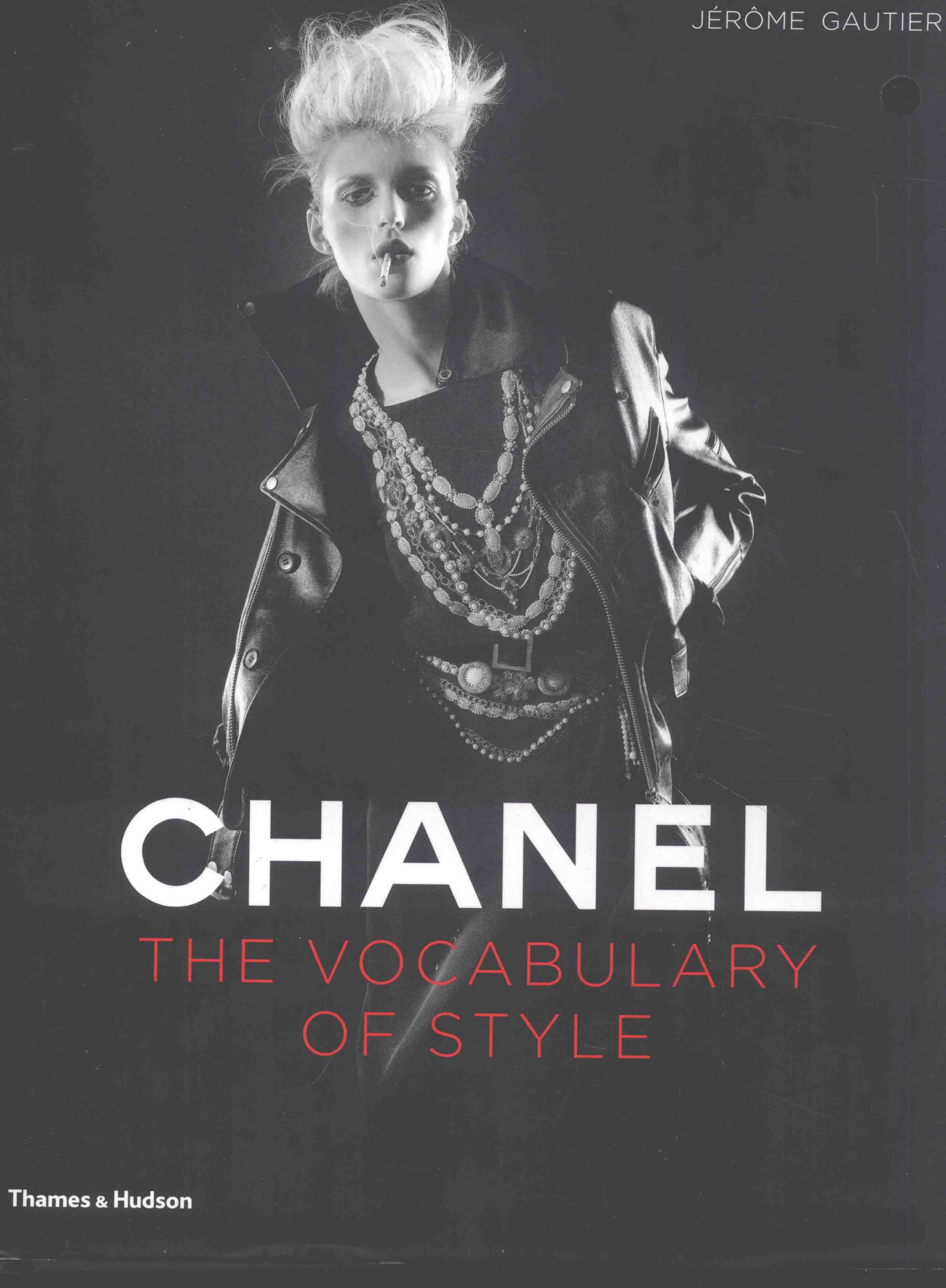


JÉRÔME GAUTIER



CHANEL

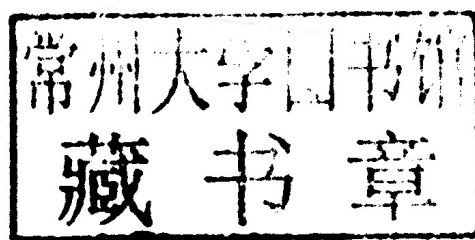
THE VOCABULARY
OF STYLE

Thames & Hudson

CHANEL

THE VOCABULARY OF STYLE

Jérôme Gautier



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The publishers wish to thank Patrick Mauriès
for his invaluable help with this book from its inception.

Note: The name of every model is given in the Credits (pp. 295–304).
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CHANEL THE VOCABULARY OF STYLE











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INTRODUCTION

FASHION PHOTOGRAPHS SOMETIMES carry markers that identify them with a particular moment in time. But images featuring Gabrielle Chanel herself clearly transcend such limitations. The woman who succeeded in representing the aesthetic of her time – her times – through her collections, and by making a name for herself wearing her own creations, will always be modern. Chanel as a fashion icon embodied her own ideal, and the magazine images of her have crystallized the memory of a woman whose style is eternal. It is not always easy, in fact, to ascribe an accurate date to the various portraits taken by Man Ray, Horst P. Horst or Cecil Beaton. These images look perfectly in keeping alongside contemporary images, in which young women of today are shown wearing Chanel: such juxtapositions – rather than inviting retrospection – demonstrate that time has absolutely no impact on Chanel's spiritual legacy, which is now in very good hands.

Since 1983, Karl Lagerfeld has been directing the company with 'holy opportunism' ('un opportunisme saint', to use his own phrase). Avoiding easy tributes to the brand he has enlivened it by skilfully and subtly uniting past and present – the spirit of the 1980s as well as the 2010s. He has introduced modernity, adjusting the image of the brand by emphasizing even more strongly the classic Chanel 'identifiers' that make *Mademoiselle*'s remarkable lexicon ever more universal. The tweed suit, the quilted bag, the little black dress: authentic or not, these are the elements that are signified instantly, throughout the world, by the word Chanel.

There have been a great many works devoted to describing Gabrielle Chanel's extraordinary life and her exemplary career, but as yet none has explored her fashion revolutions in visual terms or highlighted the ongoing stylistic dialogue between Chanel and Karl Lagerfeld. The aim of this book is to bring together the vocabulary of style as seen by the most famous photographers in the world. These images trace its essential themes, from the first jersey suits to those for which she chose tweed, by way of her 'pauper' hats and the little black dress. This style works today precisely because it was created by a woman who knew early on how to defy the conventions of her time and so showed herself to be thoroughly modern.

