They’re busy laying out the track for this month’s Formula One race in Monaco, while in the principality’s grand Beach Club on Thursday Chanel unveiled a Grand Prix chic cruise collection.
Designer Virginie Viard’s opening models marched along the shores of the Med in mechanic's jumpsuits made of checkered red-and-white wool bouclé or gray-and-black windowpane check. Many of them topped with trucker caps with double ‘C’ logos. The mood was jaunty throughout, with pants cut with ankle straps or finished with elastic trim.

The runway included a sandy beach, pontoon and boardwalk inside the tony sports club, located beneath Villa La Vigie, the seaside mansion that her predecessor Karl Lagerfeld made his principal residence for over two decades.

The audience – a mix of some international editors, movie stars, K-pop stars and well-heeled clients - perched on lounge chairs inside seaside cabins, or under giant parasols. A beautiful setting even if Chanel could not control the weather. Thursday was gray and overcast. One strained to hear any Russian voices, while Monaco’s harbor was emptied of any oligarch’s superyacht.
Several Chanel models carried race helmets, bearing the number five, *bien sûr*; others held padded mini helmet leather clutches and bags. Later Virginie even dressed a driver’s girlfriend in a bouclé jacket and metallic silk pants made in the honey-gold hue of the famed No. 5 scent.

“*Insensé* Virginie, I cannot tell you how many things I wanted to wear in this collection!” thrilled Vanessa Paradis, attired in a gilded tweed Chanel jacket and flared jeans, as she used the French term for ‘crazy’. The chanteuse and actress, fresh from gracing the cover of the latest Madame Figaro, entirely dressed in Chanel, appearing as a modern-day Marilyn Monroe. The Hollywood legend famed for boasting that she wore “five drops of Chanel No. 5” and nothing else in bed.

Post-show, guests showered Viard with compliments, after staging a supremely wearable yet also audacious collection. Spruce, sporty chic in a collection she very carefully never oversteered. Tilda Swinton, Charlotte Casiraghi, Princess Caroline of Monaco, Sofia Coppola and Carole Bouquet in turn embracing Chanel’s creative director in the show’s “backstage.” In this case, a terrace of the beach club’s Olympic-sized pool.

“I first met Helmut Newton swimming in that pool. While the first time I saw Caroline was on a beach in Monaco, dressed in a draped black dress, very thin tights and heels,” mused Viard, explaining how much emotion Monaco engendered for her.

Little black dresses also featured in this cruise 2022/23 collection along with checkered-flag tops and pit-staff sleeveless red leather jerkins. Keeping the sporty mood, bags were cut as tennis racket cases; sneakers made in silver and gold.
For evening, Viard showed some great demi voluminous grandfather striped dresses with tiny 'CC' touches. Along with a sublime series of chiffon dresses made in a checkered-flag print or perfectly draped chiffon skirts and cocktails.

As the soundtrack featured Shoes' version of *Why Can’t We All Live Together*, the cast of 67 glided along the beach, climaxing with a fantastically opulent quartet of trenches and coat-dresses made of such fine micro-sequins they looked almost like snakeskin.

The day finishing with an extended late night soirée inside Karl’s neo-classical villa.

“I can never forget the times I spent here with Karl, the elegant dinners, corbeilles of flowers, witty conversation and sheer beauty," concluded Viard.

Earlier this week, the Paris fashion house released a Coppola-directed video clip that mashed up images of Formula One, casinos, Karl at La Vigie’s, Lagerfeld’s iconic '90s photos of Linda Evangelista and Christy Turlington in Monaco, gilded youth on speedboats and Chanel herself. Coco truly loved the luxurious opulence, lush vegetation and dramatic topography of the Cote d’Azur.
Coco used to take the Train Bleu down to Monaco, staying in the Hotel de Paris, which sold her perfumes. Historians have even discovered a ministerial decree dated December 30th 1913, that allowed Chanel to run “a business selling fashion, fashion supplies, veils, boas, coats, furs, knitwear, trinkets, lace, lingerie, blouses, petticoats, parasols, bags, fans, cushions.”

It was in Monte Carlo too where she met her lover the Duke of Westminster on his luxurious yacht *Flying Cloud*. And the casual elegance of the crew’s uniforms: the wide-cut drop-front trousers; sailors’ caps, golden buttons and blend of navy and white inspired her cruise collections and elements in this one too.

The only home Coco ever built, her villa La Pausa, is located just a few kilometers east of Monaco on the last peninsula before France turns into Italy.

But that is another Chanel myth which will only be further revealed next year when the house completes the restoration of Coco’s minimalist seaside villa.

See you next year on the Med.

By Godfrey Deeny