

ADVERTISING

Karl Lagerfeld: Luxury influencer or overachiever?

November 27, 2012



By TRICIA CARR

As the creative direction behind Chanel, ringmaster of his own fashion label and one to take on multiple side projects, experts agree that Karl Lagerfeld's extensive résumé is not to be countered, but embraced by industry insiders and consumers alike.

Sign up now

Luxury Daily

Mr. Lagerfeld's has a consistent presence in the luxury industry with all eyes on his every move, word and endeavor. However, if he were to step down from either of his fashion forays, each brand would likely survive on its core DNA alone, experts say.

"Karl Lagerfeld, the consummate provocateur, serves as a source of inspiration for luxury brands and consumers today," said Molly Leis, principal of **MRL Communications**, New York. "Admired and beloved for his affiliation with prominent fashion houses and his strategic partnerships from Magnum to Rolls-Royce make luxury and fashion accessible and fun for all.

"His diverse alliances reach both mass and affluent consumers and range across product categories from home to food to automobiles," she said. "His irreverent style and joie de vivre has become ubiquitous for both class and mass.

"Mr. Lagerfeld's very essence epitomizes his predecessor Chanel's famous quote,

‘Fashion is not something that exists in dresses only. Fashion is in the sky, in the street, fashion has to do with ideas, the way we live, what is happening.’”

Fashion first

In the past few months alone Mr. Lagerfeld has dipped his does in quite a few projects.

For example, British automaker Rolls-Royce Motor Cars tapped Mr. Lagerfeld to present a new exhibit in its “Icons of Art” series featuring his photography. The exhibit focuses on Mr. Lagerfeld’s abstract take on the textures, surfaces and shapes in the vehicles ([see story](#)).

In addition, Mr. Lagerfeld is dedicating his annual read-to-wear collection for Chanel to Scottish culture and the craftsmanship of tweed and cashmere since the brand recently acquired Scottish cashmere mill Barrie Knitwear.

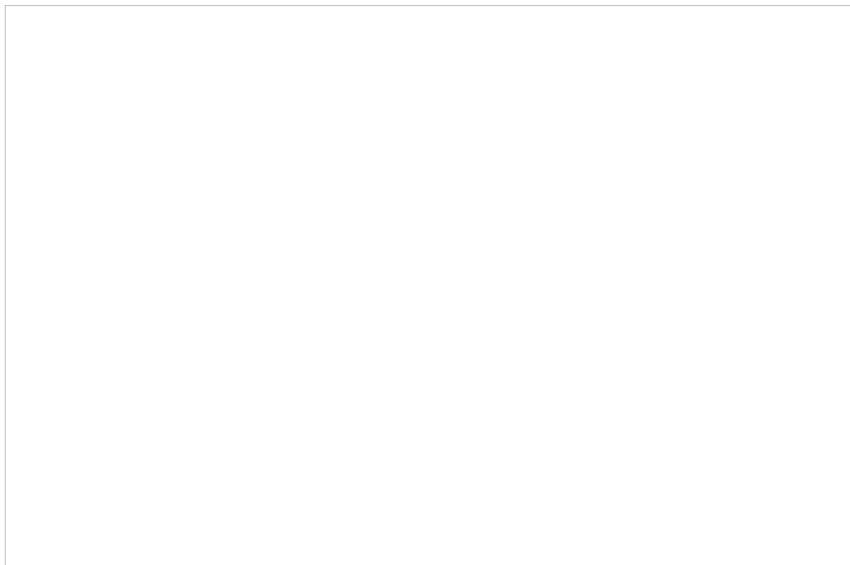
This collection will debut Dec. 4 at the Linlithgow Palace near Edinburgh, Scotland ([see story](#)).

Embedded Video: <http://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/gMWVtbiF0II>

Interview with Mr. Lagerfeld

Throughout this year, Mr. Lagerfeld is presenting photographs of actors, artists, singers and other personalities dressed in their respective interpretations of Chanel’s iconic jacket at exhibits in Tokyo, New York, Paris and Berlin.

The images are the subject of the book "The Little Black Jacket: Chanel's classic revisited by Karl Lagerfeld and Carine Roitfeld" ([see story](#)).



Mr. Lagerfeld at the Little Black Jacket exhibit opening in Berlin

Also, he holds the design responsibilities of both a self-named collection and French fashion house Chanel under his belt.

Experts agree that Mr. Lagerfeld's consistency in design is what has elevated him to a fashion icon.

“To quote a Karlism, ‘I’m a fashion person and fashion is not only about the clothes, it’s about all kinds of change,’” Ms. Leis said. “Karl challenges social conventions with irreverent and witty dialogue as seen in his branding, marketing and advertising endeavors across projects.

“Affluent consumers endorse his projects as he has historically been aligned with luxury brands,” she said. “His style and intellect, connotative of exclusivity and mystery, appeal to all consumers.”

Longevity rules

However, the designer can never be greater than the brand, per Milton Pedraza, CEO of the [Luxury Institute](#), New York.

Therefore, Mr. Lagerfeld represents the creative direction of Chanel and the Karl Lagerfeld label at the moment, but if he were to leave his position behind, there would be someone to continue the heritage of the brand.

“Karl Lagerfeld is one of the icons of the luxury industry,” Mr. Pedraza said. “He has one of the longest tenures at a brand.

“His lasting power, longevity and creativity has made him one of the last stewards of a brand,” he said. “The designer has tremendous influence over the brand, but luxury brands last for hundreds of years, no matter who the designer is, because they stay true to their DNA.”

Embedded Video: <http://www.youtube-nocookie.com/embed/jx077-3voJE>

Interview with Mr. Lagerfeld

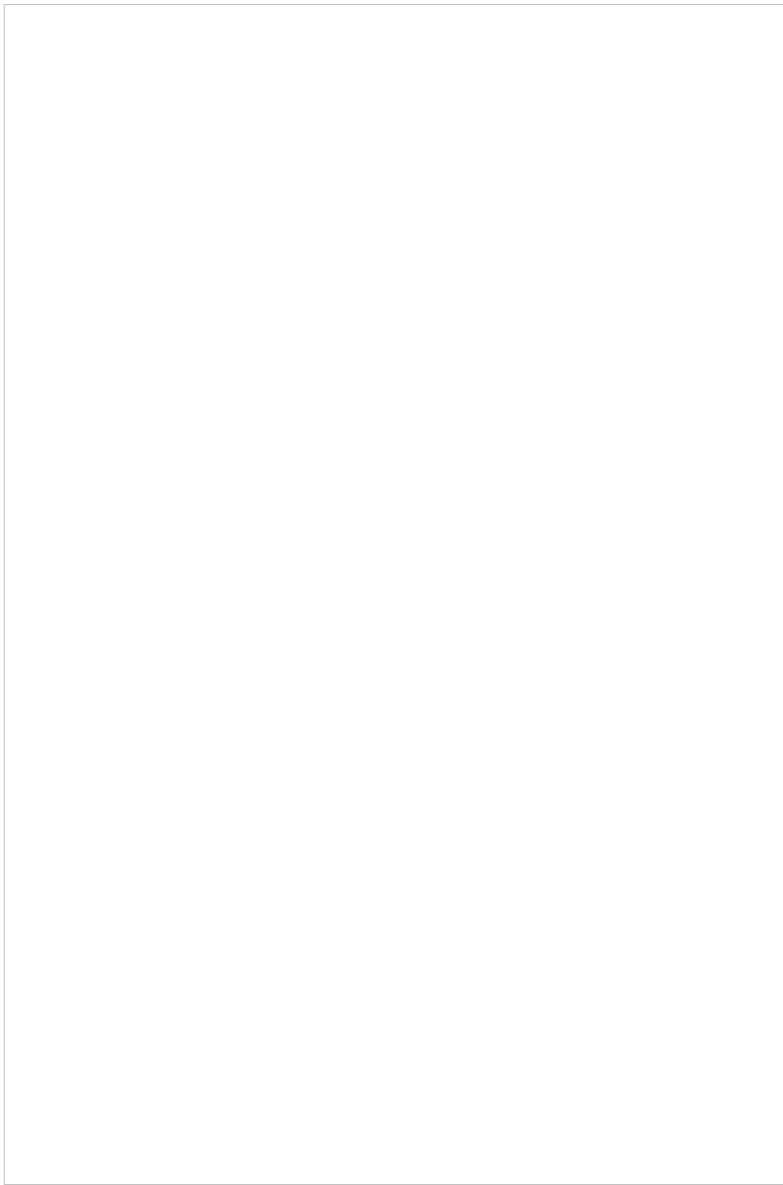
Indeed, Mr. Lagerfeld seems to be the last of his kind, said Chris Ramey, president of [Affluent Insights](#), Miami.

Luxury brands and large corporations no longer allow an employee to compete with the brand itself.

“Karl Lagerfeld is a unique cultural icon successfully leveraging his own brand while supporting Chanel,” Mr. Ramey said.

“He has worked with dozens of brands through the course of his life,” he said. “No doubt his current projects earn Chanel’s approval prior to launching.

“The backbone of luxury is the brand, never the individual.”



Mr. Lagerfeld at the fall/winter 2012 haute couture show

Survival of the fittest

Mr. Lagerfeld is likely regarded by the public as more of a creative personality than the face of the Chanel brand.

Therefore, his actions – though inspirational in the industry and aspirational for many consumers – are not necessarily reflective of his brands.

“At the age of 79, he is an elder statesman in the fashion industry,” said Al Ries, chairman of marketing strategy consultancy **Ries & Ries**, Roswell, GA. “Most consumers look at him for what he has done in the past, not what he might be doing in the future.

“The backbone of a luxury brand is authenticity,” he said. “Chanel is a brand that has a considerable amount of authenticity, especially among older, higher-end consumers.

“Chanel does not need Mr. Lagerfeld to establish its authenticity, although he, of course, can be helpful.”

In fact, luxury namesake brands, in general, have proven to survive without their founders. Coco Chanel’s death in 1971 did not weaken her label.

“If Chanel survived without Coco, then certainly Chanel will survive without Karl Lagerfeld,” Mr. Ries said. “It is possible that the Karl Lagerfeld brand will survive without Karl, but only time will tell.”

Final Take

Tricia Carr, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York

© Napean LLC. All rights reserved.

Luxury Daily is published each business day. Thank you for reading us. Your **feedback** is welcome.