MOOD
OF
THE
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Gaby Aghion
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Chloé

# BRITISH WOMEN DESIGNERS AND LA BOHÉMIENNE FLOUE

Alexis Romano

Her back is turned to us, and her head is cropped out of the photo frame. All we know of her must be gleaned through her clothing: a pair of high-waisted, wide-legged jeans and a soft, white blouse, its large folds swathing a petite body underneath. A stiff leather shoulder bag, rust colored and adorned with a chain and large O-ring, occupies the very center of the image. Its anonymous wearer stands still in a generic urban setting, seemingly paused from a busy life supported by the tidy contents of her bag. She checks many boxes: loose and carefree, in her relaxed denim and with her ribboned blouse flowing in the wind, but also put together and professional. The image begins to tell a story. Faceless, she could be anyone. And we could be her. Like the shadows that envelop the figure, the story is obscure. It is up to us to write it, perhaps by lending the model our own identity, inserting ourselves into the scene. We use her clothing to shape the embodied fantasy, the ambiguities of the image facilitating this identification with its subject and the tactility of the fabrics augmenting our sense of reality. The 2016 photograph confounds our expectations for a fashion advertisement and instead resembles a snapshot, with its cropped layout and everyday content. We believe in its authenticity, despite the fact that the model's pose and ensemble were styled with exacting purpose. Large letters spell out "Chloé," giving a name to the unknown woman, a universal Parisienne, but also to the scene and lifestyle portrayed, which we are invited to buy into.

Chloé historically employed powerful visual campaigns by prominent photographers, disseminated widely in the fashion press and other outlets, to spread a distinct construction of femininity. This was no less the case from 1997 to 2017, during which time the brand expanded widely, exporting its message to growing international markets. In 1997, after Karl Lagerfeld's long stint as creative director, Stella McCartney took the creative reins, launching a new era and brand identity. Her vision would be reinforced and refined by a subsequent wave of fellow British women designers over the next twenty years, namely Phoebe Philo (2001–6), Hannah MacGibbon (2008–11), and Clare Waight Keller (2011–17), during whose tenure the above ad was created. This chapter explores Chloé during this period through a study of the brand's output and visual culture, taking into account the dialogue between women designers and wearers in constructing a feminine ideal. That the four designers were British and had attended the same schools—Ravensbourne University, Central Saint Martins College of Art and Design, and the Royal College of Art—meant they brought with them a shared cultural sensibility and creative practice. Their common foundation informed the generic female French identity that Chloé would disperse globally through luxury fashion networks as the company expanded.

Together they cultivated a distinctive style, rooted somewhat in Chloé's late-1960s and 1970s bohemian mode, which comprised ethereal dresses and tunics in soft and lacy fabrics in pastel tones or allover patterns, adorned with patchwork, fringes, and other details. The French word *flou* aptly describes these floaty, flowing garments, which are so central to Chloé's heritage and brand identity. In a literary sense, it also connotes haziness, much like the vague story constructed in the 2016 advertisement, which could accommodate a multitude of female identities—the Parisienne, the *bourgeois-bohème* (bourgeois-bohemian), and the urban professional. Informing this construction was the blurring of the female designer's and wearer's gender identities, alongside a well-documented network of "Chloé Girls" in the press and the notion of sisterhood fabricated in the brand's visual campaigns. The various ways these designers approached other types of dress,
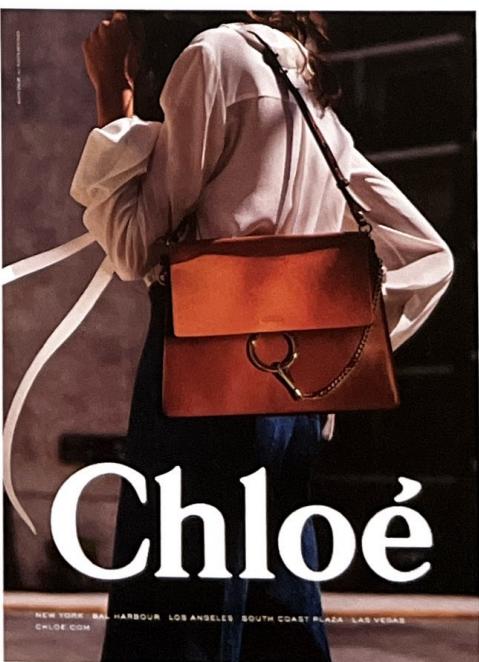
Chloé

notably suiting, also served to negotiate the professional and other identity pulls women experienced in the late 1990s and 2000s. At once bohemian, professional, and retro—everyday yet prohibitively expensive—the Chloé blouse, as seen on the 2016 model, epitomized the way such clothes mask and attach to several identities. Examining Chloé garments made during the brand's period of British female leadership, this chapter considers how the clothes were styled and presented symbolically, and how such imagery encouraged wearers to deploy clothing to express, transfer, and blur identities.

*Newcomer Approaches to Chloé's
Bohemian Heritage*

When Stella McCartney became Chloé's creative director in 1997, just out of Central Saint Martins, she immediately faced criticism due to her age, inexperience, and recognizable name.[1] Soon after her first collection, press commentary turned laudatory, situating her work in the context of British arts innovation. As described by the journalist Sarah Mower:

A wave of brash, young creativity and confidence was surging out of London: Britpop was raging between Oasis and Blur; the Young British Artists' *Sensation* exhibition at the Royal Academy was shocking the establishment with Damien Hirst's shark in formaldehyde and Tracey Emin's unmade bed; new style magazines were being launched; and little girls across the land were dancing to the Spice Girls and chanting "Girl Power!" . . . The power of British youth ideas seemed unstoppable—and

there already were two young British designers from Central Saint Martins shaking things up in Paris, John Galliano at Christian Dior and Alexander McQueen at Givenchy. Now it was the British girls' turn to have their say.[2]

Chloé had hired McCartney, with the cultural capital she brought from London, to revive the sleepy label. Two years later, Ralph Toledano was brought in as chief executive officer to reshape operations and grow the brand, according to his assistant Catherine Lebrun. She recalled how at the time, Chloé was operating at a loss, running its three boutiques with sixty-five employees worldwide.[3] Thus, a sort of renaissance was taking place at the design and executive levels, which was well documented in the international fashion press. McCartney brought a hardness and provocation to Chloé's traditional romantic femininity, introducing form-fitting silhouettes in suiting, corsetry, and mini T-shirts. Brand imagery, too, fragmented the body—in close-up shots of torsos, legs, and glistening skin—asserting fashion's carnal aspects. Its snapshot aesthetic alluded to the wearer's nightlife, as in Tom Munro's photographs of women wearing satin dresses, corsets, hot-pink blouses, and pinstriped suits, brightly lit against dark interior settings. Liz Collins pictured a pair of women in shimmery outfits applying makeup in a pub bathroom, their wine glasses as props. She also shot friends on a night out with arms linked, grinning for the camera. Such images communicate the "confidence and assertiveness . . . of the young women who parade through the city at night," as noted by Hilary Fawcett in her writing on female displays of fashion and sexuality in millennial British nightlife.[4] This message of girl power

Above left: Autumn–winter 1999 collection catalogue featuring designs by Stella McCartney, modeled by Fernanda Tavares and Danielle Zinaich. Photography by Liz Collins

Below right: Spring–summer 1998 advertising campaign, in *Vogue Paris*, February 1998, featuring designs by Stella McCartney, modeled by Kim Lemanton and Lucie de la Falaise. Photography by Perry Ogden

Above right: Spring–summer 2011 advertising campaign featuring designs by Hannah MacGibbon, modeled by Malgosia Bela. Photography by David Sims

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brazen femininity was cut with humor in airbrushed T-shirts and dresses whimsical prints of bananas and horses, instance, a winking nod to Lagerfeld's ear-graphic expression. Another connection to predecessor was an affinity for 1930s and 1940s forms, seen notably in her popular slip dresses, a 1990s staple, immortalized in brand by Perry Ogden on ethereal mod-in woodsy settings.

In addition to leveraging the 1990s trend of snapshot fashion photography, Chloé's visual campaigns under McCartney connected other genres, as in artist Taryn Simon's cinematic imagery of women surveilled in houses, for instance, or Vanina Sorrenti's moody pictures of models amid the architecture of gothic Paris. The latter showcased McCartney's penchant for sculptural bead-work, sequins, and other surface embellishments that hark back to 1930s modes. Tailoring was another important McCartney contribution, revealing the skills she acquired during an apprenticeship in London's Savile Row. In McCartney's suiting we see her propensity for mixing high and low styling, the *flou* and the sharp—a concept reinforced in a 1998 campaign by Ogden. In one image, two models gaze languidly at the camera as they lounge in suits with lacy camisole tops, a blend of bohemianism and business wear. Other advertisements pictured a model suited up in a tube top with animal motifs and McCartney's signature low-rise trousers. These examples showcased styling options for women who worked *and* partied. Lucie de la Falaise, one of McCartney's main models, recalled, "I'll always remember wearing Stella's classic Chloé trouser suits with the high waist, long leg, and perfectly fitting jacket. . . . Real girl-power suits!"[5]

A clear shift occurred when Phoebe Philo was elected creative director in 2001, having worked until then as McCartney's design assistant. Her deep dive into the brand's archive yielded her own take on its traditional floaty femininity, which is largely associated with Lagerfeld's 1970s work in bold prints on flowing dresses. Philo translated the *flou* aesthetic into goddess dresses, silky camisoles, and blouses and dresses trimmed with lace and broderie anglaise needlework, along with "pretty" details such as scalloped edges and fringes. The Frenchness of these garments was emphasized in photographic campaigns by Terry Richardson, set in Parisian streets and gardens, and by Horst Diekgerdes, who shot models in beachy surroundings drenched in hazy, pinkish Mediterranean hues.
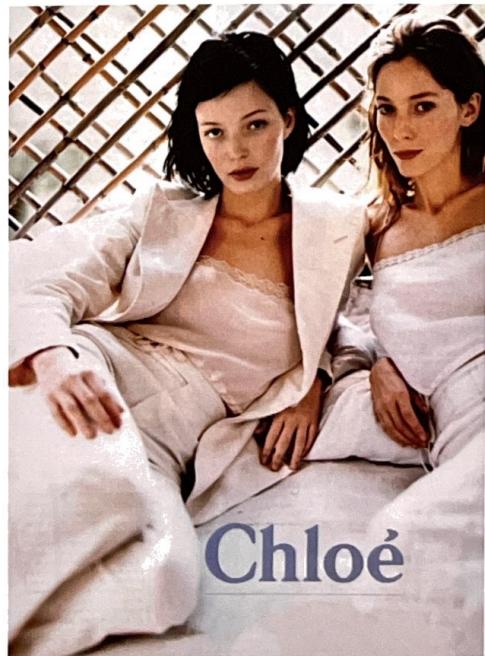
To this Philo added military and riding jackets, her signature baggy trousers, and other references to hip-hop and clubbing cultures. She also developed the brand's accessories lines, which reinforced Chloé's bohemian 1970s style. This notably included sunglasses, wedge shoes, and the *Paddington* bag (see p. 174)—the slouchy, noughties "it" bag, with its lock and detailed trim, which famously sold out and inspired countless copies. By 2003, accessories counted for a quarter of brand sales. To present this range of work, Philo frequently called on the photographers Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin (known as Inez & Vinoodh), who expanded Chloé's geography with exotic—but always ambiguous—desert locations alongside Parisian settings and interior snapshots. Thanks largely to the symbiotic image-and-object relationship, whereby brand messaging behind products was crystallized in marketing imagery, Philo perfected the Chloé *flou* formula, and business grew dramatically. In 2006, the head office and atelier expanded and moved to its present site on avenue Percier. Chloé's visibility increased, both in multibrand stores and through the opening of its own boutiques around the world, particularly in the important Chinese market.
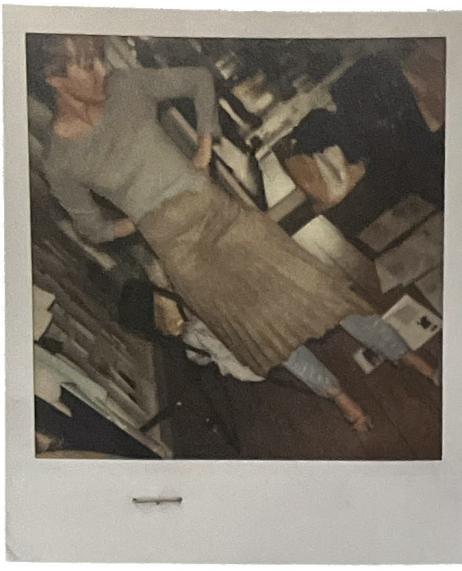
Not long after Hannah MacGibbon arrived in 2008, the global financial crisis spiraled into the fashion industry. Nonetheless, the commercial success of Chloé's bohemian modes meant that its party dresses (and blouses) could continue to function as staple pieces in women's wardrobes when such occasion wear would have typically taken a hit. Still, MacGibbon's approach to Chloe's heritage brought a nuanced practicality, focused around her own period of interest, the late 1970s and early 1980s. Having worked as Philo's assistant for five years (after having assisted Valentino) as well as on Chloé fragrances, MacGibbon knew the house well and artfully interpreted its archive. She presented a baggier yet tapered silhouette, with softer tailoring and dynamic layering, in a palette of camel, umber, olive, and other muted colors. And while her capes and mini shorts combinations may have seemed impractical in light of the economic mood, they too linked back to the brand archive, reinforcing its identity in the distressed global economy.

These looks were captured by Mikael Jansson in autumnal fields and vast, pebbly landscapes, and by Inez & Vinoodh, whose widely disseminated autumn–winter 2010 campaign pictured a model interacting with and assimilating into a dramatic stone architectural setting, both in allover beige. The somber economic climate impacted advertising imagery too, with pared-down portraits by Mario Sorrenti of models in shirtdresses, leggings, and minimalist suits; and especially in the frontal portraits by David Sims of makeupless models in light-colored garments against a plain, white ground.

When Clare Waight Keller joined Chloé in 2011, she had already worked at Calvin Klein, Ralph Lauren, Gucci, and as creative director of Pringle of Scotland. This experience proved vital to managing Chloé, by then a global brand with pre-collections and accessories lines, in a new age of fashion

Chloé

communication that encompassed online media channels, such as Instagram, and conversations with influencers and bloggers. In the same year, Géraldine-Julie Sommier founded the Chloé Archive. This action formalized the heritage labor that had been ongoing since McCartney's tenure and would continue under Waight Keller.

She notably returned to and complicated the diaphanous dress, adding sunray pleats, embroidered flowers, avant-garde forms, new textures, and injections of color. She further developed the brand's 1970s retro styling with the *Faye* bag, the focal point of the advertisement that opens this essay. For her autumn–winter 2016 collection, Waight Keller drew on the image of Anne-France Dautheville, who motored across the globe from 1972 to 1981. According to journalist Alexander Fury, Waight Keller tied "Chloé's '70s silhouette— skinny torso, high waists, flares and platform shoes—to a new spirit of female independence, epitomized by [Dautheville's] travels."[6] These garments were imagined in new and old ways, in Paris gardens, on beaches and in fields, along summery city streets, in realistic interiors by Glen Luchford, and in bright, futuristic landscapes by Craig McDean.

Many of these photographers worked in a loose creative circle from the 1990s, or slightly earlier, contributing to the same magazines, notably *The Face* and *i-D*, and some even shared a London lab. Their wider oeuvres stood at the intersection of fashion, art, and documentary photography in ways that added meaning to twenty years of design at Chloé. In this time, McCartney, Philo, MacGibbon, and Waight Keller participated in an ongoing conversation that spanned shifting cultural contexts, which the next section explores further. Following their tenure, Chloé's soft, bohemian stylings faced a noticeable challenge in 2017 when Natacha Ramsay-Levi became creative director—the first French woman to hold the role since Martine Sitbon left in 1992— launching a new brand chapter.

Women Designers and Wearers: Creative Process, Camaraderie, and Cultivating the Everyday

When Stella McCartney joined Chloé, its offices were set up at 54, rue du Faubourg Saint-Honoré, over the boutique, where, according to Catherine Lebrun, "There reigned a very joyous ambiance [with] Stella [and] Phoebe who really worked as a creative duo . . . full of creativity, joy and also provocation one might say."[7] This convivial environment was widely noted in the press and added to Chloé's reputation as a pro-women brand. According to an *i-D* article from 2000, McCartney and Philo "bounce ideas off each other." As Philo explained, "We think along the same lines. I understand where she's coming from."[8] They were also vocal about applying their personal preferences during the design process. In a 2001 American *Vogue* article on the newly appointed creative director, Philo, pictured wearing one of her lacy blouses, accounted for Chloé's high-low styling: "Stella and I really looked at what we were wearing and how we wanted to dress."[9] In an article on women designers the following year, an accompanying portrait pictured Philo with her "posse" of design collaborators, including female family and friends as well as her assistant Blue Farrier. The article's author, Sarah Mower, counted Philo among designers who "use dress-up sessions as a chief weapon in creative research—to instant reaction from friends and colleagues."[10] She expanded on this point, highlighting specific design innovations:

Phoebe Philo, 28, has a hit on her hands with her eyelet blouses and singular talent for hip new pants. Her cropped joggers, scallop-edge gauchos, and hi-rise seventies derriere-clinchers are the result of constant brainstorms with her four-strong girl team. "We look at each other and say, 'Would you wear that?'

'Do you want it on that part of your or a little lower?' Late at night we're running around like mad freaks the samples."[11]

This ongoing activity is documented in a Polaroid of MacGibbon, then Philo's trying on a pleated leather skirt over her Lebrun recalled how these designers predominantly by draping fabric directly onto the body, including samples and finds, which they would reimagine and Mower aptly described their creative as "hands-on and living in it," an method from which clothing was ized and created by questioning "what with what, how clothes should feel, we want to channel now."[13]
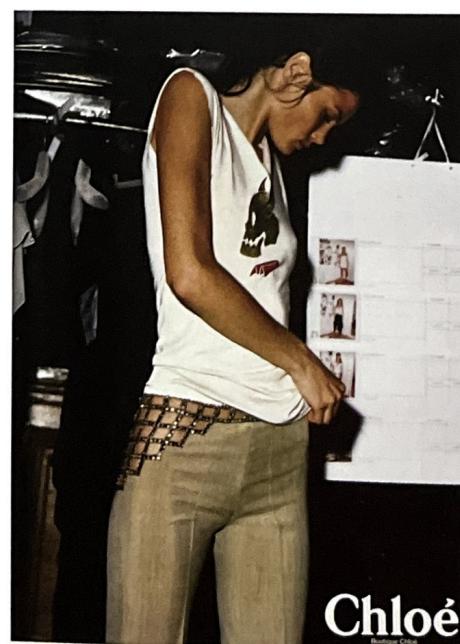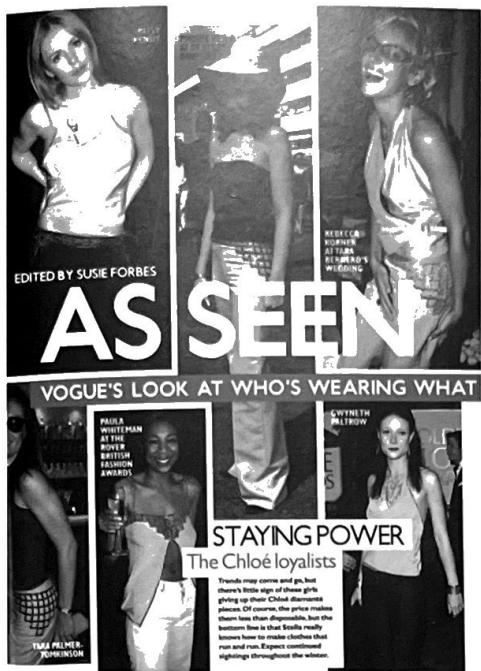
Such backstage moments were lized in a 2000 photographic campaign by Liz Collins. One image from backstage at the spring–summer 2000 fashion show at the Petit Palais captured a model in low-rise trousers with openwork jewel detailing at the hip, caught unknowingly in the process of dressing, amid what seem to be racks of clothing, with fitting test Polaroids and technical sheets behind her. Consumers encountering these images in Chloé's advertisements may have interpreted them through the lens of press coverage, like Mower's, that detailed a bodily, personal approach to fashion. The idea that these designers conceived their work in relation to themselves and their friends gave it an everyday authenticity—made by women for women—a mark of assurance for clients that added capital to the brand. As Waight Keller noted, "Chloé has moments when it's absolutely directional, but the essence of the brand is much more about portraying an attitude about real women and how they dress in life—and putting forward a new idea of that."[14]

This mentality recalled the early years of the brand, when it was largely in the hands

Above left: Hannah MacGibbon trying
on a skirt design during a fitting session
for the spring–summer 2003 collection,
Chloé Archive

Below left: Spring–summer 2000
advertising campaign featuring diamanté
trousers designed by Stella McCartney,
modeled by Mini Anden, in *Vogue Paris*,
March 2000. Photography by Liz Collins

Above: Patsy Kensit, Phoebe Philo, Rebecca
Korner, Tara Palmer-Tomkinson, Paula
Whiteman, and Gwyneth Paltrow wearing
Chloé in "As Seen: Vogue's Look at Who's
Wearing What," *Vogue* (UK edition),
October 2000

Below right: Phoebe Philo, sketch for low-
rise pants, autumn–winter 2003, graphite
pencil, ballpoint pen, felt pen, and Dymo
label on wove paper

of the female designers Christiane Bailly,
Maxime de la Falaise, Michèle Rosier, and
Graziella Fontana alongside founder Gaby
Aghion during the 1960s. The postwar devel-
opment of French ready-to-wear, in which
Chloé was a fundamental player, established a
new symbolic definition of fashion in relation
to the everyday, industrial modernity and an
active femininity.[15] It needed to stand apart
from haute couture in order to succeed as an
industry in the context of great sociopolitical
and economic shifts in Europe and beyond.
The predominantly male couturiers, who
couldn't relate to the lives of women experien-
tially, concerned themselves with other value
systems. Years later, the lifestyles and physical
appearances of McCartney, Philo, MacGibbon,
and Waight Keller likewise carried significant
weight in matters of identity branding. In 2001,
Ralph Toledano described Philo as "really very
beautiful. . . . The collection represents her,
and she represents the clothes."[16] Later, Mower
noticed the resemblance between Waight
Keller and the model Kate King, writing,
"Consciously or unconsciously, young women
designers at Chloé have always cast their own
doppelgangers somewhere in their shoes and
advertising—this is, after all, a company where
the instinct for clothes becomes personal."[17]
Amid this blurring between the personal and
the product, the brand's definition of fashion
was, of course, a privileged, white European
femininity. Perhaps because white British
designers used themselves as models for the
Chloé Girl they created, there was a glaring
lack of models of color during this period,
though this was true of most luxury brands.

McCartney famously said to fashion jour-
nalist Suzy Menkes in 2000, "I do what I want
to wear and what my girlfriends wear."[18] The
fact that many of her girlfriends were celebrities
whose wardrobes were published in the press
shined a light on this personalized creative
approach. In one of many examples, American

Vogue gushed in 2000, "Given the chance, it
seems even Gwyneth Paltrow and Samantha
Boardman would raid Stella McCartney's
closet for her sexy treasures. And they're not the
only Chloé-philes, as the frilly tops and tight
tuxedo pants of Rebecca Romijn-Stamos and
Kendra Miller suggest."[19] Earlier that year, the
magazine had noted, "There's no mistaking
the neo-Chloé look. And it's a look that inspires
a surprising fanaticism among the young and
the fabulous, most notably Cameron Diaz,
Kate Moss, and Sadie (Mrs. Jude Law) Frost."[20]
And in one of the many collages of celebrities
in their "real," albeit glamorous lives, in 2000
British *Vogue* pictured "Chloé Loyalists" in-
cluding Paula Whiteman, Patsy Kensit, and
Paltrow surrounding Philo herself wearing
some of the same items.[21] These and similar
stories conflated the roles of designer, model,
friend, celebrity, and average consumer.

The notion of strong female bonds was also
tightly interwoven in the brand's identity via
photographic campaigns. In the vast majority
of them, models are pictured in groups of two
or more, painting the picture of a collective
womanhood. They are captured taking part in
moments of joy—running through a Parisian
garden, prancing on a beach or in a forest, trav-
eling to desert landscapes, as well as in more
intimate moments, cropped from everyday
scenes in the snapshot aesthetic noted above. In
these examples in particular, which present as
autobiographical and uncontrived, professional
models become real people. They often em-
brace, lean in close, or otherwise touch, their
postures enacting a bodily intimacy that, on
another level, connects to the well-publicized
descriptions of a communal, hands-on process
of making. The viewer, or prospective con-
sumer, hopes to be accepted as part of this sis-
terhood or friendship circle.

The Chloé Blouse

One relatively affordable means of entry into
this network of fashionable women is through
the blouse. The Chloé blouse is a mainstay
in each collection, whose wider ideas are
distilled in this singular object, whether white
cotton or colorful silk. It might express the
centrality of historicism to the brand, for ex-
ample, often in quoting Victoriana through a
late 1960s lens, with high necks, ruffles, and
openwork lace detailing. The blouse is also
a symbol of 1970s bohemianism. A way of
bringing the Chloé softness, sensuality, and
flou into almost any ensemble, it epitomizes
how, according to a 1998 collection descrip-
tion, "The undies of the Belle Epoque are
now worn outside."[22] And it is a surface on
which each of the designers' preferred modes
of adornment are applied, from heavy beading
and lace to needlework, pleating, and tying.

The blouse has been used widely in adver-
tising to connect the material and symbolic
qualities of the Chloé feminine ideal in a

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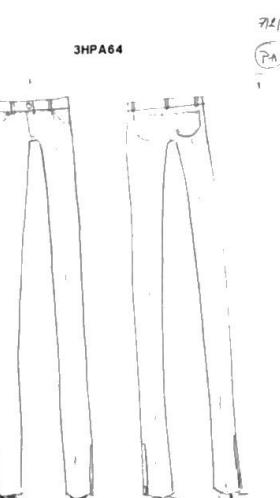
can we see stitch samples
on the fabric Merci ☺

framework of the everyday—as, for example, in Inez & Vinoodh's image of Philo's blouse with a highly textured bib for spring–summer 2006. The model, Christy Turlington, is framed in close up, at the very forefront of the picture plane, against a white tablecloth, the surface work of both textiles reinforcing the artisanal meaning of each. Seated next to a table—not posing as a model—she is captured during a banal moment and in a minimalist aesthetic, leaving the viewer to construct a narrative from the image's spare details. A central image for Diekgerdes's spring–summer 2002 campaign presents a similarly close-up view of the model Anne Vyalitsyna in a white cotton blouse, with a neckline in machine-made needle lace and scalloping at the short sleeves. The textures of the guipure echo the gravelly wilderness behind her. Her eyes lock with ours, cementing a closeness, and we feel the warmth of the sun and the crisp, white fabric on our own skin. It can be described as a mirror image, as Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton have theorized, whereby "the direct gaze of the model makes possible a symbiosis between image and observer. . . . The look—ours, hers—is one of recognition."[23]

In ways that similarly exploited the reader's subjectivity, a 2006 issue of British *Vogue* depicted a non-model in the everyday setting of the home: the stylist Deborah Brett wearing the same Philo blouse as Turlington, over a pair of black trousers. This appeared in "The Fashion Diaries," a section in which several professional women detailed their wardrobe choices in diary entry format. On March 6, Brett wrote:

This season there are some designers I am obsessed with. . . . Chloé's boxy shifts and frilly blouses. With Phoebe Philo having recently departed from Chloé, I decide it's the perfect excuse to stock up on her last collection. So, while I originally intend only to buy the cream-and-navy matelot top with jewel encrusted buttons, I also end up getting a metallic-avocado strapless tulip cocktail dress with beige satin ribbon.[24]

The blouse stands out among the several other items of Chloé apparel mentioned, and it even encouraged Brett to make other purchases—a symptom of the "Chloé bug."[25] Brett fetishized this everyday object and relied on it to facilitate her weekly activities.

The fetishization of the blouse is also a tool of stylists and photographers in editorials seeking to portray a bohemian, flirtatious innocence, as in Cédric Buchet's 2009 image of a reflective model leaning against a wall, slightly out of focus, in *Vogue Paris*. Yet this characterization is often turned on its head, revealing the multifarious femininity that Chloé supports. A 2004 Terry Richardson image of the model Kate Moss in *POP* magazine depicts the blouse's toughened wearer lighting a cigarette,


Above left: Spring–summer 2006 advertising campaign featuring a blouse designed by Phoebe Philo, modeled by Christy Turlington. Photography by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin

Below left: Deborah Brett wearing a spring–summer 2006 blouse designed by Phoebe Philo in "The Fashion Diaries," *Vogue* (UK edition), August 2006. Photography by Mischa Richter

Right: Spring–summer 2009 dress designed by Hannah MacGibbon, modeled by Laetitia Casta, in *Vogue Paris*, December 2009. Photography by Cédric Buchet

Below right: Autumn–winter 2006 dress designed by Phoebe Philo in *i-D*, December 2006. Photography by Claudia Knoepfel

Above far right: Autumn–winter 2011 advertising campaign featuring dresses designed by Hannah MacGibbon, modeled by Malgosia Bela and Arizona Muse. Photography by David Sims
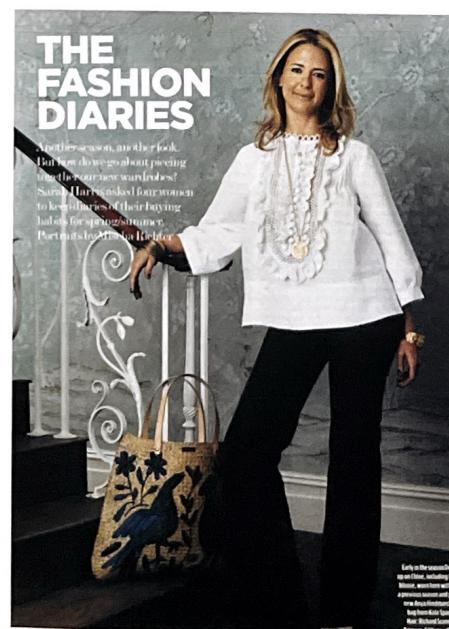
and in a 2011 sepia-toned photograph by Mert Alas and Marcus Piggott in *Vogue Paris*, a model's ripped-open Victorian blouse reveals lingerie underneath. Such images have trained us to extract many meanings from this singular garment, so when faced with only three sartorial objects and a faceless woman in the advertisement this essay began with, we can immediately construct our own Chloé story.

Who Is Chloé? The Fictions of Flou

The pamphlet accompanying Chloé's spring–summer 1998 fashion show (see p. 145) described the collection's focus on lightness, delicacy, and movement, attributing these qualities to both the materiality of the clothes and the personalities of their wearers: "The simplicity of white cotton creates an atmosphere of serenity enhanced by pleats, cutwork, tiny ruffles or ton sur ton embroidery. . . . Subtle prints, as light as air. Long scarves with dresses that gracefully flow to the rhythm of a fluid feminine gait."[26] Thus, from Stella McCartney's early days, Chloé continued to uphold its long-standing commitment, both material and metaphorical, to the *flou* (a term additionally associated with dressmaking, as opposed to tailoring, in the haute couture atelier). This trait remained essential to the brand's feminine mythmaking in the work of McCartney's British successors, exemplified by garments such as Philo's mint-green and blue goddess dresses. The model, or Chloé Girl, becomes the embodied representation of these ideas before the camera lens.

The softness or blurriness of the clothing was often echoed in the muted photography that disseminated these fashions in ad campaigns and editorials. Take, for example, a 2006 issue of *i-D*, in which a model in a Chloé dress, shot by Claudia Knoepfel, appears to us via her hazy reflection, embedded in her background and difficult to discern clearly. And in one David Sims publicity image from 2011, two women

prance through the forest in chiffon dresses, their swishing fabric melting into the textures of the arcadian setting, transporting viewers to a sylvan fantasy. They are woodland nymphs in motion, despite the overall quiet of the image. In their mischievous running, they embody the natural free-spiritedness so central to Chloé womanhood. The image conveys nostalgia—in the return to nature, in its echo of painterly representations, and in the retro styling—reinforced by the hazy photographic lens.

This *flou* also extended to the brand's loose historicism. From 1997 to 2017, Chloé permanently fixed us in the past, often bringing together several pasts at once. For instance, an autumn–winter 2015 ad depicts two women in a French garden, styled in ways that evoke both the late 1960s and 1920s, one in a patchwork skirt and the other a low-cut straight sheath. Largely though, McCartney, Philo, MacGibbon, and Waight Keller approached the archive as a practice of bricolage, reconceptualizing the 1960s and 1970s in generalized representations of these decades. Indeed, Chloé garments were often used in editorials focused on the period, from Steven Meisel's July 1999 "Indigo Girls" to Mario Testino's May 2010 "Americans in Paris," both in American *Vogue*. In all these examples, as Heike Jenß observed of the broader embrace of sixties style in the early 2000s, we hazily jump "between the past and the present time . . . between historical accuracy and its idealization of the original, and their personalization and customization . . . as it responds to their contemporary demands and preferences."[27] Under its succession of British creative directors, Chloé traded not only on its heritage but also on a collective longing for the past. Along with the Chloé Girl's long, tousled hair, the clothes they designed helped codify in aesthetic terms the contemporary trope of the Bobo—or bourgeois-bohemian—woman.

As outlined by political commentator David Brooks in 2000 and more recently explored by

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the geographer Christophe Guilluy, women at the turn of the millennium indulged in the retro fantasy of bohemianism to escape the reality of life in the increasingly complex digital era, as well as to disguise their upward economic mobility.[28] These left-leaning elites of the Information Age were, according to Melinda Wittstock, "well-educated thirty-to-fortysomethings [who] forged a new social ethos from a logic-defying fusion of 1960s counter-culture and 1980s entrepreneurial materialism."[29] Brooks notes they were averse to conspicuous consumption, clinging to their pseudo-bohemian beliefs, which the Chloé look perfectly suited. That Chloé garments don't read as expensive in the glitzy sense belies their actual high price point, a fact that has been essential in cultivating this style as a signifier of wealth; its understated elegance functions as coded signal of belonging to a niche group. Imagery showcasing female friendships in mass-marketed brand campaigns invited

knowing consumers to take part in this subculture of privileged white professionals while reinforcing their carefree identity.

Built into this Bobo fantasy is an abstract Frenchness, with Chloé, the unknown woman behind the brand, as the quintessential and universal Parisienne. Much of the brand's photography deployed the city of Paris as a signifier, building on the long-established construct of *la parisienne*. As Agnès Rocamora has shown, this figure is vital to fashion image making and messaging that upholds the notion of French fashion authority.[30] One image in particular, by Inez & Vinoodh, reveals how Frenchness was subtly layered into Chloé's definition of fashion. It depicts two entangled women, dressed in the autumn–winter 2005 line, with a very faint Eiffel Tower and the city's rooftops in the background. The act of dispersing Paris outward, aided by hazy visualizations, is particularly important in this globalized age of fashion. Paris too is *flou*, and its generalization

Above left: Autumn–winter 2015 advertising campaign featuring dresses designed by Clare Waight Keller, modeled by Anja Rubik and Julia Stegner. Photography by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin

Below left: Autumn–winter 2005 advertising campaign featuring dresses designed by Phoebe Philo, modeled by Missy Rayder and Tasha Tiberg. Photography by Inez van Lamsweerde and Vinoodh Matadin

in imagery sustains a global fantasy of the city that Chloé clothing offers access to. Its success in overseas markets derives from the fact that it was produced and branded to clearly represent a retro Frenchness.

Intrinsic to this French identity are the values of *flou*, nostalgia, and naturalness, as articulated in the press release for the spring–summer 2017 collection show, which "celebrates the effortless simplicity of French style intrinsic to the Chloé Girl. Crafted with a woman's touch, the crisp and graphic silhouette evokes a summer freshness through planed volumes and textiles light as air."[31] That consumers are searching for ease and lightness—or at least the semblance of it—in their dress practice says much about the realities of modern life. Five years before McCartney joined Chloé, the scholar Fred Davis wrote that "our identities are forever in ferment, giving rise to numerous strains, paradoxes, ambivalences, and contradictions within ourselves. It is upon these collectively experienced, sometimes historically recurrent, identity instabilities that fashion feeds."[32] The pressure women increasingly experienced in the late 1990s and 2000s—cultivating professional identities and social status while navigating gender roles and expressions of sexuality—encouraged escapism and a search for the lightness, nostalgia, and authenticity embodied by the Chloé Girl.

The irreverent, independent, whimsical, bohemian, yet privileged woman at the center of Chloé's marketing from 1997 to 2017 derived partly from the conflation between designer and wearer. While it became a brand strategy to reach the widest number of consumers, Chloé's construction of a multifaceted femininity—a woman who was equally at home on the streets of Paris, the beaches of California, and the souks of Marrakech—was performative and contradictory. The ambiguity of its imagery allowed viewers to project their own ideas of Paris, of historical belonging, and of bohemianism onto them. Aspects of identity and personal style were lost in the process, however. The preference for lightness in material (and often in palette) and the corresponding whiteness of Chloé's models served to efface individual strands of womanhood in favor of an idealized French everywoman. And yet, above all else, her identity was anonymous and *flou*: she could be anyone.

NOTES

1. Jonathan Van Meter, "Stella McCartney's Cheeky Chic," *Vogue* (US edition), July 2000, 184.
2. Sarah Mower, "Stella Steps It Up 1997–2001," in *Chloé: Attitudes*, Sarah Mower and Marc Ascoli, exh. cat. (New York: Rizzoli, 2013), 150.
3. Catherine Lebrun, interview with Géraldine-Julie Sommier and Camille Kovalevsky, February 13, 2020.
4. Hilary Fawcett, "'Doon the Toon': Young Women, Fashion and Sexuality," in *Fashioning the Feminine: Representation and Women's Fashion from the Fin de Siècle to the Present*, ed. Cheryl Buckley and Hilary Fawcett (London: I. B. Tauris, 2002), 136.
5. Lucie de la Falaise, interview with Sarah Mower, December 17, 2012, cited in Mower, "Stella Steps It Up," 151.
6. Alexander Fury, "La Femme Chloé," Style Supplement, *New York Times*, August 21, 2016, 254.
7. Lebrun, interview with Sommier and Kovalevsky.
8. Lucy Ryder Richardson, "Flying without Wings," *i-D*, May 2000, 83.
9. Eve MacSweeney, "Vogue View," *Vogue* (US edition), August 2001, 122.
10. Sarah Mower, "Girl Power," *Vogue* (US edition), March 2002, 532.
11. Mower, "Girl Power," 532.
12. Catherine Lebrun, conversation with the author, July 13, 2022, Paris.
13. Lebrun, conversation with the author.
14. Sarah Mower, "Chloé as Clare Sees It," in Mower and Ascoli, *Chloé: Attitudes*, 242.
15. See Alexis Romano, *Prêt-à-Porter, Paris and Women: A Cultural Study of French Readymade Fashion, 1945–68* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022).
16. MacSweeney, "Vogue View," 122.
17. Mower, "Chloé as Clare Sees It," 242.
18. Suzy Menkes, "Chloé: When Rock Music Is the Food of Fashion," *International Herald Tribune*, March 2, 2000, cited in Mower, "Stella Steps It Up," 151.
19. "Talking Fashion," *Vogue* (US edition), September 2000, 288.
20. Van Meter, "Stella McCartney's Cheeky Chic," 184.
21. Susie Forbes, "As Seen: Vogue's Look at Who's Wearing What," *Vogue* (UK edition), October 2000, 249.
22. Invitation défilé, 1998, Défilé Cartons Invitations, Dossiers de Presse, Patrimoine Chloé, Paris.
23. Caroline Evans and Minna Thornton, *Women and Fashion: A New Look* (London: Quartet, 1989), 102.
24. "The Fashion Diaries," *Vogue* (UK edition), August 2006, 149.
25. "Fashion Diaries," 149.
26. Invitation défilé, 1998.
27. Heike Jenß, "Sixties Dress Only! The Consumption of the Past in a Retro Scene," in *Old Clothes, New Looks: Secondhand Fashion*, ed. Alexandra Palmer and Hazel Clark (Oxford: Berg, 2005), 194.
28. See David Brooks, *BOBOS in Paradise: The New Upper Class and How They Got There* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2000); and Christophe Guilluy, *Le crépuscule de la France d'en haut* (Paris: Flammarion, 2016).
29. Melinda Wittstock, "Are You a BOurgeois BOhemian?," *Guardian*, May 27, 2000.
30. Agnès Rocamora, *Fashioning the City: Paris, Fashion and the Media* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2009).
31. Press release, 2017, Défilé Cartons Invitations, Dossiers de Presse, Patrimoine Chloé, Paris.
32. Fred Davis, *Fashion, Culture, and Identity* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 17. See also Rebecca Arnold, *Fashion, Desire and Anxiety: Image and Morality in the 20th Century* (London: I. B. Tauris, 2001).