

Watch Journal

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House Proud

With runway references and an emphasis on crafting in-house movements, Chanel fuses high fashion and watchmaking artistry.

By Tanya Dukes
Photos by Doug Young

There's no arguing that Chanel is a newcomer to the haute horlogerie block. In an industry that measures legacies in centuries, Chanel launched its first watch a mere 30 years ago. But the commitment to the category—bolstered by collaborations with independent watchmaker Romain Gauthier and ownership of watch assembly company Châtelain—has helped it quickly gain on the old guard. Chanel's mix of technical expertise and its seemingly endless archive crammed

with Parisienne elegance makes for a formidable combination.

The jewelry watch Code Coco is a case in point. It borrows design elements from one of Chanel's iconic handbags, the 2.55, and features crisp, sophisticated engineering. Since debuting in February of 1995, the 2.55 has had a bar-shaped closure called the Mademoiselle Lock, a moniker that—according to lore—referred to Coco Chanel's perennially unmarried status (or perhaps her alleged habit of

secretly love notes in her handbag). The same lock serves as a closure for the quartz-powered Code Coco.

It clicks into two positions: When horizontal, the black lacquered dial, which measures 38.1 by 21.5 mm, is fully visible. When the lock swivels into a vertical orientation, it conceals the watch's hands, obscuring the passage of time. It's a fitting gesture from a brand whose founder declared, "I don't know how to be anywhere but in the present."





PHOTO: (BOTTOM) LIPNITZKI, COURTESY OF CHANEL.

The Code Coco's flexible stainless-steel bracelet unfolds from a bangle to a flat position once opened. A grid pattern that evokes the quilted leather exterior of the 2.55 decorates the polished metal—even the faintest movement scatters light across its textured surface. Another degree of glitz comes from diamond accents. Stainless-steel models include a single diamond on their dials and bezels with or without diamonds. A version in white gold, completely covered in diamonds, is available too—but in a limited edition of five. Chanel's lucky number and the numeral associated with a certain famous perfume.

OPENING: The Chanel Code watch and the bag that inspired it. Chanel essentials: Coco Chanel in 1927. OP- POSTER: Michael Kammers' Red Wine Dress Set and Rough Diamond cuff links.



LINKED IN

Why the world's most discerning wrists wear cuff links from Michael Kammers.

The modern man has about as much need for cufflinks as he does for, well, a watch. If you need the time, you can consult your phone. If you need to keep your sleeves together, consider the button. And yet...

Wearing cuff links, like wearing a watch, signifies not just a rich understanding of history on behalf of the wearer, but also an appreciation for craftsmanship, for taste, and for the eternal notion that what's practical isn't always what's stylish, and what's convenient isn't always what's right. It also demonstrates a more forward-looking kind of aspiration: Cufflinks, like watches, are the kinds of things that get passed down from generation to generation. To wear either, or even both, is to connect yourself to both your past and your future.

Few men understand this better than Michael Kammers. A third-generation jeweler, he received his first pair of cufflinks from his grandfather (a simple gold pair he still owns), and went on to create some of the most intricately crafted and exquisitely designed ones on the market. He

learned his art collecting and selling vintage links, before he began making his own, 10 years ago. It was a decision born of necessity. "Customers were looking for vintage cuff links, but I could never find enough," he says. "I had to make them because there aren't enough around to keep everybody happy."

The telltale sign of a Michael Kammers cuff link is a unique marriage of first-rate materials with first-class whimsy. Take his first pair: theatrical masks made from fine coral. (He still has them and, we regret to inform, intends to keep them.) Then there are his later designs: A polar bear with a paw backing. An incredibly detailed dog—wearing a fedora. A diamond crown atop a coral frog. Suffice it to say, few designers, if any—and certainly not those at the big-brand jewelers—are making such painstaking and original designs today, and certainly not to such exacting standards of quality.

Where does he get his ideas? Some are commissioned by his customers. Some are inspired by vintage links.

And then some just come to him. "There are certain obvious ones that appeal to the collector's mentality: vintage cars, boats, dogs—things where there's a lot of variety," he says. "There are some cars I've done that I think are just fantastic, because of the combinations of stones, where every detail is represented by a different stone."

Once he has an idea, he sits with a stone cutter—some of whom he's worked with for his entire 10-year run—in Italy or Germany and does some sketching. They'll see what stones are available, with a particular eye for ones with a strong color variety. He'll sketch his designs directly onto the stones, estimate the time and cost involved, and then cut them to his own very precise measurements. (His experience has given him a strong sense of what his customers will like—what he calls "the sweet spot" between too big and too small.) Because each pair is handcrafted, no two sets of cufflinks are ever exactly alike. —Paul L. Underwood