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IF THE SHOE FITS



RACHEL SUTHERLAND

**Chanel: Powerfully true to herself**

The notion of being true to yourself has been on my mind lately.

Just what does it take to be comfortable in your skin? To (really) not care what others think, to own your body and your look?

I'm not talking about the material comforts. They matter, but considerably less than having the strength to declare to the world – through your personal style and actions – that you are a confident, powerful woman.

So it's fitting that "Coco Before Chanel" is opening in Charlotte on Friday. The French-language film stars Audrey Tautou as Gabrielle



Chanel

Chanel in the years before she became Coco Chanel, the legendary designer who redefined women's clothing in the 20th century.

The film is about fashion, of course, but it's also a compelling tale of how being uncompromisingly true to yourself can pay big dividends.

There were constants in Chanel's life, such as her sharp-tongued wit and honesty, when it suited her. She was abandoned by her father at an orphanage after her mother's death, and for years after, she would tell half truths or outright lies about it for the rest of her life.

Her ambition rarely waned, even when she was a moderately successful showgirl singing the song about a dog named Coco that would earn her the notable nickname.

It's subtle, but the film reminds viewers again and again that Chanel bucked convention at every turn.

She never married, instead carrying on longtime affairs with two men – one of whom would bankroll her first retail venture, a millinery shop.

Chanel's hat creations were sleek, simple, unfailingly chic and completely unlike the wide-brimmed, flouncy meringues worn by trendy women.

The star of the film is the sublime cinematography and costuming, which bring to life Chanel's quiet, often torturous climb up the social ladder from orphan to revolutionary haute couturier.

Few words are necessary to establish Chanel's uniqueness when we watch as she forages her lovers' closets for items to rework for her own wear.

While women of the day wore high-collared, ankle-length gowns with bustles and corsets, Chanel unapologetically donned self-made riding pants, jackets and jersey shirts.

The designer seemed to possess a confidence that enabled her to rise above the situation she was in at the moment.

And, perhaps more important to the fashion world, that confidence empowered her to wear what she wanted, how she wanted, when she wanted, fashion police be damned.

The women of the upper classes were laced, bound and fragile under their mounds of fabric and frills. Chanel was striking in her elegant simplicity: a little black dress, a peter pan collar.

Tautou wholly embodies Chanel, casting dismissive, sidelong glances, turning off emotion and doing what was necessary – however scandalous, given the social mores of the day – to live the life she wanted.

A sense of freedom comes with owning your personal style, which is something that has taken me a few years to relearn. It seems Coco had it right: Once you stop caring so much what the rest of the world thinks of you, everything falls into place.

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Charlotte stylist shares her knowledge of fashion in classes geared toward younger set



PHOTOS BY DIEDRA LAIRD - [dlaird@charlotteobserver.com](mailto:dlaird@charlotteobserver.com)

Style Sanctum director Nicole Sinclair's students listen to a presentation about the store by Saks store director Jameka Haynes, front, during a visit to Saks Off Fifth Ave. at Concord Mills.

**Fashionistas in training**

BY RACHEL SUTHERLAND  
Style Editor

Inspiration can be found in almost every situation.

Just ask Nicole Sinclair.

When the Charlotte stylist's husband of eight years was laid off from Wachovia last November, the couple had a "light bulb moment," she says. They sent their son to camp for exposure to things he loves, so why couldn't they create the same experience for budding fashion mavens here in Charlotte?

So five months after her husband, Clayton, lost that banking job, the pair launched Style

Sanctum, a Huntersville studio that helps children discover and nurture their creativity through fashion. The venture has been such a success, a second location will open Nov. 14 in south Charlotte.

Opening the studio was a leap of faith, Sinclair says – one motivated by her passion for fashion and desire to share her knowledge, especially with young people. As a personal wardrobe stylist, Sinclair had forever been fielding requests from clients to help their daughters get an insider perspective on the fashion industry.



Sinclair

SEE FASHIONISTAS, 6D



Shaye Ellerbe looks at sunglasses at Concord Mills.

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**Internet inspires 'Glass Houses'**

Reservations about the Web's boom of friends, connections gave Sasha Janes his inspiration.

BY STEVEN BROWN  
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Sasha Janes has every reason to be glad that the Internet helps people stay in touch across long distances.

Not only does performing with N.C. Dance Theatre keep him far from family in his native Australia, but distance is a hurdle even when he goes home. His two brothers live on opposite coasts, thousands of miles apart.

Even though the Web makes distances shrink, Janes has his reservations about the rise of Facebook, Twitter and such. He recalls being startled by the number of friends he once saw on someone's Facebook page: 2,000.

Janes started thinking about it. How many of the friends signed up

on that Facebook page could really be close to its owner?

That was the spark for Janes' "Glass Houses," which premieres tonight as part of N.C. Dance Theatre's annual Innovative Works program. "Glass Houses" looks at the Internet's boom in "supposed friends," Janes says.

At a rehearsal last week, no one mimed sitting at a computer. "Glass Houses" was more abstract than that. As it unfolded – meshing with music by the Kronos Quartet and others – it became clear that one of the six main dancers was separating herself from the others.

"She's trying to break out of this," Janes says afterward. "She doesn't want to be just one of the crowd."

Even without onstage electronics, "Glass Houses" does put one tangible component onstage: a sculpture by Shaun Cassidy, a Winthrop University teacher who has worked at the McColl Center for Visual Art.

SEE GLASS, 3D



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Rebecca Carmazzi and David Ingram are another of the three main couples in Sasha Janes' "Glass Houses."