

Red, She Said

I BOUGHT MY FIRST CHANEL LIPSTICK, "RED FLAME," AT THE DUTY-free shop on my way back from London three years ago. This is what you do when you turn 30. Now Chanel lipstick is substantial, grown-up stuff, so if you've never taken a life drawing class in Paris, you probably shouldn't risk applying it. But if you have a sure hand, wearing Chanel is the only way you're ever going to look like Grace Kelly or Kim Novak when you meet the ladies for lunch at the Four Seasons. Nothing else looks right with a cashmere twinset.

When it comes to lipstick, I have an aversion to trendy pinks and corals and browns, to frost and gloss and ultra-matte formulas. Men don't like them either. Ask them.

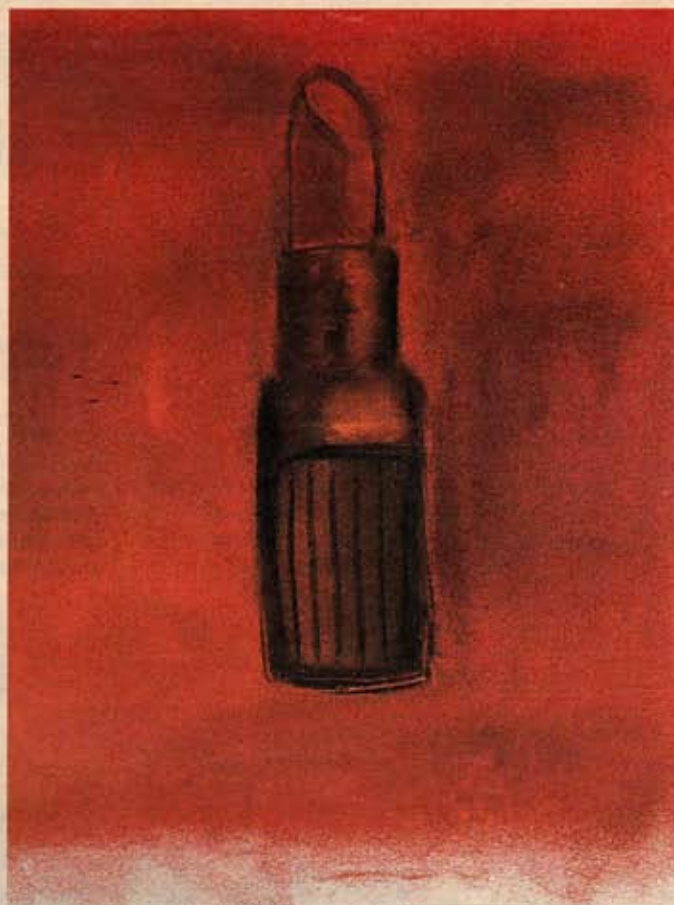
"I must say I prefer straightforward cherry red," says my friend Barry Yourgrau, the author of "The Sadness of Sex" and an expert observer of the mysteries of femininity. "It's like the cherry on the sundae, a carnal tweak. Red lipstick stirs up memories of my childhood, my mother and when women dressed in a certain way—it's by-gone now, but it was intensely lurid and civil at the same time. If Eve had been wearing lipstick when she kissed the apple, she would have been wearing red."

As a lifelong wearer of red lipstick myself, I believe lipstick should be deep, dark, womanly and self-possessed, like a rose left on a pillow at the Beverly Hills Hotel. Or it should be throbbing, slatternly and hot, like a summer on the run in a stolen Corvette.

Not all reds are racy, of course. When I'm just puttering around the house, I prefer to use Makeup Forever's "Dark Red Harmony" palette, which looks like one of those watercolor sets you had in grade school. Origins' "Maraschino" is good when you're wearing shorts or polka dots, and Chanel's "Red Red" is demure enough for meeting in-laws.

For daytime, I like Shu Uemura No. 758. It's sheer but pigment-rich, looks strangely perfect on and reminds me of an old photograph that's been hand-painted. Of all the lipsticks in the known universe, Shu Uemura feels the best on the lips, as diaphanous as a pair of Chinese silk pajamas. Not only that, it looks good even when it's half worn-off, leaving just enough of that bee-stung, over-kissed, wanton pinkness. Hey, just because it's the middle of the day doesn't mean I want to be good. Maybe I want to feel like Catherine Deneuve in "Belle de Jour."

The most dangerous red is Estée Lauder's "Silent Red," a heavy, unctuous color that is both regal and mysterious. It's the only thing I



ever saw in a magazine and ran out and bought, and, more than four years after it hit the makeup counters, it's still, in my opinion, the be-all and end-all of red lipsticks. The color is not merely the quintessence of red, but its poetic ideal—the deeply saturated hues of love and anger mixed together, a manic-depressive, murderous red. In

short, the color of consuming desire. Its texture is so profound that it will change the way you carry yourself, the way you walk into a room. "Silent Red" makes me feel as if I'm wearing important jewelry.

As with most things, there's a right way and a wrong way to wear red lipstick. I don't care for lip brushes or lip pencils or blotting tissues or base coats or powder meant to make lipstick stay on longer. They're time-consuming, impossible in the car and, above all, ungainly in restaurants. Besides, despite what Miss Manners might think, nothing in the world is as civilized and sexy as a woman touching up her lips at the dinner table with the help of a mother-of-pearl compact. As a matter of fact, there's a scene in "The Lady Eve" where Barbara Stanwyck pulls out her compact and lipstick in the dining room of a cruise ship, and as a direct result of the ensuing complications, ends up marrying Henry Fonda. Now *that's* the way to apply lipstick. And I'll bet it was a lusty red.

—HILLARY JOHNSON

Why Anything but Crimson Lipstick Is the Kiss of Death