

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Chanel embraces streetwear style with Pharrell collaboration

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*Chanel has teamed with Pharrell Williams on a collection. Image credit: Chanel*

By SARAH JONES

French fashion house Chanel is speaking to a new generation of luxury shoppers with a collaborative collection that centers on urban aesthetics.

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Building on its existing relationship with musician Pharrell Williams, Chanel has developed a collection of pieces and a corresponding campaign that are aimed at youthful clientele. As the streetwear revolution has taken over luxury fashion, Chanel has previously stayed closer to its tailored roots, but this latest collection launch favors a streetwear sensibility over its signature tweed suits.

"Pharrell is obviously a successful crossover artist with huge appeal as an influencer and style icon," said Fred Reffsin, president of **Brandgrowth**, a New York-based brand strategy firm. "This seems to be a natural extension of their partnership that they believe can be leveraged.

"Is this a bit of a stretch? Brands must evolve," he said. "If the goal is to change perceptions or grow your customer base, you have to be willing to take risks and break some rules.

"Although with luxury fashion it is often difficult to figure out what exactly these rules are. One rule that I do believe in is that if you want to replenish your franchise it cannot be done at the expense of your core customer base."

Mr. Reffsin is not affiliated with Chanel, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Chanel** was reached for comment.

### Contemporizing Chanel

While Chanel has played into the casualization of luxury in the past with sneakers, parkas and leggings, the brand has not leaned into urban aesthetics as much as some of its peers.

This new line reflects a greater embrace of streetwear styling, with hoodies, T-shirts, sneakers and slides. These pieces include Chanel branding such as sparkling double C's.



*Chanel's Pharrell collection. Image credit: Chanel*

Chanel chose to launch the collection in Seoul, South Korea first on March 29, with a global rollout on April 4.

Marketing the collection, Chanel developed a three-minute film that has the feel of a music video.

Set to the vocals of the Brooklyn Youth Chorus performing "Anni's Constant" by Caroline Shaw, the film depicts young male and female models in relatable, relaxed scenes. The gang is seen eating takeout or watching television on a couch in robes.

Connecting Chanel's past to its present, house founder Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel appears on the TV.

At the center of the marketing story is the depicted friendship, as models embrace or dance each other.

Adding a rebellious youthful edge, the models also appear riding motorcycles.

#### *Chanel's Pharrell collection*

"If impact wasn't your goal this probably wasn't such a good idea," Mr. Reffsin said. "This goes beyond clothes and accessories. The collaboration has the potential to bring a different, tangible emotional energy to brand.

"Luxury marketing doesn't have to be a zero-sum game," he said. "You can add to the mystique without diminishing something in the process.

"I give Chanel credit for being smart enough to realize that if you are going to reimagine the brand, it is wise to pay homage to the brand's history as they have done with some of the throwback imagery in the video."

[View this post on Instagram](#)

Highlights of an exclusive concert by @Pharrell Williams that followed the launch of the #CHANELPharrell collection last night in Seoul. #CHANELinSeoul #CHANEL #PharrellWilliams @jennierubyjane #JennieKim @bobbyindaeyo #Bobby @soojmooj #SooJooPark #HelenLasichanh @ireneisgood #IreneKim @nigo #Nigo @ggonekim #GoEunKim @yoanaloves #RyeoWonJung @ana.h.kim #AnaHKim @jihyeparkjhp #JiHyePark

A post shared by CHANEL (@chanelofficial) on Mar 29, 2019 at 3:52pm PDT

### *Instagram post from Chanel*

Despite dabbling in menswear, Chanel has traditionally been primarily a women's wear label. The brand has recently branched further into men's dressing, often in partnership with Mr. Williams.

In 2017, Chanel took a rebellious stance on gender norms by selecting the music producer as the face of its then new Gabrielle handbag style.

Mr. Williams had worked with the brand before, but this marked the first time Chanel had made him an ambassador for a handbag. In doing so, Chanel expanded the notions of how luxury brands can market traditionally gendered products such as handbags to consumers outside the expected demographic ([see story](#)).

Chanel has also dressed Mr. Williams for red carpet events, creating suits for him to wear to events such as the Academy Awards.

In the ad campaign, Mr. Williams is joined by other male models, who accessorize their Chanel apparel with pearls and chains.

As gender becomes more fluid, and dressing evolves along with it, Chanel is making a push to market to the male consumer.

"I wouldn't say that this would give Chanel a branch into the men's market since men have been wearing Chanel for several years," said Romey Louangvilay, communications director at [ELMNTL](#), New York. "It's just that people always referred to it as women's clothing due to society's need to categorize everything.

"As more people embrace gender fluidity and unisex and androgynous clothing styles, I would say this collaboration will attract a new wave of customers to Chanel," he said.

### Hitting the street

Streetwear is adapting how luxury brands design and retail fashion.

For instance, French footwear designer Christian Louboutin's latest design drop exhibits how far streetwear and sneaker culture has come, with the brand updating its style to continue appealing to trend-focused fashion fans.

The prestigious label, famous for its red-bottom sole, is now dipping its toe into the athletic sneaker category with a new shoe. Through a new campaign, #RunLoubiRun, Christian Louboutin uses a variety of genres to tout the new shoes ([see story](#)).

Similarly, British department store chain Selfridges is looking to attract both male and female shoppers with a menswear space devoted to high-end streetwear, leaning in to luxury fashion's increasingly gender neutral, casual aesthetic.

Dubbed the "Designer Street Room," the retail concept has found a home in the menswear department and was developed with brand mixing and cross-category shopping in mind, including luxury labels such as Gucci and Versace. Selfridges' latest opening reflects consumers' high-low shopping patterns, as they curate wardrobes that

blend a bevy of brands ([see story](#)).

Chanel's collaboration similarly reflects the converging styles of fashion.

"On the surface, it would look like a style clash from two different, yet, celebrated aesthetics," Mr. Louangvilay said. "Pharrell is all about being different and experimenting with different styles. From hats, branded sunglasses and eccentric oversized jackets, he earned his status as a fashion icon with awards to back him up.

"On the other hand, Chanel is all about less is more," he said. "It's a timeless, sophisticated look that focuses on the essentials and making a statement that way.

"I believe Chanel extended the relationship to Pharrell because Chanel has always been about being contemporary and timeless all at the same time, and there is a huge trend in high-end streetwear. No one can deny Pharrell's impact into streetwear and fashion, and this collaboration is just a natural extension for both their brands to move forward into the future of fashion."

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