

Chanel Celebrates U.K. Centenary With a Picasso, Ballet and English Stars

“Everything goes back to Gabrielle Chanel and the U.K. still has this special place for the house,” said Elizabeth Anglès d'Auriac, president of Chanel U.K., in an interview ahead of the brand's intimate dinner for 100 guests.

By Hikmat Mohammed



LONDON — **Chanel** is celebrating its 100 years in the U.K. in typical Gabrielle “Coco” **chanel** fashion.

The French brand's centenary kicked off with an intimate 100-guest **dinner** and a **ballet** performance behind a Pablo Picasso stage cloth at the V&A East Storehouse in Stratford's Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park.

Friends, executives and ambassadors of Chanel — including president of fashion and president of Chanel SAS Bruno Pavlovsky, chief executive officer **Leena Nair**, president of Chanel U.K. Elizabeth Anglès d'Auriac, **Keira Knightley**, Jenna Coleman, Ellie Bamber, Peter Saville, Bel Powley, Douglas Booth, Greta Bellamacina and Lily Allen — sat down for a meal surrounded by thousands of objects and artifacts older than 100 years.

Knightley, who has been an ambassador for Chanel since 2006, was amazed by the vastness of the venue. The space could easily rival her personal collection of pieces from the house.

She described her personal Chanel wardrobe as “quite good, but it's not quite 100 years.” Her favorite pieces she's worn over the years is a “purple '50s ballgown with a sheer T-shirt top, which was one of Karl Lagerfeld's that I wore to the Toronto Film Festival for the premiere of ‘Atonement’.”

The actress wore a long white shirtdress with an embroidered dress on top from the brand's fall 2025 collection. “Thank God they do summer looks,” she joked.

Knightley is in the midst of juggling work and summer with her children. She will start shooting the second series of the Netflix show “Black Doves” soon and she's just been on a reshoot for her upcoming film “The Woman in Cabin 10” based on a novel by Ruth Ware that Simon Stone is directing.



“It’s a thriller set on a super yacht. [I said yes to the project] because Simon is a big theater director whose work I’ve loved and I thought it was so weird that he wanted to do a flashy thriller because he’s a very serious theater director. It’s such an interesting combination,” she said.

Asked if this could be her foray into stage acting, she said, “maybe, who knows?”

The English actor Powley was also taken by the venue’s charm. She took a few snapshots of the objects on her mobile phone before sitting down for **dinner**.

Despite the hot British weather outside, Powley was committed to her Chanel short tweed dress with a ruffled feather neckline that she described as “very bird-like and beautiful.”

She has been climatized to hot weather after filming in Jamaica for the past month for her upcoming series “Inheritance” starring Gugu Mbatha-Raw and Johnny Lee Miller.

“It’s quite a dark, horror-inspired project and the overarching themes are racial identity and politics. It’s split between two timelines, the modern day and 1760 in Jamaica about the legacy of colonialism and slavery. It’s a really eye-opening, important and unique project that I’m really proud to be a part of,” she said.

Powley has just been announced to join the cast of the HBO series “Harry Potter” playing the role of Aunt Petunia. She fondly remembers reading all the books growing up.

Fantasy, on and off screen, was the subject of conversations.

Coleman was ready to talk about entering back into fantasy with the second series of the hit Netflix show “**The Sandman**” coming out in July. She plays dual characters: Johanna Constantine, an occult detective, and Lady Johanna Constantine, an 18th-century aristocrat.

“[My favorite part] is the Gothic-noir in nature and genre, also entering another realm. It’s a very unique visual,” she said, wearing a black leather look from Chanel’s Métiers d’Art collection.

“There’s a nod to [the] character [of Johanna Constantine],” she joked.

In contrast to Coleman’s gothic look, Bamber was dressed in blue tweed to match the blue skies outside with a red velvet bag that outlined roses.

“I am very hot, but I don’t mind because the color is absolutely amazing,” she said.

Bamber is no stranger to fashion and has been working with Chanel for over five years, but soon she will be taking on the role of Kate Moss in “Moss & Freud,” following the supermodel’s relationship with the artist Lucian Freud, who painted her nude in 2002.

She got into character by spending a lot of time with Moss, who is a producer on the film. “I looked at so many images of her and I worked with people who helped me curate her within the film,” she said, adding that she even took on the model’s native Croydon accent.

The musician Allen is dipping her toes back into acting this summer as Hedda Gabler in “Hedda” at the Theatre Royal Bath in a reimagining of Henrik Ibsen’s classical play “Hedda Gabler,” of a woman already bored of her marriage when she returns from her honeymoon.

“I said ‘yes’ to it because it seemed like a bad idea, in a way that it was really challenging, so I felt like throwing myself into,” she said.

Allen has been working with the house of Chanel for nearly two decades and her look of the evening — a short strapless black-and-white dress with the CC logo — was inspired by how she used to dress back in 2008, a year before she became the face of the brand’s Coco Cocoon handbag line.



“I have so many Chanel pieces, I reckon I have 100 pieces, including accessories, that’s if you counted every shoe individually,” she said charmingly with laughter.

Chanel’s World Stage

Chanel, like its friends and ambassadors of the stage and screen, took the opportunity to show what they’ve been working on, a reimagination of “Le Train Bleu” with the English National Ballet for their centenary.

The one-act performance dates back to 1924 and was performed in front of a stage cloth borrowing Pablo Picasso’s “Deux femmes courant sur la plage.” Gabrielle Chanel costumed the performance that was based on a scenario by Jean Cocteau and choreographed by Bronislava Nijinska to music by Darius Milhaud for Serge Diaghilev’s Les Ballets Russes.

The **ballet** incorporates all things Chanel: the French Riviera, sports, flirtation and striped jersey knitwear.

“The ballet feels like a museum piece because it just captures the glamour and free spirit of the Roaring ’20s, but there’s also these chic looks that are similar to how things are now,” said Stina Quagebeur, associate choreographer at the English National Ballet.

When the dancers started their fittings in Chanel lycra costumes printed with knitwear they naturally got into character.

Quagebeur wanted the short ballet to spotlight the individual nine principal dancers instead of creating a big narrative. The dancers, some performing a duet, come on and off the stage locking eyes with each other and smirking, hinting at summer love affairs.

In the lead-up to the original ballet, Nijinska and Cocteau disagreed on the direction of the narrative with Nijinska wanting a storyline, while Cocteau preferring an abstract retelling.

“I decided to focus more on the abstract side and incorporating the athleticism and pushing the virtuoso of the dancers,” said Quagebeur, adding that for one of the characters based on the 1920s tennis player Suzanne Lenglen, she wanted her to run instead of elegantly leaping across the stage.

“Le Train Bleu” fits with the Picasso stage cloth of two women with windswept hair running by the sea.

Chanel has been supporting the conservation of the cloth, which is now on display in the David and Molly Lowell Borthwick Gallery at the V&A East Storehouse.

Everything Returns to Gabrielle Chanel

Gabrielle Chanel’s love affair with the English has been a well documented one and it’s one that the brand continues to add to.

Her romance with Arthur “Boy” Capel and subsequently Hugh Grosvenor, the second Duke of Westminster, started long before the 1920s, but it was in 1925 that the designer went onto registering Parfums Chanel Limited in the U.K.; a year prior she had established Les Parfums Chanel in France.

“Everything goes back to Gabrielle and the U.K. still has this special place for the house because we still source tweed and cashmere from the U.K.,” said Anglès d’Auriac in an interview.

In times of hard luxury, she calls the events of Chanel’s U.K. celebrations serendipity.

“Things become evident and ideas bubble up when you start getting interested in your local environment, your clients and the culture environment. We always think about creation, creativity and craftsmanship — it’s our heritage, but it’s also in our present and future,” said Anglès d’Auriac.



There are more surprises in store for the rest of the year.

Anglès d'Auriac is honing on how to best show the brand's creation and craftsmanship in a culturally relevant way to their clients through Chanel's retail and boutique footprint.

"The beauty of working in the U.K. is that it's still a source of inspiration for the house and we've had our headquarters here since 2018, which shows its importance and close proximity to France," she said.

The brand has been on a high in the U.K. since 2023 when it staged "**Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto**" at the Victoria & Albert Museum and a Métiers d'Art collection in Manchester.

The **slowdown in luxury spending** may have shaken consumer confidence, but in the U.K. Chanel's bestsellers are coming out of its newly launched Métiers d'Art collection in stores; the Chanel 25 handbag that British pop star Dua Lipa is the face of and the jewelry line Coco Crush.

Anglès d'Auriac also revealed that other in-demand products include the Les Beiges Healthy Glow Bronzing Cream; the Coco Mademoiselle purse spray and the Chance Eau Splendide, which had its own pop-up on Chance Street in Shoreditch.

Gabrielle Chanel famously said, "I have always succeeded with the English, I don't know why." But perhaps her superstitions knew why.

