

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Brad Pitt, Penlope Cruz embody timeless romance of Chanel

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The maison is modernizing a midcentury film, but keeping vintage elements such as the coloring, setting, music and the classic purse. Image credit: Chanel

By EMILY IRIS DEGN

French fashion house Chanel is tapping into the power of A-list talent.

Academy Award-winning actors Brad Pitt and Penlope Cruz both star in the new Iconic Handbag campaign. Based on director Claude Lelouch's 1966 movie *Un Homme et une Femme*, "A Man and a Woman," the slot captures the romance of heritage luxury items, all while continuing this season's slew of homages to Hollywood.

"Conveying the essence of 'Frenchness' is becoming increasingly challenging for French luxury brands as the fundamental simplicity associated with it proves difficult to communicate in foreign markets, and staging Hollywood stars in cliché Parisian settings, seems out of breath," said Laurence Lim, founder and managing director of [Cherry Blossoms Intercultural Branding](#), New York.

"In light of this, the decision to adapt a scene from the iconic French film *A Man and a Woman* is a stroke of brilliance," Ms. Lim said. "The title alone hints at the love story's universality and authenticity.

"The scenes' minimalist dialogues, almost banal, reveal the tension and attraction between the two characters: nothing is said, yet everything is revealed."

Ms. Lim is not affiliated with Chanel, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

Love in the bag

Out now, Chanel's newest advertisement brings together cinema, brand history and a love story.

Chanel presents the Iconic Handbag campaign

The just over one-minute-long film was shot by Dutch-American fashion photographer-couple Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin in Deauville, a seaside town in France's Normandy region. Intrinsically linked to the house, Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel opened her first fashion boutique here in 1913 the locale is also creative director Virginie Viard's muse for her fall collection this year.

Pictured within this setting, Mr. Pitt and Ms. Cruz depict two people who meet and fall for one another.

During the off-season, the duo's developing romance is captured on camera. Together, they walk on windswept beaches, ride in vintage sports cars in comfortable silence, wander through midcentury architecture and order dinner at a fine-dining restaurant inside a hotel.



Set in France, the original production won multiple awards, such as the Grand Prix and two Academy Awards. Image credit: Chanel

The latter scene takes up most of the screen time. Just as it can be spotted in every other shot, a Chanel handbag sits between the two enamored characters, the signature logo glinting in the light as it perches in the middle of the white table.

In true Hollywood fashion, this is all captured in black and white as the original film's soundtrack by Francis Lai plays.

"I met Brad many years ago because we did a movie together but we didn't have scenes together," said Ms. Cruz, in a statement.

"I think he's perfect to embody Jean-Louis Trintignant's character," she said. "What is very mysterious and very interesting about the way Claude Lelouch portrays that connection and that love story is that you can feel the danger of it.

"They know they are already falling deeply in love with each other."



The famous movie stars reprise the roles first played by French actors Anouk Aime and Jean-Louis Trintignant, now modernized. Image credit: Chanel

Just as Mr. Lelouch brought the intensity of new love to life nearly 60 years ago, the modern actors share deep chemistry and romantic tension.

Their eye contact with each other is seldom broken, and their lines are at times delivered as voice-overs as the camera pans in on their nonverbal flirtations. Chanel earrings glitter in Ms. Cruz's ears as she smiles at her counterpart.

After ordering two medium-rare Chateaubriands and turning down starters, the film ends with a question.

"She's definitely not happy," Mr. Pitt says, referring to the waitress that just took their order.

"Do you want us to make her happy?" Ms. Cruz says.



The two stars order a steak dinner in a classic scene, capturing a sense of Old World elegance. Image credit: Chanel

At this, she calls over the waitress politely, who comes over to the table.

"Do you have any rooms available?" Ms. Cruz asks.

The maison frames the Chanel handbag involved as a witness to these interactions, acting as a character of sorts in the romantic relationship's inception. The role grants the product an emotional draw in a move that embraces some of today's biggest consumer trends ([see story](#)).

Originally played by French actors Anouk Aime and Jean-Louis Trintignant in the 1966 production, Ms. Cruz and Mr. Pitt's roles further uplift the idea of adding meaningful narratives into advertising. Together, the silver-screen staples embody what it means to fall in love, a story that is as timeless and universal as Chanel positions its designs to be ([see story](#)).



The duo reenacts the same ordering scene from the 1966 film, but swaps which lines each gender speaks. Image credit: Chanel

"This reserve and sobriety perfectly mirror the refined image of Chanel, antagonist to cheesy romance," said Ms. Lim.

"It doesn't fall into the trap of any French 'art de vivre' cliché," she said. "Furthermore, casting 60-year-old Brad Pitt and 50-year-old Penelope Cruz, and having the woman ask for 'any room available' when it was originally the man's call, are also ways to give a contemporary twist to this timeless story."

Star power

Ms. Cruz and Mr. Pitt are two of this century's biggest stars, making their presence especially powerful for partners and those they collaborate with.

The American actor has long been involved in luxury, appearing in fashion commercials ([see story](#)) and launching his own high-end Champagne house ([see story](#)). He is also a historic tap for Chanel, which made him the first male ambassador for its No. 5 fragrance in 2012 ([see story](#)).



Hollywood actors, practiced in the art of securing the attention of audiences, are now a staple in luxury ads. Image credit: Chanel

The maison has also worked with the Spanish actress before, placing her alongside fellow ambassadors in marketing since her appointment in 2018 ([see story](#)). Other businesses recognize her value as well, with even airlines working to add her prestige to their travel experience ([see story](#)).

In the midst of awards season, it is no wonder that those across the Hollywood landscape join these two mega-talents in luxury efforts.

From tourism names ([see story](#)) to automotive giants ([see story](#)), many are working to take part in the movie industry, whether that looks like sponsoring spaces at film events ([see story](#)) or signing agreements to get their products pictured on the big screen ([see story](#)).



Movie posters are now live on Chanel's Instagram and scripts are pictured on a dedicated landing page for the campaign. Image credit: Chanel

This is not the first time that Chanel has counted itself among this group, working with film festival darlings ([see story](#)) and celebrating French cinema in a nod to its home country's famous art form ([see story](#)).

The Iconic Handbag campaign extends this tradition that time and again has proven to grab the attention of shoppers across demographics, marrying universal appeal and rich heritage.