

THE
DARKEST

SHADE

On the colour that governs fashion, defines luxury branding, and carries the full weight of power, desire, and defiance.

BY THE EDITORS

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100

OF BLACK IN FASHION

Part One

The Colour That Arrives Already Dressed

There is a moment, late in the autumn of 1926, when Coco Chanel published a sketch in American *Vogue*. It showed a simple sheath. No embellishment. No colour. Just black. The editors called it ‘Chanel’s Ford’ — a car for every woman, in every shade of black. Simple. Affordable. Universally flattering. A democratic garment wearing the most undemocratic colour.

Nearly a century later, that instinct — that black is not an absence but an argument — remains the most reliable truth in fashion and brand strategy. It is the colour that needs no explanation, the one that arrives already dressed. Other colours ask something of the wearer. Black already knows.

“Black does not trend. It presides. It is not a colour of the moment — it is the colour of all moments.”

YVES SAINT LAURENT

Ask a psychologist what black does to a room and the answer comes quickly: it focuses attention. It removes the noise. When Cristobal Balenciaga dressed a client in black, he was not hiding her — he was directing every eye to her posture, her movement, the way she occupied space. This is the paradox at the heart of black’s power. It is both the colour of mourning and of mastery. Of grief and of authority. A judge’s robe. A surgeon’s silhouette at midnight. The velvet rope that divides ordinary from elite.

Luxury brands understood this long before behavioural science confirmed it. Chanel, Saint Laurent, Balenciaga — the great houses did not choose black because it was safe. They chose it because it was *final*. A statement without qualification. Black as the ultimate full stop.

Psychologists studying first impressions have found that black consistently outperforms other colours in conveying leadership, credibility, and competence. It signals, without a word, that the wearer has already decided something. The question is only whether you agree.

Part Two

The Symbolism of Absence

There is a reason the most powerful institutions on earth dress their members in black. The judiciary. The clergy. The academy. Black communicates that what is being done here transcends personal preference, that the individual within the garment is operating at the service of something larger. The colour removes vanity from the equation entirely. What remains is pure authority.

This is why black persists across industries, seasons, and cultural shifts. It does not trend. It presides. Brands that have adopted it as their signature — from Chanel to Amex — report that consumers associate their black identity with permanence and trustworthiness above all other qualities.

78%

OF LUXURY BRANDS USE BLACK
AS THEIR PRIMARY BRAND COLOUR

The Psychology of Wearing Black

Confidence. Research in embodied cognition confirms that wearing black measurably increases self-reported feelings of authority and competence.

The colour itself becomes a performance of the self one intends to inhabit.

Credibility. In professional contexts, black-dressed individuals are consistently rated as more competent and reliable in first-impression studies. The effect holds

across cultures, genders, and industries.

Desire. Black's association with mystery and sensuality is not mythological. MRI studies of colour response show elevated arousal responses to black-clad figures — a fact luxury perfume and fashion campaigns have exploited for decades.

“The great houses did not choose black because it was safe. They chose it because it was final.”

This psychological architecture is not accidental. The brands that have built lasting identities in black understood, intuitively or by design, that the colour was doing communicative work that words could not replicate. No tagline says what a black Centurion Card says when it lands on a restaurant table. No advertisement conveys what a black Porsche in morning light conveys at the kerb.

Black does not explain itself. That is precisely its power.

Part Three

The Body as Statement

It is the evening of June 29, 1994. At the Serpentine Gallery in London, cameras are trained on a door. Inside Kensington Palace, Prince Charles is on television, confirming to the nation what many had suspected: he had been unfaithful to his wife. The Princess of Wales steps out wearing a dress her stylist had urged her not to wear. Christina Stambolian had made it three years earlier. Diana had thought it too daring. Tonight, she decides otherwise.

Off-the-shoulder. Body-accentuating. Short.

Entirely, unapologetically black. The gown does not mourn. It announces.

Christina Stambolian, 1994
Serpentine Gallery, London

Historians of fashion call it the Revenge Dress. But that framing, satisfying as it is, reduces what happened. Diana did not simply choose black to wound. She chose it to redefine herself. Black as rebirth. Black as armour. Black as the declaration that one chapter had ended and another, on her own terms, had begun.

The cultural reverberations were immediate and lasting. Within weeks, black off-the-shoulder silhouettes appeared across every high street. But more than a trend, Diana had demonstrated something that brand strategists have understood ever since: black communicates narrative. It carries the full weight of what has been and what is coming.

Black as rebirth. Black as armour. Black as the declaration that one chapter had ended and another, on her terms, had begun.

On Who Black Flatters

There is a myth that black flatters everyone equally. The truth is more interesting. Black is most luminous on cool undertones — the Winter and Summer palettes of colour theory — where its depth creates contrast against the skin rather than flattening it. For warmer complexions, softer inky tones and a warm accessory let the garment recede so that the person inside it advances.

What is universally true is the psychological effect. Women who wear black consistently report feeling more confident, more authoritative, more themselves. Research in embodied cognition confirms it: what we wear alters our cognitive state, and black — with its associations of mastery and control — shifts something real. Independence. Mystery. A refusal to apologise. These are the qualities black has carried through women's fashion history, from Chanel's first little black dress to Diana's Serpentine gown.

Part Four

The Brands That Chose Darkness

Consider the brands that have made black their signature and you notice something: they are not competing for attention. They are assuming it. Chanel's little black dress did not arrive as a trend — it arrived as a correction. Before it, women dressed in colour to be seen. After it, they wore black to be known.

CHANEL

The little black dress pioneered modern feminine elegance. Coco Chanel's 1926 sketch in *Vogue* was not a garment — it was a manifesto. A single silhouette that rewrote the vocabulary of what it meant to dress with intention. The LBD remains, a century on, the most replicated concept in fashion history.

MONTBLANC

An empire built on the idea that the act of writing is itself a statement of character. The lacquered black pen, the black-and-white logo, the black leather of its accessories — each element communicates permanence, precision, and the weight of words worth keeping. The colour is not decorative. It is the argument.

BENTLEY & PORSCHE

Black finishes reserved for flagship models. Obsidian. Onyx. Midnight. The names alone suggest something beyond transportation. At this level black signals not mere luxury but a fluency in luxury — the kind that no longer needs to announce itself or justify its price.

AMERICAN EXPRESS

The Centurion Card. Black, invitation-only, no criteria published. The colour became the entire signal: if you need to ask whether you qualify, you do not. Black as the ultimate membership — exclusive by design, legible by colour alone, aspirational by absence of information.

JOHNNIE WALKER

Black Label understood that the step from Red to Black was not merely one of age but of category. Black Label is not a better whisky. It is a different kind of statement — the drink of someone who has decided what they like and does not require persuasion. Mastery rendered in dark glass.

SAINT LAURENT

Runway after runway constructed in black. A house that understands that black is not minimalism — it is maximum impact operating at its most restrained. Every collection is a thesis on how much a single colour can hold when it is given everything and asked to carry it silently.

Part Five

Black Through the Marketing Lens

Marketing theorists use the AIDA framework — Attention, Interest, Desire, Action — to map the journey from first glance to final purchase. Black navigates each stage with unusual efficiency, often collapsing multiple stages into a single visual encounter.

<p>A</p> <p>ATTENTION</p> <p>Black commands attention through contrast and restraint. The way silence commands a room full of</p>	<p>I</p> <p>INTEREST</p> <p>It sustains curiosity by suggesting depth — implying that what is inside is worth more than what is displayed.</p>	<p>D</p> <p>DESIRE</p> <p>Mystery, sensuality, exclusivity. Diana's Stambolian gown: one garment that created desire not</p>	<p>A</p> <p>ACTION</p> <p>Consumers perceive black as timeless and versatile. Black sells first and sells longest. Sneaker brands launch black colourways before all others.</p>
<p>noise. It requires nothing else.</p> <p><i>The Universal Neutral</i></p>	<p>Restraint as invitation.</p>	<p>for itself but for the possibility it represented.</p>	

One of black's greatest strategic advantages is its absolute universality. It functions effectively across every industry — fashion, automotive, luxury goods, technology, cosmetics — and pairs effortlessly with any accent to shift its meaning: paired with grey, it becomes architectural; with white, minimalist; with silver, technological; with a single vivid colour, suddenly editorial. It is the one colour that can hold any other without losing itself.

CODA

Trends arrive with the seasons and depart with them. Black does not participate in this cycle. It is not immune to fashion — it is prior to fashion. It was here before the industry named itself.

Chanel called it a Ford. Saint Laurent called it an answer. Diana wore it and changed what an exit could mean. The brands that understand it do not explain it. They simply choose it, and let the choice speak.

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