

INTERNET

Chanel expands on founder's legacy with costume docudrama

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By SARAH JONES

French atelier Chanel will debut a new film focusing on Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel's return to fashion in the 1950s following World War II, directed by the brand's creative director, Karl Lagerfeld.

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The film, aptly titled "The Return," is more Hollywood than other typical fashion films, with a run time of 30-minutes and big budget production. By creating a longer length film, Chanel will be able to educate fans on its story on a deeper level.

"Clearly, the brand is targeting its loyalists and fans of its founder Coco Chanel," said John Casey, senior vice president of [Havas Public Relations](#), New York.

"Ms. Chanel is such a force of nature and an icon in the fashion industry, so the brand is more likely to 'get away' with producing a fuller-length short film based on the subject matter," he said.

Mr. Casey is not affiliated with Chanel, but agreed to comment as an industry expert.

[Chanel](#) was unable to comment by press deadline.

Channeling Chanel

The film stars actress Geraldine Chaplin as Ms. Chanel and modern day Chanel muse, Lady Amanda Harlech as the former American Vogue fashion editor Bettina Ballard. Actor Rupert Everett plays a journalist.

Friends of the Chanel brand make cameos in the film. The atelier's real-life seamstresses play their counterparts in the film, and hairstylist Sam McKnight portrays Ms. Chanel's butler.

To set the scene, Chanel recreated its founder's Paris salon in a studio in France, complete with the iconic mirrored spiral staircase.

"The Return" will premiere Dec. 10 prior to Chanel's Paris-Dallas Métiers d'Art collection in Dallas and simultaneously on Chanel's Web site.

Chanel released a preview of the film, which shows Mr. Everett talking about how superbly he felt Ms. Chaplin took on the role of Ms. Chanel.

Through clips shown throughout the interview, the viewer sees Ms. Chaplin made up as the famous designer, working on a garment while smoking a cigarette. A fashion presentation is also shown, giving viewers a glimpse at the mid-century fashions the actors will wear throughout the film.



A still from the preview video for "The Return"

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Fashion on film

Chanel has previously used film as a storytelling tool to acquaint audiences with the brand's heritage.

For example, the fashion house showcased its history in a social video series that takes consumers through the history of the founder's life.

The fifth video of the series explores Chanel's founder Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel's early life, influences and motivations. Exploring the early life and influences of a brand's founder via social content can personalize a brand while engaging consumers ([see story](#)).

Inside Chanel: Coco

Chanel is not new to pushing the boundaries on how long a fashion film can be.

For instance, Mr. Lagerfeld's bold move to create an 18-minute brand film for Chanel's 100th anniversary signaled that the French label is not only an innovator in fashion, but is also looking to break the rules with its digital marketing.

The film called "Once Upon a Time" with actress Keira Knightley, the longtime ambassador for Chanel's Coco Mademoiselle fragrance, starts in 1913 when Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel has opened a namesake hat boutique in on the Rue Gontaut-Biron in Deauville, France. The label's creative director Karl Lagerfeld produced and directed the film to show how the brand's founder revolutionized fashion by creating a new style concept for modern women ([see story](#)).

Chanel's "Once Upon a Time"

Like former Chanel biopics, fans of the fashion house are likely to tune in to the film and tell their friends about it.

"I would imagine Chanel customers and fans will be thrilled with Lagerfeld's film," Mr. Casey said. "Coco Chanel is a fashion institution, and she's still enormously popular and influential.

"The Lifetime television film starring Shirley MacLaine as Ms. Chanel was a ratings hit when it aired in 2008, so one would assume they'll be plenty of shares and views of this film," he said.

Final take

Sarah Jones, editorial assistant on Luxury Daily, New York