

The Real Chanel Suit

Considering significance: Determining an authentic Chanel from a copy

*"She introduced the Chanel suit, which, with its collarless, braid-trimmed cardigan jacket with long, tight-fitting sleeves, and its graceful skirt, would be more copied, in all price ranges, than any other single garment designed by a couturier."*¹

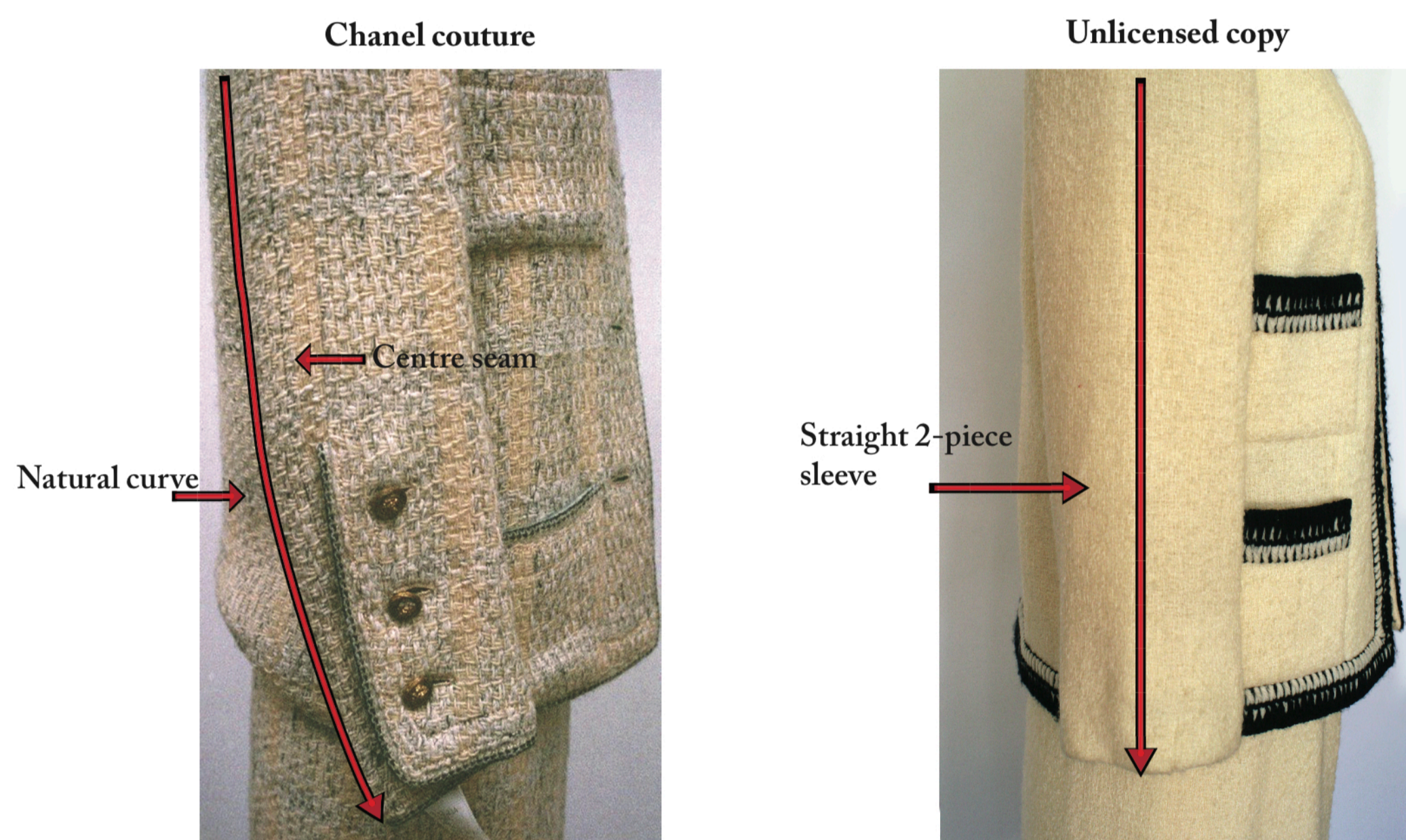
Copies of couture garments have had a bad reputation for a long time, but these aspects of costumes are a part of history that can give greater value to the originals and their copies.

This research focuses on couture Chanel suits from the 1960s and how they differ from copies. The construction techniques are the main elements evaluated when determining the levels of quality and authenticity.

Key points on authentic Chanel construction

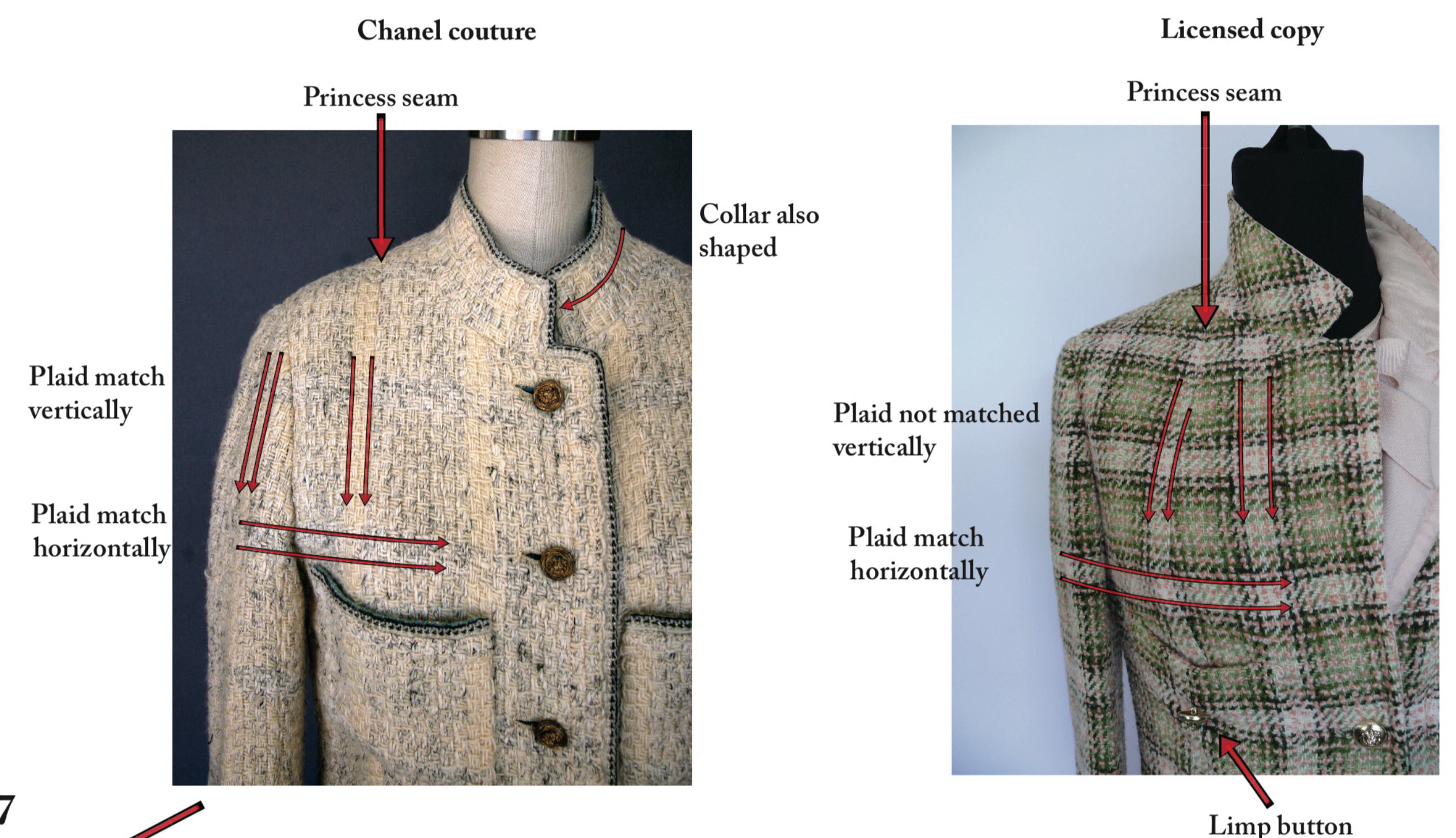
3-piece sleeves:

- Chanel is the only couturier to have used this technique extensively
- The sleeve fits close to the arm and has a slight natural curve
- Generally it has a working vent and narrow undersleeve
*"It [the sleeve] just has to follow the body of the wearer, not be all over the place. It's meant to fall straight over the shoulder-blades, not go bulging out like that!"*³



Shaping:

- Pattern sections are cut straight, then shaped with heat and moisture into the desired form
- Evident at princess line. On a Chanel (especially in plaid patterns) the stripes/grains match horizontally and are joined on the straight grain; achieved only by this method. On copies the grains/plaid match horizontally but the vertical seam is not on the straight grain

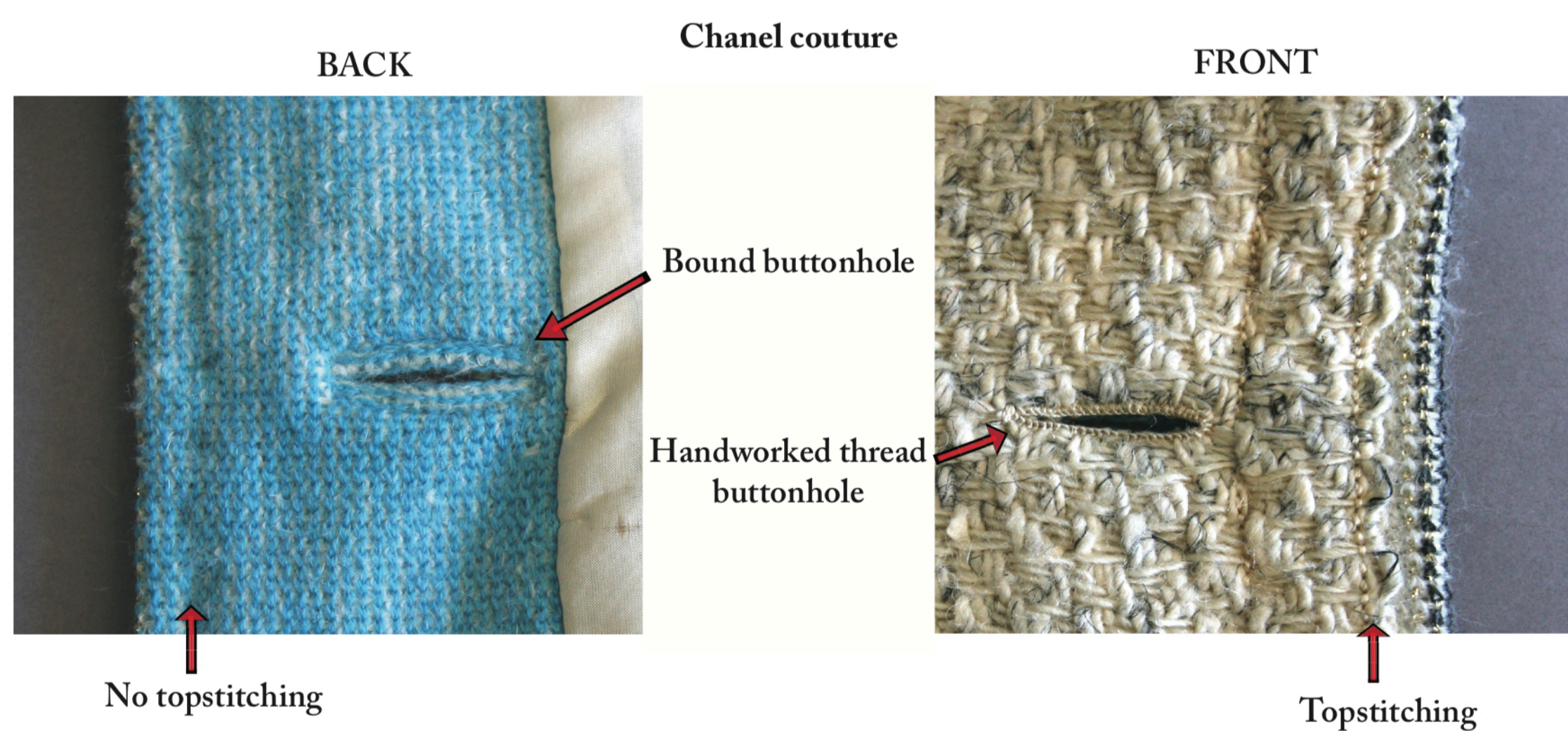


Couture Chanel suit from 1967



Trim:

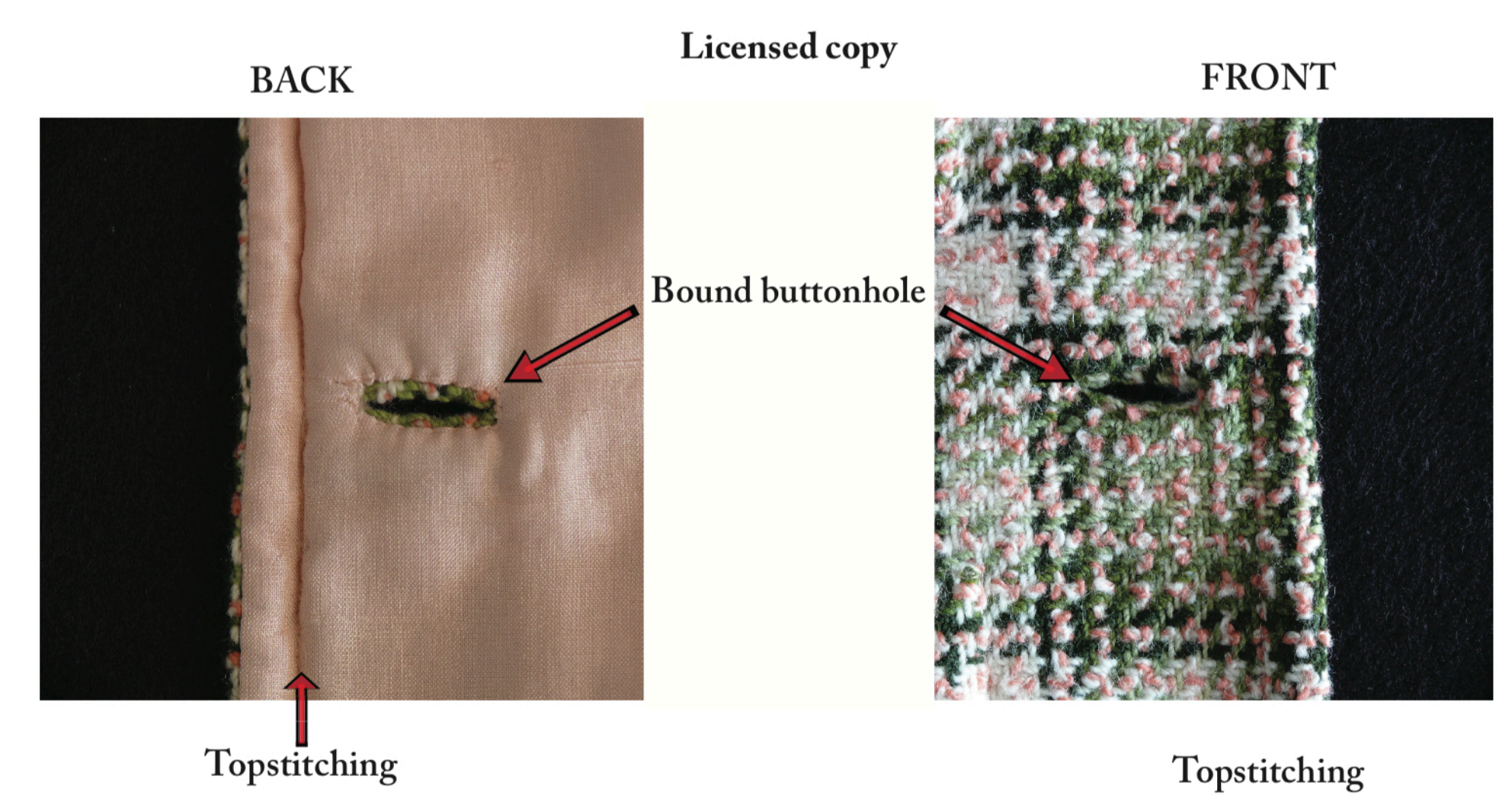
- Always made by hand and applied by hand
- If trim is simple machine topstitching, then topstitching is done before hemming, so stitching is only through one layer instead of showing on back



Hand stitched patch pockets

Buttonholes:

- Unique to Chanel suits; a handworked buttonhole on face with a 'faux' bound buttonhole on reverse. Gives clean, flat finish on both sides
- Copies use bound or machine worked buttonholes and frequently have decorative buttons without a buttonhole resulting in limp buttons
*"A dress must function; place the pockets accurately for use, never a button without a buttonhole"*²

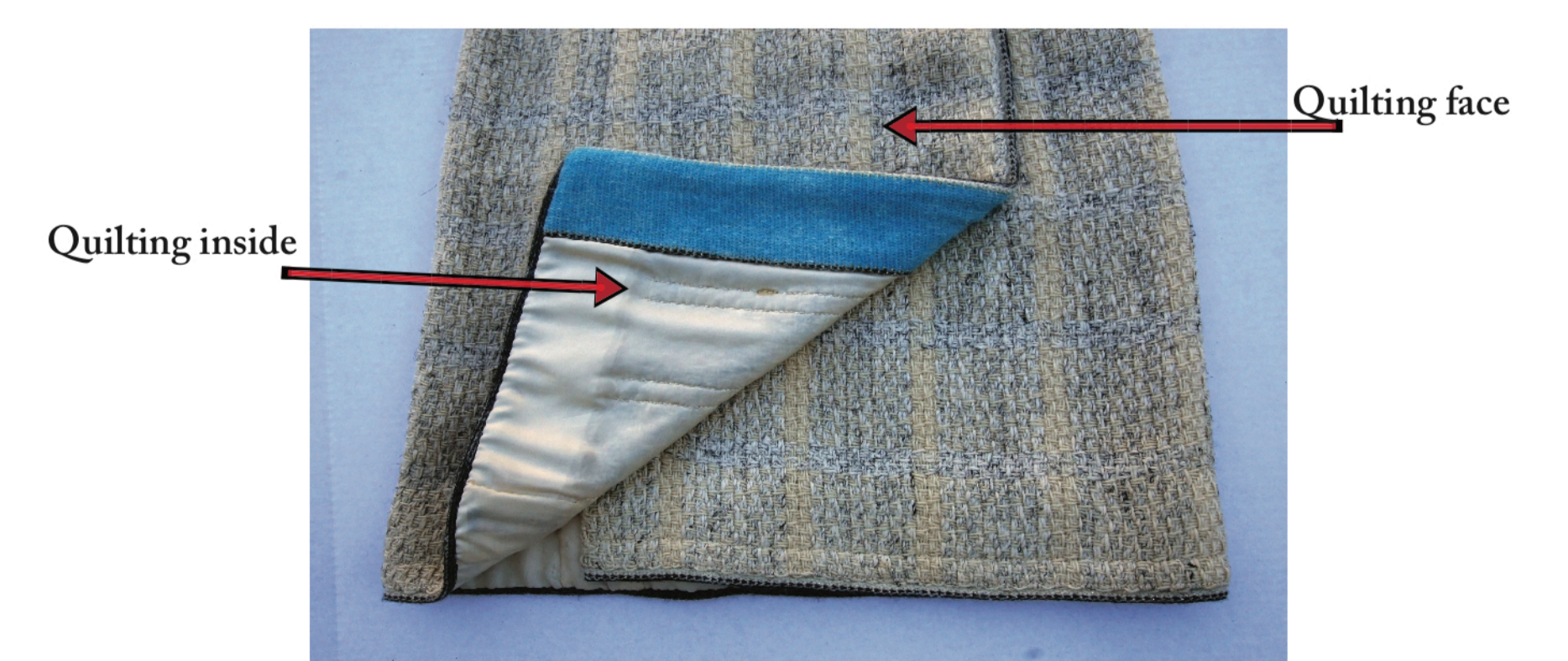


Hidden features:

- Facing and piping trim made from wrong side of blouse fabric
- Narrow side panel and seam at centre back give more shaping
*"Elegance means a thing's as beautiful on the wrong side as on the right."*³

Quilting:

- Machine quilted linings on jackets and skirts are rarely on copies. It greatly increases overall cost, because generally it requires lining seams to be sewn by hand
- Was considered one of the most prestigious qualities, and women with an original Chanel wanted others to notice



- 'Chanel' chain is frequently thought of as an original feature, however, it is one of the easiest details to copy and therefore is no longer an indication of an original over a copy or another designer's work.

Indeed there are other variables that can help assist in the confirmation of a garment's authenticity on closer examination. Some points to be aware of are: material quality (hand-woven, machine, variety of yarns used, fibre content, and hand of fabric), overall design success: flat boxy cut or subtly shaped, matching weight and density of trims to overall appearance (not too bulky or too thin).

Conclusion:

*"Let them copy. My ideas belong to everyone."*⁵

These results have indeed shown that an original Chanel suit has superior quality. However, as museums do not collect and indeed are actively deaccessioning copies, the copies have become more rare than the real thing in museum collections and the priceless value of comparisons is being lost.