



Pros

- + Eye-catching design
- + Impeccable craftsmanship
- + Comfortable on the wrist
- + Innovative material

Cons

- Less than ideal legibility
- Irregular rate



SHADES

OF

With its shiny, lightweight, titanium-ceramic case, Chanel's J12 Chromatic is a triumph of form. Now we see how it functions.

GRAY

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PHOTOS BY OK-PHOTOGRAPHY

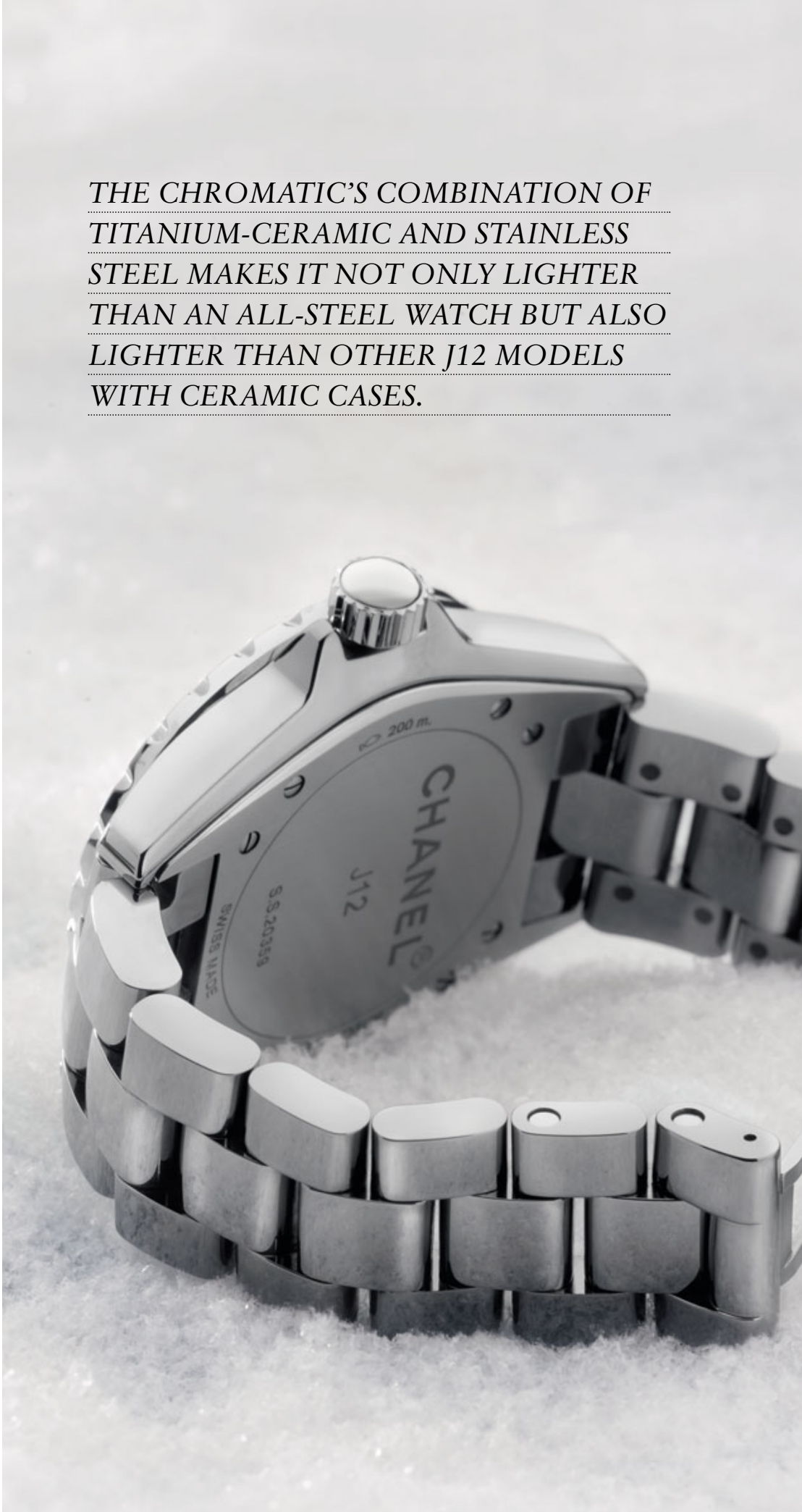
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he most difficult feature to describe on Chanel's J12 Chromatic watch, which debuted at the beginning of 2011, is its color. Too eye-catching to be called simply "gray," its closest approximation is gleaming anthracite, a contrast with the black and white cases of earlier J12 models. Rather than a standard monochrome finish, the case has a polished surface that adopts the tonality of its surroundings, which it reflects as a dark shimmer. Like a chameleon (which was the watch's name in its developmental phase), it changes its color to suit its environment.

Change and adaptation have always been hallmarks at Chanel, a company that began when Gabrielle Bonheur ("Coco") Chanel opened her first fashion boutique in Paris in 1918. Over the years, the business expanded to sell not only fashionable clothing but perfumes and accessories as well, and today Chanel ranks among the world's best-known luxury brands.

Chanel added watches to its core segments of fashions and fragrances in 1987: its first wristwatch was appropriately christened the Première. In creating that watch, Chanel enlisted the expertise of G&F Châtelain, a Swiss firm based in La Chaux-de-Fonds that has specialized in assembling watches and setting precious stones since 1947. After the launch of its second model, the Mademoiselle, Chanel took over G&F Châtelain in 1993, and its

THE CHROMATIC'S COMBINATION OF TITANIUM-CERAMIC AND STAINLESS STEEL MAKES IT NOT ONLY LIGHTER THAN AN ALL-STEEL WATCH BUT ALSO LIGHTER THAN OTHER J12 MODELS WITH CERAMIC CASES.



SPECS

CHANEL J12 CHROMATIC

Manufacturer: G&F Châtelain, Allée du Laser 18, CH-2300 La Chaux-de-Fonds, Switzerland

Reference number: H 2979

Functions: Hours, minutes, central seconds; date; stop-seconds function

Movement: ETA 2892 "Elaboré," automatic; 28,800 vph; 21 jewels; Etachron index regulation with eccentric; Incabloc shock absorption; 42-hour power reserve; diameter = 25.6 mm; height = 3.6 mm

Case: Titanium-ceramic, stainless steel (bezel, caseback, crown); bezel turns in only one direction; sapphire crystal; stainless-steel caseback held in place by eight screws; water-resistant to 200 meters

Bracelet and clasp: Polished titanium-ceramic bracelet with double-folding clasp made of stainless steel

Rate results:

(Deviation in seconds per 24 hours)

Dial up	+4
Dial down	+5
Crown up	0
Crown down	+1
Crown left	+8
Crown right	-5
Greatest deviation of rate:	13
Average deviation:	2.2
Average amplitude:	
Flat positions	280°
Hanging positions	249°

Dimensions: Diameter = 38 mm, height = 11 mm; weight = 130 grams

Variations: Various sizes (41 mm, 38 mm, 33 mm); with round or baguette diamonds; quartz or mechanical movement (\$6,300 - \$55,000)

Price: \$6,300

Chanel manufactures the J12's sprung clasp, which is unique in the watch industry.

watches have been made there ever since. From the start, Chanel wanted to bring as much of the manufacturing process in-house as possible. Watch assembly, case-component manufacturing and gemstone setting all take place in Chanel's own ateliers. The brand earned further renown through cooperative arrangements with great names in the watchmaking industry, like Giulio Papi of Renaud et Papi for the Rétrograde Mystérieuse model.

THE J12, WHICH debuted at the turn of the millennium, was Chanel's first collection with mechanical movements. The success of this high-tech ceramic watch prompted the brand to venture into horological complications. Caliber 3125 was built especially for Chanel by Audemars Piguet; in turn, A.P. equipped its own Caliber 3120 with a high-tech ceramic rotor from Chanel.

What separates the J12 Chromatic from the rest of the collection, and what gives it its distinctive color, are its case components made of titanium-ceramic, used here for the first time in the watch industry. Not only does this new compound look beautiful, it's also highly functional: the combination of high-tech ceramic and titanium makes the hybrid substance unusually lightweight, yet harder (1,650 Vickers) and more scratch-resistant than its base material, high-tech ceramic, which has a hardness of only 1,300 Vickers. Furthermore, a blend of titanium and ceramic reacts less strongly than steel to extreme heat or cold. For technical reasons, however, the Chromatic's bezel, the back of its case and its clasp are made of steel.

In keeping with Chanel's tradition, the J12 Chromatic boasts a design that's



SCORES

CHANEL J12 CHROMATIC

Bracelet and clasp (max. 10 points): The bracelet is made of titanium-ceramic and is very well crafted, but it shows smudges easily; this type of sturdy double-folding clasp is made only by Chanel.	9
Operation (5): The folding clasp is easy to grasp and operate, but only after some practice.	4
Case (10): Thoroughly well crafted and highly water-resistant; the caseback is unfortunately not made of ceramic.	9
Design (15): The lavishly detailed design is harmonious and looks very elegant in combination with the shimmery color scheme.	14
Legibility (5): Low contrast between the dial, hands and hour numerals, together with the long counterweight on the seconds hand, detract from the legibility.	3
Wearing comfort (10): Very pleasant to wear thanks to the polished surfaces and titanium-ceramic case, which quickly warms to skin temperature.	9
Movement (20): A tried-and-true, large-series ETA 2892 without adornment.	10
Rate results (10): The timing machine and the wearing test both recorded only a minimal daily gain, but the greatest difference among the several positions was very large.	7
Overall value (15): <i>Manufacture</i> watches are offered in this price range, but the unusual case material makes this time-piece special in its design and its feel.	12
TOTAL:	77 POINTS



In this watch's unconventional construction, the caseback is immovably connected to the bracelet. Left: the ETA 2892.

simultaneously elegant and richly detailed. The dial has a guilloché-embellished circular margin onto which rhodium-plated numerals are placed in a radial arrangement. This contrasts with the vertically satin-finished disk that comprises the inner portion of the dial. Small index strokes form a minute circle around the flange. Luminous material coats the hands for seconds, minutes and hours. The date is shown in a window between 4 o'clock and 5 o'clock.

The tasteful styling of the Chromatic's dial continues on the bezel, where we find the same typeface used on the dial and a juxtaposition of satin-finished and polished surfaces that suits this watch perfectly. The combination of a broad bezel and a comparatively small dial won't appeal to everyone, but the well-crafted, easy-to-grip rotatable bezel, which clicks authoritatively into place, should win many fans.

In the area of legibility, however, this watch could stand some improvement. The dial is low-contrast, the numerals are not always easily distinguishable, and the long counterweight on the tail end of the seconds hand makes it difficult to read the time at a glance. All in all, the J12's design features — like the broad bezel and luminous elements — are of the type typically seen on a divers' watch, but to achieve a well-balanced design, these details are used more playfully than functionally here. For example, the bezel isn't calibrated with individual minute markings, as it would be on a divers' watch.

The polished titanium-ceramic case with brushed steel back is solidly designed and very well crafted. The immovable connection between the caseback and the bracelet is unconventional: only the upper part of the case can be removed, along with the movement, when the watch is opened. The screwed crown is easy to grasp and turn. A convenient stop-seconds function makes it easy to set the time to the second. The watch's water-resistance, to a depth of 200 meters, is also noteworthy.

Diagonally angled lugs make a harmonious transition between the case and the bracelet, which has brightly polished surfaces, which, unfortunately, are easy to smudge with fingerprints. The bracelet's endmost elements are positioned very close to the case, where they have only minimal play. Diametrically opposite the case, shiny links completely cover the tripartite sprung clasp, creating the impression of an uninterrupted bangle: nothing but a slightly wider gap is visible between the two halves of the bracelet. Chanel itself makes the special sprung clasp, which is unique in the watch industry and one of the signature features of the J12 collection. It takes a bit of practice to get used to operating this clasp, but it is extremely sturdy and cannot pop open accidentally.

The watch's smooth surfaces make it very comfortable for daily wear. The combination of titanium-ceramic and steel make it not only lighter (130 grams) than an all-steel watch, but also lighter than the other J12 models in high-tech ceramic. The lighter weight enhances the wearing comfort.

Chanel performs many of the steps in the watch's production in its own ateliers, but it does not produce the movement. The watch contains a non-embellished version of the familiar ETA Caliber 2892. When we tested the watch on a Witschi timing machine, we discovered only a minimal average daily gain of 2.2 seconds. However, the difference among the individual positions was rather large, a full 13 seconds. The Chromatic gained a mere one second per day in the wearing test.

A price of \$6,300 seems rather expensive for a three-handed watch, especially one without a *manufacture* movement. But the primary attraction of the Chromatic is not its timekeeping or technical complexity but the innovative material used for its case and the multifaceted chromatic effects it offers. ○