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Channeling Chanel

by [Semmi W.](#) | Posted June 15, 2012

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Visitors at The Little Black Jacket exhibition. Photograph by Semhar Woldeyesus.

A tightly pulled ponytail, signature black shades and fingerless leather driving gloves have all come to define the man we know as Karl Lagerfeld. Like Jean Paul Gaultier or even Steve Jobs, the legendary designer has always taken personal comfort in repeatedly wearing simple, understated attire.

Lagerfeld's personality, of course, is in stark contrast to his trademark uniform. Bold and outspoken, the creative force behind [Chanel](#) has never been one to shy away from the camera. Especially when he chooses to step behind it.

The Little Black Jacket is Lagerfeld's latest exhibit as a photographer. Taken over the course of a year, the project features over 100 photos of famous personalities and artists wearing Chanel's iconic black jacket.

When styling the photographs, Carine Roitfeld, former editor-in-chief of *Vogue Paris*, encouraged each model to use the jacket as an instrument that could be repeatedly worn and interpreted. For Sarah Jessica Parker, it becomes a crown, while

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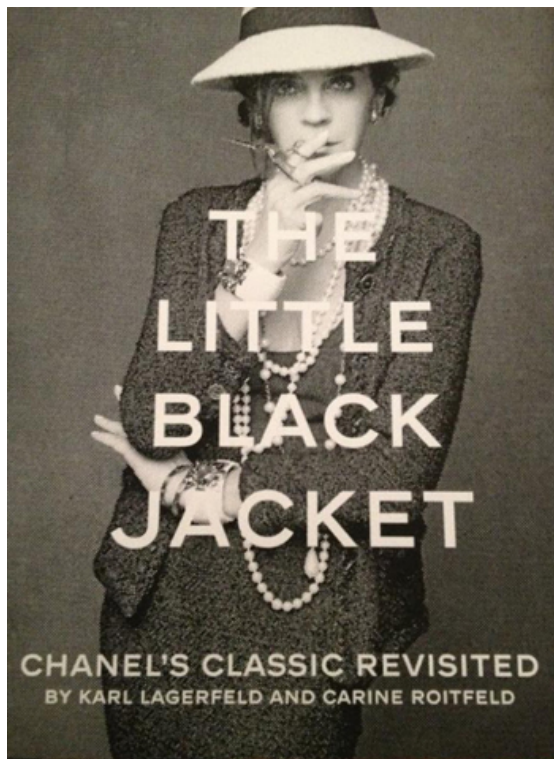
In an interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, Lagerfeld explains, "There's not a rule that tells you you have to wear [the] jacket [a certain way]...it's play time with an item that is timeless."

The Little Black Jacket will also be released as a book later this summer. The concept behind both projects came together after Roitfeld requested her own version of Chanel's classic statement piece.

Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel first envisioned the infamous black jacket in 1916. Determined to unchain women from stuffy, impractical clothing, Chanel experimented with different cuts and materials. By 1936, the black jacket had evolved to incorporate elements of tweed and fur.

"Fashion has become a joke," she once famously said. "The designers have forgotten that there are women inside the dresses... clothes must have a natural shape."

The genius of Lagerfeld's exhibit is its ability to highlight the exact same trait Chanel wanted women all over the world to feel: powerful. Whether it was Anna Wintour's backside or Kanye West's cheeky grin, each photo reflects an assertive sensibility. Lagerfeld was able to capture the essence of his subjects without sacrificing the discreet elegance of the jacket itself.



The Little Black Jacket

Source: iwanttobearoitfeld.com.

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Set in black and white, each image works together to mirror an arresting display of emotions. Jane Birkin laughs, while a separate image of her pregnant daughter (actress Charlotte Gainsbourg) looks onward. Uma Thurman channels the glamour of Marlene Dietrich, while Alexander Wang stares back at you with a brooding sense of caution. When viewed from afar, the photos mimic a mounted filmstrip.

The House of Chanel designed jackets exclusively for the project, with Lagerfeld shooting photos between Paris, New York and the south of France.

The photo exhibit first launched in Tokyo and will travel to cities around the world. After New York City, its next stop will be Taipei, but no matter where *The Little Black Jacket* goes, it will always find a way to slip into character and stand out.

The Little Black Jacket runs until June 15 in New York City. From June 16 to July 8, the exhibit will be in Taipei at the *Songshan Cultural & Creative Park, Zhongxiao*. *The Little Black Jacket: Chanel's Classic Revisited*, published by Steidl (US\$65), is out August 15.