



CARNIVAL Splendour

At the end of every year, when Pre-Fall season beckons, the fashion pack waits with baited breath for their Chanel show invite to arrive in the mail. It's a golden ticket that the rest of us mere mortals can only dream of receiving. Trust us – it's a sweet dream come true to be taken on a magic carpet ride courtesy of Karl Lagerfeld, and this year's ride is no exception. By ALICIA TAN



BYZANTINE ORIGINS IN CHANEL'S HISTORY CAN BE TRACED BACK TO MADAME COCO CHANEL, WHO USED BYZANTINE ART AS A SOURCE OF MAJOR INSPIRATION FOR HER LINE OF COSTUME JEWELLERY LAUNCHED IN THE 1920S.



When it comes down to what to expect from Chanel season after season, no one aside from those working close to the Kaiser himself will know what he has up his sleeves. If there's any indication, the destination or venue stated on the show's invite might lend a clue. Otherwise, like the rest of us clueless souls, we are left to speculate but always with full confidence that a Chanel show is worth the wait. Locations and themes aside, we contemplate what we already know. For almost a decade, Lagerfeld has paid special attention to the specialist craftsmen working with the house and dedicated annual collections to them in order to protect and perpetuate their artistry. These include the ateliers of Desrues the costume jeweler, Lemarié the feather specialist, Lesage the embroiderer, Massaro the shoemaker, Michel the milliner, Goossens the goldsmith and Guillet the floral accessory specialist.

On top of paying homage to this couturier artistry, Lagerfeld also made sure to celebrate a city that has played a role in Chanel's rich history. Since 2002, we've been swept off our feet and taken on some trips of a lifetime. We're still coming down from our high from last year's pre-fall Shanghaiese extravaganza. This year, we get to clock up some fashion fantasy miles again as Lagerfeld transports us to Istanbul to take in its lost Byzantium culture.

Held at the house's Rue Cambon couture salons, the entire place was transformed into an Ottoman palace fit for royalty – 136 fashion royalty to be exact. Paris or Istanbul, we definitely weren't in Kansas anymore.

It was a low-key and intimate affair but no expense was spared to recreate a Byzantine palace. The walls were covered with metres and metres of sequined fabric and a total of 60 kilos of pearls were to make up the curtain entrance. The rooms were also outfitted with unique and hand-painted

Backstage at Chanel Pre-Fall 2011

Photography: SKYE TAN Styling: ALICIA TAN Hair: SOPHIE LOH Make up: DILY WANG Dress and Jewellery: CHANEL



Handpainting glass beads at Lesage



The craft of Massaro

ON TOP OF PAYING HOMAGE TO COUTURIER ARTISTRY, LAGERFELD ALSO MADE SURE TO CELEBRATE A CITY THAT HAS PLAYED A ROLE IN CHANEL'S RICH HISTORY. THIS YEAR, WE GET TO CLOCK UP SOME FASHION FANTASY MILES AS LAGERFELD TRANSPORTS US TO ISTANBUL TO TAKE IN ITS LOST BYZANTIUM CULTURE.



Lesage ateliers embroidering according to sketches



cushions, carpets and low tables with motifs of Ravenna's frescos – all done in typical Lagerfeld style to complete the experience and complement the show he was to put on.

Lagerfeld explained that this season's theme, Paris-Byzance was inspired by the seductive and enchanting Empress Theodora. Everything he sent out was made for a modern-day Theodora who had the finer taste in life for the ornate and opulent. Byzantine origins in Chanel's history can be traced back to Madame Coco Chanel, who used Byzantine art as a source of major inspiration for her line of costume jewellery launched in the 1920s.

While the big traditional jewelers of her time went the safe route, Chanel chose instead to make chunky and irregularly shaped Grippoix jewellery. To date, her most recognisable Byzantine-influenced jewellery piece can be found in her crosses which she created in the 1950s and still remain an iconic feature of the house.

Using this as a starting point, Lagerfeld weaved his magic wand and created a collection that not only highlighted the abilities of the house's couture ateliers, but also

clothing and accessories that one couldn't tear their eyes away from. He revisited bold jewel tones and reinterpreted the period's togas and tunics into contemporary styles. The Byzantine signature was telltale in the house's tweeds interwoven with gold, satin leather, velvet, cashmere, chiffon, lace and tulle. Also present were intricate braids and embroidery, further adorned by jewellery stones and arabesque or palmette appliques.

The accessories that the models wore were equally opulent and embraced Byzantine in all its splendour. Belts and jewellery were chunky and covered with glass beads, filigree gilt metal, enamel and beads. Legs were clad in long socks bearing geometric designs and sheen, while feet given the Cinderella treatment in jeweled sandals. By the end of the spectacular show, we're sure none of the guests left without having filled out a mental to-buy list.

According to Lagerfeld, "Inspiration is not a copy but a starting point, taking us somewhere new." We can't agree more, as time after time, the Kaiser continues to take something old (Chanel's heritage) and inject a freshness never seen before. And that we know is what makes Chanel the powerhouse that it is today. 