



On the Scent

Chanel's latest high jewellery collection is a befitting tribute to one of the brand's biggest icons: the Chanel No 5 perfume, according to Patrice Leguèreau, director of the Chanel Fine Jewellery Creation Studio *By Ho Yun Kuan*

A suit, perhaps a tie, and a spritz of Chanel No 5 on the wrist—since the summer of 2018, this has been Patrice Leguèreau's ensemble for going to the office.

He may have turned heads, not least because he's a man wearing a scent originally dubbed "a woman's fragrance that smells like a woman". But if he did, Gabrielle Chanel would probably have approved. After all, the now-iconic perfume was always meant to be a head-turner.

Launched in 1921, Chanel No 5 broke perfumery norms of the early 20th century with its bold combination of floral notes comprising May rose, jasmine, ylang ylang and sandalwood. Legend has it that upon completing the fragrance, Gabrielle Chanel invited her friends for a celebratory meal at a popular restaurant, where she debuted her product by spraying it around the table. The scent was so alluring, every female diner who walked past stopped to ask about it.

On the centennial of its creation this year, the perfume is set to turn heads yet again, but not for its olfactory qualities. After three years experiencing the magnetism of Chanel No 5 for himself, Leguèreau, as director of the



The Grasse Jasmine necklace in white and yellow gold with diamonds. **Opposite page, from left:** No 5 Drop ring in yellow gold with diamonds; No 5 Signature Bottle Brooch in yellow and white gold with yellow sapphires and diamonds

Chanel Fine Jewellery Creation Studio, has unveiled Collection No 5, a 123-piece high jewellery collection inspired by the scent.

THE CREATION PROCESS

How does one create something as tactile as jewellery from something as evanescent as a fragrance? Leguereau had no precedent to look to for guidance—the collection is the first of its kind in the world.

He knew that he had to find a unique approach. This meant eschewing the grounded study of materials and forms and instead, giving in to spontaneity and paying heed to the emotions the perfume stirred up in him.

A trip to Chanel's jasmine fields was in order. Located in Grasse on the French Riviera, this is where the flowers are harvested for the perfume. "I took a short trip there with Olivier Polge, Chanel's perfumer. He explained to me all the details of Chanel's jasmine culture and harvest. I came away deeply inspired," he recalls.

On his return to his studio in Paris, which is serendipitously located on the fifth floor of Chanel's

What has culminated are masterpieces that take clear structural cues from the iconic bottle and octagonal stopper of Chanel No 5, yet manage the feat of giving form to the elusive *sillage* (French for scent trail) of the perfume.

"The bottle itself is a very recognisable icon," Leguereau points out. "What I wanted to create was a combination of the fragrance, the liquid and the 'solid' parts of Chanel No. 5—the bottle and stopper. The visible aspects of the perfume were just as important as the invisible."

CAPTURING THE SCENT

There is perhaps a singular moment when the fragrance ceases to be incorporeal. It's in the moment when the spray nozzle of a bottle of Chanel No 5 is pushed, and for a split second, the scent is tangible, encapsulated in the golden droplets that make up the fine mist that erupts.

This fleeting moment is captured in the Golden Burst necklace with strands of orange, yellow, and pink topazes dripping from a platinum and yellow gold

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office at Place Vendôme, Leguereau set about immersing himself in the lore of Chanel No 5. "My studio is filled with symbols and elements that remind me of the Chanel universe."

As a starting point, he began to sketch—not gemstones or specific jewellery designs, but the abstract visions that came to him. "I wanted to enter (the design process) in an artistic way, by using colours and paints on large pieces of paper—something with movement, dynamism, and energy."

Once he put brush to paper, it was as if he was guided by an invisible force. Instinctively, he reached for yellows, oranges, pinks and reds—"to me these are the colours of Chanel No 5. I couldn't imagine greens or blues," he says. He chose bold dashes and strokes layered in vibrant, abstract compositions: "the smell of the perfume brought me feelings of rising, radiating and exploding elements." Under Leguereau's brushstrokes, the spirit of the collection began to reveal itself.



structure. A 4.51-carat emerald-cut diamond sits in the centre, representing the bottle's iconic octagonal stopper.

A similar effect is also achieved in the No 5 Sparkling Silhouette necklace. Here, the bottle's silhouette, carved out of pink gold and platinum, appears to melt into diamond droplets. At the centre of the design is a 5.19-carat pear-cut diamond.

Of course, an endeavour to capture the *sillage* wouldn't be complete without a chapter dedicated to the perfume's bouquet. Leguereau has obliged with a

number of pieces featuring the May rose, Grasse jasmine, and ylang ylang.

Especially notable is the transformable Grasse Jasmine that can be worn as a necklace or bracelet. The watch is mounted on a string of cultured pearls, surrounded by yellow sapphires and adorned with a pair of diamond-embellished jasmine flowers fastened to its top edge.



The highlight is the 55.55 necklace, which takes on the shape and ethos of the iconic scent created by Gabrielle Chanel in 1921 (below). **Opposite page:** Patrice Leguereau



delicate enough," he continues. "It felt natural for me to bring in some suppleness and fluidity to break up the rigidity and give femininity to its shape."

THE PIÈCE DE RÉSISTANCE

The zenith of the collection is the 55.55 necklace, named for its centre stone, a stunning 55.55-carat emerald-cut diamond that's meant to represent the Chanel No 5 bottle. Below it hang five pear-cut diamonds that are reminiscent of droplets of perfume. Topping it all is the iconic octagonal stopper, which is set with baguette diamonds. The piece is tethered to three layers of diamond chains secured in the back by a clasp in the shape of the figure five.

"At the beginning, this necklace was a dream," Leguereau muses. "I dreamt of a masterpiece with a unique stone in the centre. I didn't know exactly what it would be—it could be in a special colour, cut or carat weight—I wasn't sure. All I knew was that I wanted a necklace that celebrated the number five, and which represented the bottle and the stopper."

It was only when the gemmology team chanced upon a D-colour, flawless diamond rough that the idea to have a centre stone of precisely 55.55 carats materialised. "We could have cut a bigger stone, or we could have cut a different stone," he says. But given Gabrielle Chanel's penchant for the number five, and her belief that it was her lucky number, nothing else would have felt right.

Created as a true tribute to Chanel No 5 and an emblem of the brand's expertise in high jewellery, the 55.55 necklace is destined for Chanel's Patrimoine (archives) and will not be available for sale.

THE FIGURE FIVE

It is believed that Chanel No 5 is so named because Gabrielle Chanel chose the fifth fragrance sample out of the many that her perfumer, Ernest Beaux, presented to her. The figure five is a recurring motif in this collection and where it doesn't take centre stage as a design feature, it often appears on the clasp.

Through Leguereau's creative interpretation, the number takes on an almost chameleon-like character, at times engaging in a playful game of hide-and-seek with the viewer. It morphs into a fluid swirl of ribbon in the Knotted No 5 pieces, disguises itself as the centre of the Eternal No 5 brooch, and hides itself so that it can only be seen in the profile of the Eternal No 5 ring.

"I imagined the number five and allowed myself to arrive slowly at the jewellery designs," Leguereau explains. He held up a painting featuring the number written in various shades of red, repeatedly and overlapping one another, to cover the entire paper. Presented this way, the figure five ceased to be a singular, recognisable number, but an abstract pattern that displayed a remarkable sense of movement.

"The figure five, if used directly in jewellery, would not be in the spirit of Chanel No 5. It is not feminine or