

KAZARIAN

MOOD OF THE MOMENT GABY AGHION & CHLOÉ

The sophisticated, romantic, and glamorous designs of Chloé have captured the energy and aspirations of generations of women since Gaby Aghion (1921–2014) created the label and designed her first collection in 1952. This sumptuously illustrated book features seventy years of clothing from Chloé designers, along with related sketches, vintage advertisements, and archival photographs. Essays shed light on Aghion's life, her vision for fashion, and the ways in which she fostered young talents like Karl Lagerfeld, who spent two decades with Aghion at Chloé. Other acclaimed designers who embodied and reinterpreted her original inspiration—Paulo Melin Anderson, Gabriela Hearst, Clare Waight Keller, Hannah MacGibbon, Stella McCartney, Peter O'Brien, Phoebe Philo, Natacha Ramsay-Levi, and Martine Sitbon—offer recollections of their experiences working at the celebrated fashion house.

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Above: Caby Aghion, 1939

Right: Caby Aghion in the desert near Alexandria, Egypt, photographed by Raymond Aghion, ca. 1940-45

*All I ever wanted was for Chloé
to have a happy spirit and to
make people happy.*

—Caby Aghion





Above: Gaby Aghion in the desert near Alexandria, Egypt, photographed by Raymond Aghion, ca. 1940–45

Right: A woman lounges in the sun at Stanley Bay beach in Alexandria, Egypt, ca. 1939–60

GABYAGHION AND THE MOOD OF THE MOMENT

Choghakate Kazarian

One morning, I woke up thinking “I will make a little collection of charming dresses, in very pretty colours which women will fancy.” I didn’t know how to sew, but I fell in love with cotton poplin; some almost look like silk. I was inspired by what we wore in the sporting clubs in Egypt: lightweight dresses which were neither evening wear, nor run-of-the-mill, but had that special something. I designed six dresses, hired a seamstress with haute-couture training, borrowed a friend’s name, “Chloé”—which I liked for the roundness of its letters—and hand-painted the label with one of my artist friends; I wanted it to be amusing. I then decided to personally propose this collection to boutiques. I was sticking my neck out. I was a client, I became a saleswoman. I had sass, I was casual, and I had a hell of a lot of nerve!

—Gaby Aghion

In this now-legendary story, Gaby Aghion (1921–2014) recalled how she launched Chloé in 1952 with a half dozen dresses “inspired by what we wore in the sporting clubs in Egypt.” Her idea of “lightweight dresses which were neither evening wear, nor run-of-the-mill” in “pretty colours which women will fancy” informed the spirit of Chloé for decades to come.¹ Anticipating the fashion industry’s major transition in the next decade from haute couture to ready-to-wear, Gaby offered her first collection to boutiques in Paris. She wanted to create off-the-rack clothes with uncomplicated shapes in high-quality fabrics and couture savoir faire—thus forging the idea of “luxury ready-to-wear.” She soon abandoned the idea of designing clothes herself and instead hired emerging stylists as she built her company. An Egyptian Jew turned Parisienne, Gaby Aghion challenged her urbane, privileged milieu and became a working woman, blurring the lines between social identities and redefining the division of labor between makers and consumers. With a talent for surrounding herself with other talents, she operated in the shadow of her designers and the name of her brand while nevertheless carving out a distinctive space within her personal life and the company she built over the next three decades.

A Francophile Egyptian

Gabriella Hanoka was born in Alexandria, Egypt, on March 3, 1921, to Albert Hanoka and Emilie Eman. Her father, who ran a cigarette factory, was Greek (of Jewish and Spanish descent); her mother was of Jewish Italian descent.² Gaby grew up in a highly cultured environment where she encountered the arts and leftist politics. The youngest of seven children, she described their house as “full of books.”³ Like most educated upper-class families, especially among Egyptian Jews, the Hanokas spoke French (and Italian) and



Colors of Egypt: The Chloé Blouse

An overtly feminine take on the masculine shirt, the Chloé blouse is an iconic but discrete staple of everyday wear. It was part of Gaby Aghion's own daily uniform and evocative of the colors of the Egyptian sand that she was so fond of. From the 1960s on, each Chloé designer has reinterpreted this wardrobe essential within an infinite range of sandy colors and through various materials, adornments, and transparencies. The blouse played with feminine and masculine codes while turning the professional shirt into a softer and floating silhouette in tune with the bohemian spirit of the brand.



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Blouse designed by Natacha Ramsay-Levi, autumn–winter 2018, double-face silk crepe

Blouse designed by Phoebe Philo, spring–summer 2006, cotton poplin

Blouse designed by Clare Waight Keller, spring–summer 2013, polyester twill adorned with *jour échelle* embroidery and cotton poplin bows

Blouse designed by Phoebe Philo, spring–summer 2006, mixed linen and cotton and rickrack ribbon

Blouse designed by Gabriela Hearst, spring 2022, cotton poplin with eyelet embroidery

Corset designed by Martine Sitbon, spring–summer 1991, raw silk, boning, and acetate and glass beads

Blouse designed by Karl Lagerfeld, spring–summer 1968, silk crepe



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Above: *Flou-flou* dress designed by C  rard Pipart, spring-summer 1961, wool crepe

Right: C  rard Pipart, sketch for the *Flou-flou* dress, spring-summer 1961, graphite pencil on wove paper



Left and above: *Tertulia* dress designed by Karl Lagerfeld, spring-summer 1966, Tergal chiffon hand-painted by Le Besnerais.
Tergal advertising photography, unidentified photographer



Left to right: Karl Lagerfeld, sketch for the *Bérénice* dress, autumn-winter 1967, graphite pencil, felt pen, pastel, sequins samples on a thread, and collage of printed paper on Bristol paper. Karl Lagerfeld, sketch for the *Bing* dress, autumn-winter 1967, graphite pencil, felt pen, and pastel on Bristol paper. Karl Lagerfeld, sketch for the *LSD* dress, spring-summer 1968, graphite pencil, felt pen, pastel, and collage on Bristol paper. Karl Lagerfeld, sketch for the *Cinétique* dress, spring-summer 1968, graphite pencil, felt pen, and collage on Bristol paper

With each collection, I try to
crystallize the mood of the moment.

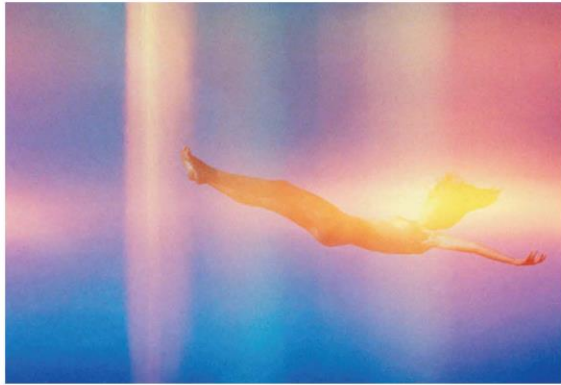
Madame Aghion is a
charming person. She sparks
off the kind of atmosphere
which has a very stimulating
effect on me.

I draw like I talk, and I don't
talk slowly. . . . My style is
more. Another Spring. Another
Love. . . . But I have an excuse:
I am in fashion where one is
supposed to change all the time.
I think one's taste should change
because one changes physically.
The difference between how
I looked fifteen years ago and
how I look now is as tremendous
as the difference between an
18th-century cupboard and an
Art Deco cabinet.

The mood was very creative
and Gaby was very gifted to
make people more creative.
She helped me in a way to
become what I am now—and
that you will never forget. I
think she had a happy life.

—Karl Lagerfeld





The spring-summer 2016 collection was a Technicolor reinterpretation of the romantic pleated dress, as in the example at right made of chiffon adorned with pompon tassels. The fluid silhouette was echoed in the invitation card featuring a photograph by the American artist Ryan McGinley (b. 1977), known for his jumping and floating nudes of young men and women. The carefree sensuality and weightlessness of McGinley's hedonistic photographs translates the optimistic, youthful spirit of Chloé embodied in the freedom of movement this dress affords the wearer.

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Above: Spring-summer 2016 fashion show invitation, featuring Ryan McGinley's *Falling Light Leak* (2013), collection by Clare Waight Keller

Right: Dress designed by Clare Waight Keller, spring-summer 2016, chiffon, hand-dyed silk crepon, drawstrings, and handmade pompon tassels

Following pages: Spring-summer 2016 advertising campaign featuring designs by Clare Waight Keller, modeled by Antonia Petkovic and Céline Bouly. Photography by Theo Wanner

