blue woollen braid and mauve

djersadrap, undoubtedly colours and fabrics which were also used for matching dress designs.

[5] Zibelinette fur was described by *BV* as 'one of those new furs of indefinite extraction' (15 November 1918, p. 45). It is in fact a fur derived from the zibeline, similar to the dark sable or marten fur.

[6] *BV* 1 October 1918, p. 43

[7] *DR* 28 December 1918, p. 330

[8] *BV* 15 September 1918, p. 60

[9] *DR* 21 September 1918, p. 320

[10] This regulation was a measure taken to preserve leather for military, rather than fashionable, use.

[11] *DR* 4 January 1919, p. 18

[12] *BV* 15 February 1919, p. 43

[13] *BV* 15 July 1918, p. 37

[14] See Elisabeth Barillé, *Lanvin* (London 1997), p. 9

[15] *DR* 3 May 1919, pp. 254-5

[16] James F. McMillan, *Twentieth Century France: Politics and Society, 1898-1991* (London 1992), p. 70

[17] *BV* 15 September 1918, p. 60

[18] Ken Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War* (Princeton University Press 1989), p. 187

[19] *BV* 15 October 1918, p. 60

[20] *BV* 15 November 1918, p. 44

[21] *BV* 1 February 1919, p. 30

[22] *DR* 4 January 1919, p. 18

February 1919

Victory Models and the Reconstruction of Fashion

This collection is represented by fifteen designs reproduced from editions of British *Vogue* published between 5 April and 15 September 1919. Nine were shown on three pages devoted entirely to illustrations of Chanel's work. The remaining examples were illustrated next to designs by Bulloz, Chéruit, Doucet, Jenny, Lanvin, Lucile and Renée.[1] In a major review of the recent collections shown by the Grandes Maisons entitled 'Paris Sets Forth the Mode of 1919' (and written by Jeanne Ramón Fernández), British *Vogue* discussed the work of Lanvin, Jenny and Dœuillet before that of Chanel. The lengthy report of Chanel's collection was followed by accounts of those by Worth, Premet, Martial et Armand, Renée, Paquin and Beer.

The Collection

Five were intended for morning/street wear (**79 – 83**: two coats, a coat dress and two capes – one with a dress); two for travel/sports wear (**84** and **85**: one cape and one dress); three for afternoon wear (**86 – 88**: three dresses) and four for evening wear (**89 – 92**: three dresses and one wrap). The collection also features one wedding dress (**93**). This was the first collection to be produced by Chanel after the war and the first full haute couture collection shown by the house in peace time. It includes a comparatively large proportion of formal afternoon and evening models and one of the very few wedding dress designs by the house to be shown in the British and French editions of *Vogue*.[2]

The principal theme of this collection is a continuation of that from August 1918: the straight, slim-fitting and relatively short (mid-calf-length) garment, with a loose-fitting, often low waistline, and simple neckline, which is once again both easy to put on and comfortable to wear. The emphasis was on simplicity, practicality and economy:

> Mlle. Chanel, understanding the present times and the unusual necessities of present day life, determined to keep in her models, for this season, a definite simplicity and practicality for which we are all grateful.[3]

The wide-at-the-hips effect, seen in both of the 1917 and in the August 1918 collections, is no longer evident. The tunic-style sports dress **85** is one of the simplest expressions of the theme of this collection, but the afternoon design **88** and the wedding dress **93** also share its basic silhouette. Variations on the main theme are wrought in an increasing number of ways throughout the categories. The different means of fastening and wearing the coats and coat-dress of the first category illustrates this point: **79** has front button fastening but is worn open and held in place with a half tie-belt; the coat-dress **80** would, like many of Chanel's earlier slip-on coats (**53** of February 1918 and **70** of August 1918), be pulled on over the head; **81** does not conform to any standard type of coat design – it is sleeveless and the bodice would appear to be constructed and worn as a shawl or cape. In a similar vein, Chanel has used a number of devices to alleviate the potential monotony of the slim, slender line: pleated side panels (**79** – which also ensure unrestricted leg movement); apron-like panels on skirt sections (**80** and **90**); tiered skirts (**86** – which was described by the press as a version of the popular 'petal frock', due to its fluttering, scalloped tiers); pointed floor-length drapery panels (**93**). One of the most important developments in the evening wear collection, which again serves to enliven the basic silhouette, is the use of semi-transparent fabrics to 'veil' the design (**89**). This is related to a new silhouette in the collection represented by **91**: a semi-transparent outer-layer of fabric is held over an opaque foundation dress (which has the basic silhouette central to the entire collection, but is worn over ankle-length pantalettes) by three concentric hoops, which mimic and subvert the effect and role of the traditional crinoline. This silhouette was further developed in the February 1920 collection (**115**).

Chanel's ability to rework established forms is further illustrated by the capes produced for this collection. **82** is a development on the cape-coat **49** (August 1917). This design was one of the most successful of the season and many versions were produced. One particular example was described as being like:

> ... a great pelerine closing in the front with great buttons covered with the fabric. A double scarf is thrown back over the shoulders; there are openings for the hands at either side of the front, and two great patch pockets are stitched on the front. In caroubier red or very dark green fabric this is the ideal coat for summertime bad weather and very new.[4]

A raincoat in black waterproofed fabric, resembling a coachman's or chauffeur's coat, was also reportedly produced by the house. The raincoat narrowed slightly towards the bottom and had a buttoned belt and two large patch pockets. Like **82**, its collar consisted of two straight scarf ends, approximately 12cm wide, which were wrapped around the neck and thrown over the shoulders. In reference to **83** British *Vogue* noted that, 'The form of the cape is highly original.'[5] Chanel continued to modify what were now accepted as some of her most successful designs. The cape **92** is similar to the versions above, but distinguished as an evening design through the types of detail, fabric and trimming employed.

The designs have either narrow-fitting full-length (**86**), elbow-length (**87**), or short, cap-like sleeves (**93**). The commentary on the coat **81** stated that, 'Chanel's coats, it would appear, aren't wearing sleeves anymore.'[6] The evening models are sleeveless with relatively wide shoulder straps and square décolletages. Necklines varied from the V, U-shaped or rounded. Irregular, scarf, tailored, and shawl or sailor collars are seen on the informal designs. The knotted neck-scarf of **80** appears for the first time in Chanel's collection. Cuffs varied from the tailored and buttoned, to the narrow; tie-belts and sashes differed considerably in width, and were fastened in either a loose knot, or – for evening wear – a prominent bow. Forms of dress such as the raincoat, and elements derived from men's clothing (tailored collars, cuffs, buttoned plackets, patch pockets) were again included, and it was reported that many of the blouses produced for this category were, 'attached to the skirt, which buttons on at the waistline with something like the effect of a small boy's sailor trousers.'[7].The coat **80** combined the designer's interest in male clothing with references to contemporary popular culture: the caption to the design stated that, 'The great American cowboy (as known to the movies) was the inspiration of this clever black satin coat.'[8] The range of identifiable sources is very diverse: from the cowboy inspired **80** to the Second Empire crinoline hoops of **91**.

The day wear fabrics included 'tricolette' (a soft, woollen fabric similar to jersey), serge, tricotine, velour de laine, velvet, foulard, tussore and satin, in black, grey, brown, blue and blue-green. Satin, foulard, crêpe georgette, Chantilly lace, and the semi-transparent net and tulle were favoured for the afternoon and evening designs. Combinations of fabric in one design were still important and written reports refer to one-piece afternoon dresses in satin and foulard. Although gold, taupe and sable were seen, it was noted that, 'Mlle. Chanel has confined herself almost entirely to black costumes for evening wear.'[9] Trimming on the informal models was limited to buttons, simple

horizontal seams (**79** and **84**), silk fringing (**80**), embroidery in black and white, or gold (**81**), and short lingerie-like frills (on the under collar of **83**). Many afternoon designs featured Chinese-style embroideries in dull greens and reds, which were trimmed with rabbit or squirrel fur.[10] More extensive and elaborate trimmings were once again found on the afternoon and evening designs: gold embroidery (**87**); jet tassels of (**88**); tiers of ostrich feathers (**89** – a version of this design, with a tiered skirt of 15cm. long bias cut black tulle draperies, instead of feathers, was also produced); bows (**89 – 91**); kolinsky fur (**92**).

Context

A new crop of Parisian haute couture houses opened after November 1918. Lelong established his house immediately after the war and Madame Renée (formerly the head designer at Premet), and Patou both began producing haute couture collections under their own name this year. The French designer Augusta Bernard and the English designer Edward Molyneux both opened Parisian houses in 1919.[11] Vionnet, who had closed in 1914, reopened in 1918 and showed her first collection since the war in February 1919.

Prior to the February collections, there was considerable press speculation as to what form a new post-war fashion might take: would it continue with the dominant 1918 silhouette, or would it break completely with recent styles? In a January 1919 edition of the *Drapers' Record* it was claimed that, 'now that fashion is once again reinstated on her throne, it is more than likely that we shall be in for an era of extravagant and eccentric ideas in dress.'[12] One British *Vogue* journalist wrote that:

> It is a foregone conclusion that the invention of the dressmakers, so long restrained by the necessary restrictions of materials... will take advantage of the relaxation of the present days of preparation for a speedy peace, to show us that the reign of simplicity has not affected their genius for origination. There are those who maintain that women, delighted to have been relieved of the necessity of radical changes in the mode from season to season during the war, will continue to fight the inclusion of revolutionary novelties.[13]

The narrow, unbroken silhouette of recent seasons was expected to change. Many hoped that skirts would become longer, although it was expected that women would continue to wear the short skirt for street and afternoon wear.[14] In February, British *Vogue* forecasted a return to the fashions of 1913: Poiret's Minaret tunic and the Tangara silhouette. Certainly one new day dress by Renée had a voluminous white crêpe georgette skirt overlaid with panels that were draped around the ankles in the manner of Turkish trousers.

However, as the collections were shown it became clear that the silhouette was to remain largely unchanged. One disapproving report stated that:

> Many of the first victory models have skirts which are scarcely more than knee-length. It is a mode without dignity or elegance and it is not likely to survive the first flush of extravagance.[15]

Straight, short lines and the low waist were shown by the majority of designers. Longer skirts were produced by more conservative couturiers such as Doucet and Worth. In general, there were not many designers who were prepared to exclude the type of straight silhouette sponsored by Chanel from their collections. Although Renée was producing draped, ankle-length dresses, she was also known for her short, neat 'tailleurs'. The tailored suit for morning/street wear, in serge, tweed and gabardine became increasingly popular as the season progressed, replacing the recent wartime one-piece dress and top-coat.

Initially, British *Vogue* was convinced that fashion would rid itself of the more sombre and, as the magazine saw it, at times dreary appearance that it had acquired during the war, 'It has been monotonously easy to be smart... but those dull days are over.'[16] However, as the season progressed it was apparent that the couturiers and their clients were continuing to favour simple, sober designs for morning and afternoon wear. Blacks and browns continued to be the most popular colours and the types of fabrics used remained largely unchanged. Even at the races, a traditional forum for the parade of new styles, clothing was relatively restrained. One report noted that:

> ... the women of the world went to the races to manifest their desire to contribute to the re-establishment of normal life. They were dressed with elegance, but they kept the discreet and reserved note imposed by memories of the past.[17]

It was not just the wartime emphasis on simplicity and restraint that continued to affect fashion in 1919: practical elements from men's clothing appeared in many collections and, in one review of the morning and sports wear categories, it was reported that, 'The sensational novelty of the season almost everywhere is the effect of a man's shirt or shirt front with a collar.'(e.g. Chanel 85)[18]

The anticipated return to elegance, extravagance and luxury was largely confined to formal afternoon and evening wear designs. Some houses revived the traditional afternoon 'tea gown' in rich, luxurious fabrics. One report claimed that evening wear designs were far less simple than they had recently been and that, 'the most elaborate materials obtainable are used.'[19] Chéruit in particular was praised for her heavily embroidered designs. Short sleeves, low necklines, semi-transparent and gauze-like fabrics (chiffons, silks and tulle), metallic thread embroidery, lace (particularly associated with Lucile and Chéruit) and draped and swathed skirts were all seen in the evening wear designs produced by Chanel's rivals.

Chanel was not the only designer producing models with hooped or bouffant skirts. In a review of the trend (which was to continue into 1920), British *Vogue* claimed that Callot had initiated the fashion in late 1918 when she, 'made the first "infanta" frocks for the fêtes which celebrated the signing of the armistice.'[20] Lanvin was also known for her range of hooped dancing dresses. Furthermore, Chanel was one of several houses producing versions of the 'petal frock'. These dresses, which were unlined 'so as to follow the lines of the figure without any stiffness' and had short skirts, were primarily associated with their originator Vionnet. One such Vionnet design was described as a, 'petal dress in black satin with floating draperies of black mousseline de soie – pleated and cut in very deep sharp points so that they fly with every movement of walking or dancing.'[21]

In several respects Chanel's collection mirrored those of her contemporaries. However, her determination (as British *Vogue* described it) to maintain the simplicity and practicality of her designs, implies that her approach was contrary to that of many other designers. Chanel produced designs that were labelled as 'highly original', and the references to American popular culture were not widely pursued at the other leading houses. The house did not adopt many of the more extreme styles shown in other collections. Lanvin's bouffant-style dresses were a much more faithful recreation of

Second Empire fashions than **91**: Chanel reinterpreted the fashion in her own terms, emphasizing the straight, sheath-like dress worn underneath.[22] Similarly, Turkish-style trousers, which were wrapped tightly around the ankles and recalled Poiret's pre-war fashions, did not appear in Chanel's work.

The season was marked by the desire of many couturiers to achieve a 'new' more flamboyant fashion and the lack of resources with which to create it. One commentator drew attention to an increasing problem in French haute couture:

> The couturiers are in a bustle of activity. They agree that they have never had so much to do, yet their work is greatly complicated by the excessive cost of labour, for their workers ask three or four times the wage accepted (during)... the war.[23]

Despite the fact that social life was returning to something of its pre-war schedule (although by June the cafés in the capital were still only open until 10.30pm), the high cost of living affected all aspects of life in Paris. Industry was greatly affected by the fact that, in 1919, 'it was estimated that France was short of three million workers.'[24] The 'taxe de luxe' still applied: 10% of the cost of a design was added on to a price which, by pre-war standards, was staggeringly high. Although Chanel, Jenny and Renée were noted for creating designs for travel and motoring, there were few private cars and taxis. In this context, it was perhaps inevitable that the practical and economic short, straight silhouette would continue to be worn. As women had been deprived of full evening wear during the war it is equally understandable that this category was revived: in March a journalist reported that, 'Once more the Parisienne wears the Grandes Toilettes of pre-war days.'[25] Designs appropriate to the dancing revival in Paris, such as Vionnet's 'petal frocks' and Chanel's hooped dress **91**, enjoyed a predictable vogue amongst those who could afford to participate. However, the anticipated fashion 'renaissance' did not happen on the scale envisaged by the fashion press. Although Poiret once again staged the type of glittering parties he had held prior to 1914, the shortages of materials, labour, difficulties of production and transportation, coupled with the determination of some women to hold on to the comfortable and practical outfits they had worn during the war, conspired to ensure that haute couture could not revert to its pre-war position.[26]

[1] Madame Renée had now established her own house (see Context section of this essay). Little is known of the designer and the house is not mentioned in the majority of fashion history texts. However, it was featured frequently in *Vogue*, and the designs were often illustrated next to those of Chanel.

[2] This wedding gown was also illustrated in *AV*. It has been pointed out that Chanel made the wedding dress for her sister Antoinette, who married in 1919: see Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1989), p. 24. However, there is no evidence that the design shown here was that worn by Antoinette.

[3] *BV* 20 April 1919, p. 55

[4] *BV* 20 April 1919, p. 82

[5] *BV* 20 August 1919, p. 35

[6] *BV* 20 May 1919, p. 46

[7] *BV* 20 April 1919, p. 55

[8] *BV* 5 August 1919, p. 37

[9] *BV* 20 April 1919, p. 55

[10] *BV* described in considerable detail (but did not reproduce) two afternoon models made by Chanel for the actress Vera Sergine. The journal stated that, 'many of the fashionable Parisiennes have already adopted these two models, which exactly fulfil the present need for an afternoon gown very lovely in fabric and embroidery, yet suitable for wear under a loose wrap. Chanel has accomplished this frock to perfection.' (20 April 1919, p. 82). Vera Sergine wore these designs in the production of the play *Secret* by M. Bernstein which, in April 1919, had recently re-opened at the Théâtre du Gymnase.

[11] The house of Augustabernard remained in business until Bernard's retirement in 1934. Molyneux, who had worked for Lucile, closed his house upon his retirement in 1950. Like Chanel he staged a 'comeback' in 1965, however this did not prove successful.

[12] *DR* 18 January 1919, p, 89

[13] *BV* 20 January 1919, p. 41

[14]The debate over the appropriateness of the short skirt was not confined to Britain and France. In the 15 March 1919 edition of the *DR* it was reported that, 'So far there have not been the protests here that we find taking place in America over the scanty, sleeveless, evening bodices, and the matter of short skirts.' (p. 458).

[15] *BV* 20 February 1919, p. 36

[16] *BV* 20 February 1919, p. 35

[17] *BV* 5 August 1919, p. 37

[18] *BV* 20 April 1919, p. 48

[19] *BV* 5 February 1919, p. 36

[20] *BV* 20 September 1919, p. 76

[21] *BV* 20 June 1919, p. 69

[22] In its 15 March 1919 edition the *DR* reported that, 'A new note in evening dresses is a little lace overskirt, a real crinoline, worn over a handsome skirt in lace or spangled dress.' (p. 470). This may be a description of **91**, or a version of it.

[23] *BV* 5 April 1919, p. 44

[24] James F. McMillan, *Twentieth Century France: Politics and Society, 1898-1991* (London 1992), p. 79

[25] *BV* 5 March 1919, p. 52

[26] See Ken Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton University Press 1989), p. 226. Silver notes that Poiret staged parties on the night of the Armistice and on the night of the signing of the Treaty of Versailles (14 July 1919).

August 1919

Post-War Delirium and Fashion Eclecticism.

Ten designs, shown in editions of British *Vogue* published between 5 October 1919 and 5 March 1920, represent this collection. Four were shown on two pages devoted entirely to Chanel. The remaining models were illustrated next to those by Callot Sœurs, Chéruit, Jenny and Renée. The main British *Vogue* review of the August shows (written by Margaret Case Harriman and published on 20 November) included a detailed survey of this collection. Chanel was one of the first houses to be discussed, (following Paquin and Madeleine et Madeleine).[1]

The Collection

Four were intended for morning/street wear (**94 – 97**: one top and skirt ensemble two coats and a coat-dress); two for afternoon wear (**98** and **99**: one dress and one cape); and four for evening wear (**100 – 103**: one cape and three dresses). It was noted in a November 1919 review that the house had shown a comparatively small autumn/winter collection.[2] This would explain the rather limited selection of Chanel designs shown in British *Vogue* over this period.

One review of the collection claimed that, 'Part of Chanel's success is her mastery of simplicity as an art.'[3] Although two main silhouettes (shown in both the day and evening wear categories) were shown, the collection was united through the simplicity and practicality of its designs. The first and dominant theme is the uncomplicated, slim-fitting and short (mid-calf-length) garment with a simple neckline and a loosely belted waist (positioned either on, or a little below, the natural level). This is represented in its most basic form by the morning/street cape and skirt **95**, but also by the more formal coat-dress **97** and the evening dress **102**. The one-piece dress **98** is a more elaborate statement of this theme: it includes pannier-like effects on the sides of the skirt which refer back to the wide-at-the-hips silhouette of previous seasons. The second theme is the garment with a straight bodice, natural waistline, and a bell-shaped skirt (the shape of the skirt is formed by stiffening, wiring or crinoline-style hoops, recalling the evening design **91** of February 1919). This is represented by **94** and **101** (an evening dress which was one of the most successful of the season and repeatedly ordered in a number of colours from the house).[4]

Although it was generally agreed that this collection did not differ greatly from that shown in February, it was still thought to be remarkably fresh, unique and innovative: 'as a whole, the collection differs entirely from anything else shown in Paris at the same time.'[5] Despite working with a limited number of themes, Chanel constantly reworked the proportions and details of a design to ensure its novelty. This is illustrated by the capes: **95** is slim-fitting and hip-length; **96** hangs straight but is fuller and calf-length with an uneven hemline; **100** hangs straight from the shoulders to the mid-calf and has a flat collar.[6] Similarly, the waistline fluctuates from a little above (**97**), to just on (**98**), and to a little below (**103**) the natural level. The usual variety of necklines and collars are seen: from the collared V-neckline, to the high fur scarf collar, and the low, square or oval back décolletage (for evening only). Sleeves are either full-length and narrow, elbow-length or non-existent. The simple tie-belt and sash are still seen, although the leather belt (**98**) and fringed sash (**100**) are new to this collection. The ruffled, pleated or fringed waistband or sash (on **98** – **100**) provides an alternative to the more straightforward tie-belt. The simple, slender line of **103** is modified by the ruffled side draperies that fall to the floor, a device which was used on several occasions in this collection.[7] Men's clothing influenced the shirt-like front of **94**, the tie-belts and neck-ties. Second Empire fashions and traditional Spanish costume may have inspired the hooped skirts and the fringed cape.

The fabrics for informal day wear designs included wool jersey and satin in black, grey, beige and dark blue. Taffeta and velvet, in brown and taupe, were used for the afternoon models, and velvet, tulle, crêpe de Chine and net, in black, mauve, jade green and écru, were seen for evening. Trimming was once again kept to a minimum on the less formal designs: beaver, monkey, grey fox and rabbit fur were used to edge the neck and hemlines. Fur trimming is applied in deeper bands on the capes. Simple chemise dresses were frequently embroidered in brown, red and cream coloured threads. The only trimming on **98** is provided by the black and white leather belt. The feathered effect of the monkey fur on **97** gives a more elaborate feel to this more formal design. The evening designs were decorated with ostrich fringing (the fringed and tiered effect of **100** recalls that of **89**, February 1919), silver thread embroidery, ruffled tulle and side draperies.

Context

In October British *Vogue* stated that individualism was the overriding tendency in fashion. A wide variety of silhouettes, drawn from a diverse range of geographical and historical sources, co-existed in the August 1919 collections. Consequently, the monopoly of the straight and the short was thought by some to be on the wane: in December, the *Drapers' Record* claimed that, '... the straight line is quite over, the fuller hip effect being maintained on everything.'[8] One reporter noted that:

> The most typical feature of the mode at the moment is its catholicity: when on the same evening, one woman may wear the hoops of a Vélazquez portrait, and another may wear velvet swathed so tightly around the body that she can hardly put one foot in front of the other, and when they are both gowned unmistakably in the fashion, how can any one silhouette be said to be in the mode?[9]

Designs such as **94**, **82**, **101** and **103** illustrate the diverse range of silhouettes shown by Chanel. Nonetheless, she did not go to the extreme of the ridiculously wide crinoline or the restrictively narrow skirt. Many other houses did experiment with more elaborate styles and forms of construction:

> There is not a collection which does not use some form of pannier; many of the Grandes Maisons use circlettes, as hoops are known in Paris; many display individual and ingenious ways of widening the outline at the hips.[10]

Like Chanel, Jenny was noted for being 'versed in the arts of simplicity', and produced what were referred to as 'severe' little tailleurs.[11] However, she also created bell-shaped gowns which were circled with wired bands of fur.[12] Lanvin, who was famous for her hooped designs, went further and reintroduced the bustle: one taffeta dress had a double puff of silk gathered in the back over a ribbon of red beads (a sceptical British *Vogue* report noted that, 'It remains to be seen, of course, whether women will adopt and popularize it, but here it is'.)[13] Accordingly, the fashion press debated the possibility of wide skirts for daytime. Although hooped tunics worn over narrow skirts (along the lines of Chanel's **94**) were quite common, the majority of commentators did not believe that the hooped dress or crinoline would be worn again during the day. One reporter argued that:

> ... modern life demands that our street clothes put the practical above the pictorial in importance, and such unchangeable things as automobile doors, trains and other modern conveniences make exaggerated skirts an impossibility for day time wear.[14]

The neat tailleur, of short skirt and neat-fitting masculine jacket (often with a plain collar, notched revers, breast pocket, buttoned cuffs and flatly set-in sleeves), became increasingly popular for morning/street wear. Doucet's version included a long coat derived from Louis XV models. This was slightly nipped in at the waist with a decorative detail at the hips and large pocket flaps. In general, suits and the popular coat-dresses tended to have a tailored appearance and street wear was more or less straight (pleats ensured ease of leg movement). Only the more restrained versions of hip extensions or panniers appeared on daytime models: like Chanel's 98, they did not detract from the slender silhouette. Although skirts were longer for afternoon and evening, they remained short for street wear. Waistlines were generally low and supple. Despite Chanel's continued use of the chemise, it was thought to be decreasing in popularity. All kinds of capes were seen in all categories of dress, and the press noted that, if the fashion for wide skirts continued, their popularity would inevitably increase.

More elaborate and sumptuous designs were produced for evening and the *Drapers' Record* pointed out that, 'The return of evening dress modes has been signalized by a remarkable riot of extravagance and colour.'[15] Wide skirts on a close-fitting bodice, the 'barrel' line, the hooped dress and closely draped and trained gowns were seen everywhere. Many designers featured very low décolletages although, as the *Drapers' Record* remarked, 'it is only the few who adopt these daring models, and most retailers state that their customers invariably insist upon modifications and additions to these frocks to make them wearable.'[16] Designers drew on an even wider range of historical and geographical sources for this category. Lanvin's evening designs were inspired by the paintings of Goya, and Louis XV or XVI styles were featured at several houses. Poiret's collection referred to Moroccan and Algerian sources, as well as 'the soft pleats of the time of Jeanne D'Arc.'[17] Dœuillet was noted for reviving the 1880s basque and Jenny had introduced dresses based on Greek models.

The most common day wear fabrics included jersey, duvetyn, kasha, serge, velvet, charmeuse and satin. Taffeta, crêpe de Chine, metallic fabrics and mousseline de soie were also favoured for afternoon and evening wear. Just as Chanel was introducing

brighter colours into her evening wear range, so too were the other Parisian houses beginning to employ vivid tones: greens, reds and blues were particularly popular. The *Drapers' Record* reported that, 'All the evening dresses at present are a mass of tulle covered with ribbons or flounces – sometimes both.'[18] Although Chanel was one of many designers producing hooped dresses she did not layer the skirts with large quantities of trimming. One fashionable design, unlike any produced by Chanel, consisted of a 'narrow *fourreau*, in plain material, under a short skirt in tulle, mousseline de soie, lace or some other flimsy material, standing well out *en crinoline*, and trimmed with bunches of small flowers.'[19] Many houses used great quantities of ribbons, jet, fur, flowers, ostrich feathers, sequins, frills, draperies and all sorts of lace to adorn their designs. Leather trimmings and belts were a prominent feature, adding colour and detail to individual designs. Although embroidery did not appear in the collections to the same extent as in previous years, it was considered to be something of a specialty at Chéruit and Callot.

Despite Chanel's inclusion of pannier-like effects and hooped skirts, her designs were clearly not as extreme as those of her competitors. Consequently, the house's collection was considered to be unique. Chanel's comparatively restrained interpretation of the crinoline silhouette did not detract from the main theme of her collection: the simple, practical and comfortable design.

Many reviewers believed that the current eclecticism was not in keeping with the realities of modern life. The *Drapers' Record* explained the more eccentric styles as a symptom of the post-war relief and exuberance of the couturiers:

> The dress designers in Paris still seem in a sort of delirium in which nothing is too fantastical, or extreme, or daring to be possible. Fortunately our own designers are working along saner paths, and have modified the new modes so that they can be generally adopted.[20]

However, extravagance in dress was largely confined to evening designs as restrictions on materials still applied: both the hooped skirts and panniers (which were cut in one with the dress) required large quantities of fabric. Prices continued to rise and labour shortages continued to hamper the industry. One form of dress that some believed had benefited directly from contemporary circumstances was the tailleur: following

demobilization there were once again sufficient tailors to cater for the demand for smart, neat suits.

Many thought that fashion would not continue along its present course and reports published towards the end of the season commented on the refusal of many women to adopt wholeheartedly the new, more flamboyant styles. In December 1919 the growing reaction against eclecticism and elaboration was discussed in the *Drapers' Record*:

> We read that in Paris the foremost social circles are uniting to discourage the love of luxury in their midst, and to encourage more simple dressing... Their influence may make itself felt in the coming modes for spring.[21]

---

[1] Madeleine et Madeleine was opened in 1919. One of its co-founders, Mlle. Madeleine, had worked with Drécoll. The house is barely remembered to day, but received considerable coverage during the 1920s.

[2] *BV* 20 November 1919, p. 44

[3] *BV* 15 November 1919, p. 48. This comment was made in reference to Chanel's **103.** A second report in the periodical claimed that Chanel's coats, capes and dresses were 'simplicity itself.' (15 November 1919, p. 44)

[4] Chanel reportedly produced several other versions of the hooped evening dress this season. One such model was of black tulle embroidered in squares of silver and decorated with silver fringing. The hoop was positioned at the hem to give the desired effect of a 'spreading bell.' *BV* 15 November 1919, p. 44

[5] *BV* 20 November 1919, p. 44

[6] A similar (unattributed) design to **100** appeared in the 28 June 1919, p. 705 edition of *DR*. It was in cashmere de soie and had three horizontal tiers of black silk fringing on a cape worn over a dress with a wide sash fringed in the same manner.

[7] **103** was one of the most popular models of the season – a similar version in black tulle was detailed at the side seams with cascades of pale blue and black tulle and the front was embroidered 'in arabesques of pale blue iridescent spangles.'(*BV* 20 November 1919, p. 44)

[8] *DR* 6 December 1919, p. 615

[9] *BV* 5 October 1959, p. 59

[10] *BV* 5 November 1919, p. 43. Popular hip extensions included panniers, cartridge pleats and cascades of fabric down the side seam.

[11] *BV* 5 January 1920, p. 41

[12] *DR* 6 December 1919, p. 617. The actress Mlle. Ventura wore a grey mousseline de soie hooped dress by Jenny for her role in the play *La Voile Déchiré* at the Comédie-Française. It featured small tassels in grey and cherry coloured silks which fell down the front and picked out the colours of the sash. The bodice was in plain mousseline with a low, round décolletage and a fur collar.

[13] *BV* 5 October 1919, p. 59

[14] *BV* 20 October 1919, p. 54

[15] *DR* 22 November 1919, p. 462

[16] *DR* 22 November 1919, p. 462

[17] *BV* 5 November 1919, p. 43

[18] *DR* 18 October 1919, p. 139

[19] *DR* 6 December 1919, p. 617

[20] *DR* 13 September 1919, p. 551

[21] *DR* 27 December 1919, p. 815

February 1920

The Call for Restraint

This collection is represented by fourteen designs reproduced from editions of British *Vogue* published between 20 April and 5 September 1920. The collection was shown early in February and it was reported that, '... Chanel's advance showing of her new models... stole a march on all the other houses.'[1] Nine of the designs were shown in the recently launched French *Vogue* (in each case the design was shown in the British edition of the periodical first).[2] Only five of the designs in British *Vogue* were shown alongside models from other houses: Doucet, Lanvin, Madeleine et Madeleine, and Martial et Armand.

The Collection

Four models were intended for morning/street or travel wear (**104 – 107**: four dresses worn with a cape, a jacket and two coats); six for afternoon (**108 – 113**: six dresses – three worn with capes); and four for evening (**114 – 117**: four dresses, one worn with a cape).

The house of Chanel was repeatedly praised for its practical, comfortable designs, which were considered highly appropriate for the lifestyle of the contemporary woman: Chanel was thought to have 'such an extraordinary perception of the woman of today.'[3] The main theme of the entire collection was the simple, straight and short garment with a narrowly pleated skirt (to ensure both the straight line of the silhouette and the woman's ease of movement), an uncomplicated neckline, and a waistline positioned on or a little below the natural level and marked by a tie-belt. This is represented in its most basic form by the informal jacket and dress **105**.[4] Chanel's concern with simplicity and economy is further expressed in the series of successful capes produced for both afternoon and evening wear: **111 – 114**.[5] Here, the garment is reduced to two basic elements: a wide horizontal band, which sits neatly around the shoulders and is fastened at the front, and a vertical drop of plain fabric, which is sewn and gathered into the band.

The bell-shaped silhouette of the 1919 collections is now limited to evening wear and represented by one design: **115** (referred to as the *Mock Crinoline*[6]). This represents

Chanel's definitive statement on a theme initiated in her work by the hooped evening dress **91** (February 1919), and continued in the day model **94**, and the evening dress **101** (August 1919). By removing all extraneous elements, such as the frilled pantalettes of **91**, the designer has subverted the traditional meaning and function of the crinoline: it is transformed from underwear to outer-wear, from a concealed to a visible element.[7] Chanel exploited both the crinoline's inherent movement (the design was specifically intended for dancing) and its visual impression of lightness, whilst at the same time ensuring it was neither cumbersome nor restrictive: British *Vogue* was careful to illustrate a woman sitting down in this design and noted that,

> ... very amusing is the effect of the frock when the wearer sits down, as the bell collapses about her like a pricked bubble. The surprise is piquant when she stands again and this reveals the large proportions of the skirt.[8]

By juxtaposing the semi-transparent crinoline to the black, tubular sheath-dress beneath (which anticipates the silhouette of many of Chanel's subsequent designs), she has simultaneously subverted and re-articulated the crinoline within the terms of modern dress.

More subtle devices were generally employed to modify the straight, simple silhouette in all categories. Tiered skirts (**104** and **117**), pleated panels (**106**), apron, basque or peplum-like effects (**108** and **110**), and side drapery panels (**109**), in the same fabric as the main body of the design, were all employed. Sleeves for day wear varied from narrow-fitting full-length, to elbow-length and short. Round, square and V-necklines were all shown. Evening dresses were invariably sleeveless, with low, square décolletages and narrow, sometimes double, shoulder straps. The tie-belts differ considerably in width and are fastened at either the front, back or sides. Pockets (breast and side welt) were included only on the more informal designs. Men's wear continued to influence Chanel's work. Two contemporary photographs of Chanel show her wearing her own sports models which included a pocketed, cardigan-like jacket and, in one example, a sports cape which is reportedly based on those worn by American YMCA volunteers: it is secured across the chest by two diagonal straps (and thus refers back to **62** of February 1918).[9]

Crêpe de Chine is used for the majority of the designs in the collection. The afternoon dress **108** is in what British *Vogue* refers to as a Jacquard crêpe de Chine overlaid with

strips of glazed satin ribbon to give a plaid effect. Serge and tricotine (for the more informal models), satin, taffeta and foulard were also used, and it was reported that 'Chanel is using bengaline', a sort of fine silk poplin.[10] These thin, lightweight and silken fabrics were ideal for summer designs. Some evening models were produced in lace. A July 1920 edition of *L'Art et la Mode* showed a short sleeved black Chantilly lace dress, with a square décolletage and a lace sash at the natural waistline.[11] The most prevalent colours were black, grey, beige, sand, blue and jade green, .

In the majority of cases, few trimmings were used, a point which was frequently remarked upon by the press. On the less formal designs, bands of picot-edged fringing, fur trim (**104**), contrasting facings (**105**), glazed satin ribbon trim (**107** and **108**), and narrow frills of organdie (edging the neckline, sleeves, waistband, apron panels and hem of **110**) were the only forms of embellishment. The designs in the catalogue were typical: in July 1920 British *Vogue* stated that Chanel's 'little summer frocks' were 'fashioned on straight, loose lines with pleated frills or soft cascades of the material at the side.'[12] The house was known for its 'very simple, beautifully cut afternoon gowns all in one colour, with no trimming, but floating panels and sometimes short capes or cape-like collars in the back.'[13] A floating black ribbon, which could be caught around the wrist, was the principal decoration on **115**. British *Vogue* identified **116** as a typical example of Chanel's evening designs: 'all line, no trimming and marked by their simplicity.'[14] It was noted that **117** 'has not even a ribbon as trimming.... Across the front there is a short basque of the crêpe de Chine, arranged to fall in soft folds at the sides. That is all.'[15] However, one dress was described as being decorated with 'black silk embroidery and black waterproof paint' (the embroidered motif was enhanced with hand-painted details).[16] *L'Art et la Mode* illustrated a three-quarter-length wrap in taupe Chantilly lace embroidered in gold and with a mole fur collar, further indicating that more elaborately decorated models were being produced.[17]

Context

In February British *Vogue* announced that: 'Paris predicts not one but many modes... individualism is rampant.'[18] The eclecticism of the August 1919 collections looked set to continue into the summer of 1920. Nonetheless, like Chanel, few houses incorporated last season's more flamboyant silhouettes into their less formal categories. The wide-at-the-hips effect was much less noticeable. Although the neat tailleur was

seen in several collections, some designers, like Dœuillet, chose not to include it, leading the press to speculate about its future. An increasingly popular alternative was the dress (either a chemise or a two-piece) worn with a matching coat or cape. As a result, British *Vogue* reported that 'Frocks with their very own capes are masquerading in Paris this season as tailleurs.'[19] Street clothes were generally straight with short, pleated skirts. Travel or motoring costumes, based along the same lines as the morning/street wear designs, were featured in many of the collections.

Afternoon designs tended to be in soft, filmy fabrics with slightly longer skirts, loose waistlines and short sleeves. Draperies, panels and apron-like effects were common. The evening collections included more extreme and extravagant designs. Lanvin, who had re-introduced the bustle in August 1919, developed the style into a new silhouette referred to as the 'robe à pouf'. This line was quickly adopted by houses such as Premet. Dresses which recalled the fashions of the 1880s (with basque effects, dropped waistlines and pleated skirts) were also shown. However, as these designs were worn on the 'uncorseted' figure, the 1880s hour glass silhouette was not revived. Worth produced three evening silhouettes: *Vestale*, a classically draped gown in white crêpe georgette; *Sultane*, which featured a bouffant skirt and a train; *Chrysis*, a straight design in black crêpe georgette with a train. Poiret continued to work with elaborate hip extensions: the design *Seranella*, in dull yellow tussore, had a widely extended skirt and a bodice ending in a deep point, 'in a fashion which reminds one of the women's costume in the time of Henri IV.'[20] Many houses produced hooped or crinolined skirts, however, few were as radical as Chanel's **115**:

> The only hoop frock shown by Jenny was a giddy gold affair called *Ballerine*. Over a straight sheathing slip of gold tissue hangs a gold net over dress, twice hooped and circled round with garlands of crimson velvet roses and garlands of gold roses.[21]

The layers of trimming on Jenny's design brought it in line with the hooped dresses of the Belle Epoque, a move which seemed retrogressive to British *Vogue* : 'the mode will never conquer jazz land. It's first rustle must send us back, back to the weary piano.'[22] In contrast, the *Mock Crinoline* would not have seemed incongruous in 1920s Paris: the sleek lines of the tubular sheath dress and the plain, untrimmed surface of the crinoline were far removed from Jenny's conception of the fashion. The press identified such differences in approach between Chanel and many of her rivals: in

reference to **114** and **117** one reporter wrote that, 'There is an indescribable charm about these simple Chanel models, which keeps her clients faithful to them in spite of all the novelties offered elsewhere in such profusion.'[23]

The key fabrics included foulard, serge, kasha, crêpe de Chine, taffeta, organdie and silks. Plaid effects, some glazed fabrics and combinations of two materials in the one design were popular. The prominence of the silk fabrics was explained as a result of its ability to adapt itself 'so easily to the graceful modes of the day.'[24] Such fabrics were ideal for slim-fitting and figure-revealing designs. Colours were largely unchanged from last season; black, gold and silver metal cloths were popular for evening. Trimmings included embroidery (particularly Oriental styles), pleated ruffles and ruches, monkey fur, fringing and lingerie details. Lace was becoming fashionable again and one report noted that, 'Paul Maresco, head of one of the leading lace houses in France, states that the great couturiers have bought more lavishly than ever of his collection for the spring.'[25]. One trend, shown by Worth, Premet and Beer, consisted of rows of 'paillettes' (sequins) which had been lacquered in patterns with ordinary enamel paint.

Chanel did adopt many of the details and trimmings shown by the other leading designers. However, it is clear that, despite the numerous and more elaborate styles available at the other houses, the continuing simplicity of her work was perceived as being unique. This is underlined by the fact that press reports continually emphasized the lack of trimmings on Chanel's work.

The houses of Worth, Martial et Armand and Jenny produced particularly large collections this season, suggesting that the industry had stabilized after the war.[26] However, the cost of living in France continued to rise and the price of haute couture was particularly high. A simple serge dress, detailed with a little embroidery, could cost 1,700 French francs: one journalist commented that, 'assuredly it is very expensive, but what is one to do when materials cost from 80 to 100 francs a metre – a price that would formerly have bought the finest fabrics of Lyons from the famous looms?'[27] The price of taffeta, which appeared in many collections, had, by April 1920, reached 'fabulous proportions'. The popularity of silk fabrics this season was undoubtedly also prompted by their relative affordability.

There was a growing reaction in 1920 against what some considered to be the overly flamboyant nature of the August 1919 collections. In January the *Drapers' Record* stated that:

> The general impression about the fashions for 1920 as they are being evolved is that styles, on the whole, are more moderate, and there seems to have come a turn in the tide of dress that, steadily diverted in the right direction, will lead to a period of reason and consistency. The craving for something impossibly and supernaturally wonderful every hour of the day is on the wane.[28]

This call for restraint – for a return to the simplicity and sobriety of fashions produced during the war – was echoed in British *Vogue*. It seemed inappropriate, at a time of continued economic and political difficulty, that fashion should once again adopt elaborate pre-war styles. For British *Vogue*, designs such as Chanel's **117** represented the most responsible direction for contemporary fashion:

> Smart Parisiennes consider a frock of this type almost an essential of their wardrobes, especially at this time when students of economics are urging the suppression of luxury as the salvation of their country.

Of course, the great irony was that a Chanel design, no matter how simple in appearance, was extremely expensive. It was ultimately this that guaranteed Chanel's success: she provided the client with an outward appearance of restraint and responsibility, whilst satisfying their desire for exclusivity and quality.

---

[1] *BV* 1 April 1920, p. 71

[2] The launch of French *Vogue* (hereafter referred to as *FV*) is discussed in the Introduction.

[3] *BV* 1 August 1920, p. 28

[4] The straight, neat silhouette of this design was shared by other models intended for morning/street wear and described in detail by *BV*: 'An interesting idea of Chanel's is to make a summer suit of satin or taffeta with a short square jacket and a skirt which mounts under the jacket in a sort of sleeveless camisole effect. For town, where one is

forced to keep on a jacket, this idea is an excellent one for warm weather. The straight band of the stuff which composes all the bodice there is held over the shoulders by bretelles which cross at the back. Chanel shows this idea in black satin, the jacket perfectly straight, with pockets at the sides, and the skirt with a gathered apron across the front.' (1 July 1920, p. 30)

[5] *BV*, in reference to **114**, stated that, 'This variation of the cape has had a great success, and, in fact, is seen more than any other form.' (1 August 1920, p. 28)

[6] Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and her World* (London 1981), p. 128

[7] See Alice Mackrell, *Coco Chanel* (London 1992), p. 39. Mackrell used the *mock crinoline* as an example of a Chanel design that 'defied convention and introduced humour into her early collections.' She also points out that Lagerfeld produced a version of the *mock crinoline* for his Autumn/Winter 1988-89 collection for Chanel.

[8] *BV* 1 July 1920, p. 30

[9] See Charles-Roux, op. cit. p. 125, Chanel, Biarritz, summer 1920, and p. 128, Chanel, Garches, summer 1920.

[10] *BV* 1 May 1920, p. 47

[11] *L'Art et la Mode* No. 27. 3 July 1920, p. 484. This design had a calf-length skirt with a scalloped flounce on the front and pointed side draperies. A large artificial flower was positioned on the right side of the sash.

[12] *BV* 1 July 1920, p. 30

[13] *BV* 15 April 1920, p. 47

[14] *BV* 1 May 1920, p. 57

[15] *BV* 1 July 1920, p. 30

[16] *BV* 15 May 1920, p. 102. This design was discussed, but not illustrated, in the periodical.

[17] *L'Art et la Mode* No. 27, 3 July 1920, p. 488. This design is also reproduced in JoAnne Olian, *Authentic French Fashions of the Twenties: 413 Costume Designs from L'Art et la Mode* (New York 1990), p. 12.

[18] *BV* 15 February 1920, p. 33

[19] *BV* 1 May 1920, p. 59

[20] *BV* 15 April 1920, p. 94

[21] *BV* 15 April 1920, p. 50

[22] *BV* 15 March 1920, p. 73

[23] *BV* 1 July 1920, p. 30

[24] *BV* 15 April 1920, p. 44

[25] *BV* 1 April 1920, p. 71

[26] Jenny's February 1920 collection was reported to be 'one of the largest of all the spring collections... which numbered 350 gowns.' (*BV* 15 April 1920, p. 45)

[27] *BV* 1 June 1920, p. 87

[28] *DR* 31 January 1920, p. 301

August 1920

The 'Freakish Mode' Gives Way

Twenty designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 5 October 1920 and 5 February 1921, represent this collection. Each model was illustrated first in the British and subsequently in the French edition of the periodical (underlining French *Vogue*'s initial lack of autonomy).[1] Fifteen of the designs were shown on pages devoted to illustrations of Chanel's work. The remaining five were illustrated alongside work by Callot, Chéruit, Dœuillet, Lanvin, Madeleine et Madeleine and Poiret.

The Collection

Six were appropriate for morning/street wear (**118 – 123**: four coats and two dresses); one for sports wear (**124**: a cape); two for afternoon wear (**125** and **126**: one suit and one dress); and eleven for evening wear (**127 – 137**: ten dresses and one cape).

This season, Chanel was noted for designs that followed 'the lines of the normal figure.'[2] Once again, the basic theme which underpins this collection is the simple, straight (sometimes clinging), and short garment with an uncomplicated neckline and a waistline positioned either on or a little below the natural level. Although this line is evident in all categories, one of the simplest expressions of it is the evening dress **128**, indicating the unity of Chanel's approach towards the design of her entire collection. Two minor themes are also shown: the garment with a slim-fitting bodice and comparatively full skirt (recalling the bell-like and stiffened skirts of 1919 and February 1920), and the garment which emphasizes the width at the hips (recalling the wide-at-the-hips effects seen in several previous collections). The first is represented by the coat **122** and its accompanying dress **123**: no stiffening devices were used, instead the fullness in the coat's skirt is created by gathering the thick, quilted fabric and trimming it with prominent horizontal bands of fur. It was noted that in some designs 'fullness is drawn to the sides and held by a button or strap – this fullness perceptibly increases the width at the hips.'[3] The second minor theme is represented by the afternoon dress **126**: its overskirt (sewn into the waistband) drops down in a curving line over the hips to create wide, hip-level side pockets.

Numerous devices were employed throughout the collection to modify and vary the basic slim-fitting silhouette: curving waistbands and seams (**119**), side drapery panels or wings (**119** and **127**), attached capes (**121**, **123** and **137**), outer-layers of a semi-transparent fabric (**123**, **131** and **136**), prominent pockets (**125**), apron panels (**129**), short peplums (**134** and **135**), and pointed skirt panels or draperies which created an uneven hemline (**132** and **137**).[4] Although the basic silhouette remains constant throughout the collection, many of the evening designs are a little longer and sleeveless with low, square décolletages. In general, sleeves are either narrow and full-length, or short (although it was reported that the sleeves of several of Chanel's coats were 'sometimes large at the bottom, but without exaggeration').[5] A great variety of collars were used: shawl (**118** – many new Chanel coats had wrap fronts which 'opened along the familiar shawl lines.')[6], high fur (**120**), and – new to this collection – a quilted roll collar with an attached shoulder cape (**121**).[7] The open-fronted bodice, secured with a bow, and the puffed, Medici-style collar with attached cape of **126** are also new developments. The square neckline is now seen as frequently on day wear models as on evening models. Narrow tie-belts, fastened at either the front, back or side, continued to be the preferred means of securing a garment (only the sports cape **124** has visible button fastening). The wrap-front coats do not appear to have pockets; the sports cape includes deep patch pockets and the two afternoon models both have unusually cut, deep side pockets. References to men's wear included the deep patch pockets and large buttons of **124**. Pantalettes (shown with **90** of February 1919) reappeared on the evening design **137**.

The day wear fabrics included crêpe de Chine, brocade crêpe, charmeuse, satin, chiffon, silk and wool velours. Just as in the previous collections, the 'clinging' quality of many of the fabrics helped ensure the slim-fitting silhouette: in fact, the British *Vogue* report on **120** described, 'A back which follows the lines of the figure without the assistance of seams.'[8] Thick homespun was used for sports wear. No new colours were introduced: the usual black, white, grey and blue were all shown (reviews noted that the majority of Chanel's tailored suits were in black, beige or grey). A silk figured with black, white and green was used for the afternoon model **126**. All of the evening fabrics had appeared in earlier collections: velvet, satin, crêpe de Chine, chiffon, chenille, silk and lace (particularly Venetian and Chantilly lace). Black, metallic embroidered fabrics, écru, rose and brown fabrics were all featured.

The few trimmings that were used on the less formal models served both to provide decoration and extra warmth: the quilted satin and charmeuse of **121** and **122**, the ermine, fox and skunk fur on the collars, cuffs and skirts of the coats. Nutria fur was overlaid on a large section of the skirt of **125**. The raised pattern of the white brocade and the triangular side-panels of **119** provided new forms of decoration. More elaborate and extensive trimmings were shown for evening: embroidery (red and beige was particularly popular), jet, lace, beading, fringing and monkey fur. Charles-Roux believed that the embroidery on **127** is typical of that used during 1922: the height of what has been referred to as Chanel's Russian Period.[9] A written report described 'a new type of embroidery' in Chanel's collection, and noted that:

> Many gowns have a single flounce on the skirt embroidered with a pattern of large leaves which suggest ferns... the leaves are in soft neutral tones. The impression is that one is looking through an aquarium or the magnifying glass of some learned botanist. It is a very new note, this embroidery in faded blues and beige, and gives great richness to a costume without rendering it in any way striking.[10]

Otter and sable fur were favoured for evening wraps. The zig-zag pattern was featured on both the cape **130** and the dress **132**, where it complemented the triangular and pointed panels of the skirt itself (anticipating the increased use of geometric forms in Chanel's work throughout the 1920s). Artificial flowers, which were shown last season and would be used on many subsequent designs, appeared on two of the models in this collection.

<u>Context</u>

Once again the press noted that Chanel's August 1920 collection did not differ significantly from those of recent seasons:

> Conservatism and impeccable taste mark the collection shown by Chanel. This house shows no striking novelties, sponsors no daring or extreme modes, but presents eminently wearable and well-designed costumes.[11]

This mirrored more general trends. Although considerable diversity was evident, it was generally agreed that no radical or dramatic change had taken place. The *Drapers' Record* stated that:

> Variety and contrasts of styles are again a notable feature, with no very extreme note, but rather a blending of the best characteristics of the styles that have pervaded in the past two years.[12]

British *Vogue* continually referred to Chanel's designs as conservative and sober. Such 'avoidance of extremes' was thought to result not only in the wearability of her designs, but also in their suitability for a wide variety of occasions. Nonetheless, Chanel was not the only designer to insist repeatedly on the straight, simple and uncomplicated silhouette. British *Vogue* reported that the Maison Renée '... advocates no change in the straight lines of the silhouette.'[13] Vionnet similarly concentrated on the, 'absolutely straight frock, which looks like a uniform of some religious order... Her latest tailored suits also are of extreme simplicity.'[14] This approach was widely applauded and one headline proclaimed:

> The simplicity of mastery: smart Paris wears costumes that are an achievement in simplicity that only the greatest of French couturiers would dare attempt.[15]

In general, the straight, slim-hipped and loose-waisted silhouette was the most common, and the lines of the wider silhouettes were generally less extreme. Although some designers, such as Poiret and Lanvin, continued to show more dramatic wide-at-the-hips effects with, in some cases, very loose, full skirts (Poiret being said to have 'no use for straight lines and sheath effects')[16], others, such as Molyneux, had rejected the pannier and returned to 'slender, supple lines without... hip extensions.[17] Examples of the short, tight skirt, the full skirt, the sheath and the draped dress were all still evident, but last season's attempt to introduce the extravagant 'robe à pouf' was abandoned. Skirts remained short for sports wear (the average length was ten inches above the ground), but were slightly longer for afternoon and evening wear. Waistlines were generally on or a little below the natural level. Every house showed tailored costumes for street wear. Tailleurs were either short or long-waisted, but, as the *Drapers' Record* noted, 'all curve in at the waist, and have a graceful, fan-like appearance.'[18] All forms of cape were shown in all categories. Evening designs were less 'décolleté' than they had

been in previous seasons. Fewer hooped dresses were produced, but designs modelled on the 'statuesque Greek lines' were still shown.

In January 1921 British *Vogue* commented that: 'It is a fact that at present more attention is given to the details of the costume than to any changes in its general line.'[19] A great variety of high collars were used and many couturiers introduced Magyar, bell-shaped or Kimono sleeves. Pleating, particularly accordion pleating, was very popular. Bloused backs and bolero effects were favoured and the sash became one of the most common forms of belt. Swathed effects, draperies and trains all appeared on evening wear designs. The leading period influence was the 'Moyen-Age' and British *Vogue* reported that at least two houses (one of which was Madeleine et Madeleine) had based their entire collections upon medieval styles. Beer, Dœuillet, Paquin and Premet also made references to this period in their work. Callot Sœurs focused on the fashions of the First Empire, Jenny on the Renaissance, Lanvin on the 'Louis-Phillipe' and Victorian eras, and Poiret continued to exploit the 'infanta' silhouette.

The key fabrics were velvet, broadcloth, gabardine, jersey and serge for morning/street wear; satins, silks, brocades, velvet, charmeuse and crêpe de Chine for afternoon; lamé, taffeta, rich metal brocades, chiffon and velvet for evening. Satin and taffeta, with tulle or lace, were considered to be appropriate for evening dresses for the young woman. Bright colours were increasingly used for day wear: mustard shades, terra-cotta, yellows and oranges. Many informal designs, particularly the tailleurs, were untrimmed. Afternoon and evening models were more elaborate. Ribbon trimmings (often ruched or pleated), fur, braid, sequins and lace were seen in all the collections. One journalist wrote that, 'The lank, queer looking monkey fur is still used on models for the ultra smart.'[20]

Embroidery was declared to be more fashionable than ever. In January 1921 British *Vogue* reported that Princesse Lucien Murat, 'who has always taken a great interest guided by knowledge and cultivated taste in modern art movements', had 'introduced... the use of Cubist designs for the embroidery of costumes.'[21] Such developments, coupled with the use of simple, pared down and geometric shapes employed by designers such as Chanel, led the *Vogue* journalist to comment on the increasingly apparent relationship between haute couture and modern art, a relationship which would develop throughout the 1920s:

> Anyone who will pause to study the designs formed by the seams of costumes, the shapes of tunics, and similar details, will be struck by the predominance of geometric forms... It is worth noting how many times the characteristic forms of Cubist art are repeated in our capes, our shirts, our sleeves, and perhaps even our hats.[22]

Chanel was clearly one of several houses who produced simple, and comparatively severe, designs, and her work was often related to that of Renée and Vionnet. Unlike many of her competitors, Chanel did not include extreme versions of any of the current silhouettes. Furthermore, her use of geometrical and Russian-inspired patterns and motifs anticipates, rather than follows, the general fashion trends of the early 1920s.

Press reports frequently disagreed over the state of the industry. In September British *Vogue* claimed that 'This August, at the first openings since peace was ratified, there were seen more foreign buyers in Paris than ever.'[23] However, a September edition of the *Drapers' Record* stated that,

> The Paris dressmakers complain of very little business from foreign buyers... many of the large French houses are beginning to reduce their prices in order to entice the Americans to return. When one thinks that to a model costing 9,000 francs, sixty per cent duty is to be added by the American customs, Americans may well hesitate before acquiring such expensive models.[24]

Haute couture was significantly affected by the high costs of materials, production, labour and transportation. For example, velvet, which was one of the most popular fabrics of the season, could cost between 130 to 150 francs a metre. Such factors had an inevitable impact on the form and development of contemporary fashion. The high costs of quality hand embroidery led to the increased use of machine embroidery, and the emphasis on simple designs, with comparatively few trimmings, can be partly attributed to the prevailing economic climate. Some commentators believed that the move away from the more 'eccentric' fashions was due to the, '... big cost of every conceivable article that goes into the making of models in these days (and) is undoubtedly responsible for the falling off in production of freakish modes.'[25]

The fashion for slender, figure-hugging designs was also often credited to what was referred to as the 'cult of the physique.' It was no longer fashionable to have the

'matronly' silhouette associated with the Belle Epoque: the craze for sport encouraged women to have, and enabled them to achieve and maintain, a svelte figure. On one level, to be slim signified that the woman was of a class that had both the leisure time and the necessary wealth to participate in sports. British *Vogue* claimed that the styles sponsored by designers such as Chanel were ideal for showing off the fashionable figure. The periodical argued that:

> The woman of naturally slight proportions (will not) consent to conceal (her body) through the adoption of cumbersome fashions of dress. The complete failure of the attempted revival of the 'robe à pouf' last season demonstrated this once more.[26]

Extravagant and eccentric forms of dress, with their accompanying forms of corsetry, were no longer acceptable to the 'new' woman of the 1920s.

---

[1] An account of the launch of *FV* is given in the Introduction.

[2] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 51

[3] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 51

[4] Although no pleated skirts are shown in the catalogue (another device employed to vary the silhouette), a photograph in *FV* (15 November 1920, p. 29) showed the Comtesse Jean de Moustiers wearing a contemporary Chanel walking suit with a pleated calf-length skirt. The reproduction of the photograph is too small and dark to be included in the catalogue.

[5] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 50

[6] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 51

[7] See Mary Vaudoyer *Le Livre de la Haute Couture* (V and O Editions 1990), p. 55. The Chanel black satin dress coat illustrated in this book is possibly a later version of **121.** Vaudoyer dates the design to 1921 and describes it as a 'Straight-hanging black satin dress-coat seamed and embroidered at lower waist, lightly gathered over right and left hip, deviating in front to leave plain front-facings which evolve into triangular winged sleeves, meticulously inlaid at shoulder level and vertically hand seamed at the back. The winged sleeves are black silk-embroidered all-over in high relief... Enveloping shawl collar of brown dyed squirrel tapering to below hipline.'

[8] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 50

[9] Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and her World* (London 1979), pp. 128-129. See the Summary of the collection February 1922 for further details on the Russian Period.

[10] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 50

[11] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 50

[12] *DR* 11 September 1920, p. 561

[13] *BV* 15 October 1920, p. 59

[14] *BV* 1 February 1921, p. 31

[15] *BV* 1 February 1921, p. 30

[16] *BV* 20 October 1920, p. 53

[17] *BV* 5 October 1920, p. 40

[18] *DR* 20 November 1920, p, 474

[19] *BV* 5 January 1921, p. 52

[20] *DR* 11 September 1920, p. 561

[21] *BV* 20 January 1921, p. 57. The Princesse Lucien Murat was a well-known figure in Parisian society with Russian connections, and a semi-professional interest in dress design. This edition of *BV* reproduced a dress by Murat with embroidered motifs adapted from the work of Léger. In May 1926 *Femina* (p. 19) reported that Murat had opened a gallery/shop *Fermé la Nuit* (the name taken from the title of Paul Morand's 1923 publication of the same name – a publication which Morand had himself given and dedicated to Chanel) at the Quai de l'Horloge in Paris. The gallery displayed contemporary art and dealt in antiquarian books. It is probable that textiles were displayed at the gallery.

[22] *BV* 20 January 1921, p. 66

[23] *BV* 20 September 1920, p. 69

[24] *DR* 18 September 1920, p. 702

[25] *DR* 11 September 1920, p. 574

[26] *BV* 20 September 1920, p. 70

February 1921

Economy and the Art of Simplicity.

This collection is represented by twelve designs reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 5 April and 20 June 1921. French *Vogue* became a little more autonomous during the first half of 1921 and of the ten designs shown in both editions of the magazine, one was published in the French version first. Two of the designs were shown only in French *Vogue*. Four of the designs illustrated in British *Vogue* were shown on pages devoted entirely to Chanel. The remaining designs were featured next to those by Chéruit, Poiret, Renée and Vionnet. The designs shown in the French edition are shown alongside the work of Callot, Lanvin, Molyneux, Paquin, Poiret and Worth.

1921 saw the launch of Chanel's first perfume: Chanel No. 5. This was the first perfume to bear the name of a designer.[1] It was also the first in a successful range of Chanel perfumes and related beauty products to be produced during the 1920s and sold from special departments within the shops. Realizing the importance of these ranges as a means of disseminating the house name (more easily affordable items meant that more people could buy into the Chanel style), the company developed these products on an unprecedented scale.

The Collection

One design was appropriate for morning/street wear (**138**: a dress); one for sports wear (**139**: a sweater and skirt); two for travel wear (**140** and **141**: a suit and a tunic-style dress); five for afternoon wear (**142 – 146**: one coat, one cape and three dresses); and three for evening wear (**147 – 149**: three dresses).

This collection did not differ dramatically from those of preceding seasons. British *Vogue* stated that the 'rule of the house' was 'the straight chemise line with short sleeves and straight necks.'[2] One report claimed that:

> Mlle. Chanel... scarcely ever changes her line, and that is her strength at the moment. At this time when no fashionable woman dresses very elaborately,

> even for the most formal occasions, this house maintains a silhouette which is always the same and always lovely, whether in tulle, cheviot or silk.[3]

The basic theme of the entire collection was certainly related to that of previous seasons: the simple, straight and comparatively short garment, with a loose waistline positioned either on, but more frequently a little below, the natural level, button fastening or a tie-belt, and a simple neckline. This theme is represented in its simplest form by the sports ensemble (or 'trotteur') **139**. None of the more pronounced wide-at-the-hips effects of earlier collections were seen, although skirt fullness was generally gathered to the sides (**141**).[4] A minor theme, evident in informal afternoon and evening models, and which may have developed as the season went on, deviated in one sense from the rigorously straight lines of the majority of Chanel's designs: these reportedly had full and circular-cut skirts, which fell straight as the woman stood still, but revealed their fullness as the woman walked.

Designs which had proved successful in previous collections were shown again: the simple and generously cut cape reappeared as **144** (it shares the wide collar and simple tie fastening at the neck of **100**, August 1919, but without the ostrich fringe trimming). In keeping with previous collections, Chanel has constantly and subtly varied the proportions and details of the designs to avoid monotony. Hemlines are generally even and set at mid calf-length for the day, uneven and slightly longer for the evening. Sleeves are either full-length and narrow, short, or, for evening, non-existent. Necklines vary from the straight (**140**), square (**145**) or, new to this collection, the asymmetric (**146**). Shirt-style collars, deep buttoned revers (on coats), scarf collars, and simple turn-back collars are all seen. Many coats continued to have pelerine-like effects. Low U-shaped and square décolletages were used for the evening designs, although British *Vogue* believed that, following last season's trend, Chanel's new evening models were not as 'décolleté' as those of previous seasons. The narrow, sometimes double tie-belt is still important in all categories, and the back belt (seen on **142** and **145**) reportedly appeared on several tailored models.[5]

Beyond such details, numerous devices were employed in all categories to alleviate the simple, slender line. The scalloped hemline of the blouse of **140**; the buttoned side panels of the coat **141**; the curving waistband of **142**; the pleated girdle of **143**; the short pleated side panels on the skirt of **146**; the long peplum and side drapery panels of **147**; the tabard-style bodice (pleated at the front and fastened in bows at the sides),

and the tiered and petal-like skirt of **148**; the semi-transparent over-bodice and double skirt (which contrasts to the opaque sheath dress beneath, recalling **115** of February 1920) of **149**. Apron panels were reportedly used on many designs, and it was noted that, 'they form part of the gown itself, and are not set on with a heading which gives a ruche above the waist' (in the manner of **129**, August 1920).[6] Short attached capes, described by British *Vogue* as 'supple and unlined', appear in the catalogue (**146**), and featured on many of the afternoon models.[7] The evening dress **147** is also worn with a matching shawl.

References continued to be made to traditional men's wear. The bodice of the shirtwaister style dress **138** and the yoked sweater of **139** both resemble a man's shirt. Large, functional buttons, deep patch pockets and turn-back cuffs are all reminiscent of men's clothing. The buttoned side panels of **141** lends a military feel to the design, indicating that Chanel was still concerned with a wide variety of men's dress.

The fabrics included jersey, foulard, cheviot, wool éponge, crêpe de Chine and crêpe tricot in black, light 'dove' grey, dark grey, beige and green. For afternoon, wool éponge, crêpe de Chine, Canton crêpe, organdie, silk and foulard, in black (on its own and in combination with white in the 'zebra' stripes of **146**), brown and tan were all employed. Crêpe de Chine, lace, tulle and mousseline de soie, primarily in black and white, were used for evening designs. Combinations of fabrics were still important: the contrast of the dove grey jersey and matching crêpe de Chine of **138** provides its only decorative element. Written reports referred to a series of tailored costumes with blouses decorated with a, 'border of great festoons of tambour embroidery, which also borders the short sleeves.'[8] Otherwise trimmings were limited to narrow bands of contrasting fabrics (**142**), pleating (**143** and **146**), ribbon (**144**), and overlaid organdie squares (**145**). The only decorations on the evening models were the fringing (**147**) and the embroidery in jade (**149**). Simple crêpe de Chine evening dresses reportedly had jet fringing or coloured beads around the waist. At least one design had a bodice completely covered in 'paillettes' of jet, with a side tasselled cord of jet for a belt. Embroidered tulle and lace were again prominent (particularly dyed silk lace); beige thread embroidery on black appeared on several models.

Context

Chanel, Vionnet and Renée continued to be regarded as the leading advocates of the straight, slender line: they were often grouped together in British and French *Vogue*. Chanel's **147** was reproduced on a page with models by the two designers, and a February edition of British *Vogue* included an article entitled 'A Mode That Makes Simplicity An Art', which stated that:

> Several names among the couturiers of Paris are to be associated with these simplified gowns, among them Chanel, who continues to make them with slight variations, season after season, Vionnet, whose house has specialized altogether in these models, and Renée, who never wears any other type of gown herself.[9]

Simply cut, plain, slip-on dresses and chemises were shown in all the collections. The more traditional houses such as Worth also acknowledged the enthusiasm for new, uncomplicated styles and included several examples in their own collections. An April 1921 article on Worth was entitled, 'A House That Regrets the Passing of Ceremonious Attire', and included an interview with Jean-Phillipe. While the designer conceded that simple models were appropriate to life in the 1920s, it is clear that his feelings for the transformation of fashion were rather ambivalent:

> The modern designer must devote his greatest effort to the clothes for ordinary mortals to wear on ordinary occasions; but there is no reason why the clothes themselves should be ordinary. Simplicity is praiseworthy and suitable to our present conditions of life, but 'simplicity' may mean more than a bag slipped over the head and tied in the middle with string. This is not dressmaking but sackmaking... Our gowns should be really designed, and should give opportunity for invention, so that a gown from a Grande Maison may be readily distinguished from one sold in a series of ten thousand and sold at a bargain price in a shop. However simple it may be, it should show that beauty of design and of finish which is the hall-mark of art the world over.[10]

Other designers, most notably Poiret, shared Jean-Phillipe's scepticism. In the face of such criticism, British *Vogue* continually reassured its readers that the fashion for simplicity was not indicative of falling standards or lack of talent:

> ... there is in this simplicity no danger to the prestige of the masters of couture; for these uncomplicated looking frocks and simple suits... require even more skill in cutting and fitting than did the elaborate fashions of the past, with their miracles of trimming.[11]

Played out against this backdrop, the February 1921 collections continued with many of the themes of the preceding seasons. Although the straight, simple line prevailed, there was considerable eclecticism and variety. Poiret's collection included designs with titles such as *Lord Byron* and *Louis XIV*; Martial et Armand referred back to the 1790s and the 1830s; and Lanvin continued to produce her famous bouffant skirts. The fashion for the 'Moyen Age' was still felt, although it was considered to be less 'costume-like' and more subtly interpreted (as Milbank has pointed out, the Middle Ages influenced many of the long, trailing sleeves, bateau necklines and low waistlines that were evident this season).[12] The Spanish influence was held responsible for the bolero effects, wide-skirted, or 'infanta' designs and fringing. A new silhouette – the circular skirt ('la jupe en forme') – was introduced in the collections of Jenny, Lucile, Molyneux, Paquin and Worth as well as Chanel. This was produced in soft fabrics which draped easily and cut so as to give 'fullness and movement to the skirt without too much bulk.'[13]

The short skirt held its own despite the efforts of houses such as Premet (which lengthened their skirts by about an inch). Some skirts were yoked, others had plain panels at the back and front with flat pleats at the sides, and others were tightly draped around the hips. On the whole, fullness was concentrated at the sides. Nonetheless this was not extreme and hips were generally slimmer. Bodices tended to be straight and loose-fitting, giving the wearer what one journalist described as a 'flat appearance.' The tailored suit was popular for both town and travel wear (which was becoming an increasingly important category and was included in all the collections). The *Drapers' Record* noted that loose 'sacque' coats, without collars or with small standing collars, wide sleeves and 'cut along Chinese lines', were also found in the morning/street category.[14] Supple, filmy, summer dresses and wraps, with very little decoration, were popular for afternoon and country wear. These designs often had lingerie trimmings in organdie or lace. A huge variety of sleeves and necklines were shown. The kimono and bell-shaped sleeve were still important. Waistlines remained relatively low. All types of drapery, apron panels and sashes continued to feature prominently on afternoon and evening models.

The most popular fabrics for less formal designs included serge and gabardine (often with satin); afternoon models were frequently in foulard, satin, crêpe de Chine and taffeta (favoured for the wide-skirted designs). Some jersey, organdie, lace, and cotton were also seen. Tulle, crêpe de Chine, crêpe georgette and satin remained popular for evening. Black, white, the autumnal colours (such as reds, browns, terra-cotta and brick), navy blue, yellow and neutral tones such as grey and beige, were the most common shades. Many designs were untrimmed. One reporter commented that the Spring fashions, '... undoubtedly depend for their chief charms on line, fabric and colour.'[15] Lace, embroidery (in wool or silk threads and beads), braid, ribbon, flowers and jet tassels or fringing (known as the 'dangle' fashion) were the most important trimmings. Beading, 'paillettes', and silver and gold thread embroidery were associated with evening wear and a caption to a Chéruit dress published in a May edition of British *Vogue* stated that, 'The new evening mode is a brilliant one.'[16]

In the face of a continuing eclecticism and diversity of styles, Chanel continued to develop and adapt the straight, short and simple silhouette. However, she was one of a number of designers who adopted this approach (notably Renée and Vionnet). Chanel's concern for the woman's freedom of movement and comfort led to the introduction of the fuller, circular cut skirt, but again, Chanel was one of several houses to do this.

Motoring was once again on a 'pre-war footing' as road and travelling conditions in France improved and many more private cars became available.[17] Chanel, Premet and Redfern were all well known for their travel wear. The Parisian social season had also resumed its normal routine and full, formal and elaborate evening dress was again being seen. Theatre dresses were produced and it was noted that, 'This is the first season since 1913 at which real evening dress has been worn by both men and women at important general rehearsals and first nights.'[18]

Despite such developments, and the increased number of mid-season collections being shown, the fashion industry was still a long way from returning to pre-1914 conditions. Consequently, designers were acutely aware of the need to attract and maintain the interest of the foreign buyers. One journalist reported that:

> An effort will probably be made to make models at a somewhat lower cost than that of the models of last season... (probably) by the use of less trimmings and embroidery and by less expensive materials, for the actual cost of production has undergone little, if any, reduction.[19]

Women were encouraged not to wear elaborate and blatantly expensive designs; they were asked to consider the social and economic implications of their fashion purchases. One article in British *Vogue* summarized the main concerns of the industry at the time and urged its designers to play a sensible, responsible role:

> The mode is not the capricious thing it used to be: it has become a calculating student of economics, very much influenced by such questions as the scarcity of raw materials, the price of coal and the cost of labour. This season of 1921, in particular, is not the moment for any haphazard experiments with a great many 'costume' types of dress... Business conditions are too uncertain, and materials too highly priced for that. The wise creator of women's apparel has concentrated on wearable models which are easy to put on and easy to wear.[20]

---

[1] See Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), p. 36. Poiret was the first haute couturier to launch his own range of perfumes. However, these were in ornate, decorative flacons (unlike Chanel's square, plain bottle) and had exotic, romantic names. Chanel's No. 5 was developed by the French chemist Ernest Beaux at Grasse.

[2] *BV* 5 April 1921, p. 36

[3] *BV* 5 May 1921, p. 76

[4] Chanel was referred to on one occasion as a sponsor of the 'wide waist' and *BV* (1 June 1921 p. 43) illustrated a simple silk elastic corset by the house which was designed to help create this effect.

[5] Many afternoon models were designed with simple girdles 'knotted with hanging ends which float as the wearer walks.' (*BV* 5 May 1921, p. 76)

[6] *BV* 5 May 1921, p. 76. One afternoon model was reported to have an apron panel which was, 'attached to the bottom of the bodice crossing from left to right, and... embroidered very closely in matching silk.'

[7] *BV* 5 May 1921, p, 76

[8] *BV* 5 May 1921, p. 76. Tambour embroidery is done on a tambour frame: a small, round frame of two concentric hoops over which the fabric is stretched while being worked. Many of Chanel's tailored suits were in black crêpe de Chine with short coats, back belts and short, narrow skirts. The accompanying hip-length blouses often had relatively high collars, short sleeves and matching belts. Some blouses were made in the same foulard that was used to line the ensemble's coat.

[9] *BV* 20 February 1921, p. 32. In the same article Mme. Renée was described as having a 'boyish' figure (like that of Chanel) which was 'ideally suited to this mode'.

[10] *BV* 20 April 1921, p. 26

[11] *BV* 20 February 1921, p. 28

[12] Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York 1989), p. 76

[13] *BV* 20 March 1921, p. 31

[14] *DR* 12 March 1921, p. 695

[15] *DR* 12 March 1921, p. 707

[16] *BV* 5 May 1921, p. 36

[17] *BV* 5 July 1921, p. 19

[18] *BV* 20 March 1921, p. 58

[19] *BV* 20 February 1921, p. 28

[20] *BV* 5 April 1921, p. 31

August 1921

Haute Couture and the Governmental Decree.

Fourteen designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 20 October 1921 and 20 February 1922, represent this collection. Nine were shown in both editions of the periodical, three were shown only in British *Vogue* and two were shown only in the French edition. In the October 1921 issue of British *Vogue*, which covered the August collections, an entire article and five illustrations were devoted to the work of Chanel. The remaining designs were shown alongside those of Dœuillet, Jenny, Poiret and Worth.

The Collection

One design was appropriate for morning/street wear (**150**: a coat); three for sports (**151 – 153**: three cape/coat, sweater and skirt ensembles); two for the afternoon (**154** and **155**: two dresses); and eight for the evening (**156 – 163**: eight dresses).

One British *Vogue* review, entitled, 'Chanel Attains Chic By Avoiding Extremes', noted that Chanel, 'follows the trend of the season to amplitude or narrowness, but always without any sharp reversal of the mode.'[1] Although the designer continued to accommodate general trends, such as the wide-at-the-hips effect, she did not betray the fundamentally straight, uncomplicated and easy-to-wear silhouette that was the back bone of her work. Consequently, the dominant theme of this entire collection is the simple, straight, and short garment, with a low waistline and a simple, frequently rounded, neckline. Skirt fullness is usually gathered to the sides (although it does not detract from the straight silhouette). This theme is clearly expressed in the sports ensemble **151**. Exceptions are normally found in the more elaborate evening category: the dresses are a little longer (falling in some cases to just above the ankles), with uneven hemlines, waistlines at the natural level, and slightly more pronounced wide-at-the hips-effects (**163**). Cap sleeves were shown on the evening model **156**, and short sleeve-like effects were created on **158**, **159** and **163** by the outer layer of semi-transparent fabric. The evening dress **162** has a scarf-like drapery attached to the back of the shoulder, a feature which would become increasingly common in later collections.[2] The triple shoulder strap of **160** (reported to be typical of many models)

and the bodice which finished in a point at the waist (**158 – 160**), were other new developments.

Once again, subordinate elements were endlessly modified. Necklines ranged from round, to V-shaped, square and bateau. Very low evening décolletages were not seen. Fur scarf collars and simple turn-back collars were all evident. Full-length sleeves were either narrow or wider towards the cuff (**150**).[3] The simple tie-belt was still seen, but broad buttoned belts, half-belts, sashes and leather belts were also prevalent. The basic silhouette was further enlivened by devices such as side panels of buttons (**152**, recalling **141** February 1921); side panels of pleating (**154**, recalling **146** of February 1921); outer-layers of semi-transparent fabric (on the evening designs **158** and **159**); and side drapery wings (**161**). Some afternoon models reportedly included pockets with pleated flaps (adding some width to the sides of the skirt). The simple jackets, wide belts, functional buttons and patch pockets all testify to Chanel's continued interest in men's wear. The bateau neckline, wide-at-the-hips effects and pointed trailing ends of **163** refers to the popular 'Moyen Age' influence.

The fabrics included plaid, Scottish and Marengo wool, tricot, cotton jersey and chamois leather (all of which were warm and durable); many day dresses combined two fabrics (recalling **138** of February 1921): the top in crêpe de Chine and the bottom, joined from just below the waist, in duvetyn or wool velours. It was reported that two new fabrics, 'croise chenillé' and 'fantaisie gris et noir', were used by the house.[4] The colours included grey, sand and 'golden brown'; one woollen fabric was described as being 'striped and barred in beige, apricot and Nattier blue on a foundation of a lighter tone of beige.'[5] For evening, crêpe georgette, crêpe de Chine, lace, voile, velvet and satin in black, white, 'absinthe' and lemon (the latter two colours being new to Chanel's collections) were used. *Femina* illustrated a Chanel evening coat made of bands of white velours covered with ermine fur. [6] The velvet evening gowns were usually worn with matching woollen wraps lined with the same velvet as the dress.

Trimmings on the informal designs were limited to small buttons, fringing, and bands of fur (often mole or imitation caracul) on the collar or hem.[7] The afternoon model **154** is completely plain: the pleated panels and the tie-belt bow are its only embellishment. The more elaborate **155** is embroidered in a bold design of 'various soft shades' at the edge of the sleeves, bodice, girdle and skirt.[8] The geometrical arrangements of the embroidery and beading on designs such as **155** and **156** refer back to that on designs

such as **132** (August 1920).[9] Evening trimmings ranged from beading, 'paillettes', fringing, clipped rabbit fur (thought to be an excellent imitation of otter), and embroidery (in crystal, diamanté and silks). Although black was the dominant colour, British *Vogue* noted that, '... uniformity is avoided by embroidering these black gowns with great flowers or simple blocks in coloured silks or silver thread.'[10] The lace dresses were often embroidered in coloured chenille.

Context

Like Chanel, designers such as Jenny, Lelong, Patou, Renée and Vionnet all produced simple, straight and uncomplicated clothes. However, some houses – most notably Poiret – continued to present elaborate and extravagant designs. One Poiret afternoon dress was described in the following terms:

> The material is nothing more than dark brown moiré, but it is cut with such a multitude of seams as we have not seen for many seasons, and each seam is bound with brown velvet ribbon... The skirt is long, for this house has made a feature of long skirts for two seasons past.[11]

The more elaborate designs of Poiret, Lanvin and Worth drew heavily upon period costume: it was noted that, 'At Poiret's, so many influences are traced among the sumptuous models that the mind becomes bewildered.'[12] It was also reported that, 'Jean Patou has a whole series inspired by Russian uniforms.'[13] Nonetheless, the house of Worth spoke out against the present eclecticism in dress. Jacques Worth believed that, 'it would be to the advantage of the Parisian couture in general, if the leaders would consult one another before hand, so that a certain homogeneity, and a real Paris fashion might be developed.'[14] By October, the eclectic approach – which led to such a diversity of styles – was thought to be on the wane: British *Vogue* commented that, 'In contrast to all these costume ideas, we find the collections of Chanel and Renée practically unchanged and true to their own traditions.'[15]

The straight one-piece dress dominated the day wear categories. It was regarded as being 'too firmly established in favour to be ousted by any novelty no matter how sensational.'[16] Coats were straight with long sleeves trimmed at the wide cuff with fur. Skirts were usually six to eight inches off the ground. As travel conditions returned to

normal, and wealthy Parisians once again took winter vacations, sports wear took on a renewed importance. Chanel's winter sports collection was covered in great detail and was rivaled only by that of Patou, whose house specialized in 'sports things', and showed, 'riding clothes, golfing clothes, waterproof costumes and hunting and automobile clothes, as well as the typical costumes for wear at the winter sports resorts.'[17]

Skirts were longer for afternoon and evening with uneven hemlines. This was often achieved through the addition of drapery panels or sashes (termed as the fashion for 'apparent length'). Waistlines were either on or a little below the natural level. The *Drapers' Record* stated that the 'umbrella skirt' (with fullness concentrated over the hips) would be seen during the autumn. Four main silhouettes were identified for formal afternoon and evening wear: the straight, the draped or that inspired by classical Greece, the full bouffant, and the long slender line. Evening designs were generally sleeveless with low waists and moderate décolletages. Long dresses with floor-length trains were shown at every house. Capes were prominent in all categories and those for evening were frequently three-quarter-length.

The most common fabrics were the crêpes. Town suits continued to be produced in broadcloth, serge, tricotine, kasha, duvetyn, velvet and matelassé. A new Rodier fabric *Perlaine* (which had a 'pebbled surface suggestive of small beads') was reportedly purchased by all the couturiers. Velvet, matelassé, crêpe romain and charmeuse appeared in afternoon wear collections. Satin, crêpe georgette and taffeta were used for evening designs. Valenciennes lace was extremely popular and proof of the widespread Spanish influence. *Femina*'s October 1921 review of the Paris fashions stated that simplicity was the order of the day in both silhouette and colour.[18] Neutral shades were more common than the vivid, bold colours favoured by Poiret. Black appeared in all categories. However, a November review discussed the imminent demise of the 'reign of black' and the reintroduction of colour, although the *Drapers' Record* claimed that, 'Parisiennes have no intention of wearing bright colours – life is still too difficult, too strained, in the French capital.'[19] Black in combination with white, grey, brown, reds, mauve, blue, green, and yellow were also seen.

One review noted that, 'There was decidedly less embroidery than last season, but it was not by any means abandoned.'[20] Many designers used embroidery as the sole means of enlivening their simple, straight, afternoon dresses. Pleating and borders of

fur were also used to provide decoration. More elaborate embroidery and sequins were applied to evening wear designs, and beading, especially white beading on black backgrounds, became particularly fashionable.

Chanel's approach was clearly to maintain the basic silhouette of previous collections (central also to the work of Renée, amongst others), but to continue to assimilate trends evident at the other houses in her own terms. However, although she had introduced some Russian embroidery in earlier collections, it was clearly Patou who had taken this trend one step further by working with the actual forms of traditional Russian costume. This development eventually appeared in Chanel's work during 1922.

Much debate surrounded what British *Vogue* referred to as the 'suppression of the corset.' The straight, loose and unwaisted designs, when worn by fashionably slim women, did not necessitate the elaborately boned and restrictive corsets associated with fashions of the Belle Epoque. However, this season, couturiers from Chanel to Worth recommended what *Femina* referred to as 'le corset-ceinture': a corset in satin or silk jersey which was designed to maintain a slim, slender line over the waist and hips.[21] The *Drapers' Record* summarized recent developments in a report immediately prior to the August collections:

> Although the fashion of not wearing corsets has been tried, it was soon discovered that well-fitting, supple corsets were necessary to graceful lines... The old-style corset would not be tolerated for an instant by the woman of today.[22]

Shortages were still a major problem for the Grandes Maisons and periodicals such as *Femina* drew a direct line between the simplicity of contemporary dress and the high costs of materials. The *Drapers' Record* believed that the fashion for lace was a direct result of the French Government's determination to revive one of the country's ailing industries:

> Many run away with the idea that the whys and wherefores of fashion are beyond fathoming... No greater mistake was ever made. French manufacturers are generally hand in glove with the big couturiers... Some months back the French Government requested the big couturiers to push lace in order to re-establish the lace industry, crippled through the war.[23]

Just as during the war, governmental intervention continued to be an important factor in the development of post-war haute couture. The fashion for short sleeves was seen in terms of the mutual cooperation between various sectors of the industry: one journalist referred to a 'preconceived arrangement' between the couturiers and the glove manufacturers. In its appraisal of the continued fashion for black, the same periodical stated that, 'It is distinguished, and, undoubtedly, an economy.'[24] As the most simple haute couture designs could cost in the region of two thousand francs, it was not surprising that there were fewer women who were able to pay for elaborately embroidered evening gowns. Women who before the war had bought several haute couture dresses each season, now restricted themselves to one or two. British *Vogue* thus related the fashion for the slender silhouette to the limited incomes of many women:

> Women seem to have acquired the habit of these simple, straight frocks, slightly drawn in by an elaborate girdle, and they will have no others. Is it for good or for ill? For the mode it is, undoubtedly, an ill, but, for the budget, it is wonderfully beneficial: thus it may be seen again that few things are satisfactory from all sides.[25]

---

[1] *BV* 20 October 1921, p. 42

[2] **162** was chosen as an example of this season's ideal evening dress for reproduction in *BV* by Chanel herself (see 5 November 1921, p. 43).

[3] Written reports testify that the type of wide sleeves and deep patch pockets of **150** were typical of many of Chanel's coats and suits this season.

[4] *BV* 20 October 1921, p. 42. The name of the manufacturer of these fabrics is not given.

[5] *BV* 20 January 1922, p. 25

[6] *Femina* 1 October 1921, p. 5. This coat, which had a shawl collar and wide sleeves, was worn with a lace dress with a long train.

[7] The house also reportedly produced a 'charming short pelerine called *Marchande des Quatres Saisons*', which had a collar of monkey fur (*BV* 20 October 1921, p. 42).

[8] *BV* 20 October 1921, p. 42. A similar design to **155**, also by Chanel, was published in the October 1921 edition of *Femina* (p. 3). It was cut straight, mid calf-length, worn with a slightly longer underskirt, and with a collared V-neckline, short sleeves and a girdle; fullness in the skirt was gathered to the sides. It was embroidered with a floral motif on the bodice and skirt.

[9] A similar version of **156**, by Chanel, was shown in *Femina* (1 October 1921, p. 61). It was described as being in white crêpe marocain and had a plain wrap.

[10] *BV* 20 October 1921, p. 42

[11] *BV* 5 November 1921, p. 43. Poiret's determination to reintroduce the long skirt continued into 1922, when he gave a lecture on fashion at the Salon d'Automne in which he discussed its revival (see *BV* 5 February 1922, p. 33)

[12] *BV* 5 October 1921, p. 38

[13] *BV* 5 October 1921, p. 38

[14] *BV* 5 September 1921, p. 35

[15] *BV* 5 October 1921, p. 38

[16] *BV* 20 September 1921, p. 48

[17] *BV* 20 October 1921, p. 54

[18] *Femina* 1 October 1921, p. 3. The article relates the simplicity and sobriety of contemporary fashion to that of modern interior design and furnishings.

[19] *DR* 15 October 1921, p. 153

[20] *BV* 5 September 1921, p. 35

[21] *Femina* 1 October 1921, p. 3. See the Chanel corset – February 1921.

[22] *DR* 30 July 1921, p. 249

[23] *DR* 20 August 1021, p. 409

[24] *DR* 23 July 1921, p. 200

[25] *BV* 20 February 1921, p. 66

February 1922

The Height of the Russian Phase.

This collection is represented by fifteen designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 5 March and 5 September 1922. Ten were shown in both editions of the periodical and five were shown only in French *Vogue*. Three models were shown on pages devoted to Chanel. The remaining designs were shown with Chéruit, Jenny, Lanvin, Madeleine et Madeleine, Molyneux, Paquin and Worth.[1]

The Collection

Six designs were appropriate for morning/street wear (**164 – 169**: one suit, one cape, sweater and skirt ensemble, three capes and dresses, one coat); three for afternoon (**170 – 172**: one cape and dress, one blouse and skirt, one dress); and six for evening (**173 – 178**: four dresses and two capes).

One review noted that, 'Chanel continues to favour simple lines, straight and slender and easy to wear, and she still makes her skirts rather short than long.'[2] The entire collection revolved around the simple, straight, comparatively short (Chanel's skirts were frequently described as the shortest in Paris)[3], and comfortable design, with a plain neckline and, in the majority of cases, a low, loosely belted waistline. Side pleats in straight skirts (**168**) and wrap-over coats (**169**) were just two of the ways in which Chanel ensured simplicity and comfort. The morning/street ensemble **165** represents the most basic expression of the main theme of the collection. It is also typical as it is accompanied by a matching cape (a garment which had become increasingly prevalent in recent collections).

A second theme is evident: the equally straight and short, but Russian-inspired silhouette. This is represented by **171** and **172.** Charles-Roux and De La Haye and Tobin claim that the form of such models was derived from the Russian 'roubachka': 'the long-belted blouse of the 'muzhiks' (Russian peasants).[4] The influence of traditional Russian costume on the shape and style of many designs was acknowledged by the contemporary fashion press. British *Vogue* stated that, 'Chanel is now showing many sports models in which the Russian influence is shown.'[5] *Femina* and *L'Art et la*

Mode both reproduced a Chanel design similar to **171** which also adopted the so-called Russian form.[6]

Some exceptions to these themes are evident. Although the evening dress **175** has a simple, straight bodice and skirt, it is unusual in that it has a tight-fitting hip band over which the bodice is slightly bloused and into which the skirt is loosely gathered. The evening dress **176** has a narrow-fitting bodice and waistline, which is finished in a point (recalling **158** of August 1921) and edged with a short pleated basque, emphasising the width of the hip area (and thus referring to the wide-at-the-hips silhouette of previous collections).

Once again, Chanel has altered the proportions and details of the individual designs to ensure variety whilst maintaining the coherence of the collection as a whole. The capes, for example, all appear simple, but vary considerably.[7] **165** is knee-length and can be draped over the shoulders or buttoned securely in place; **166** is three-quarter-length and hangs from a narrow, buttoned band at the shoulders (recalling the capes of February 1920); **167** is hip-length, fits neatly around the figure and has inverted box pleats set into a shoulder yoke; **168** is hip-length and collared; the more elaborate **170** has short, elbow length sleeves and a front that falls as two separate panels; the bodices of **177** and **178** (full-length, edge-to-edge evening capes) billow outwards over a gathered waistband.[8]

Necklines include bateau, V-shaped, and square. Evening décolletages are moderately low, and U-shaped, V-shaped, or square; the shoulder straps of these sleeveless models are either broad or narrow. Simple tailored, shirt-like, standing, and scarf collars are all seen. Day wear sleeves are either full-length and straight, or full-length and flaring. Flaring sleeves are seen on designs from both the two main themes, although they are exaggerated for the Russian-inspired models (cf. **172**). Waistlines are either on, or in the majority of cases, a little below the natural level. Fewer tie-belts and sashes are used; two models have buckled, probably leather, belts. Details derived from men's wear include the shirt-like collars and bodices, buckled belts and pockets. Many of Chanel's sports blouses were described as having, 'mannish lines and odd little cravats and shirt collars. As the only trimming (Chanel) embroiders a monogram on a single breast pocket.'[9] The ongoing influence of traditional Spanish costume upon evening wear (cf. **101**, August 1919, and **147**, February 1921) was illustrated by the lace basque and shawl of **176**.

The day wear fabrics included tweed, kasha, velvet, crêpe georgette, crêpe de Chine, crêpe Marocain and silk, in black, pale grey, brown, copper, beige, tan, blue and 'prune'. Plaids, in what were described as 'novel combinations of colours such as beige and pale blue', were frequently employed.[10] Dresses and suits often used bold colours: for example, it was reported that one design consisted of a dark blue skirt and coat worn with a red knitted blouse; however, many three-piece models were worn with a plain white blouse. Sports sweaters were usually in a woollen fabric, woven in small, multi-coloured patterns.[11] Sports blouses were produced in small-figured red and yellow silk. One travel ensemble reportedly had a 'jacket sweater... (in beige) with a small pattern making vague, horizontal stripes in cream and dark brown', and it was noted that, 'Chanel specializes in these soft woollen sweaters with their stripes of multi-coloured small designs and she is said to have been inspired by the well-known Fair-Isle type.'[12] Heavy crêpe de Chine, woollen fabrics and foulard, in black, white, grey, brown, tan or yellow, were used for the afternoon models. Woollen coats were frequently combined with foulard dresses. It was also reported that the house produced 'transparent' capes of crêpe georgette or chiffon, 'to complete afternoon dresses.'[13] Crêpe de Chine, lace and satin gaufré (seen for the first time in the catalogue), in black, a 'gun-metal' colour, rose and silver were chosen for evening.

The informal designs showed very few trimmings: narrow bands of squirrel fur, pleating, side panels of closely set small buttons (recalling **151** of August 1921), a little embroidery and beading. The formal garments were decorated with more bold and brightly coloured trimmings. The embroidery on **171** was reportedly derived from a Russian or Balkan source (cf. **127** August 1920). Oriental motifs were still in evidence. Evening trimmings included flat fur (often chinchilla), red wool embroidery, and steel or coral beading. One commentator wrote that:

> (Chanel)... beads her models for the evening most lavishly, using a small bead, so closely set that at a short distance the effect is of a new material. Bright beads on thin black chiffon, over rose colour, make a typical model.[14]

Context

Like Chanel, few designers introduced any revolutionary changes this season. One journalist noted that, 'The collections, as a whole, have never been so quiet and so restrained in taste.'[15] Although the straight, simple silhouette dominated the informal categories, sufficient quantities of fabric and specific constructional devices were used to ensure the garment was not restrictive:

> Flat pleats at the sides, box pleats, panels, a skirt open in front over an underskirt, a draped line which gives a sudden flare at one side – all these expedients are adapted to preserve us from the discomfort of the tube-like, narrow skirt.[16]

Although many houses had re-introduced longer skirts this season, there was considerable doubt as to their widespread acceptance. In one report, underlining the growing importance of the American market to French couture (see August 1922), the *Drapers' Record* noted, 'There is much talk about the New York women refusing to wear long skirts... Short skirts are too comfortable and certainly more healthy.'[17] If American women were unwilling to give up short skirts, it was unlikely that the majority of the houses would continue to pursue the revival. Consequently Chanel was one of several houses (most notably Jenny) who refused to follow the example of the more conservative houses, and showed sports and day wear skirts that were on average about eight inches off the ground. However, many afternoon and evening designs were ankle-length or longer. British *Vogue* defined the role and function of the season's afternoon designs in the following terms, 'If the aim of the morning dress is to make women look more youthful than ever, afternoon gowns seem designed... to lend them a dignity which is graciously feminine. Lines are long and languorous.'[18]

The tailleur, with short, frequently hip-length and long-waisted coats, belted and slightly bloused, was popular. Doucet, Jenny and Martial et Armand all produced what British *Vogue* referred to as the 'paletot': a short, full and circular-cut jacket often with a standing collar. Dresses with matching capes were widely seen and thought to have replaced the one-piece coat-dress. Waistlines were generally low; sleeves and collars came in a variety of forms. Three main evening silhouettes were evident: straight (for informal occasions), bouffant and draped. The few designers who showed bouffant dresses included Dœuillet, Doucet, Lanvin, Molyneux and Patou (this is perhaps

surprising, bearing in mind that Patou's sports and Russian-inspired designs were similar to those of Chanel, however British *Vogue* reported that Patou's versions were intended for young girls only).[19] Formal evening designs were long, slender and draped. The 'period' or costume influence was less conspicuous this spring (particularly in day wear) although the more extreme eclectic approach was still evident at some houses. Lanvin introduced Breton-inspired suits.[20] Jenny and Worth showed mandarin-style coats, and Madeleine et Madeleine focused on Chinese-like gowns. In general, historical or geographical references were limited more to embroidery and decoration than to silhouette or style.

Tweeds and plaid fabrics (traditionally associated men's clothing, and with houses such as O'Rossen, which specialized in strictly tailored suits)[21], were this season employed by Chanel and Molyneux. Serge, kasha, rep and silk crêpes in black, all shades of brown, beige and dark blue were popular. Sports designs were often in brighter shades and it was reported that, 'All sorts of liberties denied to more serious garments are permitted to sports clothes.'[22] The evening fabrics were taffeta, silk crêpe, crêpe de Chine, crêpe marocain, crêpe romain, foulard, satin, lace (particularly Spanish), tulle and mousseline de soie, along with the newly fashionable blistered or crinkled fabrics (particularly satin gaufrés or satin 'glaciers').[23] The preferred colours were black, white, rose, pinks and greens. Trimmings were few and far between. Instead the material itself, elaborated with pin tucks, ruching, tight groups of gathers or hemstitching, formed the main focus of a design. On formal designs the lack of trimming was compensated for by drapery effects. Many afternoon models showed long, uneven hemlines or 'dripping ends' of points and cascades of fabric. It was predicted that:

> Drapery... (will) play an important role and, as trimmings are not scheduled for any great importance, the manipulation of the material of the gown itself... seems to be about to take the place of the trimmings of the past.[24]

The ubiquitous black fabrics were usually enlivened with exotic and colourful embroidery or beading. Chinese, Russian and Balkan-inspired embroidery was widely used: Patou included Russian designs in his work and Lanvin was noted for her Persian embroidered fabric in silver and gold.[25] Heavily beaded evening gowns were seen not only at Chanel but also at Jenny, Patou and Renée, prompting one report that, 'The reign of the perfectly simple, totally untrimmed evening frock... seems to be about at an end.'[26]

If not influenced by Patou, Chanel's work was certainly in line with that of her rival: the Russian-inspired designs and embroideries, and the use of the monogram. She was also typical in her avoidance of the tight, restrictive skirt (although this approach had always been central to her work). However, unlike many houses, Chanel did not lengthen skirts. The design **175**, with its slim-fitting hipline, would seem to anticipate, rather than follow, what would become a major trend in fashions of the late 1920s.

A key aspect of the February openings was the expansion of the sports category. In May, American *Vogue* stated that, 'A few years ago the sports costume was ignored by the French couturier; now it appears in the collection of almost every house.'[27] Many designers devoted a considerable amount of time to comprehensive sports and travel ranges. Patou was known for sports designs which were worn by the tennis champion, and his close friend, Suzanne Lenglen.[28] Even the more established houses had begun to include some sports models in their regular collections. This prompted one British journalist to comment that, 'For the first time we are looking to Paris for sports fashions, artistic and yet correct (only the French could combine the two successfully).'[29] Such a development was indicative of the growing craze for sport amongst those who bought haute couture, and the realization of the long-established houses that, if their businesses were to survive, they would have to respond to contemporary trends.

The period in Chanel's career from 1920 to 1924 has been referred to as 'Chanel's Russian phase.'[30] De La Haye and Tobin's analysis of this period begins with the following comments:

> From 1920 to 1923 Chanel had a romantic affair with the Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovitch, grandson of Czar Alexander II, and the two remained close friends thereafter. Chanel met Dmitri before the First World War and when he returned to Paris... she supported him. As always, Chanel's personal life was to exert a profound influence upon her design work.[31]

In such terms, the work of the designer is explained primarily as a result of biography. However, as the above has shown, Chanel was not the only couturier to assimilate traditional Russian or Slav designs. The industry's preoccupation with Russia is more effectively explained by France's growing population, since 1921, of post-Revolution

Russian émigrés. British *Vogue* noted that, 'Many (of the Paris-based Russian aristocrats) by temperament and necessity became artists, and those who, but a few years back, had precedence over a Duke are now working in the Maison Chanel.'[32] Chanel employed many impoverished aristocratic émigrés during the 1920s and the success of designs with traditional Russian embroidery led to the establishment in 1921 of an embroidery workshop managed by the Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna.[33] Although De La Haye and Tobin refer to such developments, and are right to draw attention to her relationship with grand Duke Dmitri, the fact that the trend was widespread, and particularly associated with Patou, is not emphasized.

---

[1] There is little information available on the house of Madeleine et Madeleine. One of its designers, a Mlle. Madeleine, was, by 1925, employed at Drécoll. Valerie Steele in *Women of Fashion: Twentieth Century Designers* (New York, 1991), pp. 76-77, has noted that she 'moved about a great deal, having worked also for the houses of Paquin and Callot.' *BV*, in reference to the house of Anna, noted that it was 'formerly Madeleine et Madeleine.' (5 November 1924, p. 76)

[2] *BV* 5 April 1922, p. 84

[3] American *Vogue* (hereafter referred to as *AV*) 15 June 192, p. 32. This is the only essay to refer to *AV* in any detail, as it was the only period of the magazine to be available in an accessible source.

[4] See Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and her World* (London 1981), p. 130, and Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), p.32

[5] *BV* 5 May 1922, p. 41. Patou's August 1921 collection had featured many so-called Russian-inspired silhouettes.

[6] *Femina* 1 April 1922, p. 29; *L'Art et la Mode* 24 June 1922, and reproduced in JoAnne Olian, *Authentic French Fashions of the Twenties: 413 Costume Designs from L'Art et la Mode* (New York 1990), p. 40. This day wear model had a hip-length sweater with wide, flaring sleeves and a high roll collar in fur. In white crêpe Marocain, the top was embroidered in a style (Russian or Balkan) similar to that of **171**.

[7] The high proportion of capes shown in the catalogue reflects the very large number known to have been produced by Chanel this season. They were made to match specific dresses and came in a great variety of styles, fabrics and colours. One report noted that, 'Chanel's capes are frequently of velvet, although this material has been neglected by the other houses. Two models, one in prune colour and the other in a dull dark old-blue, are worn over short sleeved frocks of matching georgette, as simple as it is possible for frocks to be, with the very short skirts to which Chanel is faithful.' (*AV* 1 May 1922, p. 30)

[8] The 5 September 1922 edition of *BV* described the popularity of satin gaufré for dresses worn at the recent Bal de l'Opéra and the success of Chanel's cape: 'One charming young woman wore... the cape which Chanel first designed in grey satin glacier and chinchilla; her version, however, was all in white with a collar of ermine, the effect was delightful.' The cape is very similar to one reproduced in Alice Mackrell, *Coco Chanel* (London 1992), p. 49 (dated to circa 1918), and in the Spink and Son catalogue *Sale of Costume and Textiles* (London 5-20 December 1990), p. 30, dated to circa 1920. The latter volume described it as a 'Rare, three-quarter-length cape of ciré black satin, with high fox fur collar and dropped waist, slightly elasticated at the hips to give a blouson effect, further accentuated by the position of the arms which slip through the lining to hold the cape in place at the front. Lining of brown silk crêpe.' The label states 'Chanel Paris' (couture no. 14000); it has a separate label Paris. B. Altman and Co. New York.

[9] *AV* 15 May 1922, p. 38. The embroidered monogram was used most famously by Patou: it has been noted that the monogram first appeared in his collections of 1922, and that Chanel's famous interlocking C's was copied from it. See Meredith Etherington-Smith, *Patou* (London, 1983), p. 54 . However, a reference in the 15 May 1923 edition of *BV*states that Vionnet had designed 'four years ago, (a) dress of plain crêpe de Chine... trimmed only by hemstitching and initials on the left side of the blouse.'

[10] *AV* 15 May 1922, p. 38

[11] Matching soft wool scarves and hats were produced to accompany the sports models.

[12] *AV* 15 June 1922, p. 32. This ensemble also had a short woollen wrap-over skirt, and a 'straight, hem-stitched, and breast-pocketed' blouse in crêpe de Chine.

[13] *AV* 1 May 1922, p. 30

[14] *BV* 20 April 1922, p. 74

[15] *BV* 5 April 1922, p. 39

[16] *BV* 5 April 1922, p. 46

[17] *DR* 26 November 1921, p. 544

[18] *BV* 20 April 1922, p. 35

[19] *BV* 15 April 1922, p. 43

[20] Lanvin's short Breton coats, in soft kasha, had 'Puritan' collars in organdie, tied with long black streamers.

[21] Little is known of O'Rossen, although it was covered consistently by *BV* during this period.

[22] *BV* 5 March 1922, p. 62

[23] The French textile firm Bianchini produced a range of 'blistered' fabrics including satin gaufrés, satin glaciers, and satin Persian. These satins appeared to be crinkled and puffed and had what was described as a shimmering quality. Rodier's versions included cloquella and baragladine.

[24] *BV* 20 February 1922, p. 50

[25] *DR* (4 February 1922, p. 283) noted that Persian embroidered fabrics and colours were one of the key elements of Rodier's spring/summer 1922 collection.

[26] *BV* 1 April 1922, p. 43

[27] *AV* 15 May 1922, p. 38

[28] Etherington-Smith, op. cit. p. 54, claims that Patou's tennis dresses were made in consultation with Lenglen.

[29] *BV* 1 May 1922, p. 41

[30] Charles-Roux, op. cit. p. 130, refers to the period 1923-1924 as being 'Chanel in her Russian Phase'. De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit. p. 31, refer to the period from 1920 to 1924 as 'Chanel's Slav Period' (1994, p. 31).

[31] De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit. p. 31

[32] *BV* 5 May 1922, p. 41. The importance of the Russian contribution to fashion at this time mirrors the wider importance of the Russian avant garde for Western European art and design during the 1920s.

[33] The Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna was Dmitri's sister and one such member of the impoverished Russian aristocracy to work for Chanel: the magazine described her as one of many, 'vendeuse-grandes-dames-russes' working in Paris at the time (20 February 192, p. 65). It has been claimed that, 'The titled émigrés lent a certain cachet to the Chanel salons', and that Count Kutuzov was employed first as a glorified doorman and then as a member of the administrative staff. Axel Madsen, *Coco Chanel:*

A Biography (London 1990), p. 141. Chanel's links with the Russian community extended to her affair with the Grand Duke Dmitri (1920 to 1923) and to her friendship with Diaghilev, whom she had met during the summer of 1921. Maria Pavlovna (whom Chanel probably met at the same time as Diaghilev) was the widow of the late czar's uncle the Grand Duke Vladimir. She had known Diaghilev prior to the revolution and had, in wealthier days, financially backed the Ballets Russes. Maria opened her own workshop 'Kitmir' which had as its two main clients Chanel and Patou.

August 1922

The End of the Chemise

This collection is unique in the catalogue as it includes just two designs, both of which were shown in November editions of British *Vogue*, alongside the work of Jenny, Madeleine et Madeleine and Renée. It is uncertain why *Vogue* did not illustrate more Chanel models this season. One possible explanation is a dispute between the designer and the magazine, a situation which was not uncommon in the tempestuous world of French haute couture.[1] Alternatively, the collection may have been smaller this season due in part to the extended vacation taken by Chanel in the summer of 1922.[2] Nonetheless, it is possible to give a comprehensive account of the collection as it was covered extensively in *Vogue*'s written reports. Although Chanel's work was not reproduced to the same extent this spring, French *Vogue* did illustrate her costume designs for Jean Cocteau's production of *Antigone*, keeping the designer firmly in the public eye.[3]

The Collection

One model was intended for formal morning or afternoon wear (**179**: a dress) and one for evening wear (**180**: a dress with matching jacket).

This collection does not differ significantly from those of previous seasons. Chanel's strategy was to continue to produce designs that had proved successful, but to vary the details in order that last season's version would, as far as her fashion-conscious customers were concerned, no longer do:

> Chez Chanel, fashions are as stabilized as such mutable, impermanent things can be; realizing, however, that variety is very necessary to the inconstant mind of woman, Mlle. Chanel yields just enough to satisfy her clients and then proceeds to divert their attention along other lines.[4]

The straight, short and simple, garment, with a plain neckline and a low waist (over which the bodice is slightly bloused), continued to dominate the collection. Both designs illustrate this theme and represent the growing prevalence of fuller skirts. These allowed the woman to walk comfortably, but fell straight so as not to detract

from the basic silhouette. **180** (one of the most popular evening gowns of the season) is typical: the fabric is lightly gathered or pleated at the sides.[5] The simplicity of a design (in its form and fastening) was of crucial importance: many short coats had no fastenings and were reportedly 'worn with the greatest ease and grace, being merely crossed over in front.'[6] Wide, flaring sleeves (seen in the February 1922 collection) are shown again on **179.**

Variety was provided in a number of ways. Although the majority of Chanel's tailleurs were reported to have short coats, all lengths of coats and capes were shown. These frequently included 'a half-length round jacket, very flat all round.'[7] This report would imply that circular-cut coats and skirts were still important. New forms of clothing were introduced: British *Vogue* commented that, 'Chanel's most amusing novelty this season is her fur-lined sweater, instead of a coat.'[8] These designs resembled sweaters but were, 'treated in colour like the formal afternoon wrap.'[9] Day dresses occasionally emphasized the width at the sides by the addition of loose pockets and what British *Vogue* described as, 'an effect of loose pieces on the sides, and a bodice cut square in front.[10] Afternoon and evening models featured long side draperies to alleviate the otherwise straight, short silhouettes.

The fabrics for the informal designs included jersey, tweed, kasha, heavy crêpe de Chine, crêpe georgette, crêpe marocain and heavy satin, in colours such as black, grey, beige, blue and green. White was frequently used for evening wear. Many short coats were produced in a heavy fabric known as 'chameau', which resembled camel's-hair cloth. More formal coats were produced in black and brown brocade, recalling the colour of Cordavan leather. Roughly textured fabrics, such as gaufré crêpe (see February 1922), continued to be important for more formal designs, along with satin, silk, mousseline de soie and lace. Tailleurs frequently had blouses which matched the colour of the coat. One journalist described a Chanel design appropriate for morning/street or informal afternoon wear:

> Another model, which seemed to me the most successful of them all, was that worn by Mlle. Chanel herself, made of a sort of Indian material, in mixed tones of yellow, blue, brown and black.[11]

This dress was worn with either a sable-collared cloak or, as Chanel herself preferred, a coat that had a full skirt bordered with a deep band of sable.[12] The long sleeves of day

dresses often had a sable cuff; many tailleurs had large otter fur collars and the sweater-coats were usually bordered and lined with beaver fur. Apart from fur, very few trimmings were used. **179** relies for its decoration on the two vertical seams which drop down the sides of the bodice to the skirt yoke. Embroidery, which was regarded by many as the specialty of the house, was seen in all categories. Fine, horizontal embroidery was applied to day wear coats and it was reported that some blouses were embroidered in a thread which matched the colour of the accompanying coat. Steel beading often decorated the black coats. British *Vogue* stated that:

> (Chanel's) silk embroideries made with a close design resembling damascened cuirasses and recalling them in colour, are of an extreme richness; one coat, as well as certain frocks, is entirely covered with such embroidery, and the lining, like the trimming, is of beaver or otter. One looks for simplicity and one finds it in the lines of this coat, which is very smart indeed.[13]

The periodical also described this type of embroidery as being 'solid and... exactly like damascene work on a Toledo blade.'[14] Embroidered models were simply cut, so as not to result in an overly complicated design. However, even the most informal of afternoon dresses were richly embroidered. One report noted that:

> In the less formal afternoon dresses a cameo-like embroidery, mounted on crêpe marocain, is found; the corsage of matching crêpe is sometimes left bare of embroidery, while the bottom of the skirt is heavily encrusted.[15]

Many evening designs were decorated with embroidery and beading. One model was 'embellished with clear glass beads and gold metallic and black thread embroidery, applied in circular motifs and loops.'[16] White embroidery on white fabric was used to give the effect of a heavy, wrinkled fabric. Chanel also produced a range of fichus (or shawls) which were detailed with silk embroidery and edged with a bias strip of black or brown mousseline de soie. British *Vogue* commented that, 'These fichus, which can be worn or not as one prefers, revive the idea of a scarf.'[17] In a February 1923 edition of the magazine it was made clear that Chanel had originated this fashion in 1922: 'Chanel really began this last year, with the green lace fichu which she showed with a green lace evening frock.'[18]

Context

After the openings, the press announced that the new season would be characterized by several silhouettes. The straight, narrow and almost unbroken silhouette dominated the informal categories. However, the perfectly straight chemise dress, which was frequently compared to a sack tied in the middle (following Jean-Phillipe Worth's comments in the early part of 1921), was, British *Vogue* argued, no longer shown. The periodical believed that, in general, the cut of even the informal designs was more complicated. British *Vogue* emphasized this point when it described one-piece dresses, worn under simple jackets, that were:

> ... apparently as straight as ever, but in reality their cut is more complicated. This note might be made of almost every collection shown in Paris. Jenny's favourite one-piece frock... has the bodice attached to the skirt by a sort of bias cutting, running up into a point on one side and down on the other, which is not to be attempted by the amateur.[19]

The move away from the straight, simple chemise to more complicated models was thought indicative of a change in the attitudes of many women who, since the end of the war, no longer wanted to wear the figure-concealing, sack-like chemise. Margaret Case Harriman wrote that,

> The woman of 1922 no longer desires to look like a "good pal", boyishly dressed in short skirt and trim belted coat of practical material. That was the war ideal... She (the Parisienne) has given up her rather pathetic desire to be considered the comrade of man, and is making another attempt to show herself off as his ideal.[20]

The straight, short and uncomplicated silhouette of the war years was considered by some as an unfortunate necessity of its time. Many hoped that 1923 would see the rejection of the 'careless' lines of recent fashion and the adoption of a more studied and 'feminine' silhouette. However, despite Harriman's claims, 1922 and 1923 saw the consolidation, rather than the rejection, of the 'boyish look' and what came to be known as the 'genre garçon' (see February 1923).

Some morning/street skirts were circular cut, or had godets and pleats, but despite such trends no radical changes were seen in this category and every house featured simple, straight, three-piece designs. Skirts remained short – approximately eight inches off the ground – despite the efforts last season to lengthen designs. The length of a tailleur's jacket varied from house to house; high, large collars, straight and flaring sleeves were popular. Waistlines, like those at Chanel, were low: positioned at the top of the hip. Belts were often confined to sports models.

Afternoon and evening designs were more likely to be circular cut (bringing all the fullness to the sides, leaving the back and front plain), or to have inset godets (reminiscent of the fashions of the 1890s), and drapery (where the material was swathed around the figure, folded or pulled upwards in many different ways). Drapery was concentrated below the hips and frequently below the knees. These models were more elaborate, reflecting the increased distinction between the categories. The *Drapers' Record* stated that, 'Sleeves to afternoon dresses continue on the fantastic side, though they are not so long and wide as they were during the spring.'[21] Long, tight 'mitten' sleeves were seen on some models. Evening dresses were either ankle or floor-length and every house featured models draped at the front, side or hip. Many evening gowns moulded the figure closely and the majority were sleeveless with low décolletages. There was less 'period' influence, although Chéruit was known particularly for Chinese-inspired designs and Lanvin adopted the forms of the religious costumes of the Renaissance. The number of Russian-inspired silhouettes (see February 1922) was dramatically reduced.

Day fabrics included broadcloth, rep, duvetyn, tricotine, soft-finished woollens and velours de laine. It was noted that some houses continued to use serge, whilst others, including Patou, ignored it. Velvet and velveteen were used for more formal designs. Black, brown and the 'quiet' colours continued to be the most popular. The majority of coats and suits were fur trimmed, and the fur linings promoted by Chanel were also seen at Beer, Jenny, Lanvin, Lelong and Molyneux. Richer fabrics such as velvet, velveteen, crêpe Marocain, crêpe de Chine, heavy satins and matelassé were widely used for the more formal categories, and colours were bolder and brighter. Velvet (often beaded), metal fabrics, brocade, cloqué, matelassé, taffeta and satin were seen for evening; gowns in white, mauve, rose, yellow and green, far out-numbered those in black. Bows and flowers appeared in all the collections and were often placed at the side or at the back. Ribbons were shown by Poiret and Renée.

Chanel's collection was, in many senses, similar to the majority of those shown in Paris: elements ranging from the circular and more complicated cuts, to the fur-lined sweaters, were developed at other houses. However, it is clear that her work was still marked by what was perceived to be its 'stability': its continuity and coherence.

An unprecedented numbers of buyers attended the August 1922 collections. This was partly due to the determined attempts of the Grandes Maisons to keep the costs of their designs down. One report noted that, 'It is said that French couturiers are making every effort to reduce the cost of production so as to be able to place a lower price on their models. With this hope in view, buyers have arrived in greater numbers than since the war.'[22] These efforts paid off and the *Drapers' Record* noted that the amount of orders being placed was high. Although the houses were using greater quantities of fur trimming, British *Vogue* was able to report that, 'an effort has been made to keep prices within reasonable limits by using the less expensive pelts such as dyed and shaved lamb.'[23]

Unlike many of his contemporaries, Poiret was not quite as responsive to the considerable and growing importance of the American market (see February 1922). In a move which could not have helped his already struggling business, Poiret, on a business trip to America in August 1922, publicly questioned the taste and ability of its homegrown designers. As Milbank has shown, in the face of a possible import tax on clothes of between sixty to ninety percent, a measure which would of course benefit the American fashion industry, Poiret told the *New York Times* that 'American designers did not "have the spark of genius that is necessary," and furthermore, American women were always three years behind the times.'[24] It was more the willingness on behalf of designers such as Chanel and Patou to cater for and respond to the American market, rather than the undiplomatic remarks of Poiret, that ensured what would be the profitable relationship between the leading houses and the American market during the 1920s.

[1] Chanel's arguments with *Vogue* are referred to in the Introduction.

[2] See Axel Madsen, *Coco Chanel: A Biography* (London 1990), p. 123. Chanel spent a large part of the summer on holiday near Bordeaux with the Grand Duke Dmitri.

[3] *FV* 1 February 1923, pp. 28–29. The play premiered on 22 December 1922.

[4] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[5] The 15 December 1922 edition of *BV* included an article, 'Paris Wares and Wearers' that discussed how certain models of the season would be adapted by the couturiers to suit the particular requirements and tastes of their customers. The author noted that, 'This week, however... I noticed that Chanel's caracal model has undergone no changes; doubtless because it meets a certain condition of mind common to many smart women, like Mme. de Yturbe, la Comtesses de Castries, Miss Elsie Wolfe and others.'

[6] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[7] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[8] *BV* 5 October 1922, p. 35

[9] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[10] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[11] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[12] This design, with the coat instead of the cloak, was also worn by la Comtesse de Moustier.

[13] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[14] *BV* 5 October 1922, p. 90

[15] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[16] Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), pp. 33 – 35. The evening gown referred to belongs to the collection of the Victoria and Albert Museum, London (T.86 – 1974), but was originally worn by the Hon. Mrs. Anthony Henley in 1922.

[17] *BV* 20 October 1922, p. 88

[18] *BV* 20 February 1923, p. 71

[19] *BV* 5 October 1922, p. 82

[20] *BV* 20 November 1922, p., 37

[21] *DR* 9 September 1922, p. 614

[22] *DR* 12 August 1922, p. 367

[23] *BV* 5 October 1922, p. 82

[24] Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York 1989), p. 76

February 1923

Uniformity and the Garçonne Look

This collection is represented by sixteen designs reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 20 February and 20 August 1923. Seven were shown only in British *Vogue*, one only in French *Vogue* and eight were shown in both editions of the magazine. As if to make up for the lack of coverage during the latter part of 1922, the house received extensive publicity this season: five designs were shown on two full-page spreads devoted entirely to the collection. The remaining models were shown with those of Callot, Chéruit, Dœuillet, Drécoll, Jenny, Lanvin, Lelong, Premet, Vionnet and Worth. No designs by the house of Louiseboulanger (which opened this year) were shown next to those by Chanel.[1] A photograph of Chanel herself appeared in both editions of *Vogue*, indicating the level to which she had become a fashionable personality.[2]

The Collection

Nine designs were appropriate for morning/street wear (**181 – 189**: two tailleurs, four coats, two jackets, and a wrap), three for sports (**190 – 192**: one jacket and skirt, one jacket and its matching dress), and four for evening (**193 – 196**: three dresses and a cape).

In April 1923 British *Vogue* once again argued that it was the consistency of Chanel's collections that set the house apart from its competitors:

> Chanel, staunch supporter of youthful chic, goes her own way, unruffled by the clamour for more sophisticated costuming – conforming in details, perhaps, but holding to the... silhouette she has made famous.[3]

The simple, straight and low-waisted garment with straight sleeves, and a pleated or tiered skirt with a straight hemline approximately nine to ten inches off the ground, dominated this collection.[4] The evening designs shared the same basic lines, but were longer and sleeveless with low décolletages and uneven hemlines. The basic theme for day wear is represented in its most basic form by the tailleur **181** (which has the collarless 'patelot' jacket seen in earlier collections), but also by the more elaborate coat

185. The latter model has a simple wrap-front, a three-tiered skirt and an attached waist-length cape (or cape-back), a feature that was typical of many models this season (cf. the coat **186** and the evening dress **194**).

Summarizing the main points of the collection, British *Vogue* stated, 'Witness her endless variety within narrow limits; the triple skirt, for instance; the jaunty pleated affair; aprons – even ruffles or flat tiers now and then to enchant youthful fancy.'[5] The triple skirt, cape-back and apron panel were not, however, the only means employed to avoid monotony. All lengths of coat and jacket were seen (the simple, collarless box jacket was particularly important). Coat fastenings also varied considerably: **181** was secured at the neck with a narrow tie; **182** was fastened at one point at the neck; **183**, **185** and **187** were fastened in a bow at one point over the left hip. Suede belts were used on several of the tailleurs; the simple tie-belt or sash still appeared for day and evening. Shawl, roll and flat collars were all seen. Bateau, V, square and rounded necklines were shown; the tab detail on **182** was a new feature. The majority of sleeves were full-length and straight, although those of **188** flare out towards the cuff (recalling the flaring sleeves of the 1922 collections). Lightweight fichus, seen in the August 1922 collection, were often tied in a knot over the left hip, thus adding interest to otherwise simple evening gowns (**193**). Tiers (often scalloped) and outer layers of semi-transparent fabrics were an equally important means of altering the basic silhouette of the more elaborate designs.

Day and sports fabrics included wool jersey, flecked jersey, serge, tricot, kasha, crêpe roma, crêpe georgette (both plain and printed), crêpe de Chine and printed foulards. The colours included black, beige, rose, yellow, and navy blue. Printed foulard in combination with a dark, plain fabric was important: the coats of both **183** and **184** are lined and trimmed with the brightly printed foulard of the accompanying dress. Occasionally this order would be reserved: the coat would be in a printed fabric or decorated with embroidery and the dress would be plain (cf. **187**). Such designs were considered to be the 'succès fou' of the season:

> The charming idea... of lining long jackets of black or blue crêpe with a foulard or crêpe patterned in flowers on a white ground, has assured Chanel an absolute success.[6]

Many geometrical prints were seen (e.g. **182**): one report referred to a Chanel costume of pale grey rep, 'with oblongs of porcelain blue set in horizontal bands all over it.'[7] Alpaca and marabou (new to this collection) were used to line many designs. One coat with a more unusual lining was described in some detail:

> Chanel embroiders a straight brown knee-length crêpe de Chine coat with red and mastic silk thread, and lines it throughout with a sort of fur of knitted red fringe – the fringe falling a bit below the end of the coat.[8]

Thus the lining had both a functional and a decorative role. The house continued to produce a great variety of versatile slip-on sports sweaters this season in wool and silk:

> Chanel's sweaters of Fair-Isle design may be used not only with separate skirts, but as part of the whole costume. Slit up the front, bound and lined with flat crêpe, and worn with a crêpe blouse to match, and a harmonizing skirt of some soft wool material, they lend themselves to an ensemble sponsored by the smartest Parisiennes.[9]

Formal afternoon and evening designs were made in Rodier crêpes, fulgurante satin, crêpe georgette, crêpe de Chine, Chantilly lace, lamé, chiffon, mousseline de soie, net and beaded fabrics. Black (on its own or combined with a colour), white, grey, light brown, beige, red, pale rose, and dark shades of green were common. Some yellow and navy blue were also seen.

Few trimmings were employed: apron or pleated panels (the pleating on **192** recalls that of **154**, August 1921) were often the only decoration. Fur trimming (badger, fox and caracal) appeared on many of the jackets and coats. Embroidery was seen on some day and sports wear models. Like **191**, the embroidery on several sports coats was organized in narrow horizontal bands. Chanel reportedly derived many of the patterns for her all-embroidered sports coats from India and China. More elaborate trimmings were used for the evening designs. *Femina* published an afternoon dress with a bodice embroidered in a fine horizontal pattern and short lengths of feather fringing falling from below the belt.[10] An evening design shown in the same periodical was embroidered in large, circular motifs in gold and rose organized into horizontal bands.[11] Reports also referred to a series of lavishly embroidered taffeta evening coats with fur collars.

Context

Chanel was criticized for reducing women's fashion to a uniform: producing similar designs season after season with the intention that all women, young or old, should adopt them. In June, British *Vogue* included an article on the latest trends (written in the form of a letter to a friend) which dismissed this criticism: Chanel customers were clearly committed to the short, straight and uncomplicated silhouette.

> Your cousin Max pretends that Chanel has made us all the same type. Well it ought to be rather interesting to men to search and disentangle the character of each one of us, concealed beneath our smart uniform. It is a game which, it seems to me, might provide much amusement.[12]

Although known as the 'Chanel silhouette', the majority of houses produced similar lines for morning/street wear. On average the straight skirts were between eight and ten inches off the ground (exceptionally, many of Jenny's designs were ankle-length). The most popular coats were, like Chanel's, short and unbelted: the bolero (shown by Jenny, Beer and Dœuillet), or the three-quarter-length jacket worn as part of a three-piece suit and on its own. In July, British *Vogue* acknowledged the popularity of the long coat with matching dress as sponsored by Chanel: 'No silhouette is more typical of the mode of the season than... the tube-like coat or coat-frock with the hat peeping above like a little cone.'[13] Coat-dresses, with tiered skirts and cape-backs, were seen at many houses.

The fashion for such pared-down, tube-like designs came to be referred to as 'the genre garçon'. The book from which this trend took its name, Victor Margueritte's *La Garçonne*, was a bestseller by February 1923. It followed the growing independence of its unconventional heroine Monique Lerbier as she leaves home, is educated at the Sorbonne, cuts her hair, adopts men's clothing and experiments sexually. Monique's radical and 'unfeminine' approach to dress was extremely influential: clothes that appeared simple and boyish, or androgynous and 'tube-like' (such as the simple dresses, tailleurs and sports suits produced by Chanel, Patou and Premet) were referred to as the 'Garçonne Look'. Steele refers to one Premet model, designed during 1922, which was actually named *La Garçonne*: this dress, which was one of the most successful designs during 1922 and 1923, was in black satin and extremely simple,

trimmed only with a white collar and cuffs.[14] An August edition of British *Vogue* acknowledged the growing importance of this style and correctly predicted its even more widespread popularity, '... the genre garçon... is now making a decided appeal to the Frenchwoman, and will undoubtedly be felt as an influence in the coming fashions.'[15]

One article entitled 'Paris Modes In Contradictory Moods' illustrated the range of details employed by the leading houses: sleeves could be either puffed or plain, wide or tight; belts were either non-existent or a part of every ensemble; revers were narrow or wide and necklines were high or low. However, the leading houses generally agreed over sports wear:

> The smart sports silhouette is a definite thing. In fact, with chic women, it hints of the uniform. It is slender, unornamented, and youthful in outline... The dress or suit is of the utmost simplicity and the waistline is more nearly normal than in other clothes. The skirt never has an uneven hemline and is short, although not exaggeratedly so.[16]

Women were advised to wear a one or two-piece costume in wool jersey for tennis or golf on cooler days and a plain chemise, trimmed with tucks or pleats, on warm days. Pleated skirts ensured freedom of movement and, if made in a light material, were not too heavy. For the spectator, tailored skirts (worn with either a wool sweater or an embroidered blouse) were thought appropriate. The simple suit and blouse was also favoured for travel wear.

A great variety of silhouettes were shown for afternoon and evening. Jenny was associated with the 'godet' silhouette (the skirt would frequently be gathered into godets at one side under a large rosette or bow) and Callot, Drécoll, Jenny, Premet and Worth advocated the 'Indo-China' silhouette (the fabric was gathered into drapery at the front, leaving the back flat). Chéruit, Martial et Armand and Poiret's designs showed references to the 1880s and 90s, and were often straight from the shoulder to the knee with a flare or flounce at the lower skirt. The 'classic' silhouette (a slim-fitting, ankle-length design often with a floor-length train) was confined mainly to evening wear. Following the discovery in 1922 of Tutankhamen's tomb near Luxor, Ancient Egyptian design was assimilated by Jenny, Doucet and Drécoll. Patou and Poiret both created designs that recalled the fashions of the Second Empire. Vionnet was reported to have

'designed the most charming things in the fashions of Renoir and Ricard.'[17] Lanvin continued to specialize in her trademark 'robes de style' with bouffant silhouettes.[18] This more 'nostalgic and feminine look' was identified by Milbank as being the alternative direction to that offered by Chanel and her more radical contemporaries.[19]

One journalist discussed the possible revival of the chemise for afternoon, a form of dress which it was felt would make the most suitable backdrop for embroidery. However, many afternoon and evening models were already extremely simple and marked only as more formal designs by the use of embroidery and beading (prompting Baron de Meyer to refer to an 'extravagant poverty').[20] While most bodices tended to be straight and plain, skirts showed pleated sections, apron panels, drapery, bows and lace trimmings. The majority of afternoon designs fell to just above the ankles and were in crêpe, satin or charmeuse. The most common evening fabrics were taffeta, satin, crêpe, muslin, organdie and lace (including metal lace). Beading was extremely fashionable and by July it was reported that tortoise shell trimming was the latest craze.

Chanel is once again set apart from the majority of her rivals by her insistence on the straight, very short and plain silhouette (British *Vogue* suggests an almost stubborn quality on the part of the designer when it describes her 'staunch support' of the youthful look, and a determination to 'go her own way'). Nonetheless, the house was not alone in its production of plain, simple, 'boyish' designs (and may even have taken its lead from Premet). The introduction of printed coat linings and Fair-Isle sweaters were, however, particularly associated with Chanel.

Sections of the press discussed what many perceived as a move away from simplicity and a return to more complicated lines and decoration. This tendency was believed to have been initiated by a concern for the future of the French lace and trimming manufacturers. British *Vogue* noted that:

> When a woman selects a gown... she little thinks that she is affecting international trade, and that so dignified a personage as the Minister of Commerce and Industry is concerned about her choice... It seems it would be very well for French exportations if women would wear clothes of the type which used to be characterized as fuss and feathers. While they did so, of course, they were heartily condemned for their frivolity, but since then it has been discovered that this frivolity was important to a large number of luxury

> trades in France, and hence the appeal against the simplicity of the day, launched in the form of a circular letter to all those interested in the creation of woman's dress by the ministry above mentioned.[21]

In the light of such measures, it was unsurprising that, alongside the simple, severe silhouette – or the 'garçonne' look – a growing fashion for lace and more heavily trimmed designs was evident.

---

[1] Louise Boulanger trained with Chéruit. Following Chéruit's retirement in 1923, Boulanger went into business alone.

[2] *BV* 20 May 1923, p. 25; *FV* 1 May 1923, p. 22

[3] *BV* 20 April 1923, p. 83

[4] Chanel's skirts continued to be amongst the shortest in Paris.

[5] *BV* 20 April 1923, p. 83

[6] *BV* 5 June 1923,p. 26

[7] *BV* 5 June 1923, p. 66

[8] Anna Campen Van Stewart writing for *Good Housekeeping*. See Brian Braithwaite, *Ragtime to Wartime: The Best of Good Housekeeping, 1922-1939* (London 1986), p. 16

[9] *BV* 20 May 1923, p. 33

[10] *Femina* 1 June 1923, p. 23. The dress was short-sleeved with a collared V-neckline, and in black satin with an outer layer of mousseline de soie over the skirt.

[11] *Femina* 1 April 1923, p. 33. The dress was in silver-grey crêpe.

[12] *BV* 5 June 1923, p. 25

[13] *BV* 5 July 1923, p. 25. The description of this ensemble refers to the cloche hat, which had, and was to continue to be, an integral part of the fashionable woman's wardrobe during the 1920s.

[14] See Valerie Steele, 'Chanel in Context', in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader* (London 1992), p. 122. Steele states that the designer for Premet was 'unnamed, but statistically probably female.' At this time, it was in fact Mme. Charlotte who directed 'the creation of models' at Premet (see *BV* 5 February 1923, p. 111).

[15] *BV* 20 August 1923, p. 33

[16] *BV* 20 May 1923, pp. 39, 40

[17] *BV* 5 June 1923, p. 74

[18] The robe de style was, by 1923, regarded as suitable for the older woman or the young débutante. *BV* explained its survival in the following passage: 'The robe de style will remain the resource of the woman whose figure, being no longer as young as formerly, must be concealed, or of the young girl so thin that the bouffant frock is for her a very charming necessity.' (20 February 1923, p. 37)

[19] Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York 1989), p. 76

[20] De Meyer, quoted in Milbank, op. cit.

[21] *BV* 20 February 1923, p. 28

August 1923

Concealed Fullness and the Dancing Dress

The thirteen designs which represent this collection were reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 5 October 1923 and 20 February 1924. Six were shown only in British *Vogue*, one was shown only in French *Vogue*, and six were shown in both editions of the periodical. Four of the designs were featured on two pages in British *Vogue* devoted to the house. The remaining models were shown with those by Callot, Chéruit, Dœuillet, Doucet, Drécoll, Jenny, Lanvin, Patou, Paquin, Premet, Vionnet and Worth.

The Collection

Three designs were intended for morning/street or afternoon wear (**197 – 199**: one suit and two dresses), and ten for evening wear (**200 – 209**: eight dresses and two coats).

Chanel's designs this season were described as the 'acme of simplicity.'[1] Although the slim-fitting and comparatively short silhouette with a dropped waistline is seen throughout the collection, two distinct themes emerge. The first is the uncomplicated, short (nine to ten inches off the ground) and 'tube-like' silhouette (see February 1923), with details derived from men's dress. This line was confined largely to morning/street and sports wear: British *Vogue* noted that, 'In the morning, Chanel wants the woman to look neat and boyish.'[2] It is represented by the tailleur **197**, one of several similar models that were produced this season. The second theme is the more elaborate and slightly longer (lower-calf-length) silhouette with an uneven hemline and what was referred to as 'concealed fullness': devices such as pleating, streamers and drapery panels, which required considerable quantities of fabric but did not detract from the slender line, were used to modify and enliven the basic shape of the garment.[3] These designs (produced primarily for afternoon and evening wear) appeared simple, but were described as being 'softly elaborate in cut.'[4] The evening gown **206** represents this theme: the pointed drapery wings (typically positioned at the shoulders and hips) and the petal-like tiered skirt were designed to hang straight when the woman stood still, and to have a fluttering movement when in motion (the tiered skirt, cape back and drapery wings of **186** and **194** – February 1923 – anticipated this development).

Numerous versions of this model, favoured for dancing and referred to as the 'mermaid frock', were produced (cf. **207**).[5]

Chanel employed a wide range of devices to ensure the maximum possible variety. Jackets were either cut to the top of the hips or just below; many of the tailleurs had simple wrap-over jackets. Tailleurs of 'the classic type', with double-breasted jackets, were also shown. More formal ensembles comprised longer coats and matching dresses or a skirt and blouse (many of which were attached). Although these designs were cut straight, the coats were not overly 'tube-like' and had a certain amount of flare or pleating in the skirt, underlining Chanel's continued concern with comfort and the woman's ease of movement. The hipline on both informal and formal models was occasionally accentuated by pleated overlapping panels (**198** and **199**), tiers, bows (**200**), triangular godets, and tassels (**209**). One report noted that, 'Even in her tailleurs, (Chanel) places a sort of folded section making a pocket to mark this point.'[6] Simple collared V-necklines were seen on the morning/street and sports designs; round (**198**) and square (**199**) were shown for afternoon; the evening models were sleeveless with low front and back décolletages and comparatively narrow shoulder straps. A 'new note' was described as being 'the use of short, full capes with velvet or cloth dresses, recalling the cape collarette in vogue in the late 'nineties.'[7] The full-length sleeves were either straight from the armhole to the cuff (**197**), or straight with a flare towards the cuff (**199**); the flared cuff of **198** is finely pleated and falls over the top of the hand. It was during this season that the cape sleeve was introduced into Chanel's collections.[8] The simple tie-belt is replaced by the half-belt (**198**) or the sash tied in a bow (**202**).

Not all the evening designs conform to the type represented by **206. 200** and **202** both have a straight bodice and skirt with an even hemline. The former is enlivened by the pointed panels at the lower bodice which sit over the sash; the latter features a cape-back (seen on many of the evening designs from February 1923, and also on **201** and **205** from this collection) and an over-skirt opened at the front.[9] Furthermore, the influence of male forms of dress was not confined purely to morning/street or sport designs. The evening coat **209** was described by British *Vogue* as being derived 'directly from the masculine modes of Louis XV, when coat skirts assumed important proportions at the sides.'[10]

The day wear fabrics included tweed, tricot, kasha, velour, velveteen, crêpe de Chine and crêpe georgette, in black, shades of brown (including 'dead-leaf' brown), beige,

'Florentine' red, green and blue. Tailleurs were almost always produced in 'English materials'. Black and white horizontal stripes were seen on some fabrics and many sports or semi-sport continued 'to use the patterned tricot which Chanel has made famous.'[11] Coats were usually lined with the fabric of the matching dress (see February 1923). Velvet (particularly green trimmed with a dark fur), soft crêpe georgette, crêpe satin, crêpe de Chine, chiffon and lace, in black, biscuit or straw shades, pale rose, yellow, cobalt blue and green, were used for afternoon and evening designs. In reference to the 'simplicity' of the collection, British *Vogue* reported that, no brocades (and) few fanciful fabrics' were used.[12] Trimming was limited to buttons, fine pleating, frills (**199**) and small bows on the day wear models. Fur bands, ostrich feathers, tassels and streamers appeared on many of the evening dresses. Less embroidery was shown this season: one report announced that, 'Chanel's evening gowns are guiltless of embroidery.'[13] Nonetheless, the combination of beige and red embroidery, on black or very dark brown fabric and in 'conventional and geometric patterns', was considered a new development. [14] Knots of white flowers worn on the shoulder were widely seen.

Context

The August openings saw no radical changes: instead, the season witnessed the consolidation of ideas and trends that were evident during the Spring and Summer. The tube-like silhouette, shown in February, appeared at many houses (particularly for morning/street or sport coat-dresses and tailleurs). Most designers now followed Chanel's lead and produced skirts that were at least eight inches off the ground (some street or sports wear models went up to ten inches). Although many tailleurs were rather simple and severe, Poiret, who continued to use sumptuous fabrics and bold colours in all categories, created one model described as:

> ... a fantastic... creation in marron velour-de-laine, with the back of the vest (or jacket) extending to form a cape on one side only. This odd side cape is a favourite with this designer.[15]

Similarly, a Chéruit tailleur *Cambodian* was referred to in terms that were never used in connection with Chanel's work: 'an audacious affair with coat skirts like delightful panniers, stiffened by a fabric like that was used on the shoulders of men's garments.'[16] Drécoll used what were referred to as 'saddle-bag panniers' to achieve the fashionable

accentuation of the hips. The fashion at some houses for more complicated and elaborate tailleurs was, British *Vogue* believed, symptomatic of the growing numbers of women who now had their everyday suits made by a man's tailor (a more easily accessible and occasionally less expensive way of obtaining the severe little suits made fashionable by houses such as Chanel).[17] Although few designers went to the extremes of Poiret and Chéruit, most were careful to avoid monotony by adding fur bands, pleating, apron panels or ruffles. Woollen fabrics, kasha, velvet, velours, moiré, satin, and crêpe de Chine were the most prominent day wear fabrics. Trimming (with the exception of buttons, pleating, contrasting bands, and fur) was usually reserved for more formal designs.

British *Vogue* was anxious to point out that the slim-fitting and unbelted dresses shown in several collections were not like the chemise dresses of old:

> ... there is as much difference... between the old chemise frock and the present slender garment as there is between a pillow case and a pencil. The French call this new straightness "la robe collante", the dress which looks as if it were glued on, and this term is much more descriptive.[18]

The hipline was accentuated in all categories (although this did not result in the 'barrel-like', wide-at-the hips effect of former seasons). Many evening designs had shorter hemlines (Vionnet was one of the few houses whose designs remained comparatively long). The most popular evening models were the slender 'pillar' gowns and the fluttering mermaid dresses (sponsored by Chanel). The distinction between formal dinner and dancing gowns became increasingly pronounced:

> There is all the difference in the world, this year, between the formal evening gown and the dance frock; one so stately, sumptuous, sinuous and slender, the other so brief, so saucy and so apt to be ample in the new interpretation of the word.[19]

Doucet, Drécoll, Patou and Vionnet all made use of pleating, circular fronts and godets to create these new, more 'ample' evening designs. Godets at Vionnet were frequently of uneven lengths, and one report noted that, 'The straight, almost sheath gown with a circular effect placed low at the bottom is shown by almost every house.'[20] Drécoll's dancing dresses had finely pleated frills at the hem, a device which was considered 'an

excellent method of giving a gown of slender line sufficient width for dancing.'[21] The majority of dresses featured tiered skirts, floating panels and draperies: elaboration was ensured by cut and not by excessive trimming. Velvet was used for the more stately and formal evening gowns; satin and crêpe were employed for the straight, 'pillar' gowns; dancing dresses were in finer, more fragile and lightweight fabrics such as tulle and chiffon. Crêpe georgette, crêpe de Chine and moiré continued to be popular in black white, green, blue and pink. Fur and feather trim, as seen at Chanel, was widely used on evening designs: gowns by Drécoll and Poiret, shown in October 1923 editions of *L'Art et la Mode*, were bordered at the hem in deep bands of fox, 'swansdown' and marabou.[22] Although embroidery was seen on fewer Chanel models this season, it was extensively employed by Doucet, Drécoll and Patou amongst others.

Although Chanel refused, this season at least, to adopt the panniers shown at other houses (see February 1924), she was typical in her use of the very straight and 'boyish' silhouette for the morning, and in her efforts to create designs that appeared simple but were, in fact, quite elaborately cut. However, the house was particularly known for its use of British fabrics (a trend which would be widely adopted), the cape sleeve and the mermaid dress.

Acknowledging the wider impact that developments such as the more elaborate cuts and 'concealed fullness' would have, British *Vogue* noted that, 'The fabric manufacturers should take heart, for it looks as though, very soon, it were going to take a great deal of material to make even our daily garments.'[23] French textile manufacturers had carefully monitored the post-war popularity of the simple chemise-style dress, recognizing the negative impact any prolonged fashion for such a style would have on their industry In August the *Drapers' Record* reflected the relief of many sections of the industry when it announced that, 'Paris Bans The "Little Frock"':

> London buyers who attended the Paris openings last week welcome the new and determined attitude of the French fashion arbiters towards the "simple little frock" for afternoon or evening wear. This long-continued popular vogue has benefited few beyond dress material and paper pattern departments, and some of the "simple" frocks can easily be run up with a nightdress... as a guide.[24]

If a dress could be constructed at home, due to the low cost of the small amounts of fabric required and the simplicity of the dressmaking techniques involved, whole

sections of the fashion industry would suffer. The revival of more complicated styles would ensure that the widespread reproduction of individual designs would be much more difficult, and that greater quantities of fabric would be required. As a result, fashion and trade periodicals in Britain and France during 1923 enthusiastically welcomed the return of more complicated lines to haute couture.

---

[1] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 34

[2] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 34

[3] See Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), p. 36. The authors state that designs with 'concealed fullness' helped 'give an impression of the lean silhouette which anticipated future trends.'

[4] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 80

[5] The 'little mermaid frocks' (the name refers to the overlapping, scale-like tiers of the skirts) were amongst the most successful of Chanel's evening wear models. *BV* reported that they were 'one of the most frequently seen in smart dancing places in Paris.' (20 February 1924, p. 26) They were usually produced in coloured crêpe de Chine. The craze for dancing during the 1920s, which resulted in the international enthusiasm for dances such as the Charleston and the Black Bottom, numerous new night clubs, and the fashion for jazz in cities such as New York, Paris and London, has been well documented.

[6] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 34

[7] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 34

[8] See *BV* 20 September 1923, p. 55, and De La Haye and Tobin, op. cit. p. 36

[9] One model similar to **202** was described as being in apple-green 'with a pleated apron edged with light fur at the front of the skirt and a pleated cape of the same fabric at the back.' (*BV* 5 January 1924, p. 23).

[10] *BV* 20 November 1923, p. 42

[11] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 34

[12] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 34

[13] *BV* 20 December 1923, p. 39

[14] *BV* 5 October 1923, p. 34

[15] *BV* 20 October 1923, p. 32

[16] *BV* 20 October 1923, p. 32

[17] *BV* (20 October 1923, p, 88) stated that even Chanel 'has made fewer of these country wear tailleur than usual' (although a great number were produced for morning/street wear).

[18] *BV* 20 October 1923, p. 41

[19] *BV* 5 January 1924, p. 22

[20] *BV* 20 September 1923, p. 54

[21] *BV* 5 January 1924, p. 23

[22] See JoAnne Olian, *Authentic French Fashions of the Twenties: 413 Costume Designs From L'Art et la Mode* (New York 1990), pp. 62, 63

[23] *BV* 5 January 1924, p. 22

[24] *DR* 11 August 1923, p. 295

February 1924

Trimming: The Last Refuge of the Feeble-Minded

The thirteen designs which represent this collection were reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 20 April and 20 August 1924. Seven were shown only in British *Vogue*, two only in French *Vogue*, and four were shown in both editions of the periodical. Three designs were shown on a page in British *Vogue* devoted to Chanel. The remaining models were shown with the work of Bernard, Georgette, Lanvin, Louiseboulanger, Molyneux, Patou, Premet, Renée, Vionnet and Yteb.[1]

The Collection

Two designs were intended for morning/street wear (**210** and **211**: one coat and one suit); five for informal day/afternoon wear (**213 – 216**: two blouse and skirt ensembles, and three dresses – one with a cape); and six for evening wear (**217 – 222**: six dresses).

The two main themes of the August 1923 collection continue to dominate Chanel's work. The first, intended primarily for day wear, is the simple, straight and short (on average nine to ten inches off the ground) garment, with a low waistline and elements taken from men's wear. This theme refers back to the so-called 'tube-like' coats and tailleurs of August 1923 (cf. **197**), and is represented in the collection by the blouse and skirt ensemble **213**: the shirt-like collar, buttoned placket, and short, straight skirt relate it to many previous models. The second theme is the equally slim-fitting, but slightly longer and more elaborately cut dress, in a lightweight fabric, with a low or undefined waistline and an uneven hemline. Recalling the 'mermaid' dresses of August 1923 (cf. **206**), this theme is now represented by the evening model **220**: this version shares the tiered, petal-like skirt and pointed drapery wings designed to give a 'fluttering motion' when the woman walks. A sub-theme is evident and occurs in all the categories: just as last year, the hipline is occasionally accentuated by pockets, belt buckles and bows, pleating and gathering. This is illustrated by the afternoon dress **214**, but also by a more elaborate design referred to in British *Vogue*: 'One very remarkable evening gown has... panniers of dark fur placed over each hip.'[2] Chanel's

use of panniers may have been influenced by the August 1923 designs of Chéruit and Drécoll.

Once again, Chanel has varied the basic cut, details and trimming to ensure variety. For example, the tailleur **211** does not completely conform to those which are typical of the collection as a whole. Here, the double-breasted jacket (typically a four-buttoned model) has a slightly nipped-in waist. Several finger-tip-length jackets reportedly had very short godets set in below a similarly pinched-in waist. Some coats had a circular cut to give a slight flare at the sides. Numerous three-quarter-length straight and unbelted coats (**210**), frequently teamed with a matching dress, were produced. Many jackets, worn with V-shaped blouses and box-pleated skirts, were said to show, 'the influence of the boyish mode.'[3] Double blouse effects are a new development (e.g. **214**, but also **212**, where the deep V-shaped opening of the overblouse reveals a small, buttoned blouse beneath). Skirts varied considerably: **210** has a buttoned skirt which can be worn open to reveal knee-length pantalettes (seen with **91** of February 1919 and **137** of August 1920); **212** has a wrap-over skirt; the majority of the evening gowns have pleated or tiered skirts. Chanel's evening skirts were now said to be the shortest in Paris. Full-length sleeves, some with buttoned cuffs, are invariably straight (no conspicuously flaring cuffs or trailing sleeves are seen); short sleeves feature on a minority of the designs and the evening models are all sleeveless with narrow shoulder straps and low décolletages. Tailored or shirt-like collars dominate, and necklines vary from V-shaped, square and rounded. Half-belts (fastened in either a buckle or bow), rather than tie-belts, are seen in the catalogue. Detachable capes (**216**), cape-backs, apron panels, draperies, tiers (some of which were scalloped) and over-layers of semi-transparent fabric were all important means of modifying the slender silhouette. In the case of **220**, a lace panel at the shoulder is also attached to a lace bracelet worn at the wrist, thus enhancing the effect of movement as the woman moves (and recalling the streamers on the *Mock Crinoline* – **115** of 1920).

The day wear fabrics include Oxford wool cloth (one of several woollen fabrics used by Chanel which the press referred to as 'mannish'), wool tricot, crêpe de Chine (both printed and plain), crêpe marocain and crepella.[4] The most prominent colours included black, light grey, brown, beige, dark green and navy blue. Black and white checked fabrics were extremely popular. More formal designs were produced in kasha, cashmere, alpaca, satin and batiste, in bright colours such as raspberry and cornflower blue. One report stated that the house was also working with 'some of Coudurier's

crepaftas, a soft weave of silk alpaca.[5] Evening fabrics included crêpe georgette, chiffon, mousseline de soie and lace in black, white and rose. A new and extremely successful feature of the collection was encrusted chiffon (**220** and **221**). Numerous versions of **220** were produced in many colourways (black and bright green, navy and rose, two shades of blue, red and ochre). Chiffon was the most common evening fabric at the house and was used for dresses and matching scarves. One report commented that:

> Chanel does exquisite things with chiffon. Sometimes she catches a length of it to the shoulders. Again, she will leave its arrangement wholly to the wearer... not long ago Chanel herself wore a frock of black chiffon with a long scarf to match wrapped around her. The contrast between the pearls she wore and the misty black of the filmy scarf was perfection.[6]

Trimmings on the less formal designs were few and far between. One tailleur was described as being 'absolutely plain... (and in) a rather large black and white check.'[7] Buttons, narrow bands or streamers that drop from the collar, fur, and knots of flowers that matched the colour of the dress were all common. More formal afternoon designs were decorated with lace and had matching scarves. 'Little' jackets in lamé were reportedly, 'embroidered all over in a "laize" of gold and beige wool re-embroidered in bright red.'[8] *Femina* illustrated a formal dress and a short, straight jacket beaded entirely in geometrical patterns of yellow and metal grey.[9] Several evening gowns were beaded with oblongs of fine opaque or silver crystals. When beading or embroidery was used it was always arranged in geometrical patterns.

Context

Chanel was not the only designer to insist on the slender, short and low-waisted silhouette, despite what the *Drapers' Record* referred to as the efforts of some to 'oust the straight line' during 1923.[10] The fashion press discussed the widespread popularity of the straight, short silhouette, noting that it 'is exceptionally becoming to the majority of women... (and) it is mainly on this account that everyone prefers to cling to this mode.'[11] By July, a review of the season commented that, 'The real novelty consists of the length now favoured... for day and evening gowns alike stop at a point midway between the knee and the ankle.'[12] Although British *Vogue* referred to a silhouette

known as the 'stovepipe' line (an extremely narrow form which made it difficult to walk), most designers opted for a less extreme, but certainly short, version. Jean-Charles Worth, in an interview for British *Vogue*, emphasized the importance of the short skirt and stated that his designs would be 'youthful and suitable to modern conditions'; Mme. Charlotte at Premet claimed that she would 'use the simplest lines... and shorten... skirts considerably'; Jenny stated that, 'I have finished with the circular frills and godets... I was the first to put godets in the front of skirts two years ago, and I am thoroughly tired of them. Straight, straight, straight, will be my new collection'; similarly Madame Renée outlined her intention to continue with the narrow silhouette, prompting British *Vogue* to note that, 'Renée, like Chanel, is a creator who follows the dictates of her own sweet will. This year she will probably change her detail more than her line, as usual.'[13] One journalist remarked that, 'Vionnet also tends to the straight silhouette and achieves remarkable effects by the cleverness of her cut.'[14]

The neat, tailored suit, in practical woollen fabrics and sober colours (as shown by Chanel) was central to the day wear collections. The fashion for authentic male clothing and tailored lines was illustrated by the growing number of women who chose to have such suits made by a man's tailor (see August 1923). British *Vogue* maintained its support for this practice and stated that, 'There is not one dressmaker in one thousand... who really understands putting a plain sleeve... into a plain coat.'[15] The tailored suits produced by the houses existed alongside the 'robe tailleur': a dress, made usually in rep, silk, alpaca, satin or plaid, that was invariably cut along straight, simple lines and frequently incorporated details such as pleating, long, tight sleeves and white collars. The waist, if marked at all, was usually placed at the top of the hips. The tailored dress was often worn with a matching three-quarter-length and beltless coat.

The prevalence of the tailored mode was thought by some to be a reflection of women's desire to have a form of clothing that was practical, comfortable and adaptable. It was now recognized that, having become accustomed to uniforms during the war, many women were still reluctant to give up a sensible and convenient form dress:

> The joys of a standardized type of dress once tried, many... (women) found it hard to go back to the ordinary habiliments which call for arbitrary changes so many times a day... and so we find ourselves five years after the war, approaching more and more surely a type of daytime dress which can be worn,

> with modifications of accessories, at almost any hour, from 9.00am to 6 at night.[16]

The 'garçonne' style was still popular (see February 1923). Although it was associated primarily with Premet and Renée, one reporter noted that, 'if a woman knows she looks well in such unadorned simplicity, she will find plenty of Parisian houses ready to dress her "in all things like a man".'[17] A black crêpe dress by Jenny was described as 'a pleasant comedy of the "nouvelle pauvre"', referring to its extreme simplicity and lack of decoration.[18] Sports wear was equally important and Lelong produced culottes, reflecting the sports-inspired emphasis on comfort and ease of movement.[19] The practicality, adaptability and 'youthful' appearance of sports designs meant that 'the ultra-modern woman wears only two types of clothes in summer: sports things all day and dance frocks all night.'[20] The focus was increasingly on quality not quantity: the modern woman was advised by British *Vogue* to invest in hard-wearing and adaptable designs rather than a huge number of garments intended for specific hours or functions.

Most houses produced formal and evening designs that were similar to those shown at Chanel (the bouffant and picturesque robe-de-style was still produced by a few houses such as Lanvin). Drapery wings, apron panels and tiers were seen everywhere. One unattributed design reportedly included, 'an embroidered or lamé slip open at the sides, showing panels of tulle beneath.... When a woman with a good figure walks or dances in such a dress, it makes one think of the Victory of Samothrace brought to life.'[21] Some commentators questioned the appropriateness of the use of semi-transparent fabrics which meant that at times it was possible to see the knee.

Many informal designs were now produced in what were traditionally thought of as masculine fabrics, such as tweed and rep. Printed or plain crêpe de Chine, satin, silks and alpaca were all equally prominent. Dark, rather sombre colours (such as black, grey and beige) and geometrically printed and patterned fabrics were everywhere, prompting one reporter to comment:

> All in all Cubist art has had a wide influence, as well in colouring as in shape; I frankly admit that I should prefer something else. These applications of rectangles and squares of different shades of cloth leave me nonplussed.[22]

Chiffon, lamé (particularly popular with Poiret), velvet and lace, in black, white, cream and red, were the most common evening fabrics.

Just as in Chanel's collection, trimmings this season were generally few and far between. British *Vogue* referred to an unnamed 'creator' who labelled trimming 'the last refuge of the feeble-minded.'[23] In March *Femina* noted that some collections had shown a very 'reserved' use of embroidery, limiting it to a smaller number of models.[24] Like Chanel, many designers preferred embellishments that were simply a continuation of the construction of the design itself. Buttons, pleating, piqué or lingerie touches, draperies, ostrich feathers (which were mainly confined to evening wear) and scarves (a fashion which was attributed to Vionnet) were evident in all the collections. Heavy bead embroidery was used on beltless chemise-style dresses. However, as the *Drapers' Record* noted, nothing was allowed to detract from the basic silhouette:

> Everything is done to produce this flatness and slimness. Even the trimming and draperies, when any, are put on flat, and more often than not are stitched to obtain this effect.[25]

Clearly Chanel's work was, this season, typical of the collections as a whole. She was now one of several designers who insisted on the straight and very short silhouette, but did not resort to the extremes of the restrictive stovepipe line.

---

[1] Little information is available on the smaller houses of Bernard, Georgette and Yteb.

[2] *BV* 5 April 1924, p. 41

[3] *BV* 5 April 1924, p. 41

[4] The crêpe marocain and crêpella was reportedly manufactured by Rodier (see *BV* 15 April 1924, p. 41).

[5] *BV* 5 April 1924, p. 41. I have no information as yet on Coudurier.

[6] *BV* 20 April 1924, p. 66

[7] *BV* 5 April 1924, p. 41

[8] *BV* 5 April 1924, p. 41. Similar combinations of red and beige embroidery were used last season.

[9] *Femina* 1 July 1924, p. 18

[10] *DR* 26 January 1924, p. 202

[11] *DR* 26 January 1924, p. 202

[12] *BV* 20 July 1923, p. 72

[13] *BV* 20 February 1924, p. 81

[14] *BV* 20 July 1924, p. 78

[15] *BV* 20 March 1924, p. 92

[16] *BV* 20 March 1924, p. 76

[17] *BV* 20 April 1924, p. 62

[18] *BV* 5 June 1920, p. 65

[19] *FV* illustrated culottes by Chanel for ski-wear and worn by a Mrs. Agar (1 March 1924, p. 29).

[20] *BV* 20 April 1924, p. 92

[21] *BV* 20 April 1924, p. 59

[22] *BV* 20 April 1924, p. 58

[23] *BV* 20 February 1924, p. 56

[24] *Femina* 1 March 1923, p. 20

[25] *DR* 9 February 1924, p. 327

August 1924

The Tube-Like Silhouette Continues

Twenty six designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* (and supplemented by one design from *Femina* – see note 16) published between 20 October 1924 and 20 February 1925, represent this collection. Thirteen were shown only in British *Vogue* and thirteen were shown in both editions of the periodical. Eleven were shown on pages devoted to Chanel's collection. The remaining models were shown most frequently beside those of Molyneux, Patou, Premet and Renée, but also with those by Bernard, Chéruit, Drécoll, Lanvin, Leneif, Louiseboulanger, O'Rossen and Paquin. British *Vogue* also illustrated a stage costume by Chanel for the Diaghilev/Ballets Russes production *Le Train Bleu* (premiered in Paris in June 1924), continuing their extensive coverage of all aspects of the designer's work.[1].

The Collection

Two designs were intended for morning/street wear (**223** and **224**: two sweater and skirt ensembles); four for sports wear (**225 – 228**: two suits, a sweater and skirt, and one dress); three for afternoon (**229 – 231**: one blouse and skirt, and two dresses – one with a coat); and seventeen for evening (**232 – 248**: twelve dresses, one pair of lounging pyjamas, two wraps, and two coats).

This collection was described as being 'one of the most wearable of the collections.'[2] Noted for the practicality and adaptability of its designs, the entire collection was based around the simple, slender-fitting, short and low-waisted garment, that was both easy and comfortable to wear; however, once again, two distinct themes emerge.

The first (evident primarily in the day/sports wear categories) sees the continuation and development of the tube-like silhouette: the very simple, straight and short garment, with an even hemline and details derived from traditional men's wear. It is represented in the catalogue by the morning/street ensemble **223**: a simple top, with a shirt-like collar and pockets, and a plain skirt. Similar designs featured in the sports category, which drew heavily upon male dress (one headline stated that, 'The Chanel sports suit typifies tailored chic.')[3] **224** represents a development on this idea: here, the tube-like

form is modified by the inclusion of a front godet, which lends a slight flare to the silhouette and ensures the woman's freedom of movement.

The second theme (seen in the afternoon and evening wear categories) is the more elaborately cut or layered garment with a plain, loose bodice and, on occasion, an uneven hemline. Such designs are a development on the idea of the 'mermaid dress' (August 1923). In this collection, the theme is represented by **238**: a sleeveless evening gown with a plain, simple bodice, a tie-belt marking the low waist and a tiered skirt with uneven and pointed flounces (cut on the bias).

The severely straight silhouette did not entirely dominate this collection: it was noted that many Chanel designs were cut, like **224**, along slightly fuller or flaring lines. This trend was evident in the day wear coats. Although *Femina* illustrated one particularly straight and severe example (a full-length, double-breasted model with a tailored collar and jetted pockets)[4], British *Vogue* referred to new Chanel coats that flared at the sides or front. As a result, the journal commented that 'The straight coat has not yet left the mode, but the other type is in the majority at houses such as Chanel.'[5] A second development is represented by the dress of **230**, which the magazine referred to as, 'One of the innovations of Chanel's collection.'[6] Like several other models in this collection (e.g. **235**), it was constructed from four rounded sections sewn together. British *Vogue* believed that this was symptomatic of the growing tendency, identified during previous seasons, towards more intricate and elaborate workmanship. The coat or wrap with the double front (**246 – 248**), new this season, was described as one of the highlights of the collection: the outer coat had a separate, sleeveless and wrap-over inner-coat (often in a contrasting quilted fabric – seen on **210** of February 1924) for extra warmth. This collection also includes the first example of evening lounging pyjamas (**244**, which included a sleeveless top and short, full culottes) to be shown in the catalogue.

Chanel not only ensured variety in her work by introducing the above developments, but also, as usual, by varying and modifying the basic silhouette and the details. For example, day wear skirts were either cut with front godets, narrowly pleated all round, box-pleated, or designed as wrap-overs with side pleated panels.[7] The wrap-over skirt of **228** was worn over pantalettes (see **211**, February 1924). Evening dresses included those with straight bodices and tiered skirts (often with scalloped hemlines), those with layered skirts and uneven hemlines (due to apron fronts, flounces and drapery wings),

and those with straight bodices and one-piece skirts which are modified by the addition of beaded fringing. All lengths of coats, jackets and capes were seen, although the hip-length and sweater-like jacket was particularly common. Sleeves were either full-length and straight, or wider from the elbow to the cuff (**230**). Collars varied from the shirt-like, to the tailored, the deep turn-back, and what British *Vogue* described as the 'vague' round collar of **230**. The V, bateau and rounded neckline were shown on the day wear designs; evening gowns were generally sleeveless with rounded, square or oval shaped décolletages (shoulder straps were broad or narrow). Patch, welt and jetted pockets were seen on a great number of designs. Buckled belts were shown on many informal models, however British *Vogue* noted that, 'The beltless silhouette is retained, but Chanel, always a champion of the string belt placed at the top of the hips, is continuing its use.'[8]

Day wear fabrics included jersey, kasha, cotton velvet, velours, crêpella, and crêpe de Chine, in black, grey, brown ('a favourite colour at this house')[9],taupe, navy blue and green. One report referred to 'the very simple sports-coat costume carried out in velvet in such rich hues as king's blue or Florentine red.'[10] Striped jersey and tricots (often small patterns set in horizontal bands), and West of England herring bone tweed in tan and white (e.g. **225**, described by British *Vogue* as a 'typical Chanel sports suit')[11],were used for many models. Evening fabrics included velvet, crêpe georgette, lace (it was said that, 'Chanel does delightful things with coloured laces')[12], chiffon, or lamé in gold, green, rose and black. Versions of the coat **248** were produced in fur-lined, peach coloured satin fulgurante, Hudson seal, velvet and taffeta; one such model was described as being, 'in a red and gold small Persian-patterned lamé, the top part entirely shirred.'[13] French *Vogue* described an evening cape, worn by La Marquise de Laborde, in silver velours.[14] A popular development, commented on frequently by the press, was the combination of black and flesh pink chiffon in tiered skirts (**232** and **233**). British *Vogue* also discussed a 'wing gown' in black and royal blue.[15] Some of the more unusual fabrics to appear in the collection included 'poplacote', 'ruissécla', 'marokellaine' and 'tigrette'.

Few, if any, trimmings were used on informal designs. *Femina* illustrated two models, similar to **223** and **224**, on which the only trimming was a small bow positioned on the collar and on the centre front of a grosgrain band that marked the low waistline. Once again, trimmings were generally a continuation of the construction of the design itself: pleating, seaming and buttons (the blouse **229** includes a curved side pleated panel,

vertical decorative seaming on the front and tucking on the lower sleeve above the cuff). This was also the case on many of the more elaborate models: the skirt of **231** is gathered into square, possibly ruched panels that mark the low waistline; shirring featured on several of the evening coats and wraps, and on the bodice of **239**. The finely pleated frill on the dress of **230** was also seen as evidence of the tendency towards more elaborate workmanship. Fur (mole and fox), bands of lace, lace embroidered with gold cabochon beads and irregular groups of strips of black beaded crêpe georgette, were all seen. Dresses with short fringes of jet and crystal, arranged in horizontal bands of a triangular or zig-zag pattern, were extremely popular: **242** was described as, 'One of her loveliest frocks (which is) like a frozen fountain, a dripping mass of icicles in short black and beaded fringes.'[16]

Context

In September 1924, the *Drapers' Record* reported that 'fashion is decreeing in favour of dresses of twenty seven inches or less in circumference, and it is certain that there will be women who will walk in them somehow.'[17] However, many designers were, like Chanel, continuing to move away from the very narrow silhouette. In the same month, British *Vogue* noted that:

> In general the silhouette remains short, straight and slim. But there is a distinct tendency to get away from the tube effect by introducing fullness in the skirts by means of pleats, tiers or circular and bias effects.[18]

Like Chanel, Callot was, noted for coats with lower or side flare, and Vionnet, in particular, was acclaimed for her use of the bias cut and an ability 'to wrap and tie her soft gowns in unexpected fashions.'[19] Nonetheless, in December the *Drapers' Record* reported that young women had been unwilling to adopt any of the alternatives to the straight line. Instead they preferred to:

> ... cling to their "drainpipe" outline... so much trouble having been expended by so many in reducing their figures to fashionable requirements, by means of rubber reducing garments and scant meals, that they will not be inclined to forgo yet awhile their newly-attained slim lines.[20]

Morning/street designs were almost universally straight with, in many collections, a slight flare to the skirt. Tailored suits, coat-dresses and 'garçonne' dresses worn with a matching coat were popular. The majority of coats had button fastening (as opposed to the wrap-over) thus freeing the hands and ensuring the successful revival of the muff.[21] The fabrics included kasha and 'woollen mixtures resembling men's materials', in the sober colours favoured by Chanel: black, brown, dark seal, 'leather' shades and navy. Sports wear was produced in rough textured woollens, plaids, striped fabrics, homespuns, wool jersey and heavy cheviots. Alongside the ubiquitous beige, brighter colours, either on their own or in striped combinations, were coupled with more luxurious fabrics such as bouclé or velvet. Kashas and cheviots, tweeds, stripes and plaids, in browns, beige and grey were popular for country designs.

It was reported that, 'There is no insistence upon fussy details that distract the attention, for today in Paris good taste begins and ends with simplicity.'[22] Trimmings were reduced to a minimum: pleating, buttons and lingerie details (white piqué collars and cuffs) on the 'garçonne-style' frocks. A day dress by Nicole Groult, shown originally in an August 1924 edition of *L'Art et la Mode*, is, like many of Chanel's designs, without any trimming whatsoever: it relies entirely on its pleated skirt and button fastening for detail.[23]

One British *Vogue* article stated that, 'The afternoon models do not, nowadays, differ very noticeably from morning attire.'[24] Nonetheless, more elaborate workmanship, richer, lustrous fabrics and bright colours were all being employed for the more formal afternoon and evening designs. Straight silhouettes were generally modified by the addition of over-tunics, flounces, circular flare near the knees, and tiered effects. One report described the fashion for overlapping panels as a deliberate reference to contemporary art:

> ... some houses, such as Poiret's, have remembered certain pictures of the great Cubist decorator Picasso, and to this we owe a frequently successful combination of different coloured panels following one another over a black or brown skirt.[25]

The simple chemise-style dress, heavily beaded or embroidered, was rivaled in popularity only by the draped evening dress. The uneven hemline was thought smarter than the straight, and scalloped hemlines appeared at Lelong and Lanvin, as well as

Chanel. Despite increased complication, the fashionable evening dress was much simpler and far less ostentatious than it once used to be:

> The grande toilette of much gold lace, plumes, roses on the hip, and other elaboration is not worn in Paris. Such things are simply created by the French couturiers to supply the foreign markets.[26]

Velvet, panne velvet, satin, lamé, crêpe de Chine, crêpe georgette, silk and lace were widely used by many of Chanel's contemporaries, in white, gold, silver, mauves, reds and pastels. Nor was Chanel the only designer to show what was thought to be the most successful colour combination of the season, 'Chéruit and Chanel are bringing forth a newer, more feminine elegance. They have launched simultaneously the combination of black and flesh pink in afternoon and evening frocks.'[27] Drapery panels, fringing, streamers and pointed wings appeared on many dance dresses, and it was reported that 'Every Paris collection includes a white frock with crystal fringe.'[28] Chanel was not unique in her use of geometrical patterns and arrangements for beading and embroidery. As Milbank has noted that, 'Although in 1924 the Paris Exposition des Arts Decoratifs, which gave its name to the style Art Deco, was still a year off, geometric patterns were everywhere in fashion.'[29]

By offering designs that rejected the very narrow silhouette, Chanel was certainly typical of the majority of the leading houses. Her use of fabric, colours and trimming also drew the house in line with its competitors. However, Chanel was distinguished by the often 'innovative' means employed to modify the basically straight silhouette, and to ensure the warmth, comfort and practicality of her designs.

The influence of men's clothing continued to have a widespread impact on Paris fashion. O'Rossen, Premet and Renée were all equally associated with strictly tailored fashions and the 'garçonne' style of dress. In an article published in British *Vogue*, 'A Guide To Chic For The Businesswoman', Premet's designs were described as being particularly appropriate for the working woman:

> Premet... with her garçonne creations, straight, simple, belted, collared and cuffed little frocks, with demure long sleeves and convenient pockets, might have invented them for smart office environments, as well as every other environment, for they have an all-but-universal suitability.[30]

The one period influence evident in the collections owed more to its male than female manifestation. Several houses, Premet amongst them, drew inspiration from male Directoire fashions: the choker collar and cravat, prominent revers, the waistcoat, the four-buttoned coat and the high-crowned hat. The fashion for pyjamas was also seen as part of the trend for male clothing. Although Chanel's lounging pyjamas owe more to far eastern sources, those produced by Drécoll and Molyneux were based on those traditionally worn by men: one design by Molyneux had trousers cut like riding breeches worn with a crêpe blouse reminiscent of a man's shirt.[31]

At fashionable resorts such as Le Touquet, the trend to wear sports clothes all day and dance dresses all night was now firmly established. British *Vogue* believed this trend marked a new era in fashion:

> The period which ended approximately about ten years ago was one of disguise... in our dress we went out of our way to make ourselves look as little like ourselves as possible... This, on the contrary,... is the age of freedom in dress. Clothes have been reduced to the fewest and simplest, giving a "silhouette naturelle."[32]

Dress as a whole, the periodical believed, should now be a process of elimination and not of addition. Women were advised to discard all that was extraneous and superfluous, to reduce wardrobes to a minimum, and to rely on details and accessories for variation.

The growing international importance of Parisian haute couture and its related trades, during the 1920s, can be partly measured by the number of articles in the *Drapers' Record* which deal with the detrimental impact such growth would inevitably have on the British dress and textile industries. One report, entitled 'French Competition in Dress Goods – Why Bradford is Suffering', looked at the increased importation of French dress goods into Britain.[33] The periodical's attitude towards Paris was thus an ambivalent one: on the one hand, the journal aimed to support and bolster British industry; on the other, it could not ignore Paris if it wished to supply its readers with information on the most up-to-date and influential trends in contemporary fashion. Thus the regular column, 'The Latest From Paris', continued to feature in almost every issue of the magazine.

[1] See *BV* 20 December 1924, p. 50. *Le Train Bleu* was performed at the Théâtre des Champs-Elysées. An 'opérette danse' rather than a ballet, the production and choreography was inspired by the contemporary craze for sport: the dancer Bronislava Nijinska (the subject of *BV*'s illustration) played a tennis champion based on Suzanne Lenglen. All the costumes were designed by Chanel and the fittings took place at the house. Chanel's work on this production was preceded by her 1922 work on *Antigone*, for the 1924 dance spectacles *Les Soirées de Paris*, and followed by her work Cocteau's *Orphée* in 1926 and the Ballets Russes' *Apollon Musagètes* in 1929.

[2] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 80

[3] *BV* 5 January 1924, p. 58

[4] *Femina* 1 September 1924, p. 16. One page of five illustrations of designs from the Chanel collection entitled 'Chez Chanel'.

[5] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 68

[6] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 80

[7] One *BV* report noted that 'It was this house that originated the costume composed of a little sports-coat or blouse of similar cut and a wrap over skirt, pleated at one side, and this costume is the basis of many of Chanel's new models. (20 October 1924, p. 80)

[8] *BV* 20 September 1924, p. 53

[9] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 80

[10] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 80

[11] *BV* 5 January 1925, p. 58

[12] *BV* 5 October 1924, p. 120

[13] *BV* 5 October 1924, p. 120

[14] *FV* 1 September 1924, p. 12

[15] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 88

[16] *BV* 5 October 1924, p. 120. A second report in *BV* referred to the design as 'one of the loveliest gowns of the season' (20 October 1924, p. 70); *Femina* also illustrated this gown (and is in fact the source for the illustration in the catalogue), which it described as 'A marvellous effect of layered black and white, a shower of pearls of crystal and jet.' (1 November 1924, p. 27).

[17] *DR* 20 September 1924, p. 621

[18] *BV* 20 September 1924, p. 53

[19] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 68

[20] *DR* 27 December 1924, p. 769

[21] The muff was decreed one of the most important accessories of the season. This was partly due to the fashion for slim, narrow sleeves which did not allow for large, flaring fur cuffs. Chanel, Drécoll, Lanvin and Worth all produced muffs to accompany the season's winter coats.

[22] *BV* 5 February 1925, p. 53

[23] JoAnne Olian, *Authentic French Fashions of the Twenties: 413 Costume Designs From L'Art et la Mode* (New York 1990), p. 79

[24] *BV* 20 September 1924, p. 55

[25] *BV* 20 October 1924, p. 49. Premet was also regarded as a house which worked with patterns and arrangements 'suggestive of Cubist art.' One dress in blue serge, overlaid with 'bands of satin and of dull material in a single colour placed together', was though to have 'a very studied modern treatment.'

[26] *BV* 5 February 1925, p. 53

[27] *BV* 20 January 1925, p. 58

[28] *BV* 20 December 1924, p. 37

[29] Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York 1989), p. 79. Milbank also regards the fashion for checked fabrics, 'squared-off monograms and bright colours used in striking combinations' as evidence of the influence of Cubism.

[30] *BV* 20 September 1924, p. 70

[31] *BV* 20 November 1920, p. 55

[32] *BV* 20 August 1924, p. 50

[33] *DR* 20 September 1924, p. 63

February 1925

Simple Simplicity is No Longer Supreme

This collection is represented by twenty four designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 20 April and 5 July 1925. Sixteen were shown only in British *Vogue*, four only in French *Vogue*, and the remaining four were shown in both editions of the periodical. Six designs were shown separately; the remaining models were shown alongside those by Callot, Chantal, Chéruit, Drécoll, Jenny, Lanvin, Lelong, Leneif, Louiseboulanger, Molyneux, Paquin, Patou, Renée and Worth.[1]

The Collection

Six designs were intended for morning/street wear (**249 – 254**: six dresses, at least one of which is a two-piece; three of the dresses are worn with coats); four for sports (**255 – 258**: four sweaters and matching skirts); two for formal day/afternoon wear (**259** and **260**: two dresses); and twelve for evening (**261 – 272**: nine dresses and three wraps).

British *Vogue* described this collection as showing, 'no decided change from last season, but the perfection of detail and the elegant expression of simplicity are as arresting as ever. Chanel has forsaken none of her favourite ideas.'[2] The simple, slim-fitting, low-waisted and short garment, which was both easy and comfortable to wear, was once again the foundation of the entire collection.

Beyond this, two main themes were again evident. The first, which continued with the straight silhouette (made wearable by devices such as pleating and wrap-over skirts), was intended primarily for day wear. It is represented by **253**: a two-piece, pocketed dress with an even hemline cut to just below the knee. The second, the 'fluttering silhouette', dominated the evening category, and referred back to the 'mermaid dresses' of August 1923. It is represented by **262**: a simple, low-waisted gown with a plain, loose bodice and an uneven hemline, which, by virtue of its lightweight fabric, tiered skirt and drapery, had a rippling effect when the woman moved.

Despite such continuity, new ideas were introduced. Although the influence of men's clothing was once again evident in the tailored collars, practical pockets, belts, buttoned

cuffs, and tweed fabrics, Chanel also presented her interpretation of the Norfolk jacket: the hip-length sweater of **257** has patch pockets and is box-pleated at the front and back. Variety was ensured by the diverse styles of the coats: some were sleeveless and all lengths were seen, with numerous collar and sleeve types; versions of the redingote were shown alongside coats which buttoned only at the top (**251**) and had, as British *Vogue* pointed out, a 'slight flare' in their skirts (recalling similar models of August 1924).[3] The two-piece dress (a hip-length sweater-top and pleated skirt) was particularly important this season.[4] Many were closely related to sports designs (**254**), thus blurring the distinction between the categories, and prompting British *Vogue* to refer to Chanel's 'semi-sports wear'. An increasing number of scarves (attached or separate) were worn. A further development involved the rising or uneven waistline for afternoon or evening (the waistline would be slightly higher at the front).

Once again, variety was further ensured by the constant alteration of details. Necklines ranged from the rounded, V, bateau and square. Sleeves were generally full-length and straight, although some widened towards the cuff. Although many models were unbelted, the narrow tie-belt (a Chanel staple) was still used. Skirts were either entirely pleated, or pleated at one side (**252** and **260** refer back to a series of recent models – **191**, February 1923, **198**, August 1923, and **229**, August 1924, for example – which include finely pleated panels on the bodice, occasionally the lower sleeve, and skirt). Endless forms of wing draperies, apron panels, circular tunics, flounces and pointed panels were used: those on **261** are attached to the top of the skirt and fall loose at the hem.

The day fabrics included jersey, wool crêpella, printed and plain crêpe de Chine, velveteen and surah, in black, brown, brown and white checks, beige, red, navy blue and royal blue. Chanel continued to use the fabric of the dress to line its matching coat, however, one report described 'a black crêpe dress... (with) an amusing short coat tasselled and lined in red.'[5] One typical ensemble was produced in a combination of deep wine-red crêpe de Chine and black crepella. Striped tricot, stockinette and crêpe de Chine, in black, white, beige, red, green and blue (up to three colours were sometimes used, e.g. **245**)[6] were favoured for sports wear. Afternoon and evening fabrics included crêpe georgette (often pleated), chiffon, mousseline de soie, lace and silk (including 'picador', 'a new, supple silk', e.g. **264**), in black, white, cream, beige, silver, red, cherry-red, rose-red, yellow, midnight blue, green and apple green. Combinations of colour were also used on evening designs:

> Chanel does individual things with small insets of light cream embroidered net, usually on a dark frock. Bands of gold and silver, sewed to the underslip, gleam through chiffon, georgette crêpe and mousseline dresses.[7]

Informal designs relied primarily on pleating, buttons and occasionally fringing for decoration; British *Vogue* described 'a very smart outfit... trimmed with gay round brass buttons.'[8] The periodical also identified a 'new feeling for trimmed bodices.'[9] This was illustrated by the appliqué bands of **259**, and necklace-like motifs of **260** and **261**.[10] Although embroidery was not as prevalent as it had been, it was extensively applied on some evening designs (incorporating gold threads, seed-pearls, crystal, diamanté and coloured jeweled stones). Draperies, bows and attached flowers were popular, along with bands of dyed feathers (**270**), and gold and beige pointed hare (**271**).[11]

Context

Despite the fact that it was now six years since the end of the First World War, its economic affect was still closely monitored by sections of the fashion press. Immediately prior to the February collections, the *Drapers' Record* noted that, 'The affects of the Great War are being overcome, slowly but surely.'[12] Although journals such as *Vogue* and *Femina* now made little, if any, reference to the war and its aftermath, it is clear, from a reading of the more specialized trade journals, that its impact was still being felt.

In April 1924 British *Vogue* announced that, 'Simplicity is not dead, but simple simplicity is no longer supreme.'[13] It was thought that, as a reaction to the severe, tube-like silhouette, an increasing number of designers were developing a softer, more subtle line and a more intricate cut. Although a February edition of the periodical predicted the 'continuation of an existing, almost standardized mode and of a tendency towards somewhat masculine uniformity in dress', it was believed that this would be 'more supple in expression.'[14] Prior to the openings it was thought that the new, softer simplicity would appear gradually and that the day wear categories would remain largely unchanged. However, designs were generally a little shorter than those of last

season (some were up to twelve inches off the ground)[15], and there were some indications, particularly at the house of Patou, that the waistline was rising.

For town, the woman was advised that, 'a natural kasha coat cut with a distinct flare towards the hem, over a simple dress of plain or figured crêpe, is excellent.'[16] The new tailored suit was generally less austere than those of previous seasons, and British *Vogue* referred to 'semi-tailored' designs that were ideal for town or country wear. Fullness was concentrated to either the front or the sides, and gathers, godets and pleats were widely employed (breaking the monotony of the straight line). If a waistline was indicated, it was usually low. A wide variety of necklines and sleeve types were produced. The most important fabrics were foulard, rep, kasha, alpaca, crêpe de Chine and silk. More costly fabrics were now being more widely used. For example kasha, employed by most of the leading houses, was extremely expensive: the *Drapers' Record* noted that it was 'not a fabric that everyone can afford, and supplies... have been difficult to obtain, which naturally does not cheapen it.'[17]

The two-piece sports-inspired dress was popular for town. As one editorial pointed out, 'The clothes of sports feeling are better than ever in town, and... the vogue for beige and greys makes them almost interchangeable.'[18] A Lelong advertisement in French *Vogue* stated that youthful, simple sports fashions would be the key development of 1925: their practicality was said to 'answer the needs of our active lives.'[19] This trend (sponsored also by Chanel, Patou, Lanvin and Molyneux) led British *Vogue* to comment that, 'The sports type of suit is so much of a uniform just now.'[20] Although neutral, sober colours dominated, many houses introduced vivid shades into the category. One tennis blazer was in 'jersey fleece in bright orange.'[21] Lanvin produced a design in pale green stockinette enlivened with a wide, gold-coloured belt.[22] The most popular fabrics were tweed, stockinette, kasha, crêpe de Chine and silk (often in combination, e.g. **255** and **256**). Trimmings were few and far between.

Some afternoon designs referred to men's and sports fashions (Leneif created trousers to be worn beneath afternoon tunics and simple, 'somewhat mannish' evening coats).[23] However, more elaborate and intricately cut designs were the norm. Many were again described as being 'deceptively simple': they appeared uncomplicated but actually involved sophisticated couture techniques. British *Vogue* noted that, 'Chéruit, Chanel and Vionnet all delight in complications of cut that are often the only trimming on the gown.'[24] The cut was not intended to detract from the slender lines of the figure: rather

the dress should follow the lines of the body when still, and have a fluttering, flowing silhouette when in movement. A description of a Louiseboulanger gown underlines the amount of workmanship involved:

> A very good example of the devious ways of cut appears in a new Louiseboulanger frock with diagonal seams and applied points on the bodice... If the dress were ripped into its separate parts, it is doubtful if anyone but its creator could put it together again.[25]

The most common techniques were circular and diagonal cuts (particularly associated with Vionnet), godets, pleating, gathering, drapery wings, scarves, cape-like backs, streamers, panels and ruffles. Evening dresses tended to be sleeveless with a very low oval or V-shaped back décolletage. Up-in-the-front, diagonal or spiral movements and arrangements of fabric were used to alleviate the slender line: 'the diagonal crossing of soft folds or bands of fabric on the bodice' was seen particularly at Louiseboulanger.[26] Hemlines were either straight or broken. British *Vogue* advised that:

> Brilliant satin dresses are attractive for dances, and, for formal occasions, a simple beaded gown is good, but no wardrobe can be complete without at least one evening dress of exquisite airiness.[27]

The 'fluttering silhouette' was produced in chiffon and mousseline de soie. Other evening fabrics included lamé, lace and metal brocade. Chiffon designs were generally untrimmed (so as not to detract from the effect of the fabric and cut). It was, however, reported that the fashion for plain, untrimmed bodices was on the wane. Large bows were seen: one Louiseboulanger design had a plain front and an enormous bow at the back, marking the low, V décolletage and extending into a floor-length train.[28]

The house of Chanel continued to be praised for the continuity, variety and high quality of its work. The collection was typical in that it included both the simple sports suit and the more complicated, elaborately cut design. She did not raise the waistline, as Patou was beginning to do (and which she herself would eventually do in 1929); however she did introduce new designs based on traditional male fashions, new fabrics, and a larger number of colour combinations. Furthermore, elements such as the necklace-like motifs on the bodice would influence the work of other houses such as Patou (see February 1926)

Despite the elaboration evident at Chanel, Chéruit and Vionnet, the press referred to a uniform or standardized approach to fashion. British *Vogue* asked, 'Who can say why, in our epoch, we have "joined the army" in dress, as never before at any other time?'[29] In reference to the ubiquity of the Chanel-style sweater dress, the magazine noted that:

> Almost all smart women dress like this, and it is pretty, though rather uniform. We are not, of course, in a period of individuality; the less we show that we have one, the smarter we are.[30]

The debate concerning fashion, uniformity and individuality was central to this period. The mid 1920s fashion for plain uniformity was linked to the idea that flamboyant or excessive trimming on a design was vulgar and morally reprehensible (see February 1924). It was considered bad taste, in a period still affected by the impact of the First World War, to blatantly display one's wealth. British *Vogue* reasoned that, 'By all means let us have ornament, but let us draw the line somewhere. Let us have our beads, – but not beads and gold braid on the same frock.'[31].

From April to October 1925 the *Exposition International des Arts Décoratifs et Industriels Modernes*, intended to promote the French decorative and industrial arts, was held in Paris. In contrast to the *Drapers' Record*'s rather timid acknowledgment of a post-war revival as far as the fashion industry was concerned, this, as Ken Silver has stated, was 'a proclamation of France's successful and nearly complete post-war recovery.'[32] Numerous 'Pavillons' represented not only the indigenous work and commodities of the different regions in France, but also of the French colonies; the *Pavillon d'Esprit Nouveau* represented the work of the Purists, Le Corbusier and Ozenfant. National pavilions, such as those representing Italy, Austria, the Soviet Union and Belgium, showcased international decorative arts. Yvonne Brunhammer identified the four venues at which haute couture and fashion were displayed (Poiret's barges moored at the Quay d'Orsay, *Amours*, *Délices* and *Orgues*; the clothing section at the Grand Palais and the *Pavillon d'Elégance*, and Sonia Delaunay's *Boutique Simultanée* on pont Alexandre III), as representing the 'past present and future.'[33] The *Pavillon d'Elégance* included dress designs by Callot, Chéruit, Dœuillet, Drécoll, Jenny, Lanvin, Lelong, Patou, Paquin, Renée, Vionnet and Worth, amongst many others.[34] Brunhammer records that furs by Chanel were on display, and De La Haye and Tobin illustrate a Chanel evening gown which was shown, dated 1923-4.[35]

Expo Deco was discussed in considerable length in the fashion press. The event fuelled the long-running debate (indicated in previous essays) concerning the relationship between fashion, contemporary art and design. One article in French *Vogue* was entitled, 'Modern Decorative Art is Applied to Fashion.'[36] In the article, even a simple Chanel belt buckle, which had a geometrical shape and decoration, was seen to reflect the style of Art Deco. Reference was also made to a series of designs by Renée with hand-painted geometric motifs; machine embroidery, in angular motifs, was applied to kasha coats and 'metal mesh trimming' appeared on some designs. Furthermore, the successful contemporary designer was described as having, 'an architectural feeling for proportion.'[37] The inclusion of haute couture in *Expo Deco*, and the apparent similarity between the sleek, tubular and pared down forms of fashionable dress, contemporary architecture and design (and their potential for standardization), reaffirmed for many the idea that fashion, during a season which was said to be 'peculiarly free from the influence of period modes'[38], was a potent expression and reflection of modern life.

---

[1] I have no information on the houses of Chantal or Leneif, although they were covered frequently by *BV* from the mid to late 1920s.

[2] *BV* 5 May 1925, p. 61

[3] *BV* 5 May 1925, p. 61. A redingote has a close-fitting top and a full skirt (often open-fronted to reveal a decorative underskirt).

[4] Many one-piece dresses were also seen and described collectively as 'petites robes simples'; these were often produced in black crêpella.

[5] *BV* 5 May 1925, p. 61

[6] *Femina* (1 July 1925, p. 13) illustrated a jersey 'semi-sports' model which comprised a hip-length sweater and a short, pleated skirt. It reversed the arrangement of **254**: the sweater was in the striped fabric (different shades of green) and the skirt was plain.

[7] *BV* 20 July 1925, p. 50

[8] *BV* 5 May 1925, p. 61

[9] *BV* 20 April 1925, p. 50

[10] The embroidered motif was designed by the Grand Duchess Marie of Russia and derived from a necklace that belonged to the Romanoff family.

[11] *Femina* (1 March 1925, p. 1) reproduced a Chanel wrap (worn by a Mme. Bagénoff) similar to **271** and **272**; this was in velours and also trimmed with deep bands of fur,

[12] *DR* 3 January 1925, p. 21

[13] *BV* 20 April 1925, p. 47

[14] *BV* 20 April 1925, p. 33

[15] The *DR* questioned why women would want to wear skirts that stopped short of the knee, '... why Paris should embark on such a very inelegant fashion, in which few wearers over eighteen can hope to look charming, passes comprehension.' (14 March 1925, p. 597). This contrasts with their defence of the short skirt in the late 1920s (see August 1929).

[16] *BV* 20 May 1925, p. 72

[17] *DR* 31 January 1925, p. 240. The cost of many fabrics encouraged the development of cheaper alternatives, and in the same issue of the magazine it was announced that 'a quite good substitute (of kasha) has recently been put on the market.' Kasha was a Rodier trademark.

[18] *BV* 20 March 1925, p. 49

[19] *FV* 1 May 1925, p. 14

[20] *BV* 5 July 1925, p. 45

[21] *BV* 5 May 1925, p. 78

[22] *BV* 20 May 1925, p. 72

[23] *BV* 20 April 1025, p. 51

[24] *BV* 20 July 1925, p. 47

[25] *BV* 20 July 1925, p. 47

[26] *BV* 5 may 1925, p. 61

[27] *BV* 20 May 1925, p. 72

[28] *BV* 5 May 1925, p. 63

[29] *BV* 20 July 1925, p. 52

[30] *BV* 20 July 1925, p. 51

[31] *BV* 5 March 1925, p. 69

[32] Ken Silver, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant-Garde and the First World War, 1914-1925* (Princeton University Press 1989), p. 363

[33] Yvonne Brunhammer, *1925*, Exhibition Catalogue (Musée Des Arts Décoratifs, Paris 1976), p. 54. Sonia Delaunay (née Terk) was brought up in St. Petersburg. In circa 1905 she moved to Paris to study painting and married the artist Robert Delaunay in 1910. The bold colours and abstract geometrical forms of her paintings were translated into textile and dress designs. In 1921 she sold textile designs to Drécoll. She began to produce simple, sports wear designs (using a simple cut, in order that the textile design should form the main focus). The fashion house she opened closed in 1931.

[34] Lanvin was the vice-president of the Pavillon d'Elégance.

[35] Amy De La Haye and Shelley Tobin, *Chanel: The Couturière at Work* (London 1994), p. 37. This gown is of tulle and silk, embroidered with 'silver bugle beads and pearl sequins' (it has the couture number 10660).

[36] *FV* 1 May 1925, p. 14

[37] *BV* 20 April 1925, p. 48

[38] *BV* 20 April 1925, p. 48

August 1925

The Animated Fashion of the Flare

The eighteen designs which represent this collection were reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 20 September 1925 and 20 February 1926. Nine were shown only in British *Vogue*, four only in French *Vogue*, and the remaining five were shown in both editions of the periodical. Eleven were shown on pages devoted to Chanel. The remaining examples were illustrated next to those by Chantal, Chéruit, Jenny, Lelong, Louiseboulanger and Vionnet.

The Collection

Five designs were intended for morning/street wear (**273 – 277**: three coats, a coat-dress and a two-piece dress); two for sports/travel wear (**278** and **279**: two two-piece dresses, one with a jacket); three for afternoon/formal street wear (**280 – 282**: three coats); and eight for evening wear (**283 – 290**: eight dresses).

This collection was enthusiastically praised by British *Vogue*:

> From the point of view of good taste, simplicity, subtlety and wearability, this collection is without peer. They are the clothes made by a well-dressed woman of unerring taste for well dressed women the world over. Everything happens easily, gracefully and surely, without straining after effect.[1]

The entire collection is once again based around the relatively simple, short and slim-fitting garment with a low waistline. However three main themes are evident. The first, recalling that of preceding day wear collections, is the very straight garment which frequently incorporates elements derived from men's wear (tailored collars, buckled belts, buttoned cuffs and pockets), and has a very short (often up to fourteen inches off the ground, cf. **278**)[2], even hemline and full-length sleeves. It is represented by the sports/travel ensemble **279**: the simple, straight jacket is worn over a two-piece dress of a sweater and pleated skirt. Such designs were particularly associated with the house and referred to as 'the Chanel silhouette.'[3]

The second theme, confined mainly to the more formal models, is the garment with a straight bodice, a low waistline and a slight flare below the hips or skirt fullness. Although some skirts in this group were referred to by British *Vogue* as 'bell-like' (**280**), this new silhouette has little to do with the more exaggerated bell-shaped skirts of much earlier collections (cf. **94**, August 1919). Instead, it is a development on those designs produced during 1924 which incorporated a slight flare in the skirt section to modify an otherwise straight line. This theme is represented by **276**: the jacket flares out slightly over the hips, an effect which is enhanced by seaming and the curved corners of the opening at the hem. The silhouette of the more elaborate coat-dress **280** is achieved by seaming from the underarm to the hip (to shape the bodice), and circular insets to give the flaring effect in the skirt.[4] 'Circular' skirts were now seen throughout the collection.

The third theme, limited to evening wear, is the 'fluttering' or 'flowing' silhouette (anticipated by the 'mermaid dresses of August 1923), and typically consists of a sleeveless dress, with an uneven hemline and drapery panels. It is represented by **284**: an evening gown with bolero panels and a tiered skirt of separate petal-like panels.

Although this collection relates to those of previous seasons, several new developments were introduced and more established ideas reworked. One report stated that, 'Chanel uses old ideas in a new way': bolero-like drapery panels on the front, back and sides of the bodice (which, prior to February 1925, were generally plain), were introduced on both day (**275**) and evening (**284**) models to modify the slim, straight lines.[5] The cape-back coat was also shown, and referred to as 'an old idea developed in a masterly manner.'[6] Tailored and 'svelte' tweed suits were now a central feature of the collection, and referred to frequently in the press.[7] Furthermore, it was noted that while the sequin dress (e.g. **288**) was hardly a new idea, those shown by Chanel were:

> ... utterly unlike what has gone before. The sequin dresses of the past were of the dowager type. This designer cuts them on youthful lines, following slightly the curves of the figure, trims them in sequin flowers, and makes them in bright colours such as red, deep pink, silver and gold.[8]

The house was also renowned for its designs with floating and circular cut draperies (**287**). If the draperies appeared on both sides of the dress, one was usually longer than the other to give an asymmetrical effect.

Various means were employed to modify the basic silhouette. The bolero panels and flaring lines were only two ways in which Chanel brought variety to the informal designs: attached scarfs (**276**), bows (**277**) and side pleating (**278**) were all used. Although the waistlines were low, they were occasionally curving (**281**). Collars ranged from the tailored to shawl; necklines were either square, V-shaped, rounded or bateau; the full-length sleeves were invariably straight. The skirts of the evening gowns were frequently gathered to the side, and the draperies differed considerably: pointed wings, 'flying ends' or streamers were cut to all lengths (many fell beyond the actual hemline).[9] The evening designs were all sleeveless; the very low décolletages were either U or V-shaped and square. Shoulder straps were generally narrow.

The informal day wear fabrics included tweed (in either small diamond patterns, or bolder geometrical patterns), crêpella, wool crêpe and piqué (for blouses), in black, white, brown, dark red, wine red and green. Chanel's tweeds (which had now replaced stockinette for street wear models) were described as being 'thinner than one would have thought tweed could be, and boldly patterned.'[10] Deep reds were particularly important, prompting British *Vogue* to comment on one particular shade known as 'Chanel's rouge-noir.'[11] One of the most successful of Chanel's coats was in a dull red tweed worn with 'a simple crêpe de Chine two-piece dress in a brighter red.'[12] British *Vogue* also reported on a 'vivid red suede suit.'[13] Sports designs were generally produced in tweed, stockinette, and jersey, in brown, beige, black and white. The more formal designs were in black taffeta, velvet and mehari.[14] The extensive range of evening fabrics included lamé, crêpe de Chine, crêpe georgette, mousseline de soie, lace and chiffon, in black, 'flesh', pale rose, pale green and green. However, the black dresses (particularly **286** and **287**) were amongst the most successful models of the season, and British *Vogue* claimed that Chanel was 'famed for her black chiffons.'[15]

Few trimmings were seen (none were applied to the tweed suits). Some designs were edged with narrow bands of braid in a contrasting or identical colour to the fabric (**276**), and others were fringed. Many designs were detailed simply with seaming, top-stitching or tucking (**276, 277** and **280**). All of the more formal day wear models were trimmed with deep bands of fur. On some designs the fur was now gathered and puffed to give more volume. The chiffon evening gowns were left plain: draperies provided the only embellishment. Dancing dresses were often fringed, and deep red

sequins, sequin flowers, silver and pearl embroidery, and gold cabochon beads appeared on other models.

Context

In September, British *Vogue* announced that, 'The straight silhouette is dead.'[16] Two months later, in recounting the latest fashions for town, the periodical argued that:

> Yesterday was the day of the uniform mode... there are (now) no rigid rules of colour and line to which everyone conforms. Any morning one may see... a dozen women with nothing alike in their appearance except that their skirts are short and their figures are slim.[17]

Nonetheless, the tailored suit, as seen at Chanel, with a low waistline and straight silhouette, appeared in practically every collection. The periodical had to concede that, although the 'main mode' was for a softer, flaring silhouette (achieved by godets, circular cuts, gathers and pleating), many designers, including Vionnet, were still producing straight coats with a 'geometrical' cut. Coats that opened diagonally were extremely fashionable, cape-effects were used by Vionnet, and the ensemble of coat and contrasting dress (particularly important for town) was favoured for its versatility: 'The greatest advantage of this contrasting ensemble idea is that the same coat may be combined with several different frocks.'[18] The 'semi-sports' outfit (of skirt, overblouse and coat, or tailored dress and coat) was considered equally adaptable and appropriate for town, country and travel wear. Many couturiers introduced more specialist sports ranges. Designs for water sports were covered in the November editions of British *Vogue*: the magazine recommended that the 'waterproof coat and breaches, heavy wool socks, and stockings, and waterproof boots' were the essential requirements.[19] The 'Chanel silhouette' of jumper and pleated skirt was worn for more general occasions and produced by the majority of the Parisian houses.

The *Drapers' Record* reported that day wear fabrics were all to be 'exceptionally light in weight' and that, 'many of the novelties show ingenious patterning in geometrical types, for that is to be a big feature.'[20] British *Vogue* agreed, stating that, 'Fabrics exhibit a wealth of design.'[21] Although black, brown (particularly the reddish browns), beige, blue and green were universally popular, bright colours maintained the status

they had achieved during the spring and summer season. Natural tones were favoured in woollen fabrics. At most houses trimming was still kept to a minimum: it was only considered appropriate if it was discreet and, even more importantly, if it was part of the actual construction of the design itself. This attitude was underlined in the following report on a Vionnet model:

> The smartest of... (the) new crêpe dresses are by Vionnet, signed with her favourite openwork, so different from any other openwork one saw because it outlines construction instead of appearing as meaningless ornament.[22]

Fur trimming, which was sometimes dyed and bleached, was extensively and more imaginatively used (e.g. Chanel's 'gathered and puffed' fur).

Although straight lines were still evident, the fluid, flaring line was now well and truly launched in the more formal and evening categories. In October, British *Vogue* announced the introduction of the 'anatomical cut', and congratulated itself for having identified the 'new feminine feeling' in April:

> The figure is thrown into rippling relief, in much the same way that the wind playing over its draperies reveals the figure of the winged victory. The Chanel model (**287**)... is an illustration of this point. Here, the basic lines of the fabric are slim and straight, emphasizing the contour of the figure rather than concealing it. Yet, the fluttering draperies give an effect of fullness and motion.[23]

Although Chanel's designs were held up as examples of the anatomical cut, it was Vionnet who was most frequently associated with the style, and referred to as 'perhaps the greatest geometrician of all the French couturiers.'[24] The *Drapers' Record* shared British *Vogue's* interpretation of the collections:

> At last there are definite signs of a reaction against the straight-line silhouette.... Apparently designers are intent on calling halt to the elimination of the human form... and they are beginning – on a small scale, it is true – to allow women to have some semblance of a figure, though that figure must still be in the realm of slimness.[25]

Reference was also made to 'animated fashion', and Lelong described his own designs as 'kinetic.'[26] The contemporary silhouette was now, some argued, informed by the shape of the natural, slim figure, and not by an abstract straight line. When heavier and more practical fabrics were used (in the informal day or sports wear categories) slimmer-fitting bodices, fullness in the skirts and bell-like curves were seen. Cut, in all categories, was paramount, and considered to reflect fashion's on-going relationship with contemporary art: 'Not only will entire bodices be cut into mosaic-like designs of Cubist inspiration, but lines will depend materially on the intricacy of cut.'[27]

The simple and uncomplicated straight-line silhouette was thought to have hindered the invention of the couturiers:

> When two seams made a dress, what was left to encourage the invention of a Vionnet, who works with fabrics as a sculptor moulds his planes? What was left to stimulate the skill of a Jean Patou,... a Lucien Lelong, the outstanding talent of all those designers who regard the making of clothes as a definite contribution to the aesthetic expression of an age.[28]

For afternoon, soft cashmere woollens (often combined with velvet), satin-faced crêpe marocain, crêpe georgette, crêpe de Chine and plain and printed velvet were used. Formal ensembles with fur lined and trimmed coats were amongst the key designs of the category. Jewelled, beaded or sequined sleeveless dresses were fashionable for evening and a considerable amount of metallic fabrics and brocades were employed. Fringed dancing dresses were shown by Chanel, Renée, Lelong and Vionnet. Evening fabrics included velvet, satin, lamé, crêpe de Chine, crêpe georgette, chiffon, mousseline de soie and lace, in black, white, flesh tones, reds, greens and golds. One design by Martial et Armand, shown in *L'Art et la Mode*, was described as 'a pink crêpe and gold leather gown.'[29]

Chanel's collection clearly mirrored those of many of her competitors. It is, however, interesting that she was as widely regarded for those designs which displayed a more complicated and inventive cut (bringing her in line with Vionnet, amongst others), as she was for her simple tweed suits and sports models. The designer's particular use of asymmetric effects, fur, new types of tweed and chiffon set her apart from many of her rivals.

Focusing as it did on the concerns of the textile industry, it is not surprising that the *Drapers' Record* applauded the fact that a good deal more fabric was required for the new styles. Increased 'femininity' was associated with the more flowing, fluttering lines and the introduction to some collections of slightly higher waistlines. There was, however, some concern over the appropriateness of the ever-shortening skirts (the average skirt length was from twelve to fourteen inches from the ground). The belief that knee-length skirts were unlady-like aroused considerable debate in the press. Jean Leymarie has noted that the new skirt lengths were vociferously condemned by 'religious authorities worldwide and even legally repressed in certain American states.'[30] The *Drapers' Record* conceded that short skirts were only appropriate for the very young, and stated that:

> News comes from Paris of skirts being above the knees, and women having their knees rouged, but Englishwomen will pass by such transient and eccentric fancies.[31]

---

[1] *BV* 20 October 1925, p. 92. Reports on the house increasingly refer to the clothing worn by Chanel herself: the designer's personal fashion sense and lifestyle were becoming integral to the public's perception of the label. In a 20 January 1926 article on perfume, *BV* noted that the numbers 1, 5, 11, 14, 21 and 27 (all the perfumes in her range to date) 'are the only names given to (Chanel's) exceedingly plain bottles, and it is somewhat surprising that this should be so, for Chanel herself is known as being so essentially coquette and feminine.'(p. 69)

[2] Although Chanel produced some of her shortest skirt lengths this season, Jean Leymarie, *Chanel* (New York 1987), p. 98, stated that she did not go as far as to bear the knees 'for aesthetic reasons.' Certainly this ties in with Chanel's well-recorded outbursts, during the 1960s, against the fashionable mini skirt.

[3] *BV* 20 October 1925, p. 92

[4] *BV* 20 September 1925, p. 47

[5] The 20 October 1925 *BV* review of Chanel's collection claimed that the bolero was inspired by the Zouave uniform (the section of the French infantry composed of Algerian recruits).

[6] *BV* 20 October 1925, p. 92

[7] An article in *BV* (5 November 1925, p. 55), which discussed what would be worn in British and French cities during the winter, noted that, 'Inevitably there will be the incredibly svelte little follower of Chanel in tweed... Revers, if used, are not faced but finished invisibly on the edge.'

[8] *BV* 20 October 1925, p. 92

[9] **287** was said to typify Chanel's 'perfect use of draperies.' (*BV* 20 October 1925, p. 56)

[10] *BV* 5 November 1925, p. 55

[11] *BV* 20 August 1925, p. 33

[12] *BV* 5 November 1925, p. 55. This ensemble was reportedly worn with 'a hat and shoes in a tone of brown with a red undertone.'

[13] *BV* 20 October 1925, p. 57

[14] Mehari is a woollen fabric with a small, all-over pattern.

[15] *BV* 5 January 1926, p. 54

[16] *BV* 20 September 1925, p. 43

[17] *BV* 5 November 1925, p. 55

[18] *BV* 5 September 1925, p. 31

[19] *BV* 5 November 1926, p. 81

[20] *DR* 19 September 1925, p. 649

[21] *BV* 20 September 1925, p. 47

[22] *BV* 5 November 1925, p. 56

[23] *BV* 20 October 1925, p. 51

[24] *BV* 20 November 1925, p. 74

[25] *DR* 19 September 1925, p. 663

[26] This was most certainly a label that Lelong gave to his designs himself. A number of similar Lelong advertisements, written in an almost manifesto-like prose style, appeared in British and French *Vogue* during the late 1920s. See the Critical Essay for February 1926.

[27] *BV* 20 September 1925, p. 45. Two examples of what the periodical believed to be the geometrical approach to cut of Vionnet were shown in its 1 January 1926 edition (p. 53 and p. 56). The bodice of one design (p.53), in green crêpe de Chine, was constructed with horizontal and perpendicular tucks that met diagonally. *BV* claimed that it was the first fashion publication to note 'the Cubistic trend applied to costume.' (5 October 1925, 'Vogue's Eye View' – no page number).

[28] *BV* 5 December 1925, p. 99

[29] See JoAnne Olian, *Authentic French Fashions of the Twenties: 413 Costume Designs From L'Art et la Mode* (New York 1990), p. 106

[30] Leymarie, op. cit. p. 98

[31] *DR* 19 September 1925, p. 649

February 1926

The 'Masculine' Versus the 'Feminine'

This collection, the largest in the catalogue, is represented by thirty nine designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 20 March and 5 August 1926. Twenty six were shown only in British *Vogue*; eight only in French *Vogue* and five were shown in both editions of the periodical. Eleven were shown on pages devoted to Chanel; the remaining designs were shown with those by Chantal, Drécoll, Lanvin, Louiseboulanger, Molyneux, O'Rossen, Patou, Paquin and Vionnet. Chanel is now shown most frequently next to Patou and Vionnet.[1]

The Collection

Six were intended for morning/street wear (**291 – 296**: three suits and three coats); fourteen for sports (**297 – 310**: four sweater and skirt ensembles, two three-piece suits, four one-piece dresses, three coats, a golfing ensemble and a bathing suit); four for formal town/afternoon (**311 – 314**: four dresses, two with coats); and fifteen for evening wear (**315 – 329**: thirteen dresses and two capes).[2] This is the first time that a Chanel bathing suit was shown by either British or French *Vogue*.

Although several new developments can be identified, the foundation to the entire collection is once again the slim-fitting (if not always severely straight), low-waisted and short garment which, by virtue of its cut, construction and fabric type, would be both easy and comfortable to wear. Just as in August 1925, three principal themes emerge. The first, seen for informal day or sports wear, is the straight, very short (cut to just below the knee), and frequently tailored garment with an even hemline, which has assimilated elements from traditional men's wear. Recalling the group of suits **273 – 275** (August 1925), this theme is represented by **291**. It is also illustrated by the series of two-piece sports dresses (featuring simple sweaters and pleated skirts, referred to as the 'Chanel silhouette') and suits: **298** and **303**.

The second theme, evident in all categories, is based around the silhouette with a slim-fitting bodice and a slight flare below the hips, or skirt fullness (referring to models such as **276** and **280** of August 1925). It is represented by the coat **295**, and the dress and jacket ensemble **312**. The bolero jacket (seen in August 1925) and tiered skirt of

312, ideal for producing flaring effects, were becoming more evident in Chanel's day wear categories (the design was referred to by British *Vogue* as 'an excellent example of the three-tiered silhouette').[3]

The third theme, seen primarily in evening wear, is a continuation of the 'fluttering' or 'flowing' silhouette (seen since August 1923). The basic short, low-waisted or sheath-like foundation dress was once again modified by drapery panels, wings, streamers, bolero draperies, and pointed skirt panels, attached to either the shoulder straps, side seams or skirts, to ensure a 'fluttering' movement when the woman walked. It is represented by **318**, but also by **326** and **327**, which both feature long lengths of fringing on both the bodice and skirt.[4]

Several new developments are evident. The reintroduction of the waistcoat (**292**) reinforces the continuing importance of men's wear for Chanel. However, the jabot (**293**), buttoned tabs, and bows (**294**), are used to alleviate the monotony of otherwise quite 'severe' day wear designs. The collar of **295** is distinctive: it incorporates a long right lapel and a scarf collar on the left side (emphasizing the recent fashion for attached scarf-effects). The collarless coat which resembles an elongated cardigan-style jacket (**294**), and the 'all-over shirred coat' (**296**), are new to this collection.[5] Hip-length cardigan-style jackets were also shown for sports wear (**309**). New waterproofed sports designs were introduced: 'Chanel has made an amusing and decorative offering for the rain golfer, of green rubberized cape. It has a zipper fastening on one side of the blouse and on the pockets.'[6] The shape of the V-neckline was occasionally mirrored on the bodice by either applied bands or a cut-out inverted V shape at the hem (**297** and **303**). Narrow bands, or streamers (normally seen on evening gowns) are, for the first time, featured on a sports model (**298**). Short vertical rows of buttons drop from the side of the neckline down the front of the bodice of **304** and **305**. Bolero jacket-effects appeared on afternoon models (**312** and **313**), as well as on evening designs (in transparent fabrics). Drapery was treated in several new ways: on **315** drapery panels on the side of the skirt are drawn through a hoop at the centre front (and were described by French *Vogue* as characteristic of the 'simple and complex manner of Chanel')[7]; large panels on **322** and **323** fall from the back to the ankles (to create what became known as the 'peacock silhouette')[8]; and long underarm draperies were used on **325**.

Beyond the developments outlined above, variety was further ensured through the alteration of detail. A large number of different collars, necklines, sleeves, cuffs and belts were used. Some designs were collarless, but otherwise tailored, shirt-like, scarf, flat, shawl and Peter Pan collars were all seen. The V-neckline was rivaled by rounded and straight versions; evening designs were all sleeveless and frequently had low U-shaped, rounded or square décolletages with narrow straps. Most sleeves were straight, although flaring and 'bell-shaped' were sometimes shown. *Femina* also discussed Chanel's use of three-quarter-length sleeves (**313**).[9] Neat, narrow cuffs (into which the sleeve was gathered) and simple turn-back cuffs were both featured. Waistlines were low, although they were frequently not marked at all on the evening designs. Only a few tie-belts appeared: buckled belts were more common. Pleating, which often formed the only decoration on a design, came in all forms; it was noted that, for golf, 'Best of all... is the simple, inverted pleat favoured by Chanel.'[10]

Day wear fabrics included wool velour, kasha, taffeta, surah, foulard (printed), crêpe de Chine and crepella in black, cream, beige, blue and navy blue. Checked and tweed fabrics were very important: that of **292** appeared frequently and British *Vogue* reported that, 'Chanel, who is largely responsible for making bold-patterned tweeds smart, now emphasizes small, broken checks.'[11] The sports fabrics included jersey (either plain or striped), tweed, kasha, crêpe de Chine, giraffe fur and leather, in black, white, brown, beige, canary yellow, green, pink, purple and mauve. French *Vogue* illustrated Chanel ski costumes in brown suede. [12] Grey, red and blue were often used for striped jersey fabrics; beige, orange and brown appeared on new shaded woollen fabrics (**307**). For afternoon, velveteen, crêpe de Chine (occasionally spotted) and crepella, in black, white, dark or cherry red (referred to as 'one of Chanel's favourite colours')[13] were common. Evening fabrics included velvet, satin, crêpe de Chine (on its own or in combination with lace), crêpe georgette, mousseline de soie, and chiffon (which had been, and continued to be, used for several of Chanel's most successful designs), in black, white, sable, 'café au lait', cerise, deep red, currant pink, and sea green.

Trimmings were limited to pleating, seaming, buttons, small bows, bands of contrasting fabrics and flowers on the day wear models. One report noted that, like **257**, 'The frocks of many new Chanel ensembles have trimming in points and bands made of the coat material.'[14] The house continued to use geometrical designs: the decorative stitching on **314** formed the shape of an X on the lower bodice. Evening designs were

decorated with chiffon flowers, silver embroidered flowers, sequins (one design shown in *Femina* was completely covered in white sequins).[15], fringing, and mink tails.

Context

In April, British *Vogue* claimed that, 'The Paris openings are a pot-pourri.'[16] No single silhouette predominated: 'garçonne' models existed alongside flaring, bell-shaped silhouettes, sheath dresses, diaphanous evening gowns and Lanvin's bouffant robe de style or picture dresses. The season seemed to have no definite character of its own. One commentator wrote that, 'The spring of 1926 marks a transition period in the progress of fashion... The new ideas that do exist are almost lost in the general clutter.'[17] It was only after the mid-season collections during the summer that British *Vogue* announced, 'Order and logical sequence have come out of the chaos.'[18] Despite the initial bewilderment, some distinct developments (illustrated in Chanel's collection) were evident. A March report claimed that:

> Pronounced contrasts characterize the mode... Chic women are interested in two extremes of dress... there is the clear-cut, severe, highly polished type (and)... the soft, more gracious type, charmingly feminine but still far removed from the fluffy mode of bygone seasons.[19]

This contrast was noticeable within the day wear categories: many houses, like Chanel, showed short, sharp, tailored suits alongside softer, flaring coats and dresses. The 'new visibility of knees' became an increasing concern as many of the houses showed their shortest ever skirts. The average day wear hemline was fourteen inches above the ground, although some houses (Callot, Paquin, Poiret and Vionnet) were experimenting with slightly longer skirts. The waistline, if it existed at all, had no definite position. The press continued to refer to an 'apparent simplicity' in relation to contemporary day wear: those designs which appeared quite straightforward often involved circular cut, inset pieces of fabric (ensuring the fit of the garment and the woman's freedom of movement). The emphasis on a more complicated and intricate cut was again widely discussed:

> This season we have frankly broken with infantile artlessness. We shall have dresses, if not complicated by trimmings, at least complicated in cut. For, we find

> on the same garment, which might still be called the sheath, all sorts of additions, of pieces cut out and set one upon another... hence science is necessary to produce the most inconspicuous model, and hence also the ever-increasing price of each of these models.[20].

One day dress was described as having, 'a piece... let into the back, and... front pieces arranged to form a semi-circle, moulding the figure, without holding it on as the tailleur formerly did before the war.'[21] Even woollen models were cut along asymmetrical lines to give increased 'movement' to the silhouette. Straight, furless coats (full or three-quarter-length) were popular, and, just as last season, the latest ensembles did not necessarily adhere to an exact match between the coat and dress (contrasting colours were used). Older women were advised to opt for coats that closed diagonally as they were more flattering to the fuller figure: the emphasis on the slim and slender silhouette was still paramount.

The influence of men's dress was now thought to be largely confined to the informal suit and sports clothes. A great variety of collar, neckline and sleeve types were used (the dolman sleeve and lingerie touches at the collar and cuffs were particularly important). Satin coats were a new development; tweed, kasha, covert cloth, rep and wool crêpe were widely seen. The browns, beige, greens and blues were all common, and black, particularly in combination with white, had reclaimed its former popularity. Shirring and fan-shaped inserts, used by several houses, served not only as a trimming but also as a means of adding fullness to the design and softening the silhouette.

A greater number of houses were now producing sports clothes, and in August British *Vogue* reported that, 'Vionnet – like a great many of the French couturiers – has opened a sports department.'[22] Vionnet's approach to this category was no different to her approach towards day and evening wear designs:

> This gifted designer... does not feel that "sports" implies casual, informal cut. Her clothes for sports have the intricacy and perfection of cut for which all her clothes are famous.[23]

Many designers, like Chanel, expanded their existing sports collections to include more specialist lines:

> The experimental stage in the development of garments for sports is over... each sport proclaims itself sartorially. By her clothes one knows the woman who plays tennis, the woman who goes in for golf, and the woman who prefers to be a spectator.[24]

For tennis the woman was advised to opt for either a one or two-piece white dress in silk, linen or cotton. Darker colours and more substantial fabrics were appropriate for golf: pleated skirts, like those offered by Chanel, were recommended for ease of movement (those with the type of pleat which was difficult to keep in place were not recommended). Combinations of colour, striped and shaded fabrics, and increased fullness, were some of the key trends. Wearing jewellery with sports wear was now deemed acceptable, particularly double or triple rows of pearls.

The 'pronounced contrasts' referred to above were most obvious in evening wear. Floaty, diaphanous dresses in chiffon were produced alongside, 'the brilliantly challenging "paillette" (sequined) dress, which moulds the figure more plainly and has less movement and more decision.'[25] One silhouette, known as 'ampleur Vionnet', but also associated with Chéruit, was described as involving a 'new feeling of bulk and fullness, softly massed or intricately arranged.'[26] The short at the front and long at the back peacock silhouette appeared at several houses. Other trends included the very low oval décolletage, the use of light shades of chiffon as well as black, and the uneven hemline. The main fabrics were taffeta, satin, moiré, crêpe romain, crêpe georgette, lamé, chiffon, tulle and voile. Black was deemed the most important colour, although white was seen at many houses (Lanvin was particularly known for white satin and crêpe designs detailed with pearl embroidery). Combinations of several shades of one colour were often employed on individual designs: Vionnet produced one taffeta gown in three shades of rose.[27] Embroidery and beading were still seen: *Femina* reproduced an evening dress by Patou with a bodice decorated in bands of embroidery, resembling the necklace-like effects seen on Chanel models of February 1925.[28] Fringing maintained its importance and was described as 'one of the most graceful ways of bringing motion to the mode.'[29]

Chanel's 'simple and complex' approach, and the development of the peacock silhouette, drew her in line with several other houses, including Patou and Vionnet. However, the house did refuse to experiment with longer skirts. Furthermore, a considerable amount of new details (many of which would be adopted by other designers), ranging from the

three-tiered silhouette, to the jabot, and the waterproofed raincoat with zipper fastenings, set the house apart from its rivals.

Although the distinction between the straight, severe designs and the less rigid, more loosely structured models was often discussed by the press in terms of a masculine/feminine polarity, the debate was also communicated through references relating to issues in contemporary art and other branches of design. This was evident in the late 1920s advertising campaigns of Lelong. These advertisements, which were published in British and French *Vogue*, were written in a prose style that had far more in common with the manifestoes of the avant garde, than with the usual type of couture house publicity. For this designer, movement was the defining characteristic of the modern age. Believing that his designs expressed this new era, Lelong coined the term 'kinetic silhouette' to describe the movement and fluidity inherent in his work.

> The kinetic silhouette... originated by Lelong... did more than lend grace to the dress of a single season: it is now seen to have brought in a new period, a new epoch in style.[30]

In numerous advertisements such as these, Lelong harnessed both the media and the avant garde for the service of haute couture.

---

[1] **306, 308** and **329** are all worn with Vionnet designs.

[2] This season saw the publication in *BV* of designs that were described as being 'copies' of Chanel models (see 20 July 1926, p. 51). These have not been included in the catalogue as it is not always certain how faithful the copy is to the original. However, a list of the page references for these designs does appear as an appendix.

[3] *BV* 20 April 1926, p. 58. This design was reportedly one of the most successful of the season.

[4] An almost identical version of **327** was reproduced in *Femina* (1 May 1926, p. 2).

[5] Chanel's **294** was particularly successful: one review noted that, 'Especially chic is Chanel's sweater-like three-quarter-length coat that is collarless and buttons at the waistline like a cardigan jacket.' (*BV* 20 March 1926, p. 74)

[6] *BV* 5 July 1926, p. 46. Schiaparelli is often credited as being the one of the first haute couture designers to use the zipper fastening in the early 1930s. This report makes it clear that Chanel was employing the device as early as 1926.

[7] *FV* 1 May 1926, p. 13

[8] **323** was named by *BV* as 'One of the best of Chanel's famous black chiffon frocks (which has) the characteristic circular coat, the flared hemline, and huge transparent draperies.' (20 April 1926, p. 57)

[9] *Femina* 1 May 1926, p. 4

[10] *BV* 5 July 1926, p. 46

[11] *BV* 5 February 1926, p. xxv

[12] *FV* 1 March 1926, p. 68

[13] *BV* 20 April 1926, p. 58. Deep red had been particularly central to Chanel's collection for some time; Chanel's 'rouge-noir' appeared in August 1925.

[14] *BV* 20 April 1926, p. 58

[15] *Femina* 1 July p. 8. This design was worn by La Comtesse Quaranta.

[16] *BV* 5 April 1926, p. 44

[17] *BV* 20 April 1926, p. 55

[18] *BV* 5 July 1926, p. 41

[19] *BV* 20 March 1926, p. 3

[20] *BV* 5/20 June 1926, p. 67

[21] *BV* 5/20 June 1926, p. 67

[22] *BV* 5 August 1926, p. 57

[23] *BV* 5 August 1926, p. 57

[24] *BV* 5/20 June 1926, p. 3

[25] *BV* 20 March 1926, p. 3

[26] *BV* 5 May 1926, p. 76

[27] *BV* 5 May 1926, p. 55

[28] *Femina* 1 May 1926, p. 5

[29] *BV* 5 May 1925, p. 78

[30] *BV* 5 February 1926, p. xxvi

August 1926

The Reign of Reason

This collection is represented by twenty seven designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 20 October 1926 and 20 February 1927. Twenty two were shown only in British *Vogue*, three were shown only in French *Vogue*, and two were shown in both editions of the periodical. Eleven were shown on pages devoted to the designer. The remaining designs were featured most frequently with those of Lelong, Patou and Vionnet, but also with Chantal, Chéruit, Drécoll, Lanvin, Martial et Armand, Molyneux and Paquin.

The Collection

Eleven designs were intended for morning/street wear (**330 – 340**: three coats and eight dresses); six for sports or country wear (**341 – 346**: five suits and one two-piece dress); and ten for evening wear (**347 – 356**: ten dresses).

This collection is once again based on the simple, straight, short (cut to just below the knee), and low-waisted garment. However, in contrast to the previous collection, only two main themes emerge. The first, central to the day wear categories, and founded on the very straight and short silhouette, is represented in the catalogue by the town coat **332**, and the dress **335** (noted as being 'An excellent example of the straight silhouette – done so well by Chanel.')[1] It is also exemplified by the dinner dresses **347** and **348**. Typically, such designs have simple necklines, full-length sleeves and, to ensure the woman's ease of movement, pleated skirts. What had recently been referred to as the 'Chanel silhouette' – a straight sports ensemble of a sweater and pleated skirt – was again represented in this collection (cf. **345**).

The second theme, found primarily in evening wear, is a development on the idea of the mermaid silhouette (see August 1923 to February 1926): the combination of drapery panels, streamers, and tiers, in a lightweight fabric such as chiffon, created a design which 'rippled' as the woman walked or danced. This is represented in the catalogue by **353** (described as 'a new version of Chanel's simple chiffon dance frock – a favourite with well-dressed women.')[2] Very few designs refer back to what was identified as a third theme in the previous two collections (cf. **295**, February 1926): the garment with a

slight flare from the hips or skirt fullness. Only **333** and **334** would appear to continue with this line of development.

The introduction of new ideas, and the reworking of established forms, continues to ensure variety. The separate inner-front of the coat **331** (recalling those of August 1924, cf. **248**), the large bow and tab detail of **333** (cf. **294** February 1926), and the addition of bolero-like draperies at the back of the bodice (**338**), all enliven the straight silhouette. Other developments include horizontal pleating on the bodice and top of the skirt (**334**), inset bodice panels (**334 – 336**), and bands of fine pin-tucking (which forms an X shape on the front of the dress of **337**, recalling that on **314** of the previous collection). The sports model **344** was described as a 'new version of the cardigan suit', as its jacket was slightly shorter than those of previous seasons.[3]

New features were also shown in the evening wear collection. The fabric of **347** may be cut on the bias, and is draped and caught at the left hip in a brooch. **348** has the appearance of a simple day or sports wear model: it has an inset bodice panel (cf. **335** or **336**), a buckled belt and a fringed skirt, that resemble the narrowly pleated skirts of the sports designs. **352** has what British *Vogue* referred to as the 'off-one-shoulder-line': the fabric forms a short, cape-like sleeve over the right arm. The bodice of **353** is constructed from diagonal bands; it has a tiered skirt and the left shoulder and hip are both marked by large bows in the same fabric as the dress.

Chanel also continued to vary the basic details of her designs. Single and double-breasted coats of all lengths were produced; entire skirts, or simply side panels, were pleated in a variety of ways: accordion, box and inverted. Roll, shawl, flat, tailored, scarf and shirt-like collars were all seen; necklines ranged from V-shaped, to square and bateau. Full-length sleeves were either straight, wide or narrow. The majority of evening designs were sleeveless, with low, square or rounded décolletages. the very low, oval shaped back was reportedly seen on several models. Few tie-belts were used, and, like last season, most designs included a buckled belt.

The day wear fabrics include tweed, crêpe de Chine and crêpella, in black, beige, grey-blue, and purple. White piqué and starched white linen were used for the blouses or 'lingerie trimmings' (at the collars and cuffs). **331** was considered one of the most important coats of the season, due to its unique and, as British *Vogue* considered it, daring combination of ermine and tweed: 'Preposterous, of course, but extremely chic.'[4]

The principal sports fabrics were jersey (plain and striped), tweed, wool crêpe, crêpe marocain, silk crêpe and satin, in black, beige, red, green and navy blue. The house produced many versions of the tweed suit worn with a jersey blouse, and British *Vogue* noted that, 'For sports wear in the country, no frock is smarter.'[5] The combination of two or more fabrics, and the use of satin, was considered an important feature of this category. The evening fabrics included silk velvet, satin, crêpe de Chine, lace, chiffon, tulle and mousseline in black, white, beige, red, rose and blue.

Trimmings were confined to buttons, bows, pleating (both horizontal and vertical), geometrical arrangements of seaming and pin-tucking, and artificial flowers. Some designs were edged with narrow bands of a contrasting fabric (typically satin). Belts in moiré, calfskin, or with ruby buckles, also provided some decoration. Draperies and bows were the key embellishments on the evening models, however **348** has a row of small buttons down the left side of the inset panel in its bodice, and large flowers are worn on the back of the right shoulder and the front of the left shoulder of **352**. The January 1927 edition of *Femina* showed a Chanel evening design in black tulle which was covered with silver embroidery in a floral motif.[6] A second gown, shown in the following edition of *Femina*, had fine pin-tucking and pleating on both the bodice and skirt.[7]

337 was one of the most successful models this season. It came to represent (along with other examples from this collection, such as **335** and **336**), the ultimate expression of the idea of the 'little black dress': a plain black design, with a straight, simple and uncomplicated silhouette. The model, which appeared in the 1 October edition of American *Vogue*, was introduced in that magazine as 'a Ford signed Chanel – the frock that all the world will wear.'[8] The equation of an haute couture model with the mass-produced Ford car implied that high-fashion was now uniform and standardized: capable of infinite reproduction and intended for mass consumption. The design's streamlined, geometric shape has also prompted comparison with contemporary art. Jean Leymarie, in reference to **337**, stated that it was, 'as functional as a car... the purity of its design echoes the contemporary style of Léger in his mechanical phase.' Drawing Chanel's approach to dress design in line with Léger's approach to painting, Leymarie goes on to argue that, 'This painter did not imitate machines; he integrated them formally into his art through equivalent signs.'[9]

Context

Revealing similar concerns to those expressed immediately after the February 1926 openings, British *Vogue* seemed unconvinced that the new season would be marked by any one coherent line of development. It announced in September that, 'The mode is a medley. Forecasting for winter, *Vogue* foresees many variations of familiar themes with youth the only keynote.'[10] However, by October, the magazine stated that, 'One of the great accomplishments of the August collections has consisted in bringing order out of the chaos of the mode.'[11] Two main day wear silhouettes were identified (although they were practically interchangeable): the straight and short, and that with 'page-boy' characteristics (one which incorporated both a youthful feel and elements from men's dress, such as white starched collars and cuffs). Just as in Chanel's collection, the silhouette that flared from below the hips (referred to as the bell-like silhouette during 1925), was rarely seen in the day wear categories. One review stated that, 'Fullness ripples rather than flares', highlighting the fact that obvious devices of introducing fullness to the silhouette – such as godets – were thought to be on their way out (in fact, they remained in use throughout the 1920s). More sophisticated devices (asymmetrical and circular cuts) were employed to avoid harsh lines. Skirts were once again announced to be 'shorter than ever', and British *Vogue* advised that, 'A last year's dress, still wearable, would have to be taken up, though this is not as true in London as it is in Paris, where extremes flourish.'[12] Coats of all lengths were produced by most of the houses. Street dresses, particularly those with 'lingerie touches', and tailored suits, were seen everywhere. Although Chanel is inextricably associated with the 'little black dress', Vionnet was also producing extremely simple, straight and untrimmed designs in fabrics such as black crêpe satin.[13] Geometric cuts, intricate seaming (sponsored by Vionnet and Chanel), pin-tucking, pleating, jabots, and fur trimming were widely shown. The most popular fabrics were tweed, crêpe de Chine and crêpella in tan, beige and green. It was noted that black was more widely used than it had been for some time, and Vionnet was as renowned as Chanel for her use of dark red.

Sports wear continued to expand and one report noted that, 'Three-quarters of the daytime fashions offered in Paris are of the sports type. Simple, practical and youthful.'[14] The one-piece sports dress was more fashionable than the two-piece, although most houses produced versions of both. The cardigan-style suit with pleated skirt maintained its status. Satin as a trimming on sports wear was shown not only by

Chanel, but also by Lelong, Patou and Vionnet, prompting British *Vogue* to note that, 'The mode has a satin sheen.'[15]

The bloused silhouette (bloused above the hips and tight below); the flaring silhouette from below the hips, and the bolero bodice, were seen primarily in the afternoon and evening wear categories. One report noted that, 'The evening silhouette will often be straight but not too simple, and the reign of floating ends, straps, panels and sash ends is not over.'[16] Pin-tucking was also used on afternoon models, and Vionnet was noted for her 'crow's feet tucks' (tucks which splayed out in the shape of a bird's foot). The straight, sequined dress existed alongside the more diaphanous, chiffon dress. Belts became increasingly common on evening designs. Satin, crêpe de chine, chiffon, mousseline de soie and lace were the most frequently used fabrics in black, white and deep red.

Chanel's 'little black dress' could be seen as a development on the very simple, plain 'garçonne-style' models produced by Premet during 1922 (see February 1923).[17] Nor was Chanel's use of the bias cut, fine pin-tucking and geometrical patterns unique: Vionnet was famed for these devices. However, her continuing concern with asymmetry (evident in the 'off-one-shoulder-line'), and the innovative combinations of fabrics and furs, were only two of the developments which distinguished this collection.

Although economic concerns, as far as the fashion press was concerned, seemed less pressing than they had been during and immediately after the First World War, British *Vogue* did note that, 'Patriotic French couturiers are offering models with flowers and feathers as trimming motifs for the sake of the industries that have languished during the era of severe simplicity in the mode.'[18] This report underlines the fact that the wider concerns of the fashion trade, in relation to economics and governmental intervention, was still an active force in contemporary fashion.

Notwithstanding the greater use of some trimmings, simplicity was thought to be the defining characteristic of 1926: a simplicity which had rejected the more obvious and severe forms of the 'garçonne' style, but was far removed from the complexity of the pre-war fashions of the Belle Epoque. Despite claims of 'increased femininity', what was believed to be the androgyny of contemporary fashion was widely discussed, and one report claimed that, 'Men and women are becoming ever more indistinguishable.'[19]

Many more women now shopped at the traditionally male reserves of tailors and hosiers. The issue of 'female immodesty' (as skirts showed no real signs of lengthening) was debated at all levels of the media and in many fashion magazines. In one article British *Vogue* noted that:

> Mr. Ponsonby, a member of the last Labour government, has put forward a theory that the "immodesty" of the modern girl's attire is the result of a desperate attempt to attract the male in a world where increased competition and other causes have made it very difficult. The real reason for this "immodesty" is quite different. Short skirts are worn for the same reasons as short hair: they are enormously more convenient.[20]

Contemporary fashion was frequently explained in terms of practicality, convenience and suitability to modern life: 'The woman of the future cannot wear clothes that are incongruous with aeroplanes.'[21] The couturier could no longer follow his or her own individual whims or fancies. Instead, it was argued, the dress designer had a responsibility to produce clothing that addressed the demands of contemporary society. This attitude underpinned the advertising campaigns of Lelong (see February 1926). One advert, entitled 'The Reign of Reason in Fashion', stressed to the reader that:

> Fashion this year has definitely followed other modern arts toward the cool beauty of sheer intellectuality and away from the flaccidly sentimental. This means a discrediting of whimsical, flowery and ornate styles and the substitution of a logic in design that dispenses with every intrusive and unwarranted detail... It is a renaissance of the true haute couture, since all correct effects must now be gained by cut.[22]

---

[1] *BV* 20 October 1926 p. 50

[2] *BV* 20 January 1927, p. 30

[3] *BV* 5 December 1926 p. 86

[4] *BV* 5 November 1926, p. 49

[5] *BV* 5 December 1926, p. 3

[6] *Femina* 1 January 1927, p. 40

[7] *Femina* 1 February 1927, p. 35

[8] See Alice Mackrell, *Coco Chanel* (London 1992), p. 31

[9] Jean Leymarie, *Chanel* (New York 1987), p. 103.

[10] *BV* 5 September 1926, p. 65

[11] *BV* 5 October 1926, p. 59

[12] *BV* 5 November 1926, p. 50. Both *BV* and *DR*, throughout the period, comment on the greater 'eccentricity' of the fashions worn by French women.

[13] *BV* 5 December 1926, p. 86

[14] *BV* 20 October 1926, p. 66

[15] *BV* 5 February 1927, p. 34

[16] *BV* 20 September 1926, p.46

[17] See Steele, 'Chanel in Context' in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader* (London 1992), p. 122

[18] *BV* 20 August 1926, p. 40

[19] *BV* 5 September 1926, p.60

[20] *BV* 20 September, 1926, p. 65

[21] *BV* 20 September, 1926, p. 65

[22] *BV* 5 October, 1926, p. xxi

February 1927

The Kinoptic Silhouette

This collection is represented by thirty designs reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 5 March and 5 August 1927. Sixteen were shown only in British *Vogue*, twelve were shown only in French *Vogue* and two were shown in both editions of the periodical. Eleven were shown on their own; the remaining models were shown most frequently with those by Lelong and Patou, but also with Chantal, Chéruit, Drécoll, Molyneux and Jane Régny.[1]

This collection includes designs intended specifically for the British market: models for Ascot (**375** and **376**), and court gowns for the débutante (**385** and **386**). British *Vogue* gave particular attention to these designs as they coincided with the opening of Chanel's London house. A special one page feature devoted to the new branch outlined what the magazine believed was the main reason for this expansion:

> Copies of Chanel models are always being made all over the world – copies with degrees of faithfulness to the originals. It was in order to preserve the perfection of her designs that Mlle. Chanel wished to make her models in London as well as in Paris.[2]

Although the problem of design piracy may have played an important part in the decision to open the house, the opportunity to cater for and exploit the specific needs of the profitable British market would certainly have influenced the decision: it was expedient to open a branch that could concentrate on the exact requirements of the British woman. British *Vogue* reassured its readers that the expertise of the Parisian headquarters would not be lost, but that it would be combined with the experience and knowledge of a home work force:

> The Chanel workrooms in London employ only English work girls under the direction of French "premières". Only English mannequins show the models. Here in an essentially practical sense, useful to both countries... is an "entente cordiale", French chic adapted to English tastes and traditions.[3]

The Collection

Eight designs were intended for general morning/street or country wear (**357 – 364**: two coats and six suits); nine for sports wear (**365 – 373**: one coat, four suits, three dresses and one pair of beach pyjamas); four for afternoon wear (**374 – 377**: four dresses); and nine for evening wear (**378 – 386**: nine dresses).

In July, British *Vogue* described the house of Chanel as 'one of the main influences on the mode', and stated that its designs were 'invariably simple, practical and beautiful.'[4] *Femina* also referred to the 'elegant simplicity' of the designer's work.[5] The entire collection is based upon the slim-fitting, short, low-waisted and comfortable garment; however, three distinct themes, or lines of development, emerge.

The first, produced primarily for the morning/street and sports wear categories, continues with the very straight and short lines of preceding collections. This is represented by **360**: a suit with a tailored appearance, elements derived from traditional men's wear (shirt-like blouse, patch pockets), and a pleated skirt with an even hemline. The second theme, which dominates the evening wear collection, is a continuation of the 'fluttering silhouette' (first seen in August 1923): the sleeveless garment, invariably produced in a lightweight fabric, with an uneven hemline and drapery panels, wings or tiers, that 'flutter' as the woman walks. This is illustrated by **383**: a gown with a tiered skirt, pointed draperies that fall below the hem of the skirt, and an attached drapery wing. In a similar vein, many evening dresses were, like **384**, designed to hang straight but, due to the circular cut of their cut skirts, had 'a graceful fullness when in motion.'[6] The third theme is a development on an idea shown in the February 1926 collection (and to a lesser extent in August 1926): the formal day or evening garment with a straight bodice (bloused slightly over a low waistline), and skirt fullness (handled in a number of ways) or a slight flare from below the neat-fitting hipline. This is represented by the afternoon dress **375** (its skirt has set-in, side-pleated panels), and the gown for the débutante **386** (the skirt below the hipline is gathered, a puff of taffeta is positioned at the left hip, and the train is cut in one with the skirt).

Against this backdrop, several new developments are evident. A raincoat, cut along the lines of the general coats, was shown as part of the morning/street category.[7] Like many similar models this season, the jacket of **359** closes to the left side; however, the jacket buttons in such a way (the buttons are set at an angle) that the hemline rises

towards the centre front, giving an asymmetrical appearance. The small-collared (**365**), or the collarless coat or jacket (**366**) formed a central part of this collection, prompting British *Vogue* to note that, 'Chanel finishes most of her coats like dresses, with but a suggestion of a collar, giving that soigné look that the young adore.'[8] The magazine also referred to a trend for loose, 'vagabond' ties, worn with several of Chanel's new blouses (**363**). Set-in vest-like panels continued to feature (cf. **335**, August 1926), and attached capes were again important (**367**). The sports category included beach pyjamas, styled as traditional men's pyjamas, and worn with a matching full-length coat. The cardigan-style jacket, seen previously for sports wear, is now teamed with an afternoon dress **374**.[9] The use of set-in gathered or pleated skirt panels, as a means of introducing fullness and modifying the slim silhouette, was a key development in the more formal categories.

The constant modification of details such as collar, neckline, sleeve and belt type guaranteed variety. Very wide, tailored and shirt-like collars appeared on some coats and jackets (an alternative to those with no collars whatsoever). Necklines ranged from rounded, V-shaped and square. Evening models were sleeveless (with the exception of **386**), had a low décolletage and narrow shoulder straps. Full-length sleeves were usually cut straight, although British *Vogue* noted that some new models had three-quarter-length sleeves cut with a slight flare (cf. **313**, February 1926). Buckled belts were once again more common than tie-belts; large patch pockets appeared on the informal designs. The majority of skirts were either entirely pleated, or pleated at the front or sides. Bolero draperies (attached to the back of the bodice, cf. **377** and **384**), were a key device for modifying the straight lines of the silhouette. The more elaborate models **385** and **386** both incorporated floor-length trains cut in one with the skirt.

The press reported that Chanel was using more tweed (particularly Scottish tweed) than ever before this season. Other day wear fabrics included leather, waterproofed ciré, cheviot, lightweight homespun, wool jersey, velours and silk in black, white, brown, tan, beige, red, rose, green and navy blue. Wool jersey, white washing silk and striped delaine, in familiar colours such as black, brown, tan, beige, red, and blue, were used for sports designs. Jacket linings and facings were usually in the fabric of the accompanying blouse or dress. Crêpe georgette, crêpe de Chine (printed or plain), silk (printed or plain) and lace, in black, brown, red, and blue were used for the afternoon. In reference to **376**, British *Vogue* noted that, '(Chanel's) favourite black lace has now been moulded into the afternoon mode.'[10] Heavy satin, taffeta, crêpe georgette, silk,

mousseline de soie (plain and printed), French lace and chiffon, in black, white, beige, cream, green and cornflower blue (the printed fabrics were in an assortment of colours) were shown for evening. Semi-transparent fabrics were still used, and long afternoon or evening coats were in shirred chiffon or crêpe georgette (cf. **296**, February 1926). *Femina* reported that Chanel was producing numerous evening designs in printed mousseline de soie and crêpe georgette.[11] The house continued to be associated with the simple and unadorned black chiffon evening dress, although the lace gowns were extremely successful. **382** was noted for its, 'straight lines and... tiered skirt, giving a silhouette which is unusual in lace frocks', showing that Chanel was able to use her most frequently employed fabrics in new or unusual ways.[12] It was also reported that Chanel was using 'lipstick red' for many of her most recent evening designs.[13]

Trimming was generally limited to bands of contrasting colours and fabrics, buttons or pleating.[14] Pin-tucking, piping, ribbing or seaming, frequently in geometrical shapes and diagonal arrangements, is used on many of the informal models. The attached cape of **366** shows top-stitched bands with arrowheads, a new feature in the catalogue. Many suits were worn with white piqué flowers. Pleating, bows, drapery wings and bolero bodices were seen on the more formal models; geometrical shapes were also important: in reference to **384** British *Vogue* noted that, 'the circular skirt is stitched tightly in a triangular pattern below the hipline.'[15] Jewelled buckled belts and bows were also seen (French *Vogue* described one bolero jacket that was closed with three bows.)[16] A further Chanel invention was described as:

> ... a new trimming for an unlined chiffon coat. She (Chanel) makes a ruche of finger shaped pieces of chiffon sewed closely together; the effect is like coque feathers.[17]

A second report noted that, 'Chanel has invented a brand-new trimming – ragged chiffon feathers. Nothing can be more frothily graceful.'[18]

Context

In January 1927 British *Vogue* stated that:

> Simplicity has become so fundamental and permanent a part of the mode that the coming of a new season can no longer bring the sweeping changes... in fashion that were once expected.[19]

As the collections were shown, it became clear that, yet again, detail rather than a change in silhouette, would provide the expected novelty. This was thought to be indicative of a trend towards standardization in women's dress (see August 1926), a trend which would ensure that: 'a woman may reach an average of smartness with far less trouble and expense.'[20]

The main day wear silhouette was the 'sports' or 'Chanel silhouette': the straight, uncomplicated garment with a pleated skirt. Although associated with sports wear, it was widely acknowledged that the 'sports feel' was now seen throughout the day (a trend evident in Chanel's work). Chanel, Paquin and Vionnet all kept their waistlines low, despite the efforts of Lanvin, Louiseboulanger, Patou, Talbot and Worth. Short skirts, which dropped to just below the knee, dominated the collections, a fact which, as the *Drapers' Record* reported, had brought recent criticism from the Pope.[21] The 'mannish' tailleur and the ensemble maintained their popularity, and the straight, wrapped and frequently collarless coat was shown at many houses. The fashionable raglan sleeve (see **433**, August 1928) was considered to be a perfect means of softening the harsh lines of the tailleur, giving:

> ... an effect of less severe tailoring than the standardized set-in coat sleeve – an effect that is in harmony with the more feminine lines that many of the new coats sponsor.[22]

The development of a softer silhouette for day and sports wear was particularly associated with Vionnet: her day clothes were described as having 'a remarkably supple quality.'[23]

Chanel's raincoat was not unique: Chéruit and Molyneux were noted for similar designs. British *Vogue* reported that, 'Rainy weather has recently come under the attention of the French couturiers.'[24] The production of new waterproofed fabrics, such as kasha, crêpe de Chine and taffeta, enabled many houses to expand their day and sports ranges. Tweeds, jersey, woollen and printed fabrics were all seen in the colours favoured by Chanel, and Patou also combined rose and beige in his tweed and jersey

ensembles. British *Vogue* identified what it referred to as 'the extreme restraint in trimming.'[25] Geometric and asymmetrical arrangements of pleating, tucking, seaming and buttons continued to appear at all the houses, along with 'lingerie' touches such as contrasting bands, collars, cuffs, piping and jabots of white crêpe de Chine, chiffon or lace.

For sports wear, the one piece dress, the two-piece dress (usually of striped sweater with a box-pleated skirt), or the three-piece suit were all acceptable. Most of the houses now catered for more specialized sports activities, and 'beach pyjamas' were widely shown.[26] Tweed (particularly herringbone) and lightweight woollen fabrics were common; silks were used for tennis dresses. Many sports designs continued to be trimmed with satin. Black, brown, beige, tan, and white were the most typical colours, although many houses, such as Patou, produced designs in bolder, brighter colours such as yellow.

Four silhouettes dominated the afternoon and evening collections: the straight; the tiered; the silhouette with a bloused bodice or bolero above moulded hips (a key development of the season); and the silhouette with floating draperies. The square or oval décolletage and the uneven hemline featured in most collections. Heavy satin was used by the majority of the leading houses, along with taffeta, crêpe georgette, chiffon, mousseline de soie and lace. Black (in a transparent fabric or combined with white) was considered the most important shade for evening, although white, mauve, orange, terra-cotta, pink, yellow, lavender, turquoise blue and pale green all appeared in the main shows. Just as in the day wear categories, evening trimmings were no longer simply 'additional touches', but 'the outgrowth of the intrinsic feeling of the costume itself.'[27] Vionnet's crêpe evening dresses were known for their geometric patterns. Draperies, set-in panels and fringing were important, although beading, sequins, white flowers and embroidery were still seen. Worth incorporated oriental motifs, and employed more trimmings than many other houses.

The house of Chanel continued to be noted for the simplicity of its designs. However, the more obviously complicated and elaborate models were frequently commented upon, particularly in reference to the work of the other leading houses: it was reported that, 'Vionnet and Chanel, Patou and others have given... traditional fabrics (herringbone tweeds and homespun) a more sophisticated line, more intricate details and more subtle colour schemes.'[28]

On the whole, the press considered the principal development of the season to be, 'The achievement of as much intricacy of cut, design and fabric as can be combined with an effect of uncompromising simplicity.'[29] The increased complication in cut led to an 'irregularity of line', and Milbank has noted that 'Asymmetry gradually became the keynote of 1927.'[30] Such lines were thought to alleviate the monotony of the simple, straight, 'garçonne-style' of frock, and to enhance the slender appearance of the figure. One Lelong advertisement of February 1927 (see February 1926) referred to his new so-called 'Kinoptic Silhouette', a silhouette which combined some of the main developments of the season:

> In dress design... slenderness is illusory – optical. The designer's craft can transform even a heavy figure. Hence Kinoptic... kinetic plus the slimming magic of cut, line and technical proportion. Dress that slims... it is the ideal upon which I am concentrating all the technique and talent at my command.[31]

Lelong, like many other designers, was gradually modifying his approach towards the cut and structure of fashionable dress, but continuing to give priority to the very slim and slender ideal of the female figure.

---

[1] A sportswoman herself, Jane Régny ran a very successful house from 1922 which specialized in sports and travel wear.

[2] *BV* 1 June 1927, p. 49

[3] *BV* 1 June 1927, p. 49

[4] *BV* 20 July 1927, p. 32

[5] *Femina* 1 February 1927, p. 35

[6] *BV* 15 March 1927, p. 57

[7] Chanel produced raincoats throughout this period (see February 1926), but this was the first actually to be illustrated in British or French *Vogue*.

[8] *BV* 1 May 1927, p. 61. Collarless jackets were also seen in February 1923.

[9] This typifies a recent trend in Chanel's work: sports designs were being assimilated into other, more formal categories of dress (cf. **348** August 1926 – a dinner dress which resembled a sports dress).

[10] *BV* 5 June 1927, p. 49

[11] *Femina* 1 April 1927, p. 29. The magazine published a version of **381** in cream mousseline printed with bouquets of flowers in green and chestnut brown.

[12] *BV* 1 May 1927, p. 50

[13] *BV* 1 March, 1927, p. 44

[14] As trimmings became more and more limited on the day and sports wear models, accessories, particularly scarves, became increasingly important. The printed silk scarf worn with **371** was one of many to be produced by the house to accompany the season's new coats. The accessory departments were now a vital part of the house: *BV* reported that, 'Paris has a beautiful excuse for going to see Chanel and Vionnet and all the rest... (their) cases are always irresistibly spread with accessories.' (20 May 1927, p. 83)

[15] *BV* 20 March 1927, p. 57

[16] *FV* 1 May 1927, p. 35

[17] *BV* 1 March 1927, p. 78

[18] *BV* 1 May 1927, p. 58

[19] *BV* 15 January 1927, p. 31

[20] *BV* 15 January 1927, p. 32

[21] *DR* 1 January 1927, p. 15. The periodical defended the very short skirt, condemned by the Pope, by stating that it was 'modest and certainly more hygienic than when garments were more ample and more numerous.'

[22] *BV* 1 May 1927, p. 58

[23] *BV* 20 March 1927, p. 45

[24] *BV* 1 March, 1927, p. 66

[25] *BV* 20 January 1927, p. 32

[26] Beach pyjamas had, in fact, been worn for many seasons now.

[27] *BV* 20 February 1927, p. 29

[28] *BV* 20 February 1927, p. 64

[29] *BV* 15 February 1927, p. 31

[30] Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York 1989), p. 84

[31] *BV* 1 February 1927, p. 24

August 1927

The Mode of the Broken Line

This collection is represented by seventeen designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 19 October 1927 and 22 February 1928. Sixteen were shown only in British *Vogue*; one was shown in both editions of the periodical. Six were shown on pages devoted to Chanel. The remaining examples were illustrated most frequently next to those of Louiseboulanger, Molyneux, Patou and Vionnet, but also with Goupy, Lanvin and Worth.[1]

The Collection:

Six designs were intended for morning/street and country wear (**387 – 392**: two coats, two coats with dresses and two two-piece dresses); four for sports wear (**393 – 396**: three coats and one suit); and seven for evening wear (**337 – 403**: seven dresses).

The Chanel collection was extensively reviewed this season. As usual, British *Vogue* gave an extremely positive account of the designer's work:

> Mlle. Chanel's contribution to fashion is always important, extremely smart, and highly individual. Her attitude towards clothes, her technique and her restraint make her collection very personal and complete. Mlle. Chanel is justly famous for all that she has done and deserves even greater fame for the things that she does not allow herself to do. Her dresses are peculiarly free from mistakes, either in idea, taste or execution.[2]

Two main themes dominate the collection. The first, typical of so many previous collections and seen primarily in the informal categories, is based around the simple, straight and short (cut to just below the knee) ensemble. It is represented by the sports model **395**: the straight, cardigan-style jacket and pleated skirt recall the basic 'Chanel silhouette' of preceding seasons.[3] The second, confined to evening wear, refers back to the longer-at-the-back-than-front 'peacock silhouette' of February 1926 (cf. **321**), and to the trains cut in one with the skirts of the 'court' designs of February 1927 (cf. **385** and **386**). The 'fluttering' silhouette of previous seasons, produced in an appropriately lightweight fabric, has been replaced by a line which, like **385** and **386**, employs a

heavy, comparatively stiff fabric. The theme is illustrated by **401**: the loose, straight bodice is bloused over a slim-fitting hipline; the skirt is gathered loosely into a hip yoke and an ankle-length drapery, cut in one with the skirt, falls from the right side.

Although the informal designs conformed to the basic simple, straight and short silhouette, new elements and details were incorporated. Like **389** (described by British *Vogue* as 'one of the town and country models of the season')[4] many of the coats included scarves cut in one with the bodice (expanding on the recent fashion for matching separate scarves with coats). Similarly, day dresses, such as **388**, had tabs and ends cut in one piece with bands of fabric that outlined the décolletage. One report noted that, 'These dresses are full of ingenious detail.'[5] The majority of the one-piece dresses now have a skirt yoke, which rises upwards towards the centre front (mirroring either the shape of the V or rounded neckline, e.g. **391**)[6] French *Vogue* reported that, 'For the last two seasons, Chanel's evening dresses have had a close-fitting yoke.'[7] However, this season, the pointed, V-shaped yoke was particularly important for the evening (**401**). Long panels, cut in one with the fabric of the dress, are tied at the left hip on the sports dress **393**. Increased complication of cut was now prevalent in the more formal categories: 'there are many dresses, both for afternoon and evening, that belong to the type of model that is simple in aspect and complex in construction.'[8] By now, the traditional Chanel chiffon dress (such as **397**) was constructed using more complicated techniques appropriate to less flimsy fabrics: 'Chanel treats frail black chiffon as if it were a heavy material.'[9] Many of the lace dresses were produced in what British *Vogue* named the 'familiar Chanel evening silhouette': 'tight at the hips, sometimes with tiered skirts, at other times with winged draperies on both bodice and skirt, with even and uneven hemlines and with tailored belts.'[10] The back shoulder straps of **399** have attached diagonal bands that meet at the centre back, prompting British *Vogue* to write that:

> An interesting note among (Chanel's) evening dresses is the new and very smart line that is so often achieved by the crossing of streamer ends or scarves or bands across the décolletage.[11].

All types and lengths of coats were produced: full-length, seven-eighths, three-quarter-length, the wrap-over and the edge-to-edge. Skirts ranged from the wrap-over, to the pleated. Correspondingly, a great variety of collar types were shown: large shawl collars, scarf collars and small standing collars (recalling models such as **365** of

February 1927); V-shaped and rounded necklines were the most common. The evening designs were all sleeveless, with low oval, U-shaped or V-shaped décolletages, and broad or narrow shoulder straps. Buckled belts continued to be more common than tie-belts, although that of **392** was composed of small, silver discs, and it was reported that tailored belts (in satin or grosgrain) were seen on several designs. Elements derived from men's wear included the cardigan-style jackets, tailored effects, patch pockets, and buttoned cuffs.

The day fabrics included jersey, tweed, velvet, kasha, crêpe de Chine, crêpella, and satin, in black, dull grey, brown, beige, navy blue, green, purple, and 'Chinese-vermilion'. Heavy Scottish tweeds, jersey (plain and striped), homespun, cashmere, silk shirting, and shaved baby lamb, in black, beige, blue, yellow, green and red were used for the sports models. Many sports coats were lined in woollen fabrics. A report in the October issue of *Femina* confirmed that **394** was typical of many sports models produced by the house: '(Chanel) shows many ensembles where the skirt and the jacket are plain, while the lining and the jumper are striped.'[12] The evening fabrics included 'printed cut velvet', crêpe georgette, crêpe romain, satin, lamé, chiffon, and mousseline, primarily in black and white, but also grey, beige, dark and light blue, midnight-blue, pale green, red, dark red, pink, topaz, and gold. Many lace dresses were produced, and both British *Vogue* and *Femina* stated that coloured lace (pink, silver and green), as well as black, was central to Chanel's collection.

Trimming included bow details on necklines, geometrical bands of seaming, piping or banding (in horizontal and diagonal arrangements), white collars and cuffs (referred to as 'lingerie' details), and short lengths of wool fringing. **387** is trimmed with flat, grey krimmer fur (its first appearance in the catalogue); the narrow band of fur at the elbow was a new note, which, as French *Vogue*, noted, was often carried out in fox and lynx.[13] The striped fabrics and fur trimming frequently provide the only 'decoration' on the sports models. Draperies were the main form of evening trimming. **397** is decorated with a clear crystal pendant that is attached to the V of the décolletage, a form of decoration that was particularly associated with the house:

> Chanel has used a clear crystal pendant on a black chiffon evening gown, and, in another instance, has accented the V of a pink satin dress with a small conventionalized rose of the same pink satin.[14]

402 and **403** are embroidered in pearl and crystal beads respectively. Metal and gold embroidered lace, and turquoise beads were all shown. The house continued to show a range of slim-fitting, beaded dresses with an all-over distribution of small beads. One dress, shown in *Femina*, was worn with a matching scarf, a buckled belt and a topaz pin, a theme which, according to the magazine, recurred frequently in this collection.[15] One white satin dress, shown in the November edition of *Femina*, included a matching scarf lined with green satin, which was attached diagonally across the front of the bodice, and fell down the right side of the skirt. This device was announced as 'ingenious' by French *Vogue*, which described a similar design where the free end of the attached scarf was worn around the neck.[16]

Context

Many journalists believed that the season was now characterized by a decisive move away from the uniform simplicity that had dominated the collections of the mid 1920s. The September forecasts had predicted that conformity would now be replaced with diversity:

> Instead of women vigorously and rigorously restraining themselves into a mode of simplicity, this season we will see the beginning of chic women reflecting to some degree... their personality.[17]

The *Drapers' Record* echoed British *Vogue's* enthusiasm for a return to more complicated lines, and announced a new simplicity that entailed, 'much ingenious technique and elaborate creations, dazzling colours and above all perfection of cut.'[18]

Although the reaction against the uniformly straight and simple was most noticeable in the afternoon and evening wear categories, morning, street and sports designs were also thought to be more complicated. Many houses produced slightly longer skirts, with waistlines set at the natural level; day dresses were considered to have, 'acquired a greater variety of cut, detail and elaboration.'[19] Chanel was only one of many designers, including Louiseboulanger, Molyneux and Vionnet, who were all producing simple suits and coats, for town or country wear, modified and varied by a more inventive cut or detailing. One Vionnet suit of grey worsted incorporated the grey krimmer fur of its shawl collar into a centre front, oblong, set-in panel on the jacket; the vertical edges of

the panel were echoed by parallel bands of piping or top-stitching.[20] Chanel's inclusion of numerous coat, dress and skirt types, and the endless variation of elements such as collars and necklines, was again typical of the approach of the majority of the leading houses.[21]

The popularity of cardigan-jacket suits for day and sports wear (sustained by the endless variety of fabric, colour and shade combinations) was rivalled only by what was referred to as the 'new sweater costumes'. Patou produced many such models in cashmere with crêpe skirts. The first sweater designs by the newcomer Elsa Schiaparelli were produced this year: the hand-knitted sweater with a 'trompe-l'oeil' knitted bow at the neck was published in a December edition of French *Vogue* and became an immediate success.[22] Evans and Thornton have suggested that this sweater signalled the rivalry and antagonism that would exist between Schiaparelli and Chanel throughout the 1930s: the 'trompe l'oeil' sweater, by virtue of being a unique, hand-knitted design, is in direct conflict with the type of machine-knitted jersey sweaters sponsored by Chanel.[23]

The most important day fabrics included jersey, a Rodier ribbed silk and wool fabric, cheviot, woollen fabrics, velvet (a new velvet described as being 'as thin as satin and as supple')[24], crêpella, and crêpe, in colours such as black, brown, beige, green and blue. Jersey, tweed, homespun, rough-textured woollens, and striped fabrics were the most common for sports/country wear, and shaved baby lamb sports coats were seen at many houses. Wool corduroy was described as, 'one of the smartest new materials of the season', and an excellent alternative to tweed for town and country.[25] Tightly curled furs such as krimmer, astrakhan or caracal were popular: both Lanvin and Worth produced coats similar to Chanel's **387**, with extensive fur trimming of this type.

In September, the *Drapers' Record* announced that, 'The return of the afternoon dress is one of the signs of the times.'[26] Many houses showed a renewed interest in this traditionally more formal and elaborate category of dress. British *Vogue* believed this indicated the growing acceptance of the more 'feminine' silhouette in sumptuous fabrics. These designs frequently had figure-hugging lines, longer skirts, irregular hemlines and set-in pieces. Rigid or semi-rigid fabrics were often used in dresses with a circular or uneven swing to the skirt beneath a tight, draped hipline. Four evening silhouettes were identified: the stiff, crisp line in satin or taffeta with billows of fabric at the back or side of a slender silhouette; the longer-at-the-back, soft-flowing silhouette

in chiffon or tulle; the embroidered or jewelled with straight lines; the all fringe, crêpe or lace, 'little' dress, which was simple in appearance but complicated in construction. Louiseboulanger produced a gown with 'bustle-like' drapery at the back. Longer skirts were produced by the majority of the houses and the waistline remained indefinite with the focus concentrated on the hips. One Lelong advertisement (see February 1926) summed up the effect many couturiers were aiming to achieve in their evening designs:

> A... sophisticated simplicity, of studied chasteness of design, of a tense richness of line that outlaws every sensational detail contravening good taste.[27]

Long-streamered bows, low back décolletage, and a deep V at the front were common to all the houses. Velvet, satin, lamé, faille, artificial silks, taffeta, chiffon, moiré, lace and beaded fabrics were seen everywhere, in white, off-white, black and shades of blue, red, dusty browns, greens, gold and pink. Printed satin was popular and the smartest laces were, 'dull-surfaced with a small, but decided pattern.'[28]

Chanel's collection clearly resembled those of the other leading houses: her approach to cut, form, fabric type and colour was reflected by designers such as Molyneux, Patou and Vionnet. By cutting draperies, streamers and trains in one with the main body of the dress (and thus moving away from the very economical use of fabric made during the early 1920s), the house was adopting techniques employed by its rivals.

Towards the end of the season British *Vogue* heralded the era of the 'broken line'. Fashion, the periodical believed, had finally progressed beyond simplistic changes in the position of the waistline or the length of the skirt. Designers were now primarily concerned with the manipulation of proportion, cut and line:

> The broken line is a sensitive mode... The skirt that droops at the back, the shock of contrasting leathers and decorative lines... the new fabrics themselves and the varied surfaces combined in one garment – by these means the mode of the broken line declares itself. We have learned to despise ornamentation for ornamentation's sake... the broken line invokes no extraneous aids, and we find its subtle influence in the very design and manipulation of fabrics.[29]

Although the periodical asserts that a significant break has been made with the styles of the early 1920s, it is clear that its attitude towards 'ornamentation' and trimming has remained unchanged.

---

[1] I have been unable to find any information on the house of Goupy.

[2] *BV* 19 October 1927, p. 50

[3] One review noted that 'All Chanel's sports clothes have the correct and classical simplicity that makes them irreproachable.' (*BV* 19 October 1927, p. 51)

[4] *BV* 14 December 1927, p. 48

[5] *BV* 19 October 1927, p. 51

[6] **391** was described by *BV* (14 December 1927, p. 68) as a 'new version of one of (Chanel's) most successful models' (the crêpella dress).

[7] *FV* 1 December 1927, p. 24

[8] *BV* 19 October 1927, p. 50

[9] *BV* 11 January, 1928, p. 33. This recalls Chanel's unusual handling of lace in the February 1927 collection, cf. **382**.

[10] *BV* 91 October 1927, p. 51

[11] BV 19 October 1927, p. 51

[12] *Femina* 1 October 1927, p. 4

[13] *FV* 1 December 1927, p. 24

[14] *BV* 11 January, 1928, p. 56

[15] *Femina* 1 November 1927, p. 5

[16] *FV* 1 December 1927, p. 25

[17] *BV* 7 September 1927, p. 30

[18] *DR* 17 September 1927, p. 745

[19] *BV* 7 September, 1927, p. 31

[20] *BV* 14 December, 1927, p. 69

[21] In one issue, *BV* gave particular attention to the number and diverse range of necklines shown by Louiseboulanger (5 October 1927, p. 82).

[22] *FV* 1 December 1927, p. 9. The Italian born designer Elsa Schiaparelli (1890-1973) initially studied philosophy, but moved to Paris in 1920. Following the success of her

sweaters, Schiaparelli opened a boutique, *Pour le Sport*, in Paris in 1928; her own house was launched in 1929.

[23] Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, *Women and Fashion: A New Look* (London 1989), p. 134. The authors also discuss Schiaparelli's imminent rejection of the 'garçonne' silhouette, in favour of a line which incorporated padded shoulders and a nipped-in waist.

[24] *DR* 17 September 1927, p. 745

[25] *BV* 14 December 1927, p. 68

[26] *DR* 17 September 1927, p. 697

[27] *BV* 19 October, 1927, p. xx

[28] *BV* 11 January, 1928, p. 33

[29] *BV* 30 December, 1927, p. 30

February 1928

The Death of Uniformity

This collection is represented by twenty nine designs reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 21 March and 22 August 1928. Seventeen were shown only in British *Vogue*, eight only in French *Vogue* and the remaining four were shown in both editions of the periodical. Eleven models were shown on pages devoted entirely to the Chanel. The house was shown most frequently alongside Molyneux and Patou, but also with Beer, Callot, Chéruit, Groult, Louiseboulanger, Paquin, and Schiaparelli.

The Collection

Four designs were intended for morning/street or general day wear (**404 – 407**: four dresses, two with coats); ten for sports/country/resort wear (**408 – 417**: seven suits, three sweater and skirt ensembles); three for afternoon wear (**418 – 420**: three dresses); and twelve for evening wear (**421 – 432**: twelve dresses).

This collection simultaneously continues with themes that were central to the designer's work throughout the 1920s, and introduces new silhouettes which would be further developed in subsequent seasons. Thus the familiar straight, short (cut to just below the knee), low-waisted and uncomplicated silhouette, which frequently incorporated elements from men's wear, is represented in this collection by the morning/street dress **407**, the sports suit **410**, and also by the informal evening dress **421**. A new theme was based on the slim-fitting, slender silhouette, which was moulded tightly around the hips and had a pronounced flare in its skirt and an uneven hemline. This line originated with the longer-at-the-back-than-front, or 'peacock' silhouette of February 1926. In the 1927 collections, the line was produced in stiffer fabrics, such as heavy satin, resulting in a more definite outline (e.g. **401**). This effect, combined with the flaring, circular cut skirts and draperies of models such as **397** (August 1927), led to the new silhouette represented by **423**, where the deep flounces of the skirt are, like **424**, stiffened with horsehair.[1] British *Vogue* identified a third theme in this collection, closely related to that exemplified by **423**, which it referred to as the 'minaret frock': a dress with a jutting peplum or basque over a flaring skirt with an uneven hemline (e.g. **425** and **426**).[2] This basic idea was also developed in other categories: the skirt of **418** has two distinct

circular-cut side flounces, exaggerated by the tight-fitting hipline and inverted V-shaped bands which delineate the top of each tier (echoing those on the bodice). British *Vogue* referred to this line as the 'jutting silhouette'.[3]

Beyond the developments described above, Chanel has employed numerous devices to alleviate the fundamentally slender silhouette. The swathed hips effect was not just confined to the evening category: **406** (entitled *Madame*, 'the indispensable black... dress' of the season), is moulded round the hips and has a slight flare to the skirt.[4] The straight lines of the coat, **408**, are modified by the deep pockets set into a long, curving side seam.[5] Collarless coats and jackets (**408** and **409**) continued to provide an alternative to those models which featured tailored, scarf and small flat collars. **419** is unusual in that it has a finely pleated flat collar. Necklines varied from the standard V, to the bateau, and square. All types of pleating were used in a variety of arrangements (from box, to single inverted and accordion pleats). The unstiffened tiered skirt was still seen: the gathered and pointed tiers of **422** recall those of many previous evening models. However, the tiered skirt of the afternoon dress **419** shows a new line of development: continuing with the fashion for asymmetrical and angular lines, the tiers have a 'stepped' effect and are longer at the left side. Few tie-belts are used; instead the buckled belt dominates both the day and evening wear categories. The designs **430** – **432** all have lower fullness to the skirt achieved by the addition of bows, flounces and drapery wings.[6] The majority of the evening gowns have shoestring, 'lingerie' and even double shoulder straps.

An increased variety of fabrics, in sometimes quite intense colours, are used this season. Foulard (plain and printed), ondemoussa, crêpe, satin, mouslikasha, along with the more humble jersey, are seen in black, white, brown, beige, red and purple. Sports fabrics differed little from those intended for general day clothes, and included jersey (striped, flecked or plain), mixed woollen fabrics, tweed, flannel, wool crêpe, crêpella, crêpe de Chine, and ondemoussa, in red, white, blue (often together), 'bright blue-purple', brown (several shades), beige, green and orange. Written reports referred to a Chanel coat in 'thunder-red velveteen', indicating the designer's continued use of dark red shades.[7] Striped, checked or flecked fabrics (particularly in a combination of three colours), were an important feature. One design, comprising a jacket, skirt and blouse in grey jersey, shown in *Femina*, was described as 'La Robe Tricolore.'[8] The afternoon and evening fabrics were satin, crêpe Marocain, lace, Chantilly lace, chiffon (printed or plain), and tulle, in black, red, brown, 'cinnamon brown', blonde and 'egg-shell'. The

house introduced a new honey brown shade this season, and British *Vogue* noted that, 'Chanel's first use of this particular shade, in an evening dress of tulle with the fashionable basque well-emphasized, has proved an immediate success with smart women.'[9] Printed chiffon fabrics were employed for many of the designs within the collection:

> Chiffons in large and small designs in bright and pastel colours are created by Bianchini, Ducharne and other fabric designers, chiffons of which Chanel, Molyneux, Louiseboulanger in their turn have made delightful use.[10]

Despite such new fabrics and colours, Chanel's black evening gowns remained the most popular. **428** was named the most successful black dress of the season, and one report commented that it was, 'such a favourite that one frequently sees four or five women wearing it at one smart party.'[11]

Trimmings were, as had been the case for some time now, limited to bow or tie details at the neck, artificial flowers, pleating, contrasting fabrics (such as the dull and bright side of the satin of **406**), buttons, seaming or pin-tucking, banding or top-stitching. Geometric shapes were still prevalent: for example, the X-shaped band on the front of the skirt of **408** and the rectangular panels on the jacket of **411**. Nonetheless, krimmer fur was still used (see August 1927), and one day wear coat in black and white tweed was reportedly trimmed with an off-white fur.[12] The evening designs were decorated with drapery wings, flounces, tiers, bows, jewelled buckles, scarves and artificial flowers. One model, reproduced in *Femina*, showed that Chanel was still using metallic and embroidered lace: the design, in gold lace, was completely embroidered with pearl and jet beads.

Context

Immediately after the February openings, British *Vogue* stated that, 'This is the season to take stock of our inheritance by the death of uniformity.'[13] 'Youthfulness', the magazine had argued, was still the driving force behind contemporary fashion, but this was not a simple continuation of the 'flapper youth of yesterday', considered to be 'engaging but essentially unsophisticated.'[14] It was believed that the longer, supple silhouette and the moulded hipline, seen not only in Chanel's collection, but also in

those of the majority of the leading houses, could be used to create a 'youthfulness' founded on slender lines, but with greater poise, dignity and grace.

Like Chanel, most houses continued with the straight, simple and short silhouette for informal day or sports wear. However, some designers wished to reinstate the much longer skirt. The *Drapers' Record* quoted Poiret's recent statement that, 'This exhibition of legs cannot last.'[15] Although Poiret was correct when he forecast the imminent return of the much longer skirt (see August 1929), his statements were met with a considerable degree of caution. The *Drapers' Record* stated that, 'women will never return to modes that restrict their freedom of movement as in the Victorian days', believing the 1920s to be 'a very practical age.'[16] For this magazine, the short skirt represented women's emancipation and, in conclusion, it announced that, 'The exhibition of legs against which M. Poiret protests, is not an arbitrary decree of fashion, but an outward and visible sign of women's broader life.'[17]

Other staples of early and mid 1920s fashion were also being challenged. Waistlines were not always positioned at the top of the hips, and it was thought that fewer details associated with men's clothing were used. Although many houses, including Chanel's, did continue to incorporate elements taken from men's wear, the *Drapers' Record* went as far as to state that, 'all masculine ideas are being done away with.'[18] All lengths of coats, and the two-piece costume of dress and matching or contrasting short jacket, were widely seen. Schiaparelli's simple sweaters with bold patterns, teamed with a short but softly flaring skirt, were now extremely fashionable. Tailored suits were generally agreed to be 'softer' in appearance. Day wear dresses were characterized by a slim foundation modified by pleats, godets, circular skirts and tiers. The 'jutting' or up-in-the-front line of Chanel's **418** was seen at other houses, and British *Vogue* identified a wider trend for the 'fir-tree' silhouette. The *Drapers' Record* pointed out that these more complicated and elaborate designs were, 'naturally not cheap', but that, 'for those who want inexpensive lines there are still the simple "little frocks" with pleated or flounced skirts and simple bodices with a bow finish.'[19] Although all the houses continued to promote sports wear ranges, it was noted that 'The smart woman does not wear sports clothes for all occasions now, but all dresses are designed for sports bodies.'[20]

'Mannish fabrics' in somber colours (black, brown, beige and blue) were still popular, but more sumptuous materials in brighter shades appeared at most houses. Printed silk

However, British *Vogue* argued that exclusivity was no longer the central concern of haute couture. Chanel's work was used to illustrate this point:

> How completely the modern woman's attitude has changed... may be shown by citing the extraordinary history of a famous model launched two years ago – Chanel's 142 (house number). This frock may be said to have conquered the world. In its combination of simplicity, practicality, sophistication and exact adaptation to the needs of the smart woman, it was the production of pure genius and women recognized it as such. It was worn by English peeresses, Russian princesses, American heiresses, and everyone else who could afford it... On one occasion in a certain smart restaurant in Paris seventeen of Chanel's 142 could be seen in the same room at the same moment. And all its wearers were happy and satisfied, for they were wearing the most charming and becoming frock that the season had produced.[24]

While the magazine acknowledged that uniformity was on the wain, it believed that if the designer returned to the production of highly individual one-offs, their work would become nothing more than 'collections of bits and pieces, the substitution of one bit for another constituting the exclusivity that was demanded.'[25] As a result, quality would diminish and mediocrity would become the norm. The conclusion, as British *Vogue* saw it, was that, 'Today we have decided that a lovely frock is like a beautiful piece of music – it will bear repetition.'[26]

Nonetheless, the attack on uniformity was fuelled by a widespread concern with design piracy: simpler, uncomplicated models were, of course, easy to copy and cheap to reproduce. In two separate editions in May 1928, the *Drapers' Record* discussed the continuing problem of copyright protection in relation to the French haute couture industry; in August it referred to the related debates held at the Garment Retailers' Congress in Paris.[27] It was reported that 'A model sold once by the original creator is sometimes reproduced in hundreds of copies abroad... bringing much money to everyone but its creator.'[28] The periodical charted the industry's growing determination to obtain greater legal protection, but it noted that, 'What precise line the French government will take in the new bill that is reported to be under consideration has yet to be seen... Meanwhile, most originators of fashion... apply their energies to reaping the rewards of their creative labours quickly, before the design pirates can get to work.'[29]

was widely used: Lanvin was noted for her designs in polka dot fabrics, and Patou, like Chanel, coupled floral prints with pleated frills and ruffles. The 'tricolore' fashion was also seen at Patou, who created one ensemble featuring a white blouse and navy blue skirt trimmed with red bands.[21] Pleats, tucking, piping and banding (particularly in diagonal lines) continued to be the principal forms of trimming.

New silhouettes appeared most frequently in the afternoon and evening categories. Chanel was not the only designer to introduce a more pronounced flare into her evening designs. British *Vogue* was reviewing the collections as a whole when it noted that, 'the newest novelty is the dress of soft fabrics stiffened with horsehair braid into decided line and permanent flare.'[22] Cascading draperies, swinging panels, scarves, godets and puffs were all seen. Skirts were noticeably longer for evening, waistlines were higher and the uneven hemline was ubiquitous. Some simpler and straight evening designs, similar to Chanel's **421**, were made by designers such as Callot and Patou. However, like Chanel, these houses also produced more complicated models showing the popular swathed hips, flounces and trailing, floor-length panels. Both Lanvin and Chéruit continued to be known for their bouffant designs. Evening gowns for every conceivable type of activity were now being produced: dining, theatre, lounging and dancing were just a few of the categories. Velvet, crêpe romain, satin, lamé, lace, semi-transparent chiffon, and tulle, in black, grey, brown, red, green and blue were some of the key fabrics and colours.

As the above has demonstrated, the main developments in Chanel's work were generally seen in the collections of her contemporaries: the 'jutting' silhouette, the minaret frock and the 'pronounced flare'. However, she did not comply (this season at least) with the trend towards the much longer skirt, and the house continued to be noted for its often daring use of fabrics and the introduction of new colours.

The proclaimed death of uniformity was, unsurprisingly, welcomed by Poiret. An April 1928 advertisement for the house underlined his concern with the unique and the exclusive:

> Paul Poiret's dresses are a standard of refinement and individuality. Be individual. Don't dress like everybody else; don't accept to wear a uniform. Wear a Poiret dress. You were made to wear a particular dress. Where can you get that dress? At Poiret's.[23]

[1] **423** received considerable attention from *BV*. Its 30 May 1928 (p. 57) edition noted that, 'This newest version of the Chanel lace dress is one of the typical frocks of the new season. It differs from Chanel's very successful lace dresses of last season in the slight stiffening of the uneven flared skirt, which is achieved by means of horsehair.'

[2] *BV* 22 August 1928, p. 32

[3] *BV* 21 March 1928, p. 38. **418** was also referred to as 'An invention of 1928 – the "Sitabout" dress', a title which highlighted its role as a model for informal afternoon wear.

[4] *BV* 13 June 1928, p, 88

[5] These pockets recall those of the formal coat **40** of February 1917.

[6] Jean Leymarie, *Chanel* (New York 1987), p. 111, argues that dresses such as **430** mark the transition in Chanel's work from the short, tubular designs of the mid 1920s to the longer and more ample ones of 1929.

[7] *BV* 8 August 1928, p. 21. This coat was worn by Lady Davis.

[8] *Femina* 1 April 1928, p. 14

[9] *BV* 8 August 1928, p. 21

[10] *BV* 30 May 1928, p. 29

[11] *BV* 30 May 1928, p. 50

[12] *BV* 8 February 1928, p. 28

[13] *BV* 21 March 1928, p. 35

[14] *BV* 25 January 1928, p. 3

[15] *DR* 14 January 1928, p. 70. By 1928, Poiret's business was near bankruptcy and, despite his protestations against contemporary fashions, the designer was having to produce styles that appealed to younger women.

[16] *DR* 14 January 1928, p. 70

[17] *DR* 14 January 1928, p. 70

[18] *DR* 10 March 1928, p. 669

[19] *DR* 10 March 1928, p. 669

[20] *BV* 13 June 1928, p. 43

[21] *BV* 16 May 1928, p. 93

[22] *BV* 21 March 1928, p. 35

[23] *BV* 4 April 1928. No page number.

[24] *BV* 21 March 1928, p. 67. The design to which *BV* refers is probably **337** (see August 1926) a design which was described by *AV* as the 'Ford' of the season.

[25] *BV* 21 March 1928, p. 67

[26] *BV* 21 March 1928, p. 67

[27] See *DR* 4 August 1928, p. 243. This Congress was attended by American buyers and representatives from the leading houses.

[28] *DR* 19 May 1928, p. 392

[29] *DR* 26 May 1928, p. 445

August 1928

The Day of Democracy in Dress is Past

The fifteen designs which represent this collection were reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 3 October 1928 and 20 March 1929. Twelve were shown only in British *Vogue*, two in French *Vogue* and one in both editions of the periodical. Eight were shown on pages devoted entirely to Chanel. The remaining models were shown most frequently with those by Vionnet, but also with Augustabernard and Paquin.

The Collection

Three designs were intended for morning/street or general day wear (**433 – 435**: three suits); six for travel/sports wear (**436 – 441**: five coats with dresses, one cardigan suit); and six for evening wear (**442 – 447**: six dresses).

The very simple and straight silhouette, central to so many of Chanel's preceding collections, is no longer dominant. Although still evident in the sports wear category (**436** and **441** recall many previous sports designs), the comparatively severe silhouette has been replaced by a more fluid, softer line, achieved through the use of more complicated dressmaking techniques and supple fabrics. This theme is represented in the catalogue by **433 – 435**. The first of these designs has a loosely structured jacket, with raglan sleeves (in contrast to the usual tailored, set-in sleeves), an attached scarf, neckline bow, moulded hipline, hip bow, and a side pleated panel on its knee-length skirt.[1] Similar designs were also shown for the sports category:

> In the intricate cutting up and piecing together of fabric we are able to see – and to follow up again at Chanel (who shows a beige, novelty jersey one-piece dress with flat-stitched gores and bands and bows) – that these are the newest and best departures in one-piece sports dresses.[2]

One report, written as if the collection was just being shown, testified to the very large numbers of similar dresses that were being produced by the house: 'One-piece dresses of jersey, tweed and lightweight woollen material, belted, straight in the bodice, gripping the hips, with fullness below... ten, twenty of them at a time.'[3]

A second theme, represented by **445** and confined to the evening category, refers back to recent collections. This sleeveless evening gown has shoestring shoulder straps, a buckled belt, a skirt with a deep, pronounced basque (cf. **425**, February 1928), and a hemline which is higher at the front than at the back.[4] A third theme, closely related to the second, is represented by the lace dress **443** (house title, *Iceland*). This recalls models such as **423** (February 1928) which had tiered skirts stiffened by horsehair (although the hem is longer at the back, floor-length draperies, panels, bows or trains are not necessarily included).[5] Despite the fact that only one example of this type of dress is shown in the catalogue, British *Vogue* reported that seventy-five per cent of Chanel's evening wear designs were in the fabric:

> Lace is once more smart. Undeniably smart with an importance that even Chanel has failed to give it before. Slinking across the stage is a Chanel masterpiece in black lace; nude décolletage with narrow flesh shoulder straps, slim defined bodice, hips gripped tightly with a basque outstanding (actually starched) at each side and a wrapping of lace that swathes the body and finally ends on the floor on a train. The mannequin carries a small 1880 fan of stiff black lace.[6]

British *Vogue* believed that this was *the* dress of the collection. *Femina* also recognized the importance of this design, and reproduced a version in red chenille lace with a flaring, two-tiered skirt stiffened with horsehair.[7]

A new development, possibly influenced by the recent success of Schiaparelli's designs, was the introduction of, 'the little sleeveless under sweater... worn with a skirt, cardigan and sports overcoat. Chanel and Schiaparelli both show these.'[8] Although fundamentally an accessory, the scarf was now an integral part of Chanel's designs; she continued to produce matching scarves for the day wear categories, often using three colours. It was reported that, this season, the house was opting to use 'a men's tie material' for its extensive range of scarves.[9] As a result of the fashion for scarves, the collarless jacket (particularly finger-tip-length) was still produced. Sleeves for the day were invariably full-length and straight; the evening models were all sleeveless with narrow shoulder straps and low décolletages.

The day wear fabrics included jersey (plain and striped, and usually produced by Rodier), tweed, and kasha, in black, grey, brown, beige, almond green, 'hunter's green',

and red. The blouse fabric was always used to line and face the accompanying jacket. Written reports state that a series of black tweed town coats, with ermine fronts and collars, and short fur jackets were also produced. The sports models are all in tweed (particularly flecked basket weave tweed) in combinations of black and white; orange, black and white; red and brown; and green and brown. Other fabrics included jersey, homespun, and cashmere, in black, white, brown and red. A December report referred to, 'a Chanel ensemble consisting of a brown homespun coat lined with ox-blood red, which is a red with a brownish cast, and a frock to match the lining.'[10] Velvet (transparent, plain or printed – in small patterns), satin, crêpe de Chine, crêpe georgette, crêpe Marocain, Chenille lace (described as the 'novelty lace of the year' and stiffened with horsehair), and chiffon, in black, white, red, and blue and dominated the evening category.[11]

Trimmings included brown rabbit and mole fur, white linen or piqué collars, and bows (in various sizes). Contrasting bindings (**441**) appeared on skirts in the sports category, a development which was recorded by British *Vogue*: 'Chanel introduces a new note of interest by making a side-back seam in many of her skirts, emphasized by binding.'[12] Seven-eighths-length tweed coats 'of simple cut but chic detail', were trimmed with shaved lamb vests and collarless scarf-ties of fur.[13] A new detail, which would continue into 1929, was shown on the ensemble **438**: the coat's opening is detailed with regular square notches, and the neckline and hipline of the dress are decorated with a piped circular motif. Few trimmings were used on the evening models: horizontal bands of piping or pin-tucking, silver bead embroidery, bows, ruffles, drapery panels, scarves, buckled belts or artificial flowers.

Context

1928 was, some believed, a transitional year: although certain distinct trends were identifiable, both the February and August collections were thought to have lacked any real unity or sense of direction. In September, British *Vogue* stated that, 'There is no general "line" this year which is completely foolproof.... The straight silhouette which accents slender column of the body – the result of the twentieth century pursuit of youth – is the newest and smartest silhouette.'[14]

The leading houses did agree over the general day and sports wear categories. Although there was little change in the basic form and style of these designs, many houses (particularly Lelong and Patou) were revitalizing the tailleur. It was noted that the new version was, 'a long way from the "mannishness" of some past examples.'[15] Although Chanel's day wear suits were now more loosely structured, British *Vogue* believed Patou had produced the 'classic tailleur' of the season: a model named *Gaudin*. Many designers emphasized the one-piece dress, worn with either a jacket or overcoat. British *Vogue* explained its popularity as a logical result of 'the speed of modern life and our passion for having everything neat and compact.'[16] Like Chanel, Vionnet produced a number of one-piece tweed dresses, in shades of brown, with matching three-quarter-length coats trimmed with fur. Vionnet was also noted for her handling and treatment of jersey fabric. Black jersey was particularly fashionable and considered appropriate for all categories of day wear:

> Black jersey, used first by Chanel, is significant in being the truly right transition from sports to town wear.... Jerseys are practical and, though perfect for sports, are no less suitable for the casual or busy morning in town.[17]

Finger-tip-length jackets, worn with V-necked blouses and knee-length skirts, like those at Chanel, were widely shown. The most common colours included black, black and grey combined, beige, browns, cinnamon, reds and bright shades of dark blue. Tweed and 'wrap-over lines' in skirts, blouses, coats and dresses, were prominent in travel wear.

Sports wear, the least changed of all the categories, saw a fashion for diagonal and zig-zag stripes (in place of the prevailing trend for horizontal lines). This was evident not only at Chanel, but also at Patou. Jersey and tweed were seen everywhere. Lelong, like Chanel, used Rodier jerseys and English tweeds. Lelong and Schiaparelli were both known for hand-knitted jumpers, 'in modernist designs with sharply contrasting colours.'[18] Schiaparelli's sports designs were popular and her golf wear, ski-wear (often in jersey), and bathing suits (such as the model known as No. 1, with its black and white hand-knitted woollen sweater and shorts) received particular attention. *Good Housekeeping* featured several ski outfits this season, designed not only by Schiaparelli, but also by Drécoll. The magazine explained the coverage by noting that, 'ever-increasing numbers break the monotony of the bleak months by journeying to the snow sports of Switzerland.'[19]

In December, British *Vogue* announced that:

> The evening mode is one of amazing contradictions. Women appear as tall as trees, with their high heels and their dresses sweeping almost to the earth. In dancing, on one side they hide an ankle, but show a shoulder blade: on the other they unblushingly exhibit a knee. The year 1880 has bequeathed its ample fullness, its bows and its godets, but it has not bequeathed its ideas of decorum.[20]

Many evening dresses had uneven, ankle-length hemlines, and were thought to represent the return to elegance after, 'the boisterous post-war era of slap-dash and raffish chic.'[21] The princess line was revived at some houses (particularly Molyneux), although British *Vogue* assured its readers that this softer, suppler version had, 'nothing in common with the former princess silhouette, so moulded, so gored and so nipped in at the waist.'[22] The 'peacock silhouette', with its longer-at-the-back line, was shown most notably by Lelong. Basques were seen on afternoon and evening dresses, and hiplines were frequently swathed, draped, turbaned or bound. Printed fabrics were important for afternoon, whereas velvet, ciré, lace, satin, lamé, tulle, beaded embroidery and sequins were all used for evening wear. Black, according to one report, was worn by fifty per cent of women during the evening, followed by reds, misty pinks, eggshells and blues. Artificial silks were increasingly shown in the main collections, and while this was not a new development, it was recognized that, 'each season shows a wider and better use of this element in fabrics.'[23] Vionnet's satin dresses were noticeably longer than those from other houses, and Molyneux was noted for his velvet evening designs, which were considered by British *Vogue* to be next in importance to Chanel's lace. On the subject of Molyneux's red velvet designs, the magazine reported that:

> Every woman wants them, and will continue to do so – for they are not destined to become the season's Fords; but will remain what they are, Rolls Royces.[24]

Chanel's collection once again reflected the general trends evident this season. The house may even have been influenced by Schiaparelli in its introduction of certain sleeveless sports designs (although the sports sweater had been an integral part of her work for some time now). However, the use of fabrics (such as lace) and colours, did set Chanel apart from many other houses.

The idea of the 'composite wardrobe' was widely discussed this season. The practice of buying individual items to form part of a larger, interchangeable wardrobe, was first encouraged in sports wear. This season, the practice was applied to general day wear categories Designers such as Schiaparelli and Jane Regny were both producing collections with this principle in mind. Despite the notion of the 'composite wardrobe', and its implications on the reduction and simplification of the contemporary woman's wardrobe, the desire for increased individuality in dress persisted. One headline in British *Vogue* stated that, 'The Day of Democracy in Dress is Past':

> It is no longer the ambition of the good dressmaker to turn out her wealthiest clients looking as much like their maids as possible, and the little dress that did for anybody, at any time, in any place, has disappeared. Class distinctions in clothes are being reasserted, and this for the very logical reason that people with money no longer live like those with no money, nor do they pretend to.[25]

The Ford has clearly been rejected for the Rolls Royce. Paralleling this trend, was the growing distinction, evident over the past few seasons, between the different categories in dress. The houses produced clothes that were marketed as being appropriate for the early morning, shopping, luncheon parties, early afternoon (the 'sitabout dress', cf. Chanel's **418**, February 1928), sports, country pursuits, receiving guests at home, going out to tea, cocktails, dinner, formal dinner, theatre, dancing and balls.

---

[1] The raglan sleeve had been fashionable for sometime now, precisely because of its softer, less tailored feel (see the Summary of the collection February 1927).

[2] *BV* 17 October, 1928, p. 82

[3] *BV* 19 October, 1928, p. 45

[4] The more pronounced flare meant, *BV* believed, that dresses were now 'important when one stands, as well as when one moves.' (19 September 1928, p. 45). This contrasts to the 'mermaid dresses' of 1926, which fell straight when the woman stood still, and moved when the woman walked.

[5] Some comparatively simple evening gowns, with knee-length even hemlines were produced by Chanel, primarily as dinner gowns. One such model was shown in *Good Housekeeping*, and reproduced in Brian Braithwaite, *From Ragtime to Wartime: The Best of Good Housekeeping, 1922-1939* (London 1995), p. 99. This was in light red crêpe de Chine and the skirt was described as being, 'quite straight and simple.'

[6] *BV* 19 September, 1928, p. 45

[7] *Femina* 1 November, 1928, p. 39

[8] *BV* 17 October, 1928, p. 82

[9] *BV* 5 September, 1928, p. 35

[10] *BV* 12 December, 1928, p. 65

[11] *Femina* (1 November 1928, p. 39) illustrated a Chanel evening gown in blue crêpe georgette.

[12] *BV* 17 October, 1928, p. 82

[13] *BV* 19 October, 1928, p. 45

[14] *BV* 5 September, 1928, p. 31

[15] *BV* 3 October, 1928, p. 55

[16] *BV* 3 October, 1928, p. 55

[17] *BV* 5 September, 1928, p. 74

[18] *BV* 19 September, 1928, p. 47

[19] See Braithwaite, op. cit. p. 92

[20] *BV* 12 December, 1928, p. 67

[21] *BV* 5 September, 1928, p. 32

[22] *BV* 5 September, 1928, p. 32

[23] *BV* 5 September, 1928, p. 56

[24] *BV* 19 September, 1928, p. 86

[25] *BV* 17 October, 1928, p. 41

February 1929

The New Mode is a Complicated Matter

This collection is represented by sixteen designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 1 May and 7 August 1929. Eleven were shown only in British *Vogue* and five were shown in both editions of the periodical. Six were displayed on pages devoted to Chanel. The remaining examples were shown most frequently alongside those by Lelong, Patou, Paquin and Vionnet.

The Collection

Six designs were intended for morning/street wear (**448 – 453**: one coat, four dresses, one with a coat, and one suit); five for general day/sports wear (**454 – 458**: three suits, one two-piece dress and one coat); three for afternoon (**459 – 461**: three dresses, two with coats); and two for evening (**462** and **463**: two dresses).

This collection builds upon last season's developments. Once again, the relatively severe, very simple, straight and short silhouette, with a low waistline, is no longer the principal theme.[1] Although this line is still evident (e.g. **454**), it was acknowledged by the press that even the sports designs had been modified: 'Chanel shows cardigans that are a surprising two inches longer.'[2] The dominant trend in the day wear categories recalls that of August 1928 (e.g. **433**): the slim-fitting, short and low-waisted garment which, in the majority of cases, has a neat-fitting hipline, lower skirt flare, and displays a greater use of more complicated details and effects. This is represented by the dress **451**: the fabric was cut on the bias to ensure the slim-fitting silhouette, and the neat hipline is accentuated by the addition of a finely pleated basque (a device employed on many of the evening models last season); the skirt, which, although it is short, is cut a little longer than those of preceding seasons, has a low flare. A second theme, evident in the evening category, also relates to those of earlier collections: the slim-fitting, low-waisted and sleeveless design with a moulded hipline and a longer-at-the-back-than-front effect. This is illustrated by **462**, which has a floor-length train cut in one with the skirt.

Just as in all the previous collections, Chanel's designs were endlessly varied by a number of devices. Skirts were either finely pleated and tiered, or with set-in and flared

panels (often below fine bands of pleating or pin-tucking, e.g. **450**). The sports skirts tended to be the least complicated: the wrap over, or straight skirt, with a pleated side panel was frequently employed. The sleeveless sports dress (**456** and **457**) was particularly associated with the house, and the turban-style hat (which many believed had been introduced by Chanel) was credited as being the 'newest note in the mode.'[3] The serrated, jagged or latticed edge (which refers back to the notched opening of the coat **438**, August 1928), was employed throughout the collection: **448, 455** and **459**. A version of this, the ragged edge, was seen on the more formal models in lightweight fabrics: the chiffon afternoon dress **460**, where the effect complemented the pointed, or petal-like hemline of its skirt. Many collarless coats and jackets were shown, although the scarf collar was widely seen. Few models had the strictly tailored and masculine collars of past collections. The dress **460** was one of several designs to have a bertha collar, a feature which was believed to be one of the newest and most successful elements in the collection.[4] Cape-sleeves were included on many afternoon models (**461**). *Femina* regarded the fashion at Chanel for this type of sleeve as part of a general tendency towards covering the tops of the arms.[5] One report described sleeves which were positioned, 'just below the elbow, evidently an invitation and a promise to long slip-on gloves.'[6] Several evening designs had wide, semi-transparent scarves (worn like a shawl and knotted at the centre front); one August 1929 report stated that:

> Chanel's short, voluminous wrap of rose-red velveteen is capable of great chic... The short wrap is an important feature of the late summer and early autumn mode for evening, and is especially effective with the new evening gowns with their long lines and uneven hems.[7]

The fabrics included tweed, a striped woollen fabric, crêpe, linen and piqué, in black, white, 'chartreuse', red, 'geranium red', and navy blue. Although the coats in the catalogue are all black, it was reported that the majority were in brown.[8] Most day wear coats were lined with the fabric of the accompanying dress: 'The newest version... sponsored by Chanel, who makes the coat in tweed, the lining and the dress being of a harmonizing printed crêpe.'[9] The Baronne d'Almeida reportedly owned a 'very smart two-piece costume in navy blue wool with a pale pink jersey jumper.[10] The principal sports fabric was jersey (plain or diamond-checked), in red, blue, white, brown, beige, green, and black. New types of striped jersey (similar to that employed for **458**) had a considerable impact:

> One of Chanel's greatest successes for spectator sports wear suitable for the chilly summer days is a long coat of striped novelty jersey over a crêpella dress in a plain colour to match the dominating shade of the jersey.[11]

Printed woollen fabrics and printed chiffon, in floral designs of grey, green, black, brown and white, were used for the afternoon models. The use of floral prints was extended to include three-dimensional effects in one particular design:

> The constantly recurring effect of broken surface is one that impresses the onlooker. Chanel shows a dress and scarf in a flower print with cut-out petals and flowers encrusted on to similar flowers on the scarf. These petals and leaves, standing softly up from the flat fabric, intensify the floral effect.[12]

The evening designs were produced in jersey tulle, net, satin, mousseline de soie, and lace, in black, rose, and white.[13] **462**, one of the season's most successful models, was, like many of the evening designs, produced in alternative colourways: 'The Chanel jersey tulle evening dress with length and drapery at the back and side is very popular. Lady Abdy has it in black, the Baronne d'Almeida in cherry-red.'[14] It was also made in white satin.

Trimmings were generally, as had been the case throughout the 1920s, extensions of the actual form or construction of the design itself. They now included contrasting facings, serrated edges, pin-tucking, pleating, set-in panels, attached scarves, basques, encrusted bands and artificial flowers. Bows were seen throughout the collection, and one review noted that, 'Molyneux and Chanel encrust and semi-encrust theirs, both on coats and dresses' (e.g. **453**).[15] White piqué was used to trim the collars and cuffs of several of the blouses and dresses. Few trimmings were seen on the formal designs (many of which were produced in highly patterned and printed fabrics); circular flounces, tiers, and bows were the principal decorations.

Context

In January 1929, the *Drapers' Record* announced that the coming season would be revolutionary: one headline proclaimed, 'Paris Plans For 1929 – Radical Fashion Change Predicted.'[16] Skirt lengths, the journal believed, would be longer (some would

be up to three inches below the knee), hats larger and with more trimming, and materials would be richer. Milbank quotes the *Harper's Bazaar* journalist Marjorie Howard, who reported that the new tight-fitting bodices and longer skirts were being shown more by the male than the female dress designers (certainly Patou came to be the new silhouette's greatest exponent); Howard put this down to a reluctance on the men's part to have women wearing clothes as comfortable as their own.[17] British *Vogue* noted that the growing emphasis on more sophisticated cut, fabric and detailing would continue: 'The new mode is a complicated matter, and the detail of cut and make is an inextricable part of the general line and effect.'[18] However, the magazine also argued that increased complication for its own sake, which it believed was evident at some houses, would not be acceptable:

> Too much meaningless cut will give way to less cut with more meaning... slashing with the scissors just to be busy will not be a guarantee of smart dresses.[19]

The emphasis was now on reaching a balance between the comfort of the simple, sports-inspired designs, and the greater 'femininity' or gracefulness of more complicated models, 'Comfort, ease and freedom of movement will be demanded of every successful dress. There will be both complication and simplicity.'[20]

Just as at Chanel, the slim-fitting silhouette, accenting the natural lines of the body, the higher waistline and the longer skirt, were now integral to morning/street designs. Unlike Chanel, some houses produced day wear models with irregular hemlines. A wide variety of coat lengths and styles were shown. The combination of a dark dress and a light top-coat (e.g. **448**) was seen at Paquin, who produced a black crêpe dress with a light-beige cloth coat. The softly tailored (or 'semi-tailored') suit was rivalled by the one-piece 'runabout' dress, in a tweed or woollen fabric, worn with a cardigan-style jacket. Contrasting 'lingerie touches', of white linen or piqué at the collar and cuffs, were ubiquitous, and pleated basques (e.g. **451**) were also shown at Patou. The Lelong dress *Fétiche*, in beige crêpe, had a circular cut lower-skirt flounce mirroring the effect of the basque, a typical feature of his work.[21] Tweed was everywhere and Vionnet produced many successful tweed coats (referred to as the backbone of the smart woman's wardrobe), worn with leather belts and matching scarves. These designs were described as, 'an excellent choice for smart morning wear in town.'[22] 'Featherweight' tweeds in brighter colours were now available, ensuring the adaptability of the fabric.

Checked tweeds and woollen fabrics were universally employed. Paquin, Vionnet and Chanel all produced simple, softly tailored suits in checked fabrics of brown (or black) and white. Textured fabrics were extremely fashionable and trimming frequently involved 'encrusted' or set-in bands, prompting British *Vogue* to comment that,

> For years there have not been so many bands – interlacing, diagonal, horizontal and vertical; nor so much attention to the finishing of edges; nor so many bows.[23]

Circular cut, fuller and longer skirts were shown in some sports collections. Skirts were cut to below the knee and, as at Chanel, jackets and cardigans were lengthened. Tweed and jersey, in checks and stripes, were used, and the more exotic silks – such as shantung, tussore and pongee – were seen. Patou, in particular, produced a wide range of tennis dresses in shantung that were 'three inches longer than of old.'[24] Specialist categories continued to flourish, and bathing suits were discussed at great length in the fashion press. However, while general sports designs became softer and more graceful, swim wear became increasingly androgynous in appearance:

> In contrast to the mode in general, which is feminine, the bathing mode is definitely masculine. Each season there is greater uniformity in the costumes of the smartest bathers. There is very little difference between the men's and women's suits.[25]

These designs were shorter and scantier than ever before (to help ensure the maximum possible sun tan). Bathing suit belts were, however, placed at the natural waistline this season. British *Vogue* believed that this change would ensure a more general acceptance of the higher waistline for general fashions of subsequent seasons:

> After a summer of these bathing suits, many pairs of eyes will return to the city in autumn with a much more sympathetic appreciation of the newest silhouette with the long-limb line.[26]

Afternoon models were produced in soft, lightweight fabrics such as silk, chiffon and mousseline de soie, which, as the *Drapers' Record* pointed out, 'lend themselves well to the flounces and frills with which they are to be trimmed.'[27] Floral printed fabrics were seen at all the houses and cape sleeves and bertha collars appeared most notably at

Patou and Louiseboulanger. Paquin designed afternoon dresses detailed with bows on the cuffs and hip yoke, helping to emphasize its 'up-in-the-front' movement. Vionnet, who preferred black and white printed crêpe de Chine for afternoon, also included bows at the décolletage and hip.

The latest long-lined evening silhouette combined a lower flare and a floor-length hemline at the back, creating a new version of the peacock silhouette. Tiers, flounces, basques, uneven hemlines, low décolletage and trailing ends were all important. Decoration on the back of the design was extremely fashionable, and the spiral or diagonal arrangement of draperies was seen at many houses. One pale yellow crêpe dress by Paquin (a designer 'noted for her subtly distinguished evening gowns'), typified the fashion for a low, V-shaped back décolletage, moulded hips, large bows and longer back lines.[28] All evening dresses were said to be at least two or three inches longer at their shortest point; Patou was held responsible for the emerging fashion for ankle-length dresses (see August 1929). Trains, uneven hemlines and drapery panels were considered to have given the evening mode a more 'definite' form and a dramatic quality. Chanel was not the only designer to produce evening scarves and wraps: Lelong showed versions in cream-pink satin which dropped to just below the hips and were trimmed in fur.[29] The fashion for the wrap gained momentum as the season progressed:

> The short wrap is an important feature of the late summer and early autumn mode for evening, and is especially effective with new evening gowns with their long lines and uneven hems.[30]

Fabrics such as velvet, moiré, taffeta, satin, chiffon (plain or printed) and lace were widely used. Black and red were the most popular colours. Quite different types of evening dress were produced for certain occasions (see August 1928):

> ... the shorter and simpler (often worn for dinner) being sleeved. The more elaborate, peacock tailed and fluttering chiffon has to divide honours with tailored tulle dresses which sheath the figure and then flare out, low, behind.[31]

Although Chanel was modifying even her sports wear designs to accommodate the latest trends, it is clear that, unlike other designers, she was not yet willing to introduce the much longer skirt and the higher waistline in all categories. The new developments

introduced into this collection, which distinguished the house from its rivals, were based around detail and fabric type, rather than any great change in silhouette: for example, the bertha collar, and new versions of jersey.

The ongoing debate over copyright (which peaked again during August 1928), continued to be referred to in the fashion press. An increasing number of commentators believed that the use of more complicated cuts, and greater quantities of richer fabrics, was not just a simple reaction against the 'garçonne' styles of the mid-twenties. In April 1929 British *Vogue* argued that:

> The power behind the mode is concentrated in a pair of scissors. Cut was never more intricate, more exacting, and more deceptive; frocks that look the simplest are the most complicated. And this is as it was meant to be – the French dressmakers have resolved to safeguard their designs by making them difficult to copy, which they definitely have achieved, together with greater distinction and more feminine effect.[32]

---

[1] Nonetheless, Chanel was still noted for her relatively simple designs. In one report, *BV* (6 March 1929, p. 42) discussed the buying habits of the younger members of the Spanish royal family: 'The importance of line is well appreciated by the infantas in choosing their frocks. They buy extensively in Paris, Chanel being a good house for the simple type of frock with very perfect line which they prefer.'

[2] *BV* 6 March 1929, p. 36

[3] *BV* 12 June 1929, p. 55

[4] Numerous versions of **460**, in several colourways, were produced. The Duchess d'Almeida (who owned **459** and **462** – she had bought her entire wardrobe at Chanel's this season), was reported to have: 'A... formal ensemble... (with) a coat of brown jersey over a dress of brown and beige printed chiffon with a bertha collar reaching to the shoulders. The two important notes of this costume are: brown and the bertha.' (*BV* 12 June 1929, p. 55)

[5] *Femina* 1 May 1929, p. 9

[6] *BV* 20 March 1929, p. 35

[7] *BV* 7 August 1929, p. 22

[8] *BV* 6 March 1929, p. 38

[9] *BV* 29 May 1929, p, 32

[10] *BV* 12 June 1929, p. 55

[11] *BV* 29 May 1929, p. 33

[12] *BV* 20 March 1929, p. 26

[13] Three Chanel evening designs were shown in one May edition of *Femina* (1 May 1929, p. 12). The commentary noted that 'A great number of lace dresses are shown in Chanel's collection.'

[14] *BV* 12 June 1929, p. 55

[15] *BV* 20 March 1928, p. 36

[16] *DR* 5 January 1929, p. 41

[17] Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York 1989), p. 85

[18] *BV* 20 March 1929, p. 35

[19] *BV* 23 January 1929, p. 23

[20] *BV* 23 January 1929, p. 22

[21] *BV* 12 June 1929, p. 55

[22] *BV* 15 May 1929, p. 88

[23] *BV* 17 April 1929, p. 40

[24] *BV* 6 March 1929, p. 36

[25] *BV* 10 July 1929, p. 27

[26] *BV* 10 July 1929, p. 27

[27] *DR* 5 January 1929, p. 41

[28] *BV* 15 May 1929, p. 88

[29] *BV* 7 August 1929, p. 22

[30] *BV* 7 August 1929, p. 22

[31] *BV* 6 March 1929, p. 36

[32] *BV* 17 April 1929, p. 40

August 1929

The Story of a Mode Which Has Finally Changed

This collection is represented by thirty six designs, reproduced from editions of British and French *Vogue* published between 21 August 1929 and 5 February 1930. Twenty eight were shown only in British *Vogue*, four were shown only in French *Vogue* and four were shown in both editions of the periodical. Sixteen models were illustrated on pages devoted to Chanel. The remaining examples were shown most frequently alongside those by Patou, but also with those by Augustabernard, Schiaparelli and Worth.

The Collection

Eleven designs were appropriate for morning/street or general day wear (**464** – **474**: two capes, a coat and a jacket with attached capes, three dresses and four suits); eleven for sports/country or travel wear (**475** – **485**: eight suits, two coats, and one tennis dress); and fourteen for evening wear (**486** – **499**: thirteen dresses and one coat).

In September, a British *Vogue* review underlined the significant change that had taken place in Chanel's work:

> ... when Chanel, the sponsor of the straight, short chemise dress and the boyish silhouette, uses little rippling capes on her fur coats and a high waistline and numerous ruffles on an evening gown, then you may be sure that the feminine mode is a fact and not a fancy.[1]

During 1928 and the early part of 1929, the severely straight, short, low-waisted and uncomplicated silhouette was challenged by a much more intricate, fluid and longer line (cf. **433**, August 1928, and **451**, February 1929). This season saw the consolidation of a new silhouette within Chanel's work. The principal theme was now the slim-fitting garment, with a waistline set at the natural level, a moulded hipline, and a flaring, noticeably longer, skirt. It is represented by the day dresses **468** and **469** (described as 'Two of the loveliest dresses, bound to be the Fords of the season'),[2] but also by the sports suit **477**. This theme, which originated in the more formal categories of previous seasons, is, unsurprisingly, more elaborately expressed in the evening wear collection.

at the hem.'[7] Although some jackets were cut straight, others, like **474**, were double-breasted with nipped-in waistlines. Several were distinguished by rounded and curving hemlines (**472** and **473**). Sports jackets displayed a wide variety of collars: versions of the sailor or cape collar, standing collars, separate cape-collars, and scarf collars (with notched edges). The 'waistcoat blouse' (a sleeveless blouse worn beneath a jacket, **482**), was a new development. Buttoned blouses, usually with small collars and bows, were either worn over the top of the skirt or tucked in (**479**). The blouse of **481** has button fastening with a tab detail. Most day dresses were worn with buckled belts, some of which were approximately three inches wide with eyelets and hooks decorated with rhinestone (**469**). Piqué collars continued to be seen: that of **468** had a ruffled edge.

Although the evening designs shared the same fundamental lines of **495**, five silhouette types can be identified: the simpler model with an even, lower calf-length hemline (**486** and **487**)[8]; the more elaborate design with a layered net skirt (**488** and **489**); that with a tiered skirt, or a skirt with a basque (**490 – 493**); the peacock silhouette – higher at the front than at the back – (**494 – 497**); and the formal model with an even, almost floor-length hemline (**498**). Within this already quite extensive framework, there is considerable variety. The 'double waistline' (**487**); the bodice constructed from a series of finely shirred horizontal bands (**488**); the transparent bolero over-bodice and the graduated and piped edges of the net (**489**); the tiered bodice (**493** and **494**)[9]; twisted bands, in the same fabric as the dress, set across the bodice (**496**); and the wrap-over bodice that crosses in a low V at the back (**498**). British *Vogue* referred in one report to dresses which were worn over evening 'trousers':

> Talbot and Chanel... show trousers that frankly protrude under skirts. They are meant to be noticed, and Chanel even cuffs them with fur.[10]

The fabrics included fur (mink, black caracal, beaver and breitschwantz), a variety of woollen fabrics, tweed, striped or checked jersey, kasha, and crêpe Marocain, in black, brown, beige, bright blue, and white. Far more fabrics were used: it was reported that, in general, 'The silhouette is slim but very long, and fully twice as much material goes to the making of each model as in the previous season.'[11] A great variety of tweed and jersey (including ribbed and striped) were used for the sports designs. The colours were no longer limited to the somber, neutral shades of earlier collections: black, white, grey, brown, and beige, were seen with green, chartreuse green, apple green, bright blue, burnt orange, pale rose and pink. Although most of the tweed suits were in black and

white, other combinations included green and black, crimson and grey, nasturtium and brown, and orange and yellow. White satin was used for tennis wear. The evening fabrics included velvet, velveteen, taffeta, satin, crêpe georgette, crêpe Marocain, tulle, net, chiffon, and lace, in black, white, grey-white, red, geranium red, crimson, 'wild-rose', and purple. The lace dress **490** was described as 'the great success of Chanel's collection'[12];*Femina* reported that, just as last season, 'A great number of lace dresses are shown by Chanel', and illustrated two examples: one in white and the other in a mix of rose lace and mousseline.[13]

The trimmings were, in typical house style, primarily an extension of the construction of the design itself: pleating, seaming, piping, ragged or notched edges, tab details, encrusted bands, bows, buckled belts and buttons. Other trimmings include the Persian lamb on the hem of **465**. Draperies, attached or separate scarves, tiers, beading, buckles and embroidery were found on the evening designs.

Context

As the first quotation in this essay has indicated, the house of Chanel, as far as *Vogue* was concerned, was clearly a crucial barometer of fashion. However, the magazine acknowledged that it was in fact Patou who had initiated and popularized the recent and dramatic changes in women's dress. The periodical stated that, 'Patou's is the first name on everybody's lips when you reach Paris... Patou's is the first collection visited.'[14] The designer had lengthened his skirts (quite dramatically in the case of his evening models – producing hemlines that reached the floor all the way round), and decisively raised waistlines to the natural level (the waistline position had fluctuated during the past few seasons). This was seen as a firm and definite move away from the characteristic styles of the mid 1920s:

> Here is the first dramatic change in dress that has occurred since the "garçonne" mode came in. Women are as womanly as ever they can be. The change in fashion this year is almost wholly a change in proportion – the high-belted waist, the long skirt which makes fashion dramatically, almost revolutionarily new.[15]

The long skirt was not enthusiastically welcomed in all quarters, and *Vogue*, as Milbank has shown, seemed a little unsure as to which camp it should support.[16]

However, as far as Patou was concerned, the visible knee, or legs seen from the front (as in last season's peacock line), was démodé. His gowns were designed to emphasize a tall and slender ideal of the female figure. The move away from excessive simplicity, due, as British *Vogue* believed, to 'a sports mode that tried to dominate everything', was complete.[17] What was referred to as 'dressmaker's fashions', as opposed the more severe, and 'masculine' lines of traditional tailoring, were now applauded.

The return to the production of clothing that was specifically intended for different occasions (identified initially during 1927 and 1928) was now a widespread trend: women were once again willing to purchase designs suitable only for a particular event. This was evident in Chanel's evening collection, in which certain designs were said to be appropriate for the débutante, the informal dinner, dancing, or the formal or state occasion. Nonetheless, British *Vogue* realized that many women, despite being happy to define precisely their evening wardrobe, were reluctant to return to the pre-war tradition of buying specific clothes for particular hours of the day:

> This is why day ensembles have something of the sports character and are alright for almost anything at almost any hour of the day are so good and so much sought after. The dressy day dress, even if intended for late afternoon, does not look right.[18]

Simpler, practical clothes were still worn during the day, and designs intended for town were rarely produced with a dipping or fluttering hemline. There was thought to be less of an absolutely defined sports mode and more clothes that, rather like those in Chanel's collection, were based on the sports model, but were appropriate for general wear. Day fashions at all the houses included the fur jacket, all lengths of coat, attached or separate shoulder capes, natural waistlines, skirts that were typically four inches below the knee (four or five inches below for afternoon), sailor collars, fichus, the one-piece dress or the suit, tuck-in blouses, scarves, belts and bows. Tweeds and jerseys, in new weaves and colours, were ubiquitous:

> Jersey appears to be more than holding its own and is seen in a variety of new patterns... There are many jerseys woven to resemble tweeds, and tweeds that resemble jerseys.[19]

Schiaparelli was using what British *Vogue* referred to as, 'An interesting stringy rag-rug tweed in black, red and white', for some of her morning/street designs.[20] Black stocking-ribbed jersey was one of the newest fabrics of the season and was used for street wear by Yvonne Carette.[21] Crêpe de Chine, particularly in the darker shades and black, was seen at every house. Afternoon designs were usually more elaborate, with wider sleeves, draped and bloused bodices, fur collars and cuffs, wide shoulders, narrow hips, drapery wings and capes.

Evening dresses were much longer and in luxurious fabrics, richer colours and with more elaborate detail. The waist was high, and the design was generally slim-fitting from the hips to the knees. The mermaid and peacock silhouettes continued to be shown at many houses, although in longer proportions. At their shortest point evening dresses were generally six inches below the knee. The flat, simple bodice was out, and a great variety of boleros, scarves, banding effects and collars were used. Just as at Chanel, circular cuts and godets ensured the flaring skirts. Diagonal or spiral cuts and arrangements were also seen. The increased fullness did not, however, detract from the long and slender lines. The very low back décolletage and narrow shoulder straps were shown at practically every house. Fabrics included crêpe georgette, velvet, taffeta, satin, lamé, net, lace, and brocade. White challenged the supremacy of black and more pastel colours were introduced.

Chanel's collection is typical of those shown during August 1929: although the designer took her lead from Patou, she has introduced the much longer skirt in all categories and the higher waistline. It is, therefore, once again, the application of details, the use of certain combinations and types of fabrics, and the insistence on the practicality and the wearability of the design, that sets this collection apart from those of Chanel's competitors.

Although uncertain at first, mid-way through the season British *Vogue* confidently claimed that, 'The old chic has been overthrown.'[22] By January 1930, the periodical announced (in typical fashion magazine hyperbole):

> We should all fall down on our knees and thank the Gods of fashion – for we have had a narrow escape. We have changed, and while, for a few dark and uncertain weeks, it looked as though the change might be for the worse, we now know that it has been all for the best.[23]

However, not all women were happy with the new styles, a fact which tempered many reports:

> ... there are so many who so far have refused to accept the new ruler. They complain that the summary abolition of the low waistline and the compulsory lengthening of the skirt are arbitrary ideas of the dressmakers which are being pressed upon an unwilling public. But the fallacy of the tyrannic dressmaker and the unwilling client was exploded years ago.[24]

One inescapable downside to the new styles was, as the *Drapers' Record* pointed out, the inevitable increase in cost:

> Much more material is required for the new dresses, which will be appreciated by fabric manufacturers, but this factor, coupled with the return to more elaboration in styles, will make the question of cost a further knotty problem.[25]

It seems ironic that, on the eve of the Wall Street Crash (29 October 1929), fashion should finally forsake its simple, economic and 'democratic' lines, in favour of a far more costly and elaborate style. Certainly, at the time these collections were conceived, France, and the majority of its national industries, were enjoying the benefits of an economic boom. This was ultimately curtailed by the impact of the most significant economic crisis of the early twentieth century. The decline of French overseas trade during the 1930s greatly affected the haute couture industry, an industry which had become, throughout the 1920s, particularly reliant on American trade.

Nonetheless, fashion, *Vogue* had always believed, was not capricious, but responsive and responsible. In an age when women did not limit themselves loyally to just one couture house, but bought from several of those currently in favour, the industry was becoming acutely aware that it was primarily answerable to its customers. This notion contrasts to the attitude held by couturiers such as Poiret, who seemed to subscribe to the view that, as artists, they were answerable to nothing other than their 'divine inspiration.' In August, British *Vogue* considered the situation of the more realistic couturiers who, when approached with requests for the reintroduction of a certain fabric or trimming to the mode (as had especially been the case immediately after the First World War), in order to resuscitate a failing industry, were forced to reply:

We will do what we can – we will make a few models in this or a few models in that. Twenty years ago we could have promised to help you by imposing a new fashion. Now all we can do is propose ideas to our smart clients. After all they decide, because they know what they want.[26]

---

[1] *BV* 4 September, 1929, p. 34

[2] *BV* 2 October 1929, p. 110

[3] *FV* 1 October 1929, p. 75.

[4] *BV* 4 September 1929, p. 34

[5] *BV* 4 September 1929, p. 88

[6] *BV* 2 October 1929, p. 102

[7] *BV* 22 January 1930, p. 36

[8] One review indicated that **487** was one of many similar models to have been produced this season, 'The evening dresses are all long... save for the series of all-over beaded dresses with a double belt-line. These are shorter, but well below the calf.' (*BV* 4 September 1929, p. 88)

[9] The dress **494** was one of the most successful and had a considerable impact on *BV*(4 September 1929, p. 35), where it was described as, ' a perfect example of the new softness and elegance. The long trailing skirt, the floating scarf, the graceful swathed effect, almost Grecian in line, are all expressive of the new mode in its highest form... The colour – pale wild-rose pink – is indicative of the feminine charm that is now so important... Skillful handling of the ruffles in spiral and diagonal lines gives a slim and youthful silhouette, accented by the high waistline.'

[10] *BV* 2 October 1929, p. 110

[11] *BV* 4 September 1929, p. 88

[12] *FV* 1 December 1929, p. 68

[13] *Femina* 1 May 1929, p. 12

[14] *BV* 4 September 1929, p. 54

[15] *BV* 4 September 1929, p. 88

[16] See Caroline Rennolds Milbank, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York 1989), p. 85. The author refers to the American edition which, she states, 'refused to take a stand' on the subject of long skirts.

[17] *BV* 21 August 1929, p. 23

[18] *BV* 2 October 1929, p, 59

[19] *BV* 24 July 1929, p. 18

[20] *BV* 21 August 1929, p. 48

[21] I have been unable to find any information on this house or designer.

[22] *BV* 13 November 1929, p. 70

[23] *BV* 8 January 1930, p, 27

[24] *BV* 13 November 1929, p. 70

[25] *DR* 14 September 1929, p. 621

[26] *BV* 7 August 1929, p. 23

Conclusion

Conclusion

The Introduction to this thesis began by quoting Valerie Steele's question: is there anything new to be said about Gabrielle Chanel? The Introduction went on to demonstrate that due to the predominantly biographical approach adopted by the majority of the authors who have written on Chanel (many of whom chose to perpetuate, rather than to question or challenge, the myths that the designer had constructed around her own life and career), previous studies on the work of the designer are unsatisfactory. Furthermore, it was shown that within the often limited formats in which they operated, those critics who challenged the biographical approach, and chose instead to focus on the designs rather than the life story, were ultimately unable to achieve the 'systematic and specialized study' called for by Jean Leymarie. The Introduction demonstrated that this was due primarily to the fact that such texts were not founded upon a detailed, comprehensive and objective study of Chanel's work.

The catalogue presented here provides a more representative sample of Chanel's dress designs 1916-1929 than has previously been available. From this foundation, it has been possible to make a more accurate and unbiased monographic statement on Chanel's work from this period, and to begin to respond to what Steele has correctly identified as an essential requirement for further inquiry into Chanel's career and contribution: to place the designer 'back in her historical context.'[1] Together, the catalogue and the summaries of the collections have organised and described systematically Chanel's dress design production 1916-1929, and contextualised this output in relation to the work of the other leading houses in Paris.[2] The following sections of this conclusion will therefore provide an overview of Chanel's dress design production during this period. Drawing upon the individual conclusions presented as part of the summaries of each of the collections, subsequent sections will demonstrate how this thesis has effectively challenged and tested the historical claims and presumptions (as outlined in the Introduction) that have been made about the designer's work. By bringing together the evidence presented in the Introduction and in the summaries on the individual collections, this conclusion will also present an account of why Chanel came to be accepted as a leading dress designer of the twentieth century.

The dress designs produced by the House of Chanel during 1916-1929 are generally characterized by the very simple and unstructured chemise dress, the sports ensemble in jersey, the uncomplicated 'little black dress', and the severe, masculine tweed suit. Chanel's approach towards fashion design is, for many critics, encapsulated by the use of a neutral palette of soft, supple fabrics not normally associated with haute couture, the adoption and assimilation of men's clothing, the rejection of the corset, and the refusal to employ excessive ornamentation.

The collections prior to 1920 were dominated by the simple, loose-fitting and calf-length design (often a sweater-like top and skirt, a chemise or tunic-style dress), in a plain jersey fabric. Chanel also experimented with the fashionable 'barrel' silhouette, wide-at-the-hips effects (such as panniers), and the crinoline during this period. By 1918 the designs were a little shorter, visually 'neater' and more tightly structured. The straight silhouette was consolidated during 1921 and 1922, although not at the expense of the woman's comfort and freedom of movement (relatively full, circular cut skirts were also shown). Chanel's use of Russian-style embroideries was complemented in 1922 by the adoption of the forms of traditional Russian costume. During 1923, and in keeping with the general fashion for the garçonne look, the very short, low-waisted, straight, and, at times, almost tube-like silhouette, detailed with elements derived from men's wear, was shown. Less embroidery was used on the day wear models, although variety and decoration were provided by features that were an intrinsic part of the design itself: tiers, cape backs, apron panels, pleating, belts and buttons. The 'mermaid frock', or the 'fluttering silhouette', which was to appear in the evening wear collections until 1927, was first shown in 1923. Although the simple 'garçonne-style' dress, the strictly tailored suit and the straight, sheath-like and sequined dress appeared in Chanel's collections up to and during the late 1920s, softer, more fluid lines, and more elaborate or intricate techniques, were used for many garments from about 1923 to 1924. The silhouette comprising a simple, straight bodice, moulded hipline and fuller, or flaring skirt was established during 1925 and 1926. Skirts for evening wear grew much longer at the back, resulting in the 'peacock silhouette'. In 1928, due to stiffening devices and the use, in some cases, of heavier fabrics, the flare in the lower skirt became more pronounced. Finally, in 1929, the severe, straight line was replaced in all categories by a longer, more fluid silhouette, with a moulded hipline and the waist set at the natural level. Throughout the period, Chanel's approach was underlined by her insistence upon the comfort and practicality of the design. This informed the choice of fabrics, the cut of the design itself, and the incorporation of elements such as the simple

tie-belt, buttons and pockets. As if to emphasize the simplicity and practicality of these models, and to highlight the quality of the fabrics and the workmanship employed, colours were generally subdued and trimmings were reduced to a minimum. More luxurious, delicate and brightly coloured fabrics were used for the evening designs: the aim being to draw attention to and flatter the slim ideal of the female figure. Those often quite subtle trimmings that were applied to evening models emphasized the woman's movement as she walked or danced: fringing, tiers, draperies and light-catching metallic thread embroidery or sequins.

Beyond the provision of a more detailed account of the design production of the house during this period, the summaries on each of the individual collections have served to corroborate in a substantial and convincing way certain facts about Chanel which have emerged in the more recent, serious literature on the designer and to challenge the historical claims and assumptions that have been made about her work and her contribution to the history of twentieth-century fashion. To begin with, the Introduction and the summaries make it clear that Chanel was not the only designer to reject the traditional forms of corsetry and boning associated with the Belle Epoque: drawing on the example of the nineteenth-century dress reform movements, Poiret and Vionnet were only two of the leading houses which abandoned such devices (see, for example, the summaries of the collections February 1916 and August 1921). Nor was she the first to borrow from male clothing or to produce sports wear; in fact, during the period, houses such as Lelong, Patou, Jane Régny and Schiaparelli were equally well known for their sports clothing (February 1919, August 1924 and February 1925). Although the fashion press and many fashion historians have continually claimed that, throughout the mid 1920s, Chanel was producing the shortest skirts in Paris, she was just one of several designers, including the far less well-known Jenny, Premet and Renée, who cut skirts to just below the knee (February 1922 and February 1926). Despite the fact that Chanel was continually associated with jersey, the fabric was much more widely used, at all levels of the fashion industry, during and after the First World War than many books on Chanel would seem to imply (February 1918). Tweed, that other Chanel staple, also played a central part in the collections of many of her rivals (February 1927). Furthermore, although her name is inextricably associated with the idea of the 1926 'little black dress', other designers, particularly Mme Charlotte at Premet and Renée, had been producing similar models from circa 1922 (February 1923 and August 1926).

The summaries on the collections have also demonstrated that the myths surrounding Chanel have actually served to 'conceal her true significance.'[3] The historical claims made by Chanel and her numerous biographers, as discussed above, have actually obscured her real contribution. As the Introduction has demonstrated, this is symptomatic of what could be called a 'first past the post' approach to the writing of fashion history (a by-product of any methodology which focuses too heavily on the role of the individual): the convenience of attributing a development or style solely to one designer ignores the much more complex realities of design production and consumption. Ironically, Chanel has also been a victim of her own self-aggrandisement and success. Patou had the 'misfortune', as Steele puts it, to die early, thus ensuring that those factors which bolstered Chanel's fame, such as a successful comeback and longevity, were denied to him. However, although Chanel's exceptionally long career ensured that she attracted significantly more press attention than many of her less fortunate rivals from the 1920s, it has also meant that, in monographs on the designer, less detailed attention is given to one of the most crucial periods in her career. As the Introduction has shown, critics have frequently chosen to discuss only those designs from the 1920s which would seem to point ahead to the work of the 1950s and 1960s, thus limiting the field of their inquiry. Consequently, it is important not only to reconsider those areas of Chanel's work which have been excessively hyped, but also to focus in more detail upon those aspects of her design production which have been 'concealed' and neglected, as a means of reaching a more accurate evaluation of her contribution.

Many commentators have acknowledged the underlying unity and coherence of Chanel's work, a factor which was not always evident at other houses (February 1921).[4] The catalogue and summaries of the collections provide a more precise evaluation of this aspect of Chanel's approach. As Chanel consistently worked with a few limited themes, she ensured an instantly recognizable house style at a time of considerable competition. These themes were endlessly varied and modified to avoid total repetition (and to guarantee new orders each season). Importantly, Chanel's strategy was seen by the fashion press in a positive light, and regarded, in 1921, as the designer's 'strength'. This approach extended to all categories of the collection. Although the distinction between the categories became more pronounced towards 1929, the first evening designs of August 1916 closely resembled the day wear models. Thus the blurring of the categories that this approach permits, and the resulting

reduction in the number of clothes the modern woman was obliged to wear during any one day, was an integral part of Chanel's attitude towards contemporary fashion.[5]

The catalogue and summaries of the collections have also revealed, in a detail which has not previously been provided, the actual complexity and level of innovation evident within each collection. Chanel continually engaged with and adopted trends that had been initiated and developed at other fashion houses (such as the 'barrel' silhouette of February 1917). This aspect of her work is often ignored, presumably because it would detract from the idea of Chanel as a fashion leader, and also because it necessitates reference to designers who, in comparison, are not well known. However, although it is important to acknowledge the influence that other designers and fashions had upon Chanel's work, it was usually the case that she did not incorporate the more extreme manifestations of current trends, but would assimilate its basic form or details into the house style. The *Mock Crinoline*, **115** of February 1920, is an excellent, but rarely discussed, example of this. Chanel did not, unlike several of her contemporaries, use the crinoline form as an excuse for the display of trimmings. Instead, as the related essay explains, Chanel subverted the traditional meaning and function of the crinoline itself in the terms of contemporary fashionable dress.

Further evidence of Chanel's single-minded approach can be found. Although recent authors writing on the early part of the designer's career have been correct to underline the similarities between her work and that of her competitors, it must also be acknowledged that, at the time, she was frequently considered to be unique. For example, Chanel's 'staunch' support of pockets in 1918, a period when they were considered rather démodé, was repeatedly noted ('staunch', along with 'determined', was a word that was used often in connection with Chanel in the pages of *Vogue*). Furthermore, the August 1919 collection was described as being utterly unlike anything else shown in Paris at that time. Chanel's designs, and the system of promotion she employed, clearly set her apart at times from the other leading houses.

The desire to see Chanel as a purveyor of the modernist aesthetic (focusing on the form and function of a design in relation to the exact nature of the materials employed, and rejecting excessive ornamentation) has also resulted in a sometimes rather limited understanding of her work. As the Introduction has shown, Leymarie, in his concern to draw a parallel between Chanel's approach and that of the Parisian avant-garde, chose not to illustrate those numerous early designs by Chanel which were comparatively

elaborate or heavily trimmed. Similarly, many critics have neglected to consider the very wide and seemingly contradictory sources from which Chanel, and her contemporaries, drew their inspiration: military uniforms (February 1916), men's dress (February 1917), the Far East (August 1917), the American cowboy (February 1919) the Middle Ages (August 1920), and traditional Russian costume (February 1922). The catalogue and summaries of the collections have therefore provided a more balanced survey of the designer's total production.

The continual reference to the 'simplicity' of Chanel's work can similarly detract from the actual level of technical innovation and ingenuity demonstrated by many of the designs from this period. Although some critics are sceptical as to the degree of Chanel's technical ability, believing that she was heavily dependent upon the advice and skills of her staff, reference is continually made in the pages of *Vogue* to the inventiveness and the quality of Chanel's designs. The numerous ways in which Chanel created the barrel silhouette were listed for British *Vogue* readers during 1917; models in 1919 were described as 'highly original' and 'clever'; as early as 1923, during the reign of the 'garçonne' style of dress, commentators identified an 'increased complication' in her work: a complication that was expressed through cut and technique, rather than elaborate trimming. While, on the one hand, Chanel was frequently compared to Premet and Renée, exponents of the simple, uncomplicated, and 'boyish' silhouette, she was also repeatedly aligned in the pages of *Vogue*, particularly during the mid to late 1920s, with Vionnet. Fashion histories generally set Chanel and Vionnet at opposite ends of the spectrum: one adept at the simple, but chic, sports style; the other a great and gifted technician. However, it is clear that, while Chanel was certainly not as highly trained as her rival, she was recognized at the time for both her skill and technical innovation.

Chanel is always associated with jersey. Although many texts discuss the designer's use of this traditionally non-haute couture fabric at great length, few go on to consider in detail the other fabrics she employed, and her often very radical and inventive approaches towards them. The catalogue has highlighted the numerous types of jersey fabric Chanel used, and which were created specifically for her by Rodier and later at her own factory, Tricots Chanel. This practice also extended to her use of tweed: she was one of the first designers during the 1920s to use very lightweight tweeds, and to team what was believed to be a rather 'mannish' fabric with luxurious ermine fur (a combination which *Vogue* thought extremely daring). Her skill in working with

chiffon, lace and other very fragile fabrics was also frequently commented upon. Furthermore, although the designer is repeatedly associated with a very neutral palette of beige, black and white, the summaries of the collections highlight the fact that the house was also known for its use of what were considered 'daring' combinations and bold colour (February 1922 and February 1925).

Just as Chanel's use of jersey has almost obscured her work with other fabrics, so too has the fame of the archetypal 'little black dress' overshadowed many of her other designs: the numerous and at times often ingenious capes, the models with hip extensions or panniers, the evening design decorated with 'black waterproof paint', and the rubberized raincoats with zip fastenings are just a few examples. Similarly, the continual focus on the simple, economic 'little black dress' in the majority of the texts, and the interpretation of it as an indication of Chanel's democratic approach to fashion (highlighting its potential for standardization and mass production), has drawn attention away from the house's numerous attempts to ensure that the 'design pirates' could not easily imitate her work. The increased elaboration of cut and detail in her work during the 1920s, as demonstrated in the summaries on the collections, was referred to on several occasions by British *Vogue* as a deliberate ploy to hamper the trade in Chanel copies. The opening of the London house in 1927 was also seen as a calculated measure to help prevent this illegal practice in Britain. Although Chanel did not, unlike many of her contemporaries, attempt to enforce the legal protection of copyright (realizing that such attempts would ultimately be futile), tactics such as those outlined above bring into question the accepted readings of Chanel's frequently quoted statement that, 'Fashion does not exist unless it goes down to the streets.'[6]

Steele has stated that, 'To the extent that she (Chanel) stands out, it is because she most successfully synthesised, publicised and epitomised a look that so many other people developed.'[7] The Introduction and summaries on the collections have shown that Chanel certainly combined the more radical developments and trends in fashion that existed prior to the First World War into a style that seemed her own, and continued to respond to and assimilate the work of other designers throughout the 1920s. Any understanding of the success of the house must acknowledge Chanel's unique ability to promote and capitalise upon her own image. Chanel's system of promotion was one which not only capitalised on the fame and glamour of others (those who were frequently photographed for the society pages of fashion magazines such as *Vogue*), but also placed her own personality and lifestyle at the centre of the development of her

business. Chanel's identity permeated throughout all aspects of her work and she became synonymous with the modern woman; *Vogue*, who repeatedly referred to her designs as 'chic' and 'youthful' also stated that the designer had 'such an extraordinary perception of the woman of today' (February 1920). The summaries of the collections have shown how the designer, in 1922, embroidered a monogram onto sports blouses. Although Patou was also producing designs with embroidered monograms at the same time, the corporate identity of the House of Chanel, which was consolidated in the development of the perfume and beauty range in 1921, was uniquely stamped across the total range of the product. The summaries of the collections have also shown that Chanel's designs were often far from simple in their construction. However, although her technical skill as a designer is acknowledged in the pages of *Vogue*, the emphasis on the simplicity, unity and consistency of her design approach dominates the mediation of her work. Although Chanel was undoubtedly not the first to develop those fashions which are now synonymous with the 1920s, she was arguably the most adept in her ability to publicise and disseminate the house style and, as a consequence, to ensure the iconic status of her work.

In conclusion, the main title of this thesis, *Reviewing Chanel*, hopes to articulate the contribution that a catalogue raisonné of Chanel's dress designs, 1916-1929, and critical summaries of the individual collections could make to the study of Chanel and to fashion history as a whole. *Reviewing Chanel* seeks: firstly, to refer to a research methodology which elects to focus not only upon individual dress designs, but to set these designs firmly in their historical context as part of collections in the overall production of the House of Chanel; secondly, to demonstrate the necessity of a critical re-examination and re-assessment of Chanel's output with reference to the wider context of *haute couture* in the period; thirdly, to demonstrate the way in which the thesis aims to function as an aid to further research in the field; and finally, to contribute to the understanding of the importance of Chanel's dress designs to the history of twentieth-century fashion and, by extension, to the wider economy of visual culture.

[1] Valerie Steele, 'Chanel in Context', in *Chic Thrills: A Fashion Reader* (London 1992), p. 118

[2] The process of organising the catalogue has in itself revealed several important discrepancies and inaccuracies in the previous studies on Chanel. For example, several designs have been misdated in some secondary sources (see **2, 5** and **6** , and footnote 3 of the Critical Essay for February 1916). It has also brought forward evidence which challenges the dating of other designs: for example, the cape **177** of February 1922 is very close to one published in Alice Mackrell, *Coco Chanel* (London 1992), p. 49, dated c. 1918 (see also footnote 7 of the Critical Essay for February 1922).

[3] Steele, op. Cit. P. 118

[4] Jean Leymarie, *Chanel* (New York 1987), p. 217, cites Roland Barthes: 'Chanel always works over the same model, which she does no more than "vary" from year to year, as one varies a theme in music.'

[5] Even when the distinctions between the categories were, to an extent, reinforced during the late 1920s, Chanel's attitude remained largely the same (many of Chanel's late 1920s informal dinner dresses had a 'sports feel' in their general form and simplicity).

[6] Chanel quoted in Edmonde Charles-Roux, *Chanel and her World* (London 1982), p. 237

[7] Steele, op. cit. p. 122

Bibliography

Books:

American Fabrics and Fashions Magazine (Editors of), *Encyclopedia of Textiles* (New Jersey. Third Edition, 1980)

Ash, Juliet & Wilson, Elizabeth (eds.), *Chic Thrills. A Fashion Reader* (London, 1992)

Barillé, Elisabeth, *Lanvin* (London, 1997)

Baudot, François, *Chanel* (London, 1996)

Braithwaite, Brian et al, *Ragtime to Wartime: the Best of Good Housekeeping: 1922 - 1939* (London, 1995)

Breward, Christopher, *The Culture Of Fashion* (Manchester University Press, 1995)

Charles-Roux, Edmonde, *Chanel* (London, 1989)

Charles-Roux, Edmonde, *Chanel And Her World* (London, 1981)

Chase, E.W & Chase, I, *Always In Vogue* (London, 1954)

Chenoune, Farid, *A History Of Men's Fashion* (Paris, 1993)

Craik, Jennifer, *The Face of Fashion: Cultural Studies of Fashion* (London, 1994)

Dars, Celestine, *A Fashion Parade: The Seeberger Collection* (London, 1979)

De La Haye, Amy & Tobin, Shelley, *Chanel: The Couturière At Work* (London, 1994)

De Marly, Diana, *The History of Haute Couture: 1850-1950* (London, 1980)

Demornex, Jacqueline, *Madeleine Vionnet.* (London, 1991)

Deslandres, Yvonne, *Poiret: Paul Poiret 1879-1944* (London, 1987)

Deslandres, Yvonne and Muller, Florence, *Histoire de la mode au XXe Siecle* (Paris, 1986)

Dorner, Jane, *Fashion in the 20's and 30's* (London,1973)

Etherington-Smith, Meredith, *Patou* (London, 1983)

Evans, Caroline & Thornton, Minna, *Women And Fashion. A New Look* (London, 1989)

Fausch, Deborah et al, *Architecture in Fashion.* New York, 1994

Forty, Adrian, *Objects of Desire: Design and Society Since 1750* (London, 1986)

Gaines, Jane & Herzog, Charlotte (eds.), *Fabrications. Costume And The Female Body* (London, 1990)

Galante, Pierre, *Mademoiselle Chanel* (Henry Regnery Company, Chicago, 1973)

Ginsburg, Madeleine, *An Introduction to Fashion Illustration* (London, 1980)

Ginsburg, Madeleine, *Paris Fashions: The Art Deco Style of the 1920's* (London, 1989)

Glynn, Prudence and Ginsburg, Madeleine, *In Fashion: Dress in the Twentieth Century* (London, 1978)

Gold, Arthur and Fizdale, Robert, *Misia: The Life of Misia Sert* (New York, 1980)

Greenhalgh, Paul (ed.), *Modernism in Design* (London, 1990)

Hadjinicolaou, Nicos, *Art History and Class Struggle* (London, 1978)

Haedrich, Marcel, *Coco Chanel: Her Life, Her Secrets* (Hale, Canada, 1972)

Hall, Carolyn, *The Twenties in Vogue* (London, 1983)

Healy, Robyn, *Worth to Dior: Twentieth Century Fashion From the Collection of the National Gallery of Victoria* (Australia, 1993)

Howell, Georgina, *In Vogue: Six Decades of Fashion* (London, 1975)

Howell, Georgina, *In Vogue: 75 Years of Style* (London, 1991)

Kamitsis, Lydia, *Vionnet* (London, 1996)

Kennett, Frances, *Coco: The Life and Loves of Gabrielle Chanel* (London, 1989)

Ladbury, Ann, *The Dressmaker's Dictionary* (London, 1982)

Ladbury, Ann, *Fabrics* (London, 1987)

Laver, James, *Costume and Fashion: A Concise History* (London, 1982)

Leymarie, Jean, *Chanel* (New York, 1987)

Lifar, Serge, *Ma Vie: From Kiev To Kiev* (London, 1970)

Lynam, Ruth, ed., *Paris Fashion: The Great Designers And Their Creations* (London, 1972)

Mackrell, Alice, *Coco Chanel* (London, 1992)

Madsen, Axel, *Coco Chanel. A Biography.* (London, 1990)

Margolin, Victor (ed.), *Design Discourse: History, Theory, Criticism* (Chicago and London, 1989)

Mauriès, Patrick, *Jewellery By Chanel* (London, 1993)

Milbank, Caroline Rennolds, *Couture: The Great Fashion Designers* (London, 1985)

Milbank, Caroline Rennolds, *New York Fashion: The Evolution of American Style* (New York, 1989)

Moore, Doris Langley, *Fashion Through Fashion Plates: 1771-1971* (London, 1971)

Morand, Paul, *L'Allure De Chanel* (Paris, 1976)

Mulvagh, Jane, *Vogue History Of Twentieth Century Fashion* (London, 1988)

Nunn, Joan, *Fashion in Costume: 1200-1980* (London, 1984)

O'Hara, Georgina, *The Encyclopaedia of Fashion* (London, 1989)

Olian, JoAnne, *Authentic French Fashions Of The Twenties: 413 Costume Desugns From 'L'Art et la Mode'* (London, 1990)

Packer, William, *Fashion Drawing in Vogue* (London, 1983)

Peacock, John, *20th Century Fashion* (London, 1993)

Rees, A. L, and Borzello, F., *The New Art History* (London, 1986)

Rouse, Elizabeth, *Understanding Fashion* (London, 1989)

Russell, Douglas A, *Costume History and Style* (New Jersey, 1983)

Seebohm, Caroline, *The Man Who Was Vogue: The Life And Times Of Condé Nast* (London, 1982)

Silver, Kenneth E, *Esprit de Corps: The Art of the Parisian Avant Garde and the First World War: 1914-1925* (Princeton University Press, 1989)

Steele, Valerie, *Women of Fashion* (New York, 1991)

Steele, Valerie, *Paris Fashion. A Cultural History* (Oxford University Press, 1988)

Stegemeyer, Anne, *Who's Who In Fashion* (New York, 1980)

Touzot, Jean, *Cocteau* (Paris, 1989)

Troy, Nancy J., *Modernism and the Decorative Arts in France: Art Nouveau to Le Corbusier* (Yale University Press, 1991)

Vaudoyer, Mary, *Le Livre de la Haute Couture* (V and O editions, 1990)

Vreeland, Diana, *Inventive Paris Clothes: 1909-1939* (New York, 1977)

Walker, John A, *Design History and the History of Design* (London, 1989)

Wallach, Janet, *Chanel: Her Style and Her Life* (London, 1999)

Waugh, Nora, *The Cut of Women's Clothes: 1600-1930* (London, 1968)

White, Cynthia L., *Women's Magazines 1693-1968* (London, 1970)

White, Palmer, *Elsa Schiaparelli: Empress Of Paris Fashion* (London, 1986)

Wigley, Mark, *White Walls, Designer Dresses: The Fashioning of Modern Architecture* (Massachusetts Institute of Technology Press, 1995)

Wilson, Elizabeth, *Adorned In Dreams. Fashion And Modernity* (London, 1985)

Wilson, Elizabeth and Taylor, Lou, *Through the Looking Glass* (London, 1989)

Wilcox, C and Mendes, V, *Modern Fashion In Detail* (London, 1991)

Yoxall, H. W., *A Fashion of Life* (London, 1966)

Exhibition and Sales Catalogues:

Brunhammer, Yvonne, *1925*. 2 Vols. Exh. cat. Musée des Arts Décoratifs, Paris, 1976

Christie's, London, *Sale of the Personal Collection of Chanel*. 2 December 1978

Fine Arts Museum, Bunkamura, Tokyo, *Mademoiselle Chanel*. 1990

Musée du Costume de la Ville de Paris, *Modes des Années Folles 1919-1929*. November 1970-March 1971.

Musée de la Mode et du Costume, Palais Galliera, Paris, *Robes du Soir: 1850-1990*. 27 June-28 October 1990.

Sotheby's, London, *Chanel*. 5-13 September, 1987

Sotheby's, Monaco, *Mode des Années 1840-1970: Collection Mary Vaudoyer*. 10 October, 1987.

Victoria and Albert Museum, London, *Fashion: 1930-1939*., 1975

Articles:

Baudot, François, 'Chanel: La Femme du Siecle', *Elle* (Paris), No. 2309, April 1990.

Boodro, Michael, 'Art and Fashion: A Fine Romance', *Art News*, September 1990

Borrelli, Laird O'Shea, 'Dressing Up and Talking About It: Fashion Writing in Vogue from 1968 - 1993', *Fashion Theory: The Journal of Dress, Body and Culture*, Volume 1, Issue 3. September 1997

Chatwin, Bruce, 'Surviving In Style', *Sunday Times Magazine*, 4 March 1973, pp. 42-49.

De La Haye, 'The Dissemination of Design from Haute Couture to Fashionable Ready to Wear During the 1920s', *Textile History*, 24 (1), 1993

Delay, Claude, 'Chanel et Son Decor', *L'Oeil*, No. 351, October 1984

Hollander, Anne, 'Chanel: The Great Emancipator', *Connoisseur*, February 1983

Radford, Robert, 'Women's Bitterest Enemy': The Uses of the Psychology of Fashion', *Journal of Design History*, Volume 6, No. 2, 1993.

Rolley, Katrina, 'Fashion, Femininity and the Fight for the Vote', *Art History*, Volume 13, No. 1, March 1990

Wigley, Mark, 'White-Out: Fashioning the Modern (Part 2)', *Assemblage 22*: A Critical Journal of Architecture and Design Culture, December 1993

Videos:

Hershon, Eila and Guerra, Roberto, *Chanel, Chanel* (RM Arts, 1986)

Unpublished Sources:

Burman, Barbara L., *1900-1925: Some Aspects of Dress History With Special Reference to the Work of Picasso and Matisse*. M.A. Report, Courtauld Institute, May 1973.

Periodicals:

L'Art et la Mode

Drapers' Record

Les Elégances Parisiennes

Elle

Femina

Good Housekeeping

Textile/Art

Vogue (American, British and French editions)

Appendices

Appendix I

Captions to the Dress Designs by Chanel as Reproduced in British and French *Vogue*, 1916-1929

February 1916

1

No commentary

2

No Commentary

3

No commentary

4

No commentary

5

No commentary

6

No commentary

7

No commentary

August 1916

8

This coat strives to please by an exterior of dark red cotton velvet, which is a new Parisian smartness, and a lining of dark red pongee, also one of the last words in the guide-book of fashion. Nearly all coats show the tracks of the versatile rabbit, and here they are in the shape of a few brown bands and a brown collar as wide almost as a cape.

9

Paris has been maligned. It is not fickle, for neither velvet nor satin can alienate its affections from jersey, this elastic material is even used for boudoir gowns. Here it is a grey coat with the novelty guaranteed by the fashionable narrowness of belt and the trimming of grey rabbit, which appears in a natural colour to convince us that it has one.'

10

'To call this a black satin coat would be telling only half the truth. The other half is fur trimming, which may be either of seal or of that turncoat animal, the rabbit, dyed to imitate seal. Since one collar cannot be in two places at the same time, this thrifty coat has one up over the ears and another down over the shoulders. The upper one is of satin lined with fur.'

11

'Very occasionally Chanel forsakes the firm of Jersey et Rabbit et Cie; but she never forsakes the big, comfortable, roomy, furry coat. The one at the right is of black velvet and sealskin; and not in height nor depth nor width nor any other thing does it fall short of the mode.'

12

'"They say" woman is tiring of jersey, but to look once at a Chanel jersey costume is to desire it ardently. This is very nearly a formal suit; for, though dark blue jersey is hardly formal, silver embroidery and a jauntily pocketed waistcoat of grey taffeta transform it. The fur (one guesses) is rabbit.'

13

'If one has a cerise jersey frock one is happy; but one is a queen for the moment if one has also a white suede coat lined and faced with cerise jersey, to wear with it.'

14

'Checks get a square deal; the house of Chanel combines them with grey woollen cloth and makes the whole into a sports costume de luxe.'

15

'To use jersey successfully in a manteau is a thing few designers could accomplish, yet here it is successfully done. This manteau, "Teheran", is of beige jersey edged with marine blue. Like many French things just now, it is devoid of all trimming except tassels.'

16

'Chemise, Chanel, and chenille, these describe the frock above - for of course one knows the frock is of jersey. The colour of the frock is Bordeaux and the chenille embroidery is Bordeaux, with the design of the embroidery picked out with tarnished silver.'

17

'Of all designers who love jersey cloth this designer loves it most, and accomplishes the most startling things with it. This season that means a great deal because of the

immense popularity of jersey. Here, black silk jersey is combined with black lace for an afternoon frock.'

18

'This designer's favourite pastime, lately, is making black silk jersey frocks trimmed with Japanese embroidery. Embroidered white cherry blossoms bloom on the basque and flourish on the back of the collar.'

19

'This is the sort of thing that Chanel is doing these days. It is an evening frock - at least, so its designer says - of black charmeuse, waist-deep in gold-embroidered irises. Its interlaced girdle is gold-embroidered.'

20

'Here the noted designer of sports clothes has carried an outdoor style into the making of an evening coat; for this model, "Mélisande", has a trimness of line, a close sleeve, and a narrow belt that evening wraps do not often have. It is of corbeau satin and gold embroidery.'

21

'"Now for a dream of fair women", said Chanel, gathering together a length of splendid geranium velvet, broad bands of imitation marten, and a dash of genius. Out of them was created this coat, and the fair woman who wore it looked like a scarlet lily in bloom. Perhaps you think it of a simplicity - but no! That is not simplicity; it is genius.'

February 1917

22

'This designer made jersey what it is to-day - we hope she's satisfied. It's almost as much a part of our lives as blue serge is. This costume is of blue jersey with a belt and collar of brown suede embroidered with blue silk.'

23

'Checked with black, white and grey, this Chanel jersey suit hangs in almost straight lines, though the skirt is kilted and flares prettily with the wearer's movements. the coat with patch-pockets and an easy waistband is also of grey. Smart and trim as this costume certainly is, the final not of audacious smartness is seen in the tall cloche hat. Who but Reville, utterly assured, would dare to wind a spool of white worsted round a green straw cloche, and thereupon produce a most captivating and original creation?'

24

Coats are all lengths; this Chanel coat, though it has a normal waistline came precious near being an Eton jacket. It is of grey chanella (chanella, by the way, is a jersey cloth of unbelievably fine texture), faced with bright red and green tartan; the straight grey chanella skirt has a pleated tartan overskirt. The black Réboux liséré hat, like other spring turbans, attains great height; it does so with a flying black satin bow.'

25

'The barrel silhouette does not confine itself to frocks and suits; some coats have it too. This Chanel coat of navy blue satin has it, and two very new and clever things besides. One is that the bottom of the coat turns under and up to meet the beige wool homespun lining; the other is that there are two large patch pockets, the tops of which are fastened to the belt which is lined with homespun. Sleeves, collar and pocket are embroidered in beige soutache and chenille.'

26

'They simply can't seem to see enough of beige. This time, it's a coat and cape, complete in one instalment, of beige jersey lined with beige satin. The hat is of brown cloth banded with beige chiffon.'

27

'Puisque les taxis sont rares... Puisque l'essence nous est complée, puisque les chauffeurs ne sont pas toujours aussi amènes qu'on le voudrait, il a fallu chercher un nouveau moyen de locamation. La "nouvelle automobile" sembable à celle au fait la joie des enfants, permet de ne plus dépendre d'un conducteur narquois qui consent a vous mener à la Bastille lorsque vous avez besoin d'aller a Passy. L'exemple que nous donne ici, Mlle. Hilda May incitera-t-il les Parisiennes à adopter ce petit vehicule.'

28

No commentary

29

'The general sympathy that national all over the world have been showing for one another lately, may account for the fact that a French slip-over sweater is of emerald green silk, and green even to the coroso buttons at the neck.'

30

'Chanel adheres tenaciously to the wide-at-the-hips effect for which from the first she has stood sponsor, setting it forth here in well-cut grey green jersey.'

31

'One of the newest whims of Chanel is the combination of silk and wool jersey. Some of her newest models are quite untrimmed save for such varying textures as appears in this frock of Bordeaux wool jersey, liberally trimmed in deep bands and yoke with silk jersey of the same colour.'

32

'Much respect is being given to jersey this season, and beige is receiving its share of attention, so the success of this one-piece beige jersey frock should be assured.'

33

'Navy blue tricotine in any other hands would not be nearly as smart, for it was Chanel who though of trimming it with bands of tan satin embroidered in tan soutache. And it's the clever way the skirt is gathered into pockets which make the silhouette what it is; the dress slips over the head. Then there's the hem. Instead of being sewn but not seen, like most hems, it turns up where one least expects it - on the outside, and is covered with a satin facing and bound with soutache.'

34

'In time, jersey will come to be "of course, jersey". Here it is grey, red-stitched.'

35

'At least one dark dress decided not to be sombre; it is of blue jersey with gold.'

36

'Our Mr. Macawber is the chemise frock; we will never, never, desert it - at least not until after the openings. To make us abandon it then, the couturiers have their work cut out, for they must outdo the charm of this Bordeaux satin frock embroidered in gold and dull coloured silks.'

37

'This is one of those tunics, attached to the bodice, in which we are often surprised to find ourselves clad, these days. This gold-embroidered blue satin frock chose a dropped waist-line.'

PAGE NUMBERING AS ORIGINAL

February 1918

53

Chanel, who is already famous for her staunch fidelity to jersey, is making a stir just now by her individual use of jersey-de-soie. This slip-on coat, tobacco brown like the frock it covers, is trimmed with a most unusual brown wool lace. One must practically dive into these buttonless coats, but when on they are charming.'

54

Chanel supports the cause of pockets in the same staunch way she has upheld jersey; this tête de nègre velours coat has its one and only pocket in its tête de nègre and white checked belt.

55

No coat could be more unpretentious in line than this one of brown wool jersey, but Chanel, who designed it, felt that her duty to simplicity ended there and embroidered it to her heart's content with brown wool and gold tinsel thread and bits of dark green.

56

One needn't regret covering the loveliest summer frock if this coat is the cover. It's of lustrous black satin outside with a glimpse at all the edges of the black and white tartan that lines and trims it.

57

The part of this costume that shows in the sketch is a summer coat of tan jersey banded with brown rabbit fur, but underneath is a lining and a blouse, both of white-dotted rose foulard.

58

A coat of tan jersey cloth trimmed with brown rabbit fur matches the skirt of this country costume and is sketched in the middle at the right on page 36.

59

Brown foulard with a pin stripe of white allows neither cut nor trimming to divert it from the straight and narrow way that so many dresses follow this season.

60

That one's frock may be low in tone and simple in line, without being in the least common-place, Chanel asserts by means of black and white stripes marquisette embroidered with tiny steel beads. The sash is of black satin.

61

"Adèle" is made of brown charmeuse, with one of those tiny little coat effects of brown wool cloth trimmed with brown cotton thread lace, - and Chanel was always clever with coloured wool and cotton lace - so that the frock really looks like a suit with a charmeuse blouse under it. The bottom of the skirt is of wool, too, so that it completes the illusion of a suit when it shows beneath the graceful coat.

62

It was Chanel who made jersey cloth what it is today; and it was Chanel who made this frock of grey silk jersey embroidered with grey cotton - "Greeque," she called it. Then the wrap, and this is a clever bit of silk conservation, is of cotton jersey, embroidered to match the frock. The Lewis hat is of brown tulle, put on in many ruffles and with a sash end of the tulle that winds around the neck.

63

Ruffles and frills are forbidden fruit these war-time days, but we may have embroidery to our heart's content. And surely nothing could be lovelier than the beige embroidery

which trims the tunic and the collar and the vest of this frock of beige or marine blue serge.

64

She is all wrapped up in silk jersey - and no wonder, when jersey is so very becoming to the straight slim silhouette that is so popular in Paris. Not only her underdress, but also her overdress is of black silk jersey - but the overdress almost conceals the fact that under solid embroidery of sapphire blue and a band of seal fur.

65

It looks as though almost any one could make it - that's what proves that the designer was an artist. It's of black satin from its square neck to the wide band of taupe fur at the bottom. The bodice is embroidered in gold in a design which is another of those simple things it is so difficult to reproduce.

66

Black satin and jet reduced to simplest terms make an informal evening frock that is a precise follower of the rules prescribed by Paris. It is straight, simple, and somewhat scant - three s's which are ever so much more patriotic than those fashionable f's of other years - full, fluffy, and fancy.

67

Here is the original Christmas-card lady in a coat of Bordeaux red velvet, trimmed and then trimmed again in soft grey rabbit.

68

Paris has always liked South Americans, so it has named fur like that which is used on this brown velvet coat, "Peruvienne".

69

The Duchess of Sforza buttons a surprising amount of chic into her black velvet coat with kolinsky trimming and pockets that add two interesting points to the silhouette. The becoming hat is from Lewis.

70

Mlle. Cécile Sorel has put her faith in Chanel, of late, and been rewarded by such interesting things as this coat of black silk jersey and monkey fur. The Marie-Louise felt hat, too, is trimmed with monkey.

71

Wool jersey, like the poor, is always with us. But who wouldn't envy it a full length destiny like this, combined with castor?

72

The Parisienne gives winter a confident coup d'œil, knowing that pride in her brown charmeuse costume trimmed with castor will keep her warm.

73

This Parisienne is just a slender exclamation point emphasising the smartness of the colour brown in a long unbroken length of brown bure and big brown coroso buttons.

74

That the couturiers are still embroidering their way to success is proved again in this blue satin frock embroidered in brown and silver and orange and made with a fur-banded tonic and a vest of Chantilly lace.

75

In this frock of black satin, embroidered in white angora and black beads, Paris has brought tow of this winter's favourites into a happy combination.

76

The drum-major hat, from Lewis, that tops the chic little head of the Duchess Sforza, flares into monkey fur and drips black jet. More jet, combined with white silk chenille, trims her black satin frock.

77

"Zibelinette", one of those new furs of indefinite extraction, is used on this gown of black tulle embroidered in small wood coloured beads.

78

Madame Vera Sergine, playing in "Samson", thinks, with many another wise woman, that there are few things more becoming than the softness of black velvet and the dark mysterious sparkle of jet.

February 1919

79

In this black satin suit, Chanel, fond of making her models less slender, uses pleats to accomplish this result. The jacket shows other favourite features in its length and in its irregular collar.

80

The great American cowboy (as known to the movies) was the inspiration of this clever black satin coat, fringed with black silk and collared with just a flowing handkerchief tie.

81

Chanel's coats, it would appear, aren't wearing sleeves anymore; this one of sable brown silk tricolette, lined with crêpe de Chine of the same shade makes only a pretence of it. Since they are, however, wearing embroidery, this one chose the richness of gold threads. The tendency to puff over the belt is exaggerated into cape-like looseness at the back.

82

In a day when manteaux are in favour, the designer may create the swaying grace of this satin cape. Nattier blue velvet lines the cape, and wraps around the neck continuously, for volume, especially about the neck, is characteristic of the new wraps which are seen everywhere in Paris.

83

In "Pour Avoir Adrienne" at the Théâtre Michel, Mlle. Charlotte Lysès wore a Chanel costume consisting of a rabbit-trimmed cape of green-blue velours de laine with a gown of the same material.

84

It needs no prophet to predict that the motor wrap of autumn will be a warm and enveloping cape. One of the present versions of this "cape-manteau" of of grey and black satin.

85

By its looseness and simplicity and its low waist-line, marked by a narrow girdle tying loosely across the front, this blue serge frock proclaims that Chanel made it. The back is straight like a man's coat.

86

Flounced within an inch of its beige coloured Chantilly life, much after the manner of the famous petal frocks, this gown has a way of slipping its jacket-shaped bodice over the wearer's head.

87

This very long waist is a marked note in the mode just now, whether in tailleurs or such frocks as this of gold-embroidered taupe Georgette crêpe, which might grace one of those famous "five o'clocks" which Paris bachelors are giving in their homes or in their studios.

88

A frail gown of black Chantilly lace has very potent charms of delightful French savour. The upper part of the lace is of gold-spun net while the lower part is weighted with jet. The jet side panels swing jet tassels.

89

Chanel takes into account the lack of motors and the general difficulty of living in Paris just now by her almost invariably black evening dresses. To her favourite tulle shoulder straps she adds a pretence of square tulle sleeves, which is as far as she gets with sleeves in evening gowns this year.

90

In this gown of silver brocade is embroidered that tendency of frocks which gives us pause, - an alarming tendency to come down at the top and go up at the bottom. Not since the days of the Bourbons has the woman of fashion been visible so very far above the ankles.

91

Shall we look for Second Empire modes? Here, at least, is the hoop, though it spreads but thin black lace, and very much here are the pantalettes in pleated black tulle.

92

Very easily seen through was Chanel's scheme for making this voluminous summer wrap of sable-coloured net, gathered into narrow bands of kolinsky fur and wearing its double cape effect becomingly. The collar, which is part of the cape, softly envelops the throat and chin with its net and fur, showing just a glimpse of tantalising eyes.

93

When one marries in a Chanel gown, one swathes white satin with white Chantilly lace which falls into a pointed drapery at the sides and floats across the shoulders into an airy manteau at the back; then one ties white satin ribbon over it all to make the inevitable low wait-line.

August 1919

94

Chanel still favours the chemise dress, and certainly no one else knows its possibilities as she does. This one of beige wool jersey buttons to the neck and the tunic is finished with a heavy band of beaver that ripples down either side to the skirt's edge - which maintains its aloof distance from the ground.

95

Some distant relative of the rabbit supplies this rich impression on a satin cape from Chanel. Inside are pockets, the Parisienne's way of fastening a cape.

96

A straight frock of grey wool jersey buttons quietly up the front and puts its chance of effect into a broad hem of grey fox and a double cape of fox and matching jersey. the top cape is rather the favoured one and, though coming last is succeeded in acquiring an amazingly high soft collar of fox and an extravagant amount of grey fox at its hem.

97

Coat-dresses are, at present, much in favour in Paris because of their very obvious attractions, smartness, utility, and warmth. This Chanel frock of black satin slips on like a coat, crosses in front, and fastens at one side under a string belt. Monkey fur bands the bottom and forms the amusing cape over which is a narrow collar of black satin ending in a bow, or, if desired, tied about the neck.

98

Chanel has fashioned it out of brown taffeta, Simple of line and scarcely with trimming, A shiny belt of black leather with dashes of white, Is worn over the sash, and the vest is quite light, A linen vest of a pale coffee colour.

99

Life is just one cape after the other - those French designers have so many ideas on the subject. Here is a cape for afternoon or evening of taupe velvet. The snug shoulders slip under a collar of kamschatka - yes, it is spelt like that - and it's one of those furs that hide the light of their origin under a bushel of a name.

100

Chanel is under a Spanish influence. It is admitted, too, in this evening cape of black velvet, which suggests a bull-fighter's raiment. And it is drenched with rows and rows of ostrich fringe. In Paris, ostrich trimming is even smarter than it was last season - hats, gowns and wraps wear those borrowed feathers wherever they go.

101

The Comtesse de Roche received in a gown of mauve tulle which borrowed its charms and its billowing ruffles from the Second Empire through the agency of Chanel.

102

Just to show to what very attractive depths a back may go, Chanel drops a brilliant jade coloured evening gown of crêpe de Chine all the way to the waist. Then over it all, she casts a coat, a sleeveless evening affair of écru net elaborately traced in silver thread. In front, a square-necked bodice of the crêpe de Chine emerges gracefully from beneath the lace coat which falls back and is draped softly at one side under a large rosette and loops that are made of green crêpe de Chine.

103

Part of Chanel's success is her mastery of simplicity as an art. Here it is shown is a gown of rich burgundy crêpe de Chine that swathes the figure in straight soft folds, falling at the sides in little cascades. Chanel relies much on nature when it comes to backs, therefore she has given this gown only a pair of shoulder-straps. The great fan and the lady's feet match her gown in colour.

February 1920

104

Chanel's version of the cape and frock combination is a delightful thing of crêpe de Chine in shades of grey. The straight chemise frock has two tiers finished with a slashed fringe of crêpe de Chine, picot-edged. The short, graceful cape of gun-metal grey crêpe de Chine with a collar and band of dark flying squirrel, has a lining to match the frock.

105

Worn by the Comtesse de Moustiers, such old friends as dark blue serge and fine pleats become delightfully unhackneyed, especially when accompanied by a blouse of jade green and a camellia-trimmed Reboux hat.

106

Chanel has fashioned sand coloured crêpe de Chine into a frock no less versatile than charming, for it combines with the coat at its right to make a delightful motor costume; and alone, it is suitable for lunching or shopping in town or to wear during the hotel intervals of a motor tour. Sketched with it is a gaily coloured hat of felt with ribbon loops.

107

Blue tricotine makes the attractive coat, trimmed with glaze satin ribbon. it is topped with a red leather hat, small and close fitting, stitched with blue.

108

Chanel, according to her custom, chooses Jacquard crêpe de Chine for the frock at the left. It has wide and narrow satin stripes to give the favoured plaid effect and is untrimmed, except for the series of apron effects, one of which drapes about the figure and ties at the back into loose ends.

109

Silks are much used as the fabrics of new frocks, and greatly favoured is soft crêpe de Chine, adapting itself so easily to the graceful modes of the day. This frock of crêpe de Chine, beige coloured, flares unexpected wings at either side as a gay concession to the mode of drapery.

110

The black crêpe de Chine frock of Madame Subercaseaux de Lamarca had white frills.

111

Harmonious and restful as a summer twilight is the Comtesse de Moustiers's cape of grey crêpe de Chine, softly pleated and amply collared with grey fur. Long plumes droop becomingly from her Reboux hat.

112

Madame Brach smilingly regards polo in one of the loveliest of new models, Chanel's crêpe de Chine cape with grey fur.

113

The Duchesse de Maille wore a green gown of black crêpe de Chine, and, over it, one of Chanel's most successful capes, pleated on the shoulders.

114

It hangs from a straight band of grey fur, - her old-blue evening wrap, which expresses with much charm and chic the simplicity that has characterized Chanel creations through all the vagaries of the mode.

115

Her crêpe de Chine frock was surrounded by a mist of black tulle, the mere shadowy wraith of a crinoline hanging bell-shaped from her shoulders. But when she sat down, where was it? Vanished, as one may see in the sketch below, with only a gossamer sweep left at each side of her black-clad slimness.

116

Even if crêpe de Chine were not one of the fabrics of the moment, Chanel would regard with no less favour her typical crêpe de Chine gowns, all line, and no trimming, and marked by their simplicity. This one, in a cool shade of grey, is scant as to its close-fitting bodice and is made with a succession of overtunics for the skirt, which may be belted in or tied about the waist with its own draperies.

117

A black crêpe de Chine frock has a narrow peplum, graceful cascades at the sides, a plain bodice held over the shoulders by folded ribbon-like bands which spell Chanel, and the simplicity achieved only by art.

August 1920

118/119

The costume consisting of a frock and a coat has lost none of the favour accorded to it in recent seasons. In this case, the connecting link is the white brocaded crêpe which forms the top of the frock and the lining of the coat. The loose unbelted coat has a yoke drawn close about the shoulders after a manner acceptable to coats this season, and the silhouette in both is straight and slim, but slightly widened by the cascades at the sides of the frock, for Chanel is not of those who advocate fullness in the new mode. Ermine collar and cuffs finish the coat.

120/121

A back which follows the lines of the figure without the assistance of seams is characteristic of Chanel coats this season, and its effectiveness may be seen in the coat of the three-piece costume in grey crêpe de Chine at the right. The wide bands are of grey fox. The short cape which is a marked feature of both wraps and suits appears on the long black satin coat at the left, a very smart affair of conservative lines, but elaborated with a design in quilting which covers most of its surface. No fur is used, for the quilting is both warm and decorative.

122

An engaging idea of Chanel's is to quilt a black charmeuse coat in a warm and cosy way, wrapping the throat and wrists with the skunk that bands the two-tiered skirt. Out of sight, but not out of mind of the Parisienne, is the charmeuse frock that goes with it and is sketched opposite.

123

It seems a pity that the frock of the two-piece charmeuse suit should wear a coat, for this is how it looks all by itself. On the black chiffon that veils the charmeuse are bands of French blue tissue, and at the back sways a gay little version of the "petit abbe" cape that keeps cropping out unexpectedly this season.

124

Chanel made the sports cape of a maize homespun plaided in light grey and lined with maize homespun.

125

Mademoiselle de Saint-Sauveur wears a distinguished Chanel afternoon costume of wool velours, the skirt of which is chiefly a wide band of nutria which also trims the coat.

126

A quaint Chanel frock in silk figured green, white, and black has a skirt of amusing cut which forms wide pockets. A straight cape, barely wider than the back of the frock, hangs from the puffed Medici collar.

127

An uneven line at the bottom, often formed by long points of over drapery, may be noted on many of the new frocks for afternoon or evening wear. The points are here of plain brown chiffon, the gown of the same chiffon with conventional eyelet embroidery.

128

Sober colours, conservative lines, and distinctly wearable qualities mark the costumes in this collection, which votes for simplicity and slim lines. Monkey fur is the only trimming used on this gown which depends on grace of line and shimmer of black velvet.

129

Chanel frocks the Comtesse de Maigret in a slim gown of black velvet, with an apron front bordered with monkey fur and balanced by a short slim cape, similarly bordered.

130

For the Princesse de la Tour d'Auvergne, Chanel, whose models find high favour with the smart Parisienne, has created this theatre wrap of jet-embroidered black satin with collar and curving band of sable.

131

Following, as a rule, the lines of the normal figure, this designer yet attains always new chic effects. In this case, the substance of the gown is black satin, but its unsubstantial smartness lies in its clever use of a new chenille-dotted black veiling.

132

It isn't the skirt of a fair sea-islander, nor a gift of Harlequin, but just a mass of little panels fluttering Paris-wise below the silver-thread encrusted bodice of a black crêpe de Chine frock, belted with the silk.

133

French looms are busy spinning metallic lace of mingled gold, bronze and silver, like that which makes this frock. Black lace flirts out into a bolero-like effect at the back and floats above the ankles, and draperies almost make trains.

134

For Mlle. Zigers, Chanel has made this frock of black crêpe de Chine, relieved by motifs in gay beads and diamanté.

135

When she came to Versailles to give a recitation in honour of marshal Foch, Mlle. Cécile Sorel was gowned (by Chanel) all in Binche lace, of an écru verging on rose, and superb ropes of pearls ending in long pear-shaped pendants.

136

The influence of the moyen-âge is evident in the lines of a black satin evening gown, but the surface is solidly incrusted with red beads after the newest whim of fashion. Brown tulle puffs out about the skirt.

137

The point of the Chanel gown of black Chantilly which Mlle. Sorel wore at the dance of the Duchesse de Gramont was not only the "manteau d'abbe" which lent a second veil to the back, but the trouser underskirt ending in frills. Marie Louise designed the coiffure.

February 1921

138

One of those delightful and obliging little frocks which may be used for morning wear in town and for afternoon wear in the country is this Chanel model of dove grey jersey and matching crêpe de Chine, attractively combined. The hat is of linen with a latticed brim of dark blue linen picoted bands.

139

Of green and beige tissue chiné, Chanel makes for the Comtesse Rehbinder a sports costume with a blouse finished like a man's shirt.

140

Mme. Jacques Porel wears a Chanel suit of black crêpe tricot and a tricot blouse.

141

An ideal travelling frock is the Comtesse Rehbinder's Chanel costume of black wool éponge, wide on the hip and with buttons of corozo.

142

Pleats and bands accent the lines of the Chanel coat of black wool éponge which the Comtesse François de Castiers wears over the gown beside it. The collar ends in scarfs.

143

A novel girdle with pleated front section is the feature of the Chanel frock of black crêpe de Chine, which goes between the Comtesse François de Castiers and the coat beside it.

144

The new crêpe capes must match something, and this, from Chanel, of Malay brown crêpe, matches the Marguerite and Leonie hat with a wreath of brown horsehair braid petals.

145

After the Parisienne has tried a novelty or two, she is certain to appear in a crêpe frock like this model of tan Canton crêpe with squares of brown organdie.

146

The new foulards are likely to borrow their patterns from any source, not excluding the zebra, as in this white foulard striped in blue and wearing a cape.

147

What might have remained a simple dinner frock of black crêpe de Chine, immediately became a smartly involved affair when Chanel answered the demands of all of Paris and the entire length of the Riviera by adding a shawl folded diagonally and edged with a fringe.

148

Mlle. Sorel se montre en robe de mousseline de soie blanche de Chanel, découpée en petales de marguerites, avec un empiècement nouveau se terminant par deux pans noués très bas derriere.

149

Robe de la Princesse Soutzo, pour le bal "clair de lune". Elle est en grosse guipure noire, sur fond de crêpe noir, avec motifs "jade", les dents "jade". Sur la tête, une tiare en brillants. Éventail "jade" et argent.

August 1921

150

The tailleurs at this house show the long waist, though the waist-line is normal in nearly all other models. Black fox here trims black cloth with white lines, above a short skirt.

151/152/153

These ... mondaines follow winter sports and lead the sports mode. At the left is a Chanel costume of grey wool and fur (**151**); next is a jersey blouse and striped skirt (**153**), again from Chanel, who is also responsible for the fringed plaid costume (**152**).

154

Chanel has no mind to change the silhouette, and who would wish to change it when she embodies it so charmingly in sand crêpe de Chine?

155

A preference for brown is shown in many collections. The golden brown crêpe de Chine of this frock is embroidered in various soft shades.

156

Beads are the chosen means for elaborating the mode, this season, and one reason may be seen in this chic gown of white Georgette crêpe.

157

Mme. Jacques Porel chose a Chanel gown for the Claridge ball - one of those slim models of diamanté and crystal which are the newest version of the all-white costume so much in favour now.

158

For the extravagances of youth, she wisely substitutes gowns of such gracious dignity as this Chanel costume of black lace and paillettes set in Renaissance design, which fittingly adopts the new length.

159

Black lace - for black predominates in the evening gowns - makes this slim gown with a cuirass bodice worked in black and green beads.

160

White China beads are a feature in Paris done in designs similar to the one above, in this instance developed on black voile. the triple shoulder strap is typical of Chanel.

161

On a vu au théâtre la belle marquise de Chabannes avec cette jolie robe du soir de chez Chanel en crêpe de Chine couleur "absinthe" garnie de franges du même ton. Le décolletage carré est très seyant. La taille est basse.

162

Lui plairai-je ainsi? The answer is assuredly an affirmative, for the anxious demoiselle wears the gown which Chanel herself has selected to represent in the pages of Vogue her ideal of the evening gown this season. It is of lemon coloured crêpe de Chine - the favourite material at so many houses - and is frosted with embroideries in diamanté, and a wing-like drapery.

163

De Chanel également cette robe portée par une belle inconnue. Un fourreau de satin noir garni de dentelle noire toute brodée de roses noires avec des feuilles en lamé d'argent. Deux pointes tombent très bas sur les deux côtés.

February 1922

164

La femme élégante qui s'adonne aux sports revêt un costume de cette sorte en tweed bleu horizon où Chanel a réussi à harmoniser les exigences de l'action et celled de l'élégance. Pour ornement unique, une ceinture de cuir brun. Avec cette souveraine indépendance vis-à-vis des lois de la mode que les costumes de sports seuls peuvent afficher, la jupe s'arréte assez loin du sol. Le chapeau est souple, sans garniture, et jamais noir à moins que l'on ne soit en deuil. Chanel a vraiment le secret de ces costumes.

165

La cape, grand favori des "openings" d'automne, a triomphé des vents froids de l'hiver et accompagne sous des formes nouvelles beaucoup des modèles printaniers. Cette cape de Chanel en kasha au ton cuivré, bordée d'une large bande d'écureuil, souligne le charme de la robe dans le même tissu en répétant la simplicité de sa ligne. La ceinture de la robe est en cuir brun, et la cape, qui se boutonne sur les épaules, peut être portée nonchalamment en arrière ou retombante sur les épaules.

166

A brown checked tweed frock has an accompanying cape of plain brown tweed - a fabric repeated in the underskirt of the dress. The collar and cuffs are of deep cream silk.

167

Chanel is making many untrimmed Georgette crêpe dresses with matching short capes. One of pale grey (right) has a band of matching lace around the bottom of the skirt. Its short cape has a collar and band of squirrel and obtains its fullness from inverted box pleats.

168

The short length of this beige crêpe de Chine cape is weighted against the winds with matching embroidery in fine beads and metal thread. A matching frock accompanies it. Talbot hat, black straw and ostrich.

169

Chanel a si bien recouvert d'une fine broderie exécutée au point de chainette, en fil de soie gris clair et biege, tout le haut de ce manteau qu'il est très difficile de reconnaître le crêpe marocain.

170

This tan frock owes its embroidery design in rose, grey and tan, to the Indians. The snug shoulder cape gets its fullness and added individuality from gathers at the elbows. Maria Guy hat, black straw and net.

171

In this daytime costume of black crêpe de Chine, Chanel turns to the Balkans not only for embroideries, but also for the lines of the blouse itself. Blue, yellow and red appear in the embroidery of the blouse, which is worn over a plain, straight skirt.

172

A second Chanel frock reversed the plan of ornamentation, making a plain bodice and embroidered skirt, and looks farther to the East for inspiration in its embroideries, which develop a design in green and red and blue on a heavy black crêpe.

173

This Chanel gown of black crêpe de Chine shows the interesting new feature of the spring evening mode in the wide bands of gold lace on the skirt. The brilliance of the lace is enhanced by red wool embroidery, and the long bodice is cleverly tied with a narrow belt of black crêpe.

174

Gunmetal coloured lace, novel and fascinating and sufficient unto itself, is shown to great advantage in this simple chemise frock from Chanel. Here one sees the new departure of the bateau neck-line, which brings it nearer the steel, metal cloth girdle embroidered in steel beads.

175

Madame Jacques Porel, one of the most beautifully dressed women in Paris, wears a very smart Chanel model of a type which is having an extraordinary vogue among "les femmes élégantes". It is of brilliant rose crêpe de Chine, heavily embroidered with coral beads. The corsage has a slight blouse effect, and the skirt is attached to a closely fitting yoke.

176

Robe de crêpe de Chine noir, dont le corsage ajusté à la taille est terminé par une basque de dentelle noire. La jupe est faite entièrement de dentelle noire. Châle de dentelle sur les épaules.

177

The new crinkled satin material, gaufré, is used in a lovely shade of silver grey to make a long chinchilla-trimmed coat. The top blouses deeply, the skirt line is slender, and there are no sleeves.

178

Mme. Jacques Porel porte le manteau de Chanel, en lamé gaufré argent patiné, avec le haut blousant as-dessus des hanches et maintenu par quelques rangées de fronces. L'empiècement des épaules est plat, le col, la bordure et les bas sont ornés de bandes de chinchilla.

August 1922

179

Although the back is quite flat, after the prevailing mode, the extremely wide skirt of this Chanel frock in heavy black satin has a full apron effect and a yoke in front.

180

Caracal, one of the smart furs of the season, leads a double life, as in this charming Chanel costume, where it not only trims a gown of black gaufré crêpe, but also makes the short sleeveless jacket accompanying the dress.

February 1923

181

The kasha suit has a paletot of wool tricot.

182

I have chose for you - an for myself - one of Chanel's indispensable tailleurs in printed foulard.

183

A very youthful model of navy blue serge lined with vividly coloured foulard and worn with a frock of foulard to match.

184

A "succès fou" - Chanel's foulard-lined coat.

185

A coat of black crêpe roma with the new tiered skirt, the cape back - a great favourite with Chanel - and a collar of pale grey silver fox.

186

The costume of black georgette (right) a tiered skirt and cape-backed jacket.

187

Chanel designs a coat to match the spring sunlight beneath which it will be worn; it is of yellow crêpe embroidered with white wool, and has a crêpe sash and a white caracal collar.

188

Bows are the belles of fashion, and here we see a charming case in point. On the material of the frock itself (beige crêpe de Chine), it fastens the drapery at the left side. Embroidery in white, green and gold covers the Chanel coat.

189

The favourite wrap for daytime is seen in beige, putty, or brown shades of a soft woollen material, lavishly trimmed with badger or fox. The orange straw cloche is the only colour note here.

190

La Comtesse Elie de Gaigernon est charmante dans son costume de Chanel: jupe et veston en tricot chiné.

191

A Chanel jacket trimmed with chenille embroidery in brown and yellow, is lined with beige crêpe.

192

A Chanel frock in box-pleated flat crêpe.

193

For day and night - straight and short - so says Chanel.

194

Chanel uses many underskirts - scalloped, pointed, and plain - to redouble the chic of this white crêpe de Chine gown embroidered with jet and brilliants.

195

Skirts hold the attention of the evening mode... Chanel by black Chantilly lace flounces (right) over a finely pleated net underskirt.

196

"Short and straight" is the unvarying motto of Chanel; therefore the mannequin (left) wears a youthful pink lamé wrap trimmed with chinchilla.

August 1923

197

This Chanel model (1) at the upper left on page 40 is a straight sac-coat of black wool velours worn with a black and white striped skirt. This combination is Chanel's way of replacing the strictly tailored mode.

198

No commentary

199

No commentary

200

That Chanel still favours beading is evident in a biscuit-coloured georgette frock trimmed with gold bead embroidery. At the back of the bodice points afford glimpses of the sash.

201

Modèle de Chanel tout à fait typique, en velours noir, complété d'une cape attachée à l'épaule.

202

A charming short cape edged with grey fur hangs from the shoulders of this slender theatre frock made of crêpe romain in pale straw colour.

203

Straw colour again appears in a crêpe jersey frock with gauged side flounces and streamers wound divertingly about the wearer's wrists. The frock is worn with gilt kid evening slippers.

204

A gown of cobalt-blue fulgrante has a skirt with fullness at the sides falling in uneven panels longer at the sides than at back and front. The bodice is in two pieces - the front wrapped closely and the back in panel effect, its sides prolonged, brought towards the front, and loosely tied in a small bow at the left side. The décolletage, which is square in front and deeply oval at the back, is a favourite of Chanel's.

205

Chanel is making many perfectly simple chiffon evening gowns without bright embroidery or contrasting colour of any kind, trimming them sometimes with a bouquet of flowers or with bands of ostrich feathers, as in the case of this black chiffon frock, which has much concealed fullness in its skirt composed of three layers of different lengths. The back of the gown has an ostrich-bordered cape.

206

No commentary

207

This Chanel model, first shown by *Vogue* in the Late October issue, page 33, is repeated because it is one of the most frequently seen in smart dancing places in Paris.

208

A faint tracery of diamond grapes with their tendrils glistens on a green crêpe de Chine frock which is worn with an embroidered coat lined with crêpe to match and ornamented with lavish brown fur trimmings.

209

Though Chanel is deserting somewhat her beloved embroideries, she offers many handsome embroidered coats like this of green crêpe de Chine entirely covered with tarnished gold designs and edged with brown fur.

February 1924

210

Two black and white costumes that have captured smart favour are (left) a black crêpe marocain coat with a black-and-white plaided vest and (right - by Vionnet) a black alpaca dress with one scarf in front and one at the back.

211

Oxford cloth in green-grey and beige is a popular spring fabric. Chanel makes a suit-dress of light grey Oxford cloth with a slightly fitting coat, a grey crêpe bodice, and a skirt that may be buttoned or unbuttoned, over the grey crêpe pantalettes.

212

Chanel has produced a beige kasha frock with a wrap-around skirt, pockets and long, tight sleeves. The overblouse, cut in a V, has a vest of the same material fastening up to the throat.

213

Sur la blouse en batiste blanche de Chanel, des rayures ajourées en cordonnet noir sont disposées en travers.

214

This model of white crêpe marocain with a double blouse and skirt wrapped well over might be made of several different materials in accordance with the present fad.

215

This white kasha frock from Chanel is quite devoid of trimming save for the geraniums placed on the right shoulder and the bow of the material itself on the left side.

216

Two finely pleated tiers make the skirt of a black crêpe frock with a loose blouse finished with a band drawn tightly about the hips. The pleated cape is detachable.

217

This model is typical of the new Chanel evening gowns. Here, a rose coloured chiffon gown with three tunics to the skirt has wing panels on bodice and skirt, longer on the left side.

218

Une robe en mousseline noire pour le soir est aussi necessaire en voyage qu'à la ville. Ce joli modèle se porte avec écharpe assortie.

219

A black lace Chanel evening gown has a short, black lace-edged crêpe slip. A lace bracelet holds the cape-like drapery to the left wrist. A large white flower gives the smart black and white note.

220

The newest thing in the Chanel collection is the incrustation of chiffon in contrasting colours - in this case, bright green on black. Chanel's evening skirts are the shortest in Paris.

221

Chanel's butterfly wings of encrusted chiffon.

222

Robe Chanel. Mousseline de soie noire.

August 1924

223

No commentary

224

No commentary

225

A recent charming photograph of Miss Ina Claire, wearing a typical Chanel sports suit. All the well-dressed world looks to Chanel for the epitome of smart simplicity, as exemplified in the skirt and jumper, or vareuse type of frock. This model is in West of England herring-bone tweed in tan and white. The tailored revers, flap pockets, inverted box pleat and mannish buttonhole all typify the boyish mode which has come to be the hall-mark of the chic woman of to-day. With this sports suit is worn a heavy brown belt, a beige felt hat, and beige gauntlet gloves, slightly large.

226

Chanel's youthful sports costumes are the perfect expression of the Parisienne's preference for the simple line that carries elegance in its wake. Here, as always, the details are most important.

227

This is the newest Chanel sports costume - a pleated crêpe de Chine skirt with a jersey blouse trimmed with bands and buttons of the crêpe de Chine. This costume is in chair (flesh) colour with a felt hat to match. The matching of frock and hat is most important this season.

228

Chanel has designed a sports outfit (number 4) with an eye to the practical, for the little frock of beige crêpe conceals knickers beneath its wrap-over skirt. Buttons trim the skirt, bodice and sleeves.

229

In this attractive green crêpe de Chine blouse from Chanel, one sees a skilful use of narrow tucking, which trims the sides of the blouse and the long sleeves. The blouse fastens with buttons covered with the material.

230

One of the innovations of Chanel's collection is the ensemble with a frock made of rounded sections sewn together and with an unusual, vague collar. Here, the frock and coat lining are of green crêpella and the collar is trimmed with mole to match the coat.

231

Chanel, with her marvellous flair for the youthful, has created an ingenious frock of pink chiffon (number 12) with rows of lace on the blouse, skirt and long sleeves. Gathers appear at the front waistline and small wheels of lace decorate the skirt.

232

A Chanel frock (number 14) uses black and pink chiffon is effective combination - a very new note; with the flounced skirt keeping all the fullness at the sides. The scarf may be thrown about the shoulders.

233

This evening gown of black chiffon and flesh-pink chiffon is designed for Riviera wear and shows the present tendency towards a more feminine elegance. The flounces are arranged so that the fullness comes to the sides, leaving the back and front quite flat. Another sketch on page 45 shows the back of the frock.

234

No commentary

235

No commentary

236

Chanel still clings to the simple, youthful chiffon frock.

237

This gown of wine-red lace started out to be a sheath-like affair, but a double-pointed apron in front and a double wing-like panel at the back - a type frequently used by Chanel this season - changed its intentions. A narrow ribbon ties at the waist.

238

The evening frocks of this house have not changed their slender, long-waisted lines, but their details bring novelty. The corsage remains plain - as shown in this white georgette crêpe frock; the narrow belt is still favoured. And the deep bias flounce that ripples down in a long point at the left side is extremely chic.

239

This rose georgette crêpe evening gown is especially graceful for dancing, as it has wing-like panels in the back and the circular movement that is so smart in its double skirt. The bodice has a slight fullness caught in front by vertical shirring.

The back view of the rose georgette crêpe evening gown shows how the favoured cape idea is adapted to suit the needs of a filmy dancing frock. Here, two floating panels drop in soft folds from the shoulders and swing free as the wearer moves.

240

A Chanel gown with the smartest evening neckline for spring and summer is of heavy gold cloth combined with a wide flounce of heavy gold lace embroidered in huge gold cabochon beads. A narrow piece of the material combined with lace forms a loose circular drapery at the back, and a long end of the lace and gold cloth falls to the floor.

241

Narrow strips of material covered with black beads on this black georgette crêpe frock go disguised as graceful, swaying fringe. The décolletage is low at the back, and the flower changes its conventional shoulder position to the back strap.

242

Jet and crystal trim a lovely Chanel gown.

243

Above the waist, the fur is attached like a boa.

244

A costume that meets the energetic requirements of the modern woman, but satisfies her age-old love of luxurious comfort in her boudoir, is this of green-and-gold lamé bordered with kolinsky on the short, full culottes and at the back of the short sleeveless blouse that buttons on each hip.

245

Fur trimming - especially in bands about the bottom of capes or coats - is a great fashion point. In the case of this evening wrap, silver fox is the fur used, and the cape is a lovely shade of rose velvet to harmonize with the evening gown worn underneath it.

246

Quilted, separate fronts are a feature of the collection at this house and are shown on both coats and capes. In this chic Hudson seal cape, smartly abbreviated in length, the collar is quilted, too, and, like the fronts, is made of bright, but dark, blue taffeta.

247

Quilted fronts add warmth to many coats at Chanel's.

248

Fashion, not satisfied with one beautiful coat at a time, now demands two as the latest novelty. The double coat, sponsored by Chanel, is adapted here as an evening wrap. A brown velvet coat trimmed with shirred panels and marten collar and cuffs has a separate, fur-lined, inner coat made of peach-coloured fulgurante.

February 1925

249

Chanel, the exponent of simplicity, fashions a straight one-piece frock of brown-and-white checked silk surah, over which is worn a plain brown jersey coat that fastens with self-covered buttons.

250

L'idée est amusante de cette adaptation de bonnet d'aviateur exécuté en crêpe mastic et brun. Lady Abdy recouvre sa robe mastic d'un manteau de Chanel de même ton. Son sac dernier cri, très grand, est en peau de porc naturelle.

251

Among the new modes emphasised by Chanel are the use of wool crepella for daytime, the turn-over collar and cuffs, and the buttoning near the collar. This coat is of beige crepella, the lining and frock of printed crêpe de Chine.

252

The collection offered by this designer shows charming, wearable frocks with a perfection of detail rather than any great change in silhouette. Crepella is a favourite material for Chanel's "petites robes simples" - frocks like this button-trimmed model of grey crepella with pleated panels falling from under two pockets.

253

Chanel's new collection is expressive of her very personal chic. A two-piece frock, called "613", is of royal blue crêpe de Chine bordered with bias bands and trimmed with corrugated pleating forming a yoke on the bodice and the top of the skirt and tightening the wrists. the ends of the long scarf collar fall at the back.

254

The skirt of this two-piece frock of nay-blue tricot is horizontally striped in light blue, dark blue, black and white.

255 (right)/256 (left)

These two new versions of the favourite two-piece Chanel sports frock are both of stockinette trimmed with crêpe de Chine. the one at the left is in two shades of green. the other, with a stockinette jumper and skirt in natural colour, has brown crêpe de Chine trimming.

257

A sports frock from Chanel, number 28, follows the line of a Norfolk jacket and is of red stockinette, using inverted pleats.

258

La veste de sport colle aux hanches et l'ampleur de la jupe est donée très bas par des godets groupés à l'endroit où se ferme la jupe enroulée.

259

An afternoon frock of black georgette crêpe is trimmed with bands of appliqué flowers cut from printed crêpe de Chine. The short sleeves continue in a small cape collar at the back, and there is a tunic effect over a pleated skirt.

260

A Chanel day dress of faultless and exquisite taste is of midnight blue georgette crêpe, with embroidery in gold, seed-pearls, and coloured jewelled stones in a motif designed for Chanel by the Grand Duchesse Marie of Russia, from a beautiful necklace belonging to the Romanoff family. Such a dress combines perfectly as an ensemble with the Paquin coat in the sketch above.

261

Still another instance of the very lovely fluttering silhouette is this white georgette crêpe frock richly embroidered in crystal, pearls, and diamanté, with flying wings, front panels, and pointed sections on the skirt. The new feeling for trimmed bodices is accented by a pointed necklace made of beaded material.

262

A Chanel chiffon evening dress has leaf-like pointed frills in three tiers, and bows with long ends at the right front and left back of the bodice; it is carried out in apple-green.

263

Cette robe de Chanel en crêpe romain vert découpé en pétales, était portée au Casino par une charmante jeune femme venue au Touquet pour passer les courtes vacances de Pâques.

264

Red is a favourite Chanel colour, and cherry-red is chosen for this frock of "picador", a new supple silk. The skirt is tiered, and a bow of material trims one side, while a smaller bow is placed on the bodice.

265

En dentelle crême, cette robe de Chanel que porte Lady Davies est formée de quatre volants s'entrecroisant, fleur rouge sur la hanche.

266

A charming summer wrap that will accompany any type of evening frock is a crêpe roma scarf with long silk fringe. It is a Vionnet model in light gold, black, or white. The Chanel black lace frock beneath the scarf, which has a plain bodice and ruffled skirt, is typical of the lace frock that occupies so important a place in summer wardrobes for town or country.

267

La modé qui demande amjpleur et mouvement et la nécessité de ne pas épaissir les hanches sont conciliées en cette robe de dentelle d'argent, dont les volants en forme sont placés bien au-dessous de las taille.

268

A dinner-dress that has just the right degree of informality for restaurant wear is of blue chiffon, with a scarf giving graceful fluttering motion. This model is from Chanel.

269

A low décolletage characterises Chanel's lace frocks of the season. In number 14, in black or beige lace, Chanel employs graceful cascade.

270

Chanel has used an entrancing shade of rose-red for the crêpe de Chine of the graceful evening coat, which depends upon the border of feathers in the same rose-red for its sole and lovely trimming.

271

This simple, delightful Chanel evening wrap, worn as an ensemble with the Chanel chiffon frock on the opposite page, and equally charming with other frocks, is of pleated georgette crêpe trimmed with bands of gold and beige pointed hare.

272

An unusual scarf collar and border of tan hare have given an air of restrained richness to an exquisite Chanel summer wrap (number 12) of pleated beige georgette crêpe.

August 1925

273

Many new French tailored costumes make use of mannish materials with small all over patterns, giving the effect of a plain fabric. Such a fabric, with a diamond design, is used for the coat at the left of the sketch, a model with a low belt and four pockets.

274

A bolder pattern in brown-and-white makes the coat-dress in the middle, with an underblouse of white piqué.

275

The coat at the right is of dark red tweed with a little brown bolero hanging from the shoulder yoke at the front.

276

From Chanel is a three-quarter-length coat suit of green crepella trimmed with green braid.

277

Chanel was the original designer who started the two-piece jumper frock upon its way to fame. The two-piece model for day wear was originally the only type; this new version is the most recent Chanel inspiration and is in wine-red wool crêpe.

278

The balance of the beige jersey and the checked wool in beige and brown, the well-placed pleats, and silver buttons all combine to make a dress for sports and travel that epitomises the mode, yet is distinctly individual to the wearer.

279

Three ship sweaters with pleated skirts - one (by Chanel) with a black and white sweater and black jersey coat.

280

This black taffeta model is an interesting example of skilful cut and of the bell-like silhouette with a line from the underarm to the hip that slightly defines the figure. Rows of small tucks appear at the bottom and edge the circular insets.

281

The gathering and puffing of fur promise to be very good for winter. Successful examples of each of these interesting ways of handling fur appear on this velvet coat, seen at Vichy. The low back fullness is also an important fashion feature.

282

A fur-trimmed coat of mehari (one of the new woollens with a small all-over pattern that gives the effect of a plain fabric when seen from a distance) was see at Aix-les-bains. The low, curved bodice is very smart above the skirt fullness.

283

Mme. May dans une robe de Chanel en crêpe vert absinthe et dentelle de soie verte et or formant des bandes sue lesquelles retombent des panneaux de crêpe froncés. Sur l'epaulette gauche une grande aile faite de crêpe et de dentelle descend jusqu'au bas de la robe, fixée, semble-t-il, par une fleur de cristal. Mme. May porte un ravissant collier et des bracelets de cristal de Bohême taillé, vert et blanc, complétans sa toilette.

284

A Chanel evening dress is of pale green chiffon.

285

Chanel uses flesh coloured georgette crêpe for an evening frock.

286

An excellent example of Chanel's famous black chiffon frocks is this with a bodice made of chiffon strips that tie at the right side, with floating ends. The bracelets and the new Antoine coiffure, swirled off one ear, are chic notes.

287

Chanel's perfect use of draperies is illustrated by this graceful frock of black mousseline de soie, which has the flowing motion of the mode on a foundation as slim as youth itself. Four circular sections float from hip to hem, and four more are attached to the little bolero. Boleros, placed at the back, are another feature to which Chanel is partial this season.

288

Chanel a rajeuni avec une étonnante maitrise le principe de la robe pailetée. La jupe de ce modèle rouge brillant est faite de volants superposés, légèrement froncés de chaque côté. Des fleurs en paillettes ornent le décolleté rectangulaire, largement échaneré. Soulier en satin du ton de la robe lamé.

289

Cette exquise robe de Chanel donnant une allure extrêmement jeune est en crêpe Georgette rose très pâle, le corsage dessinant comme une boléro noué devant par un galon prelé qui part des épaules pour retomber jusqu'au bsa de la robe. La jupe est faite de petits volants superposés et légèrement froncés, et la robe entière est brodée de perles argent de differentes grosseurs.

290

Le décolleté largemenet ouvert en ovale dans le dos est préconisé par Chanel. La robe est en lamé or avec tunique un peu évasée en dentelle d'or rebrodée de gros cabachons.

February 1926

291

Mrs. Arbuthnot Leslie's smart Chanel suit is of navy-blue wool velours with an interesting detail at the left side where a pleat seems to continue from the skirt up to coat, making its appearance through the pocket. The wearer's shoes, bag, and hat are all of brown suede, in chic contrast to her costume.

292

Une inconnue porte une manteau de Chanel, en quadrillé bleu at crème sur un costume à veste croisée en kashatoil bleu. La blouse que l'on aperçoit dans l'ouverture de la veste est crème comme le fond de manteau.

293

No commentary

294

The use of crepella and the Chanel sweater-coatare new notes in this ensemble. Silk to match finishes the neck-line, and the same colour appears on the hat.

295

Sur une robe en foulard imprimé, Mme. W. K. Wanderbilt porte un manteau en kasha beige dont la doublure, en même foulard que la robe, forme revers s'élargis santen écharpe de Chanel.

296

This very new coat of beige crêpe is shirred all over, with shirring in two widths. its neck-line and its bell-shaped sleeves are very smart.

297

A Chanel jumper frock in canary-yellow crêpe has a scarf that ties in a knot behind and colourful field flowers on the shoulder.

298

A day costume consists of a white Chanel frock, one of the two-piece crêpe de Chine models that are a criterion of Riviera chic, with a Reboux white felt hat with two huge diamond and pearl pins.

299

The Comtesse Elie de Gaigernon in a charming pink Chanel jumper suit, the jumper adorned with pockets and a big shaded rose worn near the left shoulder.

300

Colour contrasts in sports clothes is a new note that appears in this Chanel costume with a purple jersey sweater and a finely pleated skirt made of light mauve jersey.

301

A un goûter au Château de Madrid, Mrs. Arbuthnot Leslie portait une robe de Chanel en crêpe de Chine imprimé.

302

Ancient and modern confront each other in this delightful photograph which shows the Lady Diana of real life, clad in the smartes of Chanel suits, studying a portrait of the Lady Diana of "The Miracle", wearing the Madonna robes in which she has appeared so often and with such success. Photograph by Curtis Moffat and Olivia Wyndham, whose exhibition at the Brook Street Gallery opens July 7th.

303

Lady Henriette Davis en costume de peau rouge sombre, de Chanel, la veste s'ouvrant sur une blouse rayée gris, bleu et noir.

304

Chanel sports dress of natural coloured wool jersey with a pleated skirt and kid belt. Beige felt hat, brown and tan bands and a narrow brim. Alligator Oxfords complete this chic costume.

305

La Comtesse de la Mejorada partant pour le golf porte, avec la robe de Chanel en lainage chiné beige, un chapeau de Reboux en feutre du même tonque la robe. Le bord, court derrière mais assez grand devant, est relevé au-dessus des yeux et une amusante garniture de gros-grain est disposée à droite. Long manteau droit en gazelle.

306

Lady Davis takes the air in a smart Chanel jersey costume in grey. Her grey kasha coat from Vionnet is lined with a new fur.

307

For the country, the clever wearer has her straight, scarf-collared coat (in the middle, above) in shaded wool - orange and beige and brown - under which she may wear her natural kasha two-piece dress, with the little orange and brown and beige knotted scarf giving a flash of colour.

308

A beige kasha dress, from Vionnet, and a coat of giraffe lined with taffeta, from Chanel, combine in this extremely chic sports costume. Nothing could be smarter, this season, for resort wear on a cool day or for wear when motoring in the country.

309

This golfing costume from Chanel is made in two tones of kasha-beige and brown, and has an inserted gilet and a suede belt. With it is worn a cream-beige sweater of thin knitted wool and a grey-beige hat of the new flecked felt, with a soft rippling brim. The silk handkerchief is in navy blue figured with white.

310

Very striking is the Duchesse de Gramont's Chanel bathing costume for Palm Beach. It is of black jersey with a cape that is simplicity itself, but very unusual because of the ingenuity of its cut. the helmet shaped cap is interesting and becoming.

311

The frocks of many new Chanel ensembles have trimming in points and bands made of the coat material. here, a frock of black and white spotted crêpe combines with a coat of black crepella.

312

An excellent example of the three-tiered silhouette is this very popular dress and bolero coat of crepella in dark red - one of Chanel's favourite colours. A red carnation trims the left shoulder.

313

A Chanel-red velveteen dress with a beige crêpe blouse beneath the bolero is an appropriate and a becoming model for a young girl to wear to a matinée.

314

Mrs. W.K. Vanderbilt's gown of printed crêpe de Chine has a finely pleated skirt and a bolero that hangs free in the back. The Reboux toque of brown straw is draped at one side.

315

Très caractéristique de la manière à la fois simple et complexe de Chanel, cette robe de mousseline cerise esquisse un mouvement drapé devant.

316

This Chanel frock of deep red lace over red crêpe, with its graceful scarf, scalloped skirt, and flower at the shoulder, is the type of frock that is not only very practical, but also extremely chic for wear on summer evenings when rich colour is pleasing.

317

At the extreme right is a Chanel model of "sable" chiffon.

318

Chanel fashions a dancing dress (next to right) of sea-green chiffon with a scarf at the shoulder and large chiffon roses at shoulder and hip.

319

A lovely summery evening frock of white chiffon, by Chanel, has a pointed skirt and a wide girdle with an end falling at the left side. there is a white chiffon flower at the shoulder and another at the low waistline. The bodice is slightly bloused.

320

Chanel makes small bias scarfs of chiffon in a colour to contrast the accompanying frock and to match the huge chiffon rose.

321

This very effective frock from Chanel is of soft black chiffon, against which embroidered silver flowers stand out in striking relief. A long circular panel floats at the left side, and a huge silver flower trims the right shoulder strap at the front.

322

An extremely interesting development in the cut of chiffon draperies is a noticeable feature of the new Chanel evening gowns: this is the addition of shaped panels of varying length which give great fluidity and grace of movement, as the gown shown above goes far to prove. it is made in currant pink chiffon, but can be copied in any colour.

323

One of the best of Chanel's famous black chiffon frocks has the characteristic circular coat, the flared hem-line, and huge transparent draperies. the back drapery begins just above the hips and falls to the heels.

324

Black chiffon frock from Chanel trimmed with jet.

325

A familiar Chanel treatment appears in this black crêpe romain frock in the bolero bodice and the long underarm drapery. Four narrow and one wide rows of fringe are covered with sequins.

326

Mrs. O'Brien était d'une élégance impeccable au Gala au Palais, dans sa robe de Chanel en crêpe blanc frangée de soie.

327

Black is smartest among colours for evening, fringe is one of the most important themes, and their combination in this frock is a triumph of chic. The foundation is of georgette crêpe, and a swaying flounce of long black silk fringe trims the skirt and the bodice. The deep U shape in the back is the newest version of the décolletage.

328

Chanel is sponsoring such filmy, transparent evening wraps as this made of café au lait chiffon trimmed with mink tails. It is equally harmonious with either of the evening gowns sketched on this page and makes an ideal wrap for hot summer evenings.

329

The Chanel beige velvet cape is lined with rose chiffon.

August 1926

330

Baby calf trims the coat of this grey tweed suit, which is worn with a grey felt hat and a jumper of plain grey jersey.

331

The white ermine front is the radically new note of this tweed suit for town; ermine is also used to make the cuffs.

332

The ruby buckle on this beige tweed coat is an innovation that appears in the tweed made very often this season.

333

A beige tweed dress with an intricate white girdle and white piqué collar is perfect for town wear and for winter travel.

334

Black crêpe de Chine is a classic for the business woman. This very smart Chanel model is widely tucked and pleated, yet does not spoil easily with hard wear.

335

An excellent example of the straight silhouette - done so well by Chanel - is this daytime frock made of grey-blue crepella with a collar and cuffs of white starched linen. The moire belt is smart and typical of Chanel.

336

Few frocks achieve such sudden and great popularity as this one of crepella, made in black, or, more frequently, in purple. It is straight as to silhouette, with smart details in its bolero, pleats, and shoulder flowers.

337

Cette robe en crêpe de Chine noir est le modèle type de Chanel: sober s'adaptant aisément aux circonstances, et d'une élégance impeccable dans sa simplicité. Pour tout ornamentation, de fins plis lingée groupés de manière à former une quadruple pointe dans les angles se rejoignent. La ligne n'offre complication.

338

No commentary.

339

No commentary.

340

This Chanel dress of purple crepella has a bloused top with a bolero effect at the sides, and a pleated skirt. The Reboux hat worn with it is of deep purple felt.

341

Ensemble composé du sweater en marocain rayé transversalement de vert et noir, d'une jupe de jersey noir à larges plis creux, bordée d'un ruban de satin, d'une veste en laine tricotée noire doublée de marocain rayé. Une fleur répétant les deux tons du costume est fixée à l'épanie.

342

Chanel introduces a novel use of satin for sports wear in this black jersey cardigan costume. The green crêpe marocain blouse and facings on the jacket are striped with black satin.

343

This interesting three-piece costume by Chanel has a pleated skirt and jacket of navy-blue wool jersey and a blouse of rough, red silk and wool crêpe striped with blue satin, which material is also used to line the coat half-way.

344

The use of two fabrics - jersey in the jacket and wool crêpe in the frock. The chic of beige and royal-blue in combination. The separate belt. The shorter cut of the cardigan.

345

A blouse of beige jersey with tweed cuffs and band accompanies the country outfit at the right and matches the hat.

346

This coat and skirt in green-and-beige checks is typical of the winter tweed outfit for the country as shown by Chanel.

347

A very chic Chanel day frock that might also be used for informal dinner is of black, grenadine-red, or sapphire silk velvet with tuck seaming to the left hip.

348

This dinner-dress of beige crêpe de Chine has a sports feeling in its jumper, its belt and even in its fringe skirt.

349

Black lace (an extremely chic fabric) makes an evening gown with a bolero bodice, side drapery, and an uneven hemline.

350

For a very successful evening gown with flattering draperies and bolero effect, Chanel chose a small-patterned lace in purplish-blue. The scarf is separate.

351

The importance of lace. The separate moire belt with a jewelled buckle for evening. The off-one-shoulder line. The very deep décolletage.

352

A black chiffon frock has an uneven hem-line formed by godets let into the skirt, with huge flowers on the right shoulder at the back, at the left in front, and at the waist-line.

353

A new version of Chanel's simple chiffon dance frock - a favourite with well-dressed women - is in red with a bodice made of diagonal bands, a skirt of two overlapping flounces, and bows as the smart trimming.

354

Comtesse de St. Quentin in a soft rose mousseline gown from Chanel flounced from the hips.

355

Le corsage partiellement decoupée est un détail fréquement répété par Chanel. L'ampleur est donée à cette robe de satin noir par deux sections en forme incrustées dans le dos. Ceinture drapée et nouée.

356

In the centre is shown a Chanel dress of white satin crêpe, a fabric Chanel is now sponsoring for evening.

357

Chanel has made this smart raincoat of black ciré corded in diagonal lines, and lined it with crêpe de Chine in her favourite green. The hat is of quilted glacé kid that rain cannot spoil, in green to match the lining of the coat. Costume from Peggy Ross.

358

A côté ce manteau de cuir noir garni de piqûres dans le dos et au bas de la taille; boutons assortis et doublure de velours rouge. Modèle de Chanel. Feutre rouge avec gros-grain.

359

Chanel designed this suit of soft tan-woollen with a coat lining, collar, cuffs, and a blouse of rose jersey. The coat buttons diagonally; the skirt is box pleated in front only.

360

Lady Davis en tailleur bleu marine, de Chanel, avec blouse en piqué.

361

La Comtesse de Breteuil est en tweed vert avec blouse en toile de soie rayée vert et brun. Chanel.

362

Autour de la source, à Aix-les-Bains: charmant costume de sport, de Chanel, en jersey beige et tricot beige et blanc, accompagné d'un petit feutre beige.

363

Beige jersey and navy-blue cheviot combine in a youthful costume that may go travelling or serve for daytime wear in town or in the country with equal success.

364

This beige, brown and white three-piece jumper suit of homespun material designed by Chanel is suitable for warm days upon the moors, for colder weather when worn with a top coat, or for indoor wear in cold houses.

365

Chanel présente cet autre manteau en tweed brun orné de fines nervures en lignes parallèles.

366

Vestes et manteaux sans col pour le sport sont préconises par pleurieurs maisons, dont Chanel et Louiseboulanger. Cet ensemble de sport en tweed blanc et brun comporte une veste courte à laquelle est fixée une cape emboitant les épaules. Trois étroites bandes appliquées borden le décolleté de la veste. La cape est taillée de sorte que le tissu forme dans le dos des bandes horizontales.

367

Cet ensemble d'une élégance impeccable se compose du manteau en tweed beige, ouvert sur une blouse de crêpe blanc, et d'un tricorne en feutre beige de Reboux. Les gants d'antilope, les Richelieu en chevreau, le camélia complètent la toilette.

368

Miss Fellowes Gordon, who has also been training for Opera, in Milan, is photographed here wearing a very simple but smart Chanel sports suit in tweed, with a high-necked woollen jumper. Her felt hat is from Rose Descat.

369/370

Leaving the links: the Comte de Gouy d'Arcy with Mme. de Candamo and Mrs. Marshall, both in the same Chanel model of natural Scotch wool with a white piqué blouse, over which Mrs. Marshall has thrown a grey tweed coat in grey and beige.

371

The Marquise de jaucourt, whose husband is President of the Biarritz Polo Club, is here seen in a charming new Chanel costume in brown wool, which she wears with a square of printed silk in blue, yellow and mauve, knotted on the shoulder.

372

Mrs. Satterthwaite keeps to the traditional all-white for tennis. Chanel has made this sleeveless dress of washing silk in two pieces, with a skirt that wraps around with three pleats at the left. A silk cardigan of the same material, and culottes, complete the costume.

373

The beach pyjamas at the extreme left are of delaine in Chanel red, black, and beige, and the long coat is lined in red China silk.

374

Pour recevoir à déjeuner, Madame J.-M. Sert, dans un costume de Georgette noir, de Chanel, porte sa magnifique chaîne de diamants à triple rangs. Un simple tricot de laine rouge, de Chanel également, accompagne cet ensemble.

375

This "little" frock of medium blue silk with white spots, with its loose vagabond tie, its bolero, its jewelled belt, its snug hipline above a skirt that frills with fullness, is the height of sophisticated simplicity; the Reboux hat worn with it is of black straw faced with satin, the small brim cut away in a peak at the left side.

376

Even Chanel thinks in terms of lace for Ascot! Her favourite black lace has now been moulded into the afternoon mode; a square neck, a floating scarf, a bolero, and long loose sleeves are the features of this simple dress that has such great distinction; Reboux picture hat of straw faced with satin.

377

Mme. Van Heukelom, habillée par Chanel, porte aux courses une robe de crêpe imprimé de fleurs grèges sur fond noir.

378

Au même bal, la Marquise de Laborde, habillée de crêpe grège à fleurs vertes, portait le collier à la mode, en strass, de Chanel.

379

Chanel uses heavy lustrous satin - a fabric that is important in creating many of the newest evening frocks - in Nile green for this distinguished gown. The skirt has a slight circular flare in front, and a long side drapery achieves the uneven hemline. A belt of satin with a pearl buckle goes around the hips. Posed by Ilka Chase.

380

La seconde robe, en mousseline bleu "bleuet" est de Chanel.

381

Les mousselines à fleurs à fonds teinté les plus en vogue. Chanel a choisi pour cette robe un dessin multicolore sur fond crème. Deux panneaux superposés descendant sur l'un des côtés au-dessous du bas de jupe, dans le prolongement de l'écharpe.

382

This Chanel model of beige French lace has straight lines and a tiered skirt, giving a silhouette unusual in lace frock. The moire belt has a diamond buckle.

383

The Marquise de Jaucourt looked very chic in a Chanel frock of black lace, cut in a bolero at the back, with a long panel falling from the shoulder.

384

Chanel stands sponsor for this black chiffon frock that hangs in straight classic lines, but has a graceful motion; the circular skirt is stitched tightly in a triangular pattern below the hip-line, the bolero at the back becomes a blouse in front.

385

Chanel combines modernism with tradition in this daring version of the court dress; daring because of its entire simplicity and severity, because of the white taffeta of which it is made, and because of the manner in which the train is cut in one with the skirt - a way that is reminiscent (but with what a difference!) of the demure eighties.

386

Bouffant white taffeta, simple and unadorned, makes this picturesque Chanel court dress; a 'picture frock' at once mondaine and chic. The head-dress has been designed to complete the costume - as modern jewellery is designed to complement a simple evening dress - and harmonise by the complete simplicity with which it has been treated.

August 1927

387

Again a flat curly fur - grey krimmer, in this instance - again a long shawl collar, and again interesting cuffs, for these are the three most important new features of tweed coats for the new season. This one is in a blue-purple shade, making an attractive contrast with the grey of the krimmer.

388

Two of Chanel's favourite sports fabrics - tweed and jersey, are combined in this informal ensemble. The coat and skirt are of the tweed, in beige and brown with a very softly defined check, and the blouse of natural coloured jersey is trimmed with bands of the tweed.

389

This Chanel model is one of the smartest town-and-country ensemble costumes of the season. The coat is of tweed in shades of green and grège and has the new scarf collar; the one-piece dress is of green kasha.

390

Since tweed has come to be an integral part of the mode for town, it is one of the most satisfactory mediums for the town and country coat. A soft, loosely woven beige tweed is used for the enveloping Chanel coat, which buttons all the way down the front and has a slightly bell-shaped skirt.

391

Chanel has given a new look to crepella by the skilful use of short wool fringe that matches the fabric. This new version of one of her most successful models is in reseda-green with an interesting treatment of hip yoke and front pleats. It is the type of frock that may appear either in town or in the country.

392

This grey dull crêpe blouse was designed by Chanel and is especially suitable for wear with tweeds. It has an unusual collar that ends in a bow, and a belt of small silver discs, while a tiny fringe of the tweed of the suit at the hips and cuffs adds a smart finish.

393

The very important fashion points illustrated by this Chanel ensemble are - first, the furless coat for the country; second, the vogue of woollen linings; and third, the mode of ensembles with long coats for semisports wear. The coat is of heavy Scotch tweed in green, lined with a soft homespun in lighter green, which is also used for the dress.

394

This Chanel suit, also, illustrates the importance of woollen linings, ensembles, and furless coats in the country. The coat and skirt are of tweed in yellow-beige, and the sweater and coat lining are of striped jersey in yellow, black, and white. The bow at the neck and the buckled belt are smart details, and the costume is one of great distinction.

395

Another variation of the sweater costume is this of white silk shirting. The one-piece dress of simple sports lines is worn with a buttonless short coat. The coat is of cashmere striped in red, blue, and black and made with a turn-down collar and lapels.

396

This costume was chose because of the outstanding chic of shaved baby lamb. Of its smart sports colour - beige. Of its loose lines and three-quarters length.

397

In this graceful gown, Chanel treats frail black chiffon as though it were a heavy material. The clear crystal pendant at the V of the décolletage is an important new fashion note.

398

Black velvet leads the evening mode, and this Chanel model utilises it in a very charming fashion. Long-streamered bows lined with white velvet are placed at the low corsage in the front and again at the hip-line at the back.

399

Chanel is one of those who believe in the evening dress that is no longer at the back. This model, "403", is of black mousseline in bands and overlapping graduated petal panels.

400

Stiff black satin fashions "480", with wing fullness on bodice and skirt at the left side, giving an uneven silhouette.

401

White is one of the smartest colours of the evening mode. Here it is combined by Chanel with the chic of stiff satin in an important dress which relies upon the perfection of its lines and its workmanship for its great distinction. Screen and chair from Hartigan.

402

The gown below was chose because of its deep décolletage at the back, of its down-at-the-back line. It shows Chanel's typical new crochet beading.

403

This velvet evening wrap from Vionnet, a model of outstanding chic, has the new rolled velvet collar replacing fur. It is worn over a Chanel frock of white georgette and crystal beads.

February 1928

404

No commentary.

405

This interesting Chanel jacket suit is of purple ondemoussa with a sleeveless jacket worn over a one-piece frock with narrow belt.

408

This four-piece ensemble includes a blouse and handkerchief of gaily checked crêpe de Chine in squares of blue, brown, and beige, a beige crepella skirt with an unusual incrustation, and a coat of distinctive cut accentuated by stitching.

409

La Comtesse Elie de Gaignernon dans le charmant costume de Chanel en jersey "tapisserie", veste et jupe de plussieurs tons assortis à l'écharpe' blouse en crêpe de Chine beige. Souliers bruns.

410

Beige, orange and brown jersey is used for the jumper and coat facing of this sports ensemble. The short coat and skirt are of beige mixed woollen, the flower of georgette crêpe in beige, orange, and brown to match the sweater.

411

De Chanel aussi, cet ensemble en tweed brun clair avec blouse en tricot à damiers bruns et rouges.

412

Ensemble de Chanel en tweed beige moucheté rouge et brun, et longue blouse en crêpe blond.

418

Chanel "667" Mendel crêpe marocain. here novelty is used with great restraint and taste. the narrow bands which accentuate the up-in-the-front movement and the beautifully cut circular flounces which tell the story of the jutting silhouette are made of the same dull crêpe as the body of the dress.

419

A tiny flecked print with red and white and brown predominating is the medium of this model with turreted ruffles, finely pleated. Distinguishing touches are the round collar, and the bows at the neck and waistline.

423

Larue. Chanel model. This new version of the Chanel lace dress is one of the typical frocks of the new season. It differs from Chanel's very successful lace dress of last season in the slight stiffening of the uneven flared skirt, which is achieved by means of horsehair.

427

Layer upon layer of diaphanous brown tulle is used for this frock. The skirt is beautifully cut to give length and fullness to the sides and back. The tiny lingerie straps are a clever feature of the Chanel collection.

428

The Marquise de Paris, well-known for her chic and distinction, is shown wearing the successful black dress of the season, a tulle frock from Chanel that is such a favourite that one frequently sees four or five women wearing it at one smart party.

429

La Marquise de Laborde, née Pauline Saint-Sauveur, est une des beautés de la haute Société Française; son charme et son élégance sont légendaires. Sa robe de tulle noir signée Chanel lui sied à merveille.

430

Chanel "654". Taffetas de Rémond et Cie. L'une des meilleures versions de la silhouette étroite élargie très bas et fournie par cette robe noire dont le corsage blouse imperceptiblement au-dessus des hanches amincies. Un gros nœud placé à la naissance du volant prolonge ses pans jusqu'au-dessous du bas de jupe. La ceinture est en chevreau noir.

431

Robe en tulle noir entièrement en forme. Ceinture de moire avec boucle en onyx et brillants. Grand éventail de tulle noir. Chanel.

432

Robe de Chanel en chiffon "Fleurs des Champs". Des volants en forme montés en arrondis donnent une très grande ampleur.

August 1928

433

This very smart ensemble has a two-piece dress and finger-tip coat and is of Rodier novelty jersey in almond-green striped in dark brown, and beige jersey fashions the coat lining.

434

A Chanel suit in hunter's green that lunched at Masters.

435

The great chic of this costume lies in the jacket of finger-tip length. The jacket and skirt are of bright red kasha, the blouse and coat lining of grey-and-black striped Rodier jersey.

436

Orange threads fleck the white, beige and black of this heavy basked-weave tweed ensemble with a long coat trimmed with beige lapin. The blouse is of soft natural cashmere.

437

Colour, again, is an interesting feature in this ensemble. A bright red basket-weave tweed coat with brown lapin combines with a brown jersey dress to match the coat lining.

438

Madrie has this ensemble in black. It is charming also in almond-green and brown. Here, jacket, skirt and blouse are of green-and-brown tweed, coat of brown tweed; hat from Kosky.

439

Another tweed suit, a Chanel brown tweed, also seen on the Blue Train.

440

Lady Graham préfère cet élégant costume sport de Chanel: jupe et manteau droit en tweed noir, tricot rayé noir et blanc en diagonale. Petit feutre classique. Sac et ceinture en daim noir.

441

Scarf of painted rose, black, and white silk and cardigan of pale rose woollen homespun with bindings of crêpe de Chine to match (Chanel). Hat of pale rose felt with deep rose and black grosgrain bands.

442

No commentary

443

Fine silver beading gives a frosty shimmer to this white lace dress, "Iceland". The narrow satin belt, tied at the natural waist-line, the bolero back, and the tiered skirt slightly stiffened by horsehair, are chic details. The Chanel fan is of stiffened white mousseline de soie.

444

It is naturally most amusing to dine and dance where one meets the greatest number of amusing people; no place answers this description better than the Café Anglais. where one goes "just as one is", or dresses to the fullest; the woman in white is wearing Chanel 668 from Lady Victor Paget, destined to be one of the dresses of the year, in chiffon.

445

This gown of transparent velvet has the "slinky" length of line typical of the new season. A dipping basque flounce is placed just below the hip-line, and a second flounce dips almost to the floor. The fan, of black velvet to match the frock, is a smart accessory.

446

Both Roma and Paris claim La Principessa Carla Boncampagni Ludovisi (née Borromeo), who is greatly admired for her charm and distinction. She is wearing a black chiffon evening dress from Chanel with a very new effect in its trailing panel.

447

Pour dîner chez des amis, Mme Alfred Fabre-Luce a choise cette robe en chiffon flamme, dont la jupe en arrière, simule de longs pétales. Chanel.

February 1929

448

Another smart reversal of colour is seen in this Chanel ensemble. The coat is chartreuse tweed and the dress black and chartreuse crêpe: in light and dark blue marocain.

449

This Chanel coat accompanies the frock at the right above (**450**), and is of grêge tweed flecked with black and red. The cuffs are lined with geranium red to match the dress.

450

Dull fabrics are a better choice than lustrous materials for the woman who is no longer young. This Chanel dress is in dull crêpe is a soft shade of geranium red.

451

A flatly pleated ruffle forms an unusual basque on this Chanel frock for the slim. The striped black-and-white woollen fabric is cut on the bias to effect diagonal stripes. Linen collar and cuffs.

452

Fine black-and-white checked woollen, like the fabrics of ten years ago, has been used for this suit. A short basque is suggested by the leather belt and the narrow collar and cuffs are of piqué.

453

A white piqué flower, collar and hip band furnish a lingerie touch to this navy-blue Chanel two-piece dress.

454

The newest notes in the mode are Chanel's jersey turbans. Here, the bold pattern of blue, grège, and black jersey in scarf and toque contrasts smartly with the even pattern of the grège-brown jersey used for the suit.

455

Grège-brown is again the basic colour in this ensemble, with horizontal stripes in red, blue, and black used for the hat, scarf, and sweater, and the lining of the cardigan. The plain and striped fabrics are both the again modish jersey.

456

Gertrude Lawrence wears the new Chanel three-piece jersey sports costume in beige, blue and black, with a Marie-Christiane hat. The sports costume is obtainable in London from Lilian Lawer.

457

This version of Chanel's sleeveless sports frock and jacket is natural coloured jersey resembling tweed with a blue-and-black and design. It is ideal for "spectator" sports.

458

Patou designed this rough straw sailor hat in yellow-beige banded in brown, worn with a Chanel coat of beige jersey striped in red and green. The envelope purse is of the same jersey novelty.

459

The Baronne d'Almeida was seen lunching at the Ritz in this smart afternoon ensemble from Chanel. The printed dress is in grey, green and black, and the straight woollen coat has its edges finished in a lattice motif.

460

For late summer afternoons are the three costumes shown above. The youthful Chanel ensemble of brown-and-white chiffon, at the left, has an unlined coat and a sleeveless dress, on which flowers cut from the dress have been applied.

461

Chanel dress at right from Marion Lambert; jewels from Mauboussin.

462

Cette robe a traine de Chanel, en tulle jersey noir, au décolleté orné d'une écharpe, a été choisie par Lady Abdy.

463

No commentary

August 1929

464

Une silhouette très nouvelle est donnée par cette courte cape vison. remarquesz le travail en lignes incurvées des peauz. Chanel.

465

The separate cape of fine black caracal in finger-tip length is another innovation made by Chanel. It is shown at the left, and it has an inner sleeveless jacket with a fur front, for extra warmth. This model is very smart when worn with one of the new dresses in black woollen, such as the Patou dress with which it is photographed. A black felt hat, designed by Rose Descat, with the brim cut and rolled back and held by a satin tab, is a very smart complement. It is representative of the feeling for wider brims, which have a definite place in the highly feminine mode of today.

466

One of the smartest and most youthful black coats of the season is the model designed by Chanel and shown at the right. Persian lamb trimming on the skirt of the coat, and the brightly buckled belt at the waist-line are characteristic of this designer. The Lanvin hat, from Yorke, of black felt with Persian lamb extending well down at the back, completes a costume of outstanding distinction in this season when black holds first place, and in which the cape is playing an increasingly important part. Jewels from Mauboussin.

467

Chanel's black Breitschwantz jacket; Marie -Christiane hat.

468

Chanel No. 11, of black crêpe marocain with a shoulder-cape and a white piqué collar cut like a ragged carnation petals.

469

Chanel uses black crêpe marocain with rhinestone eyelets and buckle on the wide belt, which is placed at the natural waist-line.

470

Chanel's striped jersey frock, in the centre, has a cape attached to a smart yoke and circular godets inserted in the skirt to give a smart low flare.

471

Another new jersey is a small brown-and-white checked weave, which Chanel uses for the ensemble in the centre. The straight jacket is enlivened by a wide and crisp piqué collar.

472

The Chanel suit, third from the left, is of bright blue tweed with a blouse and revers of beige kasha.

473

No commentary

474

Chanel sponsors black and white for tweed jersey suits, and this one has a very chic short jacket with a nipped-in waist and double-breasted effect. The skirt flares at the sides. The white satin blouse worn with it is chic.

475

No commentary

476

Two shades of jersey are combined very effectively in Chanel's ensemble "No. 36." The skirt and cardigan are in dark brown, the blouse and lining in pale rose, forming a charming contrast. The chemisette cut of the jersey blouse and notched scarf are characteristic of Chanel this season.

477

Lady Ashley wears Chanel's brown wool suit with a pink jersey jumper.

478

Chanel has used a monotonous tweed with a miniature check in the weave for this coat and dress, "No. 39". It is in a light brown and trimmed with green jersey, and it is cut in this designer's favourite sectional manner, giving it a fitted silhouette with the smart, low-placed flare at the hem.

479

Chanel's "No. 242" is a suit of vivid blue tweed with a typically long skirt that extends even above the belt, which is at the natural waistline. The tuck-in blouse of grège jersey resembles a polo shirt. A strip of the tweed forms pockets in the short straight coat and extends across the back, thus forming a band.

480

No commentary

481

No commentary

482

Chanel sports suit "No. 23". Honey comb-textured tweed in orange with a beaver collar and cuffs and a waistcoat blouse of orange beige and brown striped jersey.

483

The full-length coat seen in the photograph above is made with an ample shoulder cape and designed for the traveller. This Chanel model is made of diagonal tweed in a chartreuse green shade. It is worn with a plain little Reboux turban in beige suède leather.

484

Very smart are the new capes, separate or attached, and especially when made by Chanel. In this three-piece suit, a three-quarters length cape and a skirt, both of horizontally striped tweed jersey in tête de negre and beige, combine with a blouse of apple-green jersey and the same soft green jersey is used to face the cape and the scarf.

485

Mlle. Gabrielle Chanel, the famous couturière, has just finished a set of tennis with Captain Jack Hillyard at sunny Biarritz.

486

Chanel's lovely geranium-red velveteen frock trimmed with petals is a good choice for the débutante. The material is young and the long and picturesque skirt is still good for dancing.

487

Chanel's "226" illustrates the type of dress that will be chosen for informal dinner wear this season. The ensemble is of solid red beading on net, and the straight line of the dress is broken by a double belt-line of red satin. The three-quarters length sleeves of the jacket are important.

488

Chanel designed this youthful evening gown of dahlia-purple net. The bodice is made of horizontal bands of shirring and closely moulded to the body to a point well below the hips. Below this, fullness falls in a circular flounce which stands out like a ballet skirt. Net, which is extensively used this season, is especially charming for dresses of this type.

489

Black net in many layers is used by Chanel for this dancing frock embroidered all over with palest beige silk daisies. The edge of the net are graduated and piped, forming a panel in front, while a little bolero floats out at the back.

490

Cette robe en dentelle rouge vif a été le grand succès de la collection Chanel. Les volants joints à la cape indépendant allègent la silhouette.

491

L'ampleur rigide de cette robe contraste avec le modèle ci-dessous. L'etroit fourreau est en satin noir et les deux volants en tulle noir. Chanel.

492

La dernière version par Chanel de la robe longue donne une ligne plus régulière et plus symétrique à la jupe de tulle. Bijoux de Mauboussin.

493

Chanel gives further evidence of the chic of white at night with this chiffon dress with a bodice banded to suggest a bolero and girdled with a sash. The skirt ends at the smart ankle length, as do all the models illustrated on these two pages.

494

Wild rose pink georgette crêpe dress by Chanel.

495

Chanel, "280." Grey-white satin; draped, bloused bodice, tied in front; full flounce, dipping at back; moulded hips; circular fullness.

496

Chanel - since the smart world is lionizing white almost as enthusiastically as black - offers this white crêpe marocain dress with twisted bands giving an entirely new bodice interest. The skirt panel reaches almost to the floor.

497

The black velvet dress, designed by Chanel, is slightly more formal. The arrangement of the large bows at back gives great distinction. The scarf end thrown over one shoulder and the high-placed belt with a strass buckle complete a quaint but modern silhouette

498

Chanel's black velvet gown, "176", has all the beauty of line and the dignity required for important formal occasions. The bodice, diagonal in front, crosses low at the back, where it is held by knotted ends. A string belt marks the high waist, and the skirt falls in supple folds.

499

The black velveteen coat is equally smart over either dress and looks well by night or by day.

Appendix II (a)

Biographies of Named Women Wearing Dress Designs by Chanel and Illustrated or Photographed in British and French *Vogue*, 1916 - 1929

1. **CAT. NO.:** **27**

COLLECTION: February 1917

SOURCE: Charles-Roux

1981, p. 101

SITTER: Hilda May

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

2. **CAT. NO.:** **60**

COLLECTION: February 1918

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 August 1918, p. 37

SITTER: Mme. Henri Letellier

BIOGRAPHY:

Edmonde Charles Roux (London, 1981, p. 107) refers to Paul Morand's comment, noted in his journal of May 1917, that Mme. Letellier and Chanel were 'leading the way' in the fashion for bobbed hair.

3. **CAT. NO.:** **69**

COLLECTION: August 1918

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 February 1919, p. 28

SITTER: Duchess Sforza.

See also Catalogue Nos. **76** and **126**.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

4. **CAT. NO.:** **70**

COLLECTION: August 1918

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 December 1918, p. 41

SITTER: Mlle. Cécile Sorel.

See also Catalogue No. **135, 137** and **148**

BIOGRAPHY:

French actress, particularly assoiciated with the Comédie Française during the 1910s. One of Chanel's earliest customers, Sorel purchased designs from the Deauville branch during the First World War. It was through Sorel that Chanel was introduced to Misia Sert. Sorel was also associated with Diaghelev's circle.

5. **CAT. NO.:** **76**

COLLECTION: August 1918

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 February 1919, p. 28

SITTER: Duchess Sforza.

See also Catalogue No. **69** and **126**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

6. **CAT. NO.:** **78**

COLLECTION: August 1918

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 February 1919, p. 43

SITTER: Mme. Vera Sergine.

BIOGRAPHY:

French actress. Sister-in-law to the film director Jean Renoir.

7. **CAT. NO.:** **83**

COLLECTION: February 1919

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 August 1919, p. 34

SITTER: Mlle. Charlotte Lysèes

BIOGRAPHY:

French actress. In mid-1919 Lysées was starring in the production *Pour Avoir Adrienne* at the Théâtre Michel, Paris. The actress wore Chanel designs in this production (see Catalogue no.**83**).

8. **CAT. NO.:** **101**

COLLECTION: August 1919

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 March 1920, p. 57

SITTER: Countess de Roche

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

9. **CAT. NO.:** **105**

COLLECTION: February 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 August 1920, p. 28

SITTER: Comtesse de Moustiers.

See also Catalogue No. **111**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

10. **CAT. NO.:** **110**

COLLECTION: February 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 June 1920, p. 87

SITTER: Mme. de Subercaseaux de Lamarca

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

11. **CAT. NO.:** **111**

COLLECTION: February 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 August 1920, p. 28

SITTER: Comtesse de Moustiers.

See also Catalogue No. **105**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

12. **CAT. NO.:** **112**

COLLECTION: February 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 August 1920, p. 42

SITTER: Mme. Brach.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

13. **CAT. NO.:** **113**

COLLECTION: February 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 September 1920, p. 48

SITTER: Duchesse de Maille.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

14. **CAT. NO.:** **125**

COLLECTION: August 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 December 1920, p. 44

SITTER: Mlle. de Saint-Sauveur.

See also Catalogue Nos. **378** and **429**

BIOGRAPHY:

Pauline de Saint-Sauveur was a devoted Chanel client during the War years. Madsen (London, 1990, p. 73), notes that Saint-Sauveur only bought hats from Chanel during this period and had been introduced to the designer by Count Léon de Laborde (who was to become her

husband). Madsen also records (p. 121) that Saint-Sauveur worked for Chanel during the 1920s and was, quoting Valéry Ollivier, 'in charge of perfumes, knic-knacks, and scarves.'

15. **CAT. NO.:** **126**

COLLECTION: August 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 October 1920, p. 42

SITTER: Duchess Sforza.

See also Catalogue Nos. **69** and **76**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

16. **CAT. NO.:** **129**

COLLECTION: August 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 December 1920, p. 44

SITTER: Comtesse de Maigret.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

17. **CAT. NO.:** **130**

COLLECTION: August 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 December 1920, p. 44

SITTER: Princesse de la Tour d'Auvergne.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

18. **CAT. NO.:** **134**

COLLECTION: August 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 February 1921, p. 30

SITTER: Mlle. Zigers.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

19. **CAT. NO.:** **135**

COLLECTION: August 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 October 1920, p. 64

SITTER: Mlle. Cécile Sorel.

See also Catalogue Nos. **70**, **137** and **148**

BIOGRAPHY:

French actress, particularly assoiciated with the Comédie Française during the 1910s. One of Chanel's earliest customers, Sorel purchased designs from the Deauville branch during the First World War. It ws through Sorel that Chanel was introduced to Misia Sert. Sorel was also associated with Diaghelev's circle.

20. **CAT. NO.:** **137**

COLLECTION: August 1920

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 October 1920, p. 64

SITTER: Cécile Sorel.

See also Catalogue Nos. **70**, **135** and **148**

BIOGRAPHY:

French actress, particularly assoiciated with the Comédie Française during the 1910s. One of Chanel's earliest customers, Sorel purchased designs from the Deauville branch during the First World War. It ws through Sorel that Chanel was introduced to Misia Sert. Sorel was also associated with Diaghelev's circle.

21. **CAT. NO.:** **139**

COLLECTION: February 1921

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 June 1921, p. 43

SITTER: Comtesse Wladimir Rehbinder (formerly Comtesse Jacques de Pourtalès).

See also Catalogue No. **141**

BIOGRAPHY:

Madsen (London, 1990, p. 62) and Charles-Roux (London, 1989, p. 197) note that the Comtesse Renée de Pourtalès was, like Chanel, present at the May 13, 1913, debut performance of the Ballet Russes' *Rite of Spring* at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées.

22. **CAT. NO.:** **140**

COLLECTION: February 1921

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 June 1921, p. 35

SITTER: Mme. Jacques Porel.

See also Catalogue No. **157**, **175** and **178**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

23. **CAT. NO.:** **141**

COLLECTION: February 1921

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 June 1921, p. 43

SITTER: Comtesse Wladimir Rehbinder (formerly Comtesse Jacques de Pourtalès).

See also Catalogue No. **139**

BIOGRAPHY:

Madsen (London, 1990, p. 62) notes that the Comtesse Renée de Pourtalès was, like Chanel, present at the May 13, 1913, debut performance of the Ballet Russes' *Rite of Spring* at the Théâtre des Champs Elysées.

24. **CAT. NO.:** **142**

COLLECTION: February 1921

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 June 1921, p. 43

SITTER: Comtesse François de Castries.

See also Catalogue No. **143**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

25. **CAT. NO.:** **143**

COLLECTION: February 1921

SOURCE: British *Vogue*
5 June 1921, p. 43

SITTER: Comtesse François de Castries

See also Catalogue No. **142**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

26. **CAT. NO.:** **148**

COLLECTION: February 1921

SOURCE: French *Vogue*
15 August 1921, p. 14

SITTER: Mlle. Cecile Sorel.

See also Catalogue Nos. **70**, **135** and **137**

BIOGRAPHY:

Actress, particularly assoiciated with the Comédie Française during the 1910s. One of Chanel's earliest customers, Sorel purchased designs from the Deauville branch during the First World War. It ws through Sorel that Chanel was introduced to Misia Sert. Sorel was also associated with Diaghelev's circle.

27. **CAT. NO.:** **149**

COLLECTION: February 1921

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

15 May 1921, p. 26

SITTER: Princesse Soutzo

BIOGRAPHY:

Madsen (London, 1990, p. 130) refers to a Roumanian heiress Hélène Soutso (sic) who accompanied Paul Morand to Chanel's 1922 Christmas party.

28. **CAT. NO.:** **157**

COLLECTION: August 1921

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 February 1922, p. 66

SITTER: Mme. Jacques Porel.

See also Catalogue No. **140**, **175** and **178**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

29. **CAT. NO.:** **161**

COLLECTION: August 1921

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 November 1921, p. 21

SITTER: Marquise de Chabannes.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

30. **CAT. NO.:** **175**

COLLECTION: August 1922

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 September 1922, p. 50

SITTER: Mme. Jacques Porel.

See also Catalogue Nos. **140**, **157** and **178**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

31. **CAT. NO.:** **178**

COLLECTION: August 1922

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 September 1922, p. 17

SITTER: Mme. Jacques Porel.

See also Catalogue Nos. **140**, **157** and **175**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

32. **CAT. NO.:** **190**

COLLECTION: February 1923

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 May 1923, p. 23

SITTER: Comtesse Elie de Gaigernon.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

33. **CAT. NO.:** **225**

COLLECTION: August 1924

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 January 1925, p. 58

SITTER: Ina Claire.

BIOGRAPHY:

Madsen (London, 1990, p. 163) claims that the American actress Ina Claire, who worked during the 1920s and 1930s for Samuel Goldwyn, was the first to wear Chanel clothes on screen and that the photographer Edward Steichen (who took the photograph of Catalogue No. **225**) took photogrpahs of the actress in all her Chanel outfits for *Vogue*. Claire had previously chosen to wear Chanel designs in her stage productions. Chanel designs were worn by Claire and her co-stars Joan Blondell and Madge Evans in the 1931 film *The Greeks Had a Word for It*.

34. **CAT. NO.:** **250**

COLLECTION: February 1925

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

5 August 1925, p. 23

SITTER: Lady Abdy.

See also Catalogue No. **462**

BIOGRAPHY:

Iya Abdy (daughter of a famous Russian actor) was in contact with Chanel, as a friend, throughout the 1920s and until the designer's death. She was also involved in Cocteau's 1937 production of *Oedipe Roi* (for which Chanel designed costumes). Abdy was interviewed by Pierre Galante.

35. **CAT. NO.:** **265**

COLLECTION: February 1925

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1925, p. 17

SITTER: Lady Davies.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

See also Catalogue no. **360**. It is possible that these women are one and the same; however, the illustrations provided do not confirm this. See also Catalogue no. **306**; again, it is possible that Lady Davies and Lady Davis are one and the same; however, the illustrations provided do not confirm this.

36. **CAT. NO.:** **283**

COLLECTION: August 1925

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 February 1926, p. 4

SITTER: Mme. May.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

37. **CAT. NO.:** **291**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 March 1926, p. 55

SITTER: Mrs. Arbuthnot Leslie.

See also Catalogue No. **301**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

38. **CAT. NO.:** **293**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 August 1928, p. 18

SITTER: Comtesse D'Audiffret-Pasquier.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

39. **CAT. NO.:** **295**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1926, p. 12

SITTER: Mme. W.K. Wanderbilt.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

See also Catalogue no. **314**. It is highly probable that these women are one and the same; however, the spellings of the surnames given here replicate those in *Vogue* and the illustrations do not provide any further clarification.

40. **CAT. NO.:** **299**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5/20 June 1926, p. 59

SITTER: Comtesse Elie de Gaignernon.

See also Catalogue No. **409**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

41. **CAT. NO.:** **300**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 April 1926, p. 70

SITTER: Duchesse de Gramont.

See also Catalogue No. **308**, **310** and **431**

BIOGRAPHY:

Elisabeth de Gramont was a friend of Boy Capel, whom she knew through her half brother Armand de la Guiche, and one of the designer's first clients at the Deauville branch. Noted as one pf the most elegant women in Paris during the 1920s, Gramont was also a patron of Vionnet.

42. **CAT. NO.:** **301**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

5 August 1926, p. 14

SITTER: Mrs. Arbuthnot Leslie.

See also Catalogue No. **291**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

43. **CAT. NO.:** **302**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 July 1926, p. 52

SITTER: Lady Diana Cooper.

BIOGRAPHY:

Diana Cooper (died 1986). Daughter of the Duchess of Rutland. Married the untitled and penniless Duff Cooper in 1919. Actress on both stage and screen. Close freind of Evelyn Waugh.

44. **CAT. NO.:** **303**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

5 May 1926, p. 3

SITTER: Lady Henriette Davis.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

45. **CAT. NO.:** **305**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1926, p. 15

SITTER: Comtesse de la Mejorada.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

46. **CAT. NO.:** **306**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 May 1926, p. 54

SITTER: Lady Davis.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

See also Catalogue nos. **265** and **360**. It is possible that Lady Davies and Lady Davis are one and the same; however, the illustrations provided do not confirm this.

47. **CAT. NO.:** **308**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 April 1926, p. 71

SITTER: Duchesse de Gramont.

See also Catalogue Nos. **300**, **310** and **431**

BIOGRAPHY:

Elisabeth de Gramont was a friend of Buy Capel, whom she knew through her half brother Armand de la Guiche, and one of the designer's first clients at the Deauville branch. Noted as one pf the most elegant women in Paris during the 1920s, Gramont was also a patron of Vionnet.

48. **CAT. NO.:** **309**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 July 1926, p. 43

SITTER: Mrs. Wakefield Saunders.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

49. **CAT. NO.:** **310**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5 April 1926, p. 71

SITTER: Duchesse de Gramont.

See also Catalogue Nos. **300**, **308** and **431**

BIOGRAPHY:

Elisabeth de Gramont was a friend of Buy Capel, whom she knew through her half brother Armand de la Guiche, and one of the designer's first clients at the Deauville branch. Noted as one pf the most elegant women in Paris during the 1920s, Gramont was also a patron of Vionnet.

50. **CAT. NO.:** **314**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

5/20 June 1926, p. 68

SITTER: Mrs. W. K. Vanderbilt

BIOGRAPHY: No information available.

See also Catalogue no. **295**. It is highly probable that these women are one and the same; however, the spellings of the surnames given here replicate those in *Vogue* and the illustrations do not provide any further clarification.

51. **CAT. NO.:** **326**

COLLECTION: February 1926

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1926, p. 4

SITTER: Mrs. O'Brien.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

52. **CAT. NO.:** **354**

COLLECTION: August 1926

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 February 1927, p. 36

SITTER: Comtesse de St. Quentin.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

53. **CAT. NO.:** **360**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1927, p. 21

SITTER: Lady Davies.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

See also Catalogue no. **265**. It is possible that these women are one and the same; however, the illustrations provided do not confirm this. See also Catalogue no. **306**; again, it is possible that Lady Davies and Lady Davis are one and the same; however, the illustrations provided do not confirm this.

54. **CAT. NO.:** **361**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1927, p. 21

SITTER: Comtesse de Breteuil.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

55. **CAT. NO.:** **368**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 April 1927, p. 56

SITTER: Miss Fellowes Gordon.

BIOGRAPHY:

The British *Vogue* commentary notes that Miss Fellowes Gordon was, at that time, training for the opera.

56. **CAT. NO.:** **369**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 May 1927, p. 81

SITTER: Mrs. Marshall.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

57. **CAT. NO.:** **370**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 May 1927, p. 81

SITTER: Mme. de Candamo.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

58. **CAT. NO.:** **371**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 May 1927, p. 80

SITTER: Marquise de Jaucourt.

See also Catalogue No. **383**

BIOGRAPHY:

The British *Vogue* commentary notes that the Marquise de Jaucourt's husband was the President of the Biarritz Polo Club.

59. **CAT. NO.:** **372**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 June 1927, p. 43

SITTER: Mrs. Satterthwaite.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

60. **CAT. NO.:** **374**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 April 1927, p. 24

SITTER: Misia Sert.

BIOGRAPHY:

Madsen claims that Chanel met Misia Sert in May 1917 (born, St. Petersburg, 1872) at the house of Cecile Sorel. Sert worked as an actress and was associated with Diaghilev and Cocteau and it was through Sert that Chanel became friends with many of the leading figures of the Parisian art scene during the first part of the twentieth century. Sert and Chanel remained friends until Sert's death

61. **CAT. NO.:** **377**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1927, p. 21

SITTER: Madame Van Heukelom.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

62. **CAT. NO.:** **378**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 August 1927, p. 3

SITTER: Marquise de Laborde.

See also Catalogue Nos. **125** and **429**

BIOGRAPHY:

The Marquise de Laborde (née Pauline de Saint-Sauveur) was a devoted Chanel client during the War years. Madsen (London, 1990, p. 73), notes that Saint-Sauveur only bought hats from Chanel during this period and had been introduced to the designer by Count Léon de Laborde (who was to become her husband). Madsen also records (p. 121) that Saint-Sauveur worked for Chanel during the 1920s and was, quoting Valéry Ollivier, 'in charge of perfumes, knickknacks, and scarves.'

63. **CAT. NO.:** **383**

COLLECTION: February 1927

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

20 July 1927, p. 41

SITTER: Marquise de Jaucourt.

See also Catalogue No. **371**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

64. **CAT. NO.:** **407**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

8 August 1928, p. 20

SITTER: Comtesse Gaston de la Rouchefoucauld.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

65. **CAT. NO.:** **409**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 April 1928, p. 22

SITTER: Comtesse Elie de Gaigneron.

See also Catalogue No. **299**

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

66. **CAT. NO.:** **411**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 May 1928, p. 6

SITTER: Mlle. de Gainge.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

67. **CAT. NO.:** **412**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 May 1928, p. 6

SITTER: Mme. Larvenstein

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

68. **CAT. NO.:** **415**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 July 1928, p. 3

SITTER: Mme. Arnus.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

69. **CAT. NO.:** **424**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

8 August 1928, p. 21

SITTER: Madame Pedro Coreuera.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

70. **CAT. NO.:** **428**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

30 May 1928, p. 50

SITTER: Marquise de Paris

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

71. **CAT. NO.:** **429**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1928, p. 13

SITTER: La Marquise de Laborde (née Pauline Saint-Sauveur).

See also Catalogue Nos. **125** and **378**

BIOGRAPHY:

Pauline de Saint-Sauveur was a devoted Chanel client during the War years. Madsen (London, 1990, p. 73), notes that Saint-Sauveur only bought hats from Chanel during this period and had been introduced to the designer by Count Léon de Laborde (who was to become her husband). Madsen also records (p. 121) that Saint-Sauveur worked for Chanel during the 1920s and was, quoting Valéry Ollivier, 'in charge of perfumes, knickknacks, and scarves.'

72. **CAT. NO.:** **431**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 May 1928, p. 5

SITTER: Duchesse de Gramont.

See also Catalogue Nos. **300**, **308** and **310**

BIOGRAPHY:

Elisabeth de Gramont was a friend of Buy Capel, whom she knew through her half brother Armand de la Guiche, and one of the

designer's first clients at the Deauville branch. Noted as one pf the most elegant women in Paris during the 1920s, Gramont was also a patron of Vionnet.

73. **CAT. NO.:** **432**

COLLECTION: February 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 May 1928, p. 5

SITTER: Mrs. Johnston.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

74. **CAT. NO.:** **440**

COLLECTION: August 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 March 1929, p. 56

SITTER: Lady Graham.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

75. **CAT. NO.:** **442**

COLLECTION: August 1928

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

12 December 1928, p. 47

SITTER: Mrs. McAdoo.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

76. **CAT. NO.:** **446**

COLLECTION: August 1928

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

9 January 1929, p. 26

SITTER: Principessa Carla Boncampagni Ludovisi (néeBorromeo)

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

77. **CAT. NO.:** **447**

COLLECTION: August 1928

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 March 1929, p. 18

SITTER: Mme. Alfred Fabre-Luce.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

78. **CAT. NO.:** **456**

COLLECTION: February 1929

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

15 May 1929, p. 82

SITTER: Gertrude Lawerence.

BIOGRAPHY:

The English actress Gertrude Lawerence was regarded as one of London's leading beauties in 1920s and 1930s.

79. **CAT. NO.:** **459**

COLLECTION: February 1929

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

12 June 1929, p. 55

SITTER: Baronne d' Almeida.

BIOGRAPHY: No information available

80. **CAT. NO.:** **462**

COLLECTION: February 1929

SOURCE: French *Vogue*

1 June 1929, p. 18

SITTER: Lady Abdy.

See also Catalogue No. **250**

BIOGRAPHY:

Iya Abdy (daughter of a famous Russian actor) was in contact with Chanel, as a friend, throughout the 1920s and until the designer's death. She was also involved in Cocteau's 1937 production of *Oedipe Roi* (for which Chanel designed costumes). Abdy was interviewed by Pierre Galante.

81. **CAT. NO.:** **477**

COLLECTION: August 1929

SOURCE: British *Vogue*

8 January 1930, p. 29

SITTER: Lady Ashley.

BIOGRAPHY:

Georgina Howell (London, 1975) notes that Lady Ashley, formerly Sylvia Hawkes, had been a model for Reville and a chorus girl for cabaret shows in London. Howell also notes that Lord Ashley was the first of fivehusbands. She was photographed on several occassions for *Vogue* during the 1920s by Cecil Beaton.

---

[1] A full statement of the purpose, origination and acknowledged limitations of this Appendix is given within the Introduction (Part One) to this thesis: see footnote 74.

Appendix II (b) - Index

Biographies of Named Women Wearing Chanel and Illustrated or Photographed in British and French *Vogue*

Appendix III

Synoptic Table of Dress Designs by Chanel Reproduced in British and French *Vogue*, 1916-1929

Collection	British *Vogue*	French *Vogue*	Both	Other	Total
1916 - Feb			7		**7**
1916 - Aug	14				**14**
1917 - Feb	20		2		**22**
1917 - Aug	9				**9**
1918 - Feb	14				**14**
1918 - Aug	12				**12**
1919 - Feb	14				**19**
1919 - Aug	10				**10**
1920 - Feb	5		9		**14**
1920 - Aug			20		**20**
1921 - Feb		2	10		**12**
1921 - Aug	2	2	10		**14**
1922 - Feb		5	10		**15**
1922 - Aug	2				**2**
1923 - Feb	7	1	8		**16**
1923 - Aug	6	1	6		**13**
1924 - Feb	7	2	4		**13**
1924 - Aug	14		12		**26**
1925 - Feb	16	5	3		**24**
1925 - Aug	9	4	5		**18**
1926 - Feb	23	8	8		**39**

1926 - Aug	22	3	2	**27**
1927 - Feb	16	2	12	**30**
1927 - Aug	16		1	**17**
1928 - Feb	17	8	4	**29**
1928 - Aug	12	2	1	**15**
1929 - Feb	11	1	4	**16**
1929 - Aug	28	4	4	**36**

Appendix IV

Copies of Dress Designs by Chanel as Reproduced in British *Vogue*

1 British Vogue
20 March 1926, p. 78

Day-wear coat (black satin trimmed with ermine fur) worn with a cloche hat, earrings, gloves and high-heeled shoes. The model carries a small clutch bag.
The coat has a straight, narrow silhouette and is cut to just below the knee. It closes diagonally and is fastened at the left hip with a large bow. The straight full-length sleeves are finished with a narrow cuff and the standing collar is in ermine fur.

2 British *Vogue*
5/20 June 1926, p. 89

Day-wear coat (in deep tan soft woollen) worn with a trilby-style hat and high-heeled shoes.
The coat is knee-length and cut straight. It is single breasted and fastens at one point to the left side at hip level (the fastening is not visible). The design shows a small standing collar, shallow V-neckline, a seam pocket on either side at waist level and straight full-length sleeves. The diagonal created by the closing of the coat to the left side is echoed down the top section of the coat and sleeves with parallel seams, piping or top-stitching. These vertical bands meet a curving horizontal seam at hip level echoed in the shorter seams that incorporate the pockets immediately above it. The skirt of the coat is plain.

3 British *Vogue*
20 July 1926, p. 50

Summer day dress (in yellow crêpe de Chine) and jacket worn with a matching scarf, wide-brimmed hat, earrings, bracelets and high-heeled shoes.
This straight, slim-fitting two-piece design comprises a sweater-like top and knee length skirt. The hip-length top has a deep V-neckline and full-length sleeves gathered into a narrow cuff. A pocket is placed on either side at waist level. The neckline and

pockets are both trimmed with bands of shirring which is also used in a broad horizontal band at the top of the finely pleated skirt. A plain wide scarf is worn closely around the neck and draped over the right arm, falling to knee level.

4 British *Vogue*
20 July 1926, p. 51

Mid-summer day-dress (in printed chiffon, colours not specified) worn with a wide brimmed hat and high-heeled shoes.
The dress is slim-fitting with a slight flare towards the hem of its knee length skirt. It has a round neckline finished with a centrally placed necktie in the same printed chiffon. The set-in sleeves are very full and gathered into a tightly-fitting cuff. The bodice is slightly bloused over a narrow tie-belt positioned at hip level and fastened at the front in a bow. The dress is detailed with wide horizontal bands of shirring set at the top of the shoulders and arms, the bodice and the top of the skirt. The hem of the skirt is finished with a petal-like effect. The fabric is printed with what would appear to be a floral motif.

5 British *Vogue*
15 July 1926, p. 51

Sports cardigan (in white crêpe), sweater-style top and skirt (in white crêpella and marine blue stitching) worn with a white felt cloche hat (with a marine blue band), a flower, beads, gloves and high-heeled shoes.
The hip-length cardigan has button fastening at waist level, full-length sleeves with a wide cuff and at least one patch pocket placed towards its hem (cf. 277). The top of the cuff and pockets would appear to be edged with a narrow band of what may be a contrasting fabric (possibly the marine blue); it is faced with the crepella of the skirt and top. The hip-length top has a round neckline and a wide marine blue belt. The knee-length skirt is cut straight and has three low pleats (one at the centre, two at the sides) marked at the top with a decorative angular seam.

6 British *Vogue*
16 May 1928, p. 66

Day-wear coat (in bright blue woollen fabric lined with the fabric of the dress) and one-piece dress (in bright navy crêpe printed with small white flowers) worn with a cloche hat, beads, artificial flower, gloves and high-heeled shoes. The model carries a large handbag.

The knee-length coat and dress are cut straight. The coat has set-in, full-length sleeves and a flat collar. It is worn open and no fastenings can be seen. The design is decorated with what would appear to be overlaid pieces of fabric in a contrasting colour; these triangular shaped panels radiate out from one point at the back and appear on the lower sleeve. The dress has a shallow V-neckline echoed by a deep V-shaped yoke on the front of the bodice; the point of the yoke is decorated with a small, loose bow. A narrow hip band in the same finely printed fabric is just visible. The skirt is in two tiers and finely pleated inverted V-shaped panels.