

DESIGN: LIMITED-EDITION STEINWAY

## Karl Lagerfeld, piano man



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In a recent issue of Elle USA, designer Karl Lagerfeld admits that his biggest self-indulgence is "spending too much." And while it's no surprise that the fashion world's most eccentric icon possesses an extravagance that knows no bounds (apologies to Lady Black), the prodigious visionary behind Chanel may have recently outdone himself.

The Steinway Limited Edition Lagerfeld compares with your average baby grand the way Prada compares with Adidas. With its dramatic black lacquer and glossy red accents, the Lagerfeld Steinway brings to mind the perfect patent-leather pump - but, at \$97,000 a pop, far exceeds the mere indulgence of designer footwear both in terms of price and exclusivity (there are only 150 in existence).

The rounded rectangular music desk and legs are said to have been inspired by Lagerfeld's childhood growing up in Hamburg.


"Mr. Lagerfeld told us that one of his favourite memories as a child was sleigh riding in Germany, and it has this sled-like design if you look at it holistically," says Leo Spillman of Steinway in New York. "Our associates in Hamburg worked with him in close collaboration. We needed to preserve the integrity of the instrument while he needed to focus on the decorative aspect."

### Print Edition - Section Front



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The idea for the project came about in 2003, when Steinway, one of the world's most respected piano manufacturers, was celebrating its 150th anniversary. "We wanted to make a commemorative limited edition and, as we considered the perfect design, we realized we needed two: one in the traditional style of the late 1800s and another in contemporary design. We immediately thought of Lagerfeld because of his connection to Hamburg, where we have a branch factory. He is also a player and an enthusiast."

Until recently, the Lagerfeld piano sat in the window of the venerable Remenyi music shop on Toronto's Bloor West strip, where it attracted hundreds of admirers over a two-month period, which included the duration of the Toronto International Film Festival.

"The piano was a great hit," says Michael Remenyi, the store's proprietor. "We took it down the street for a party at the Chanel store and it received attention all night long." It has since moved to New York.

While Lagerfeld's name lends a celebrity patina to this project, limited-edition designer instruments are nothing new in the world of music. Art case pianos, as they are called, have been around for almost long as the instrument itself. According to Remenyi, as far back as the 1850s, manufacturers such as Ibach invited renowned artists and designers to help create instruments that doubled as beautiful objects.

"With an art case piano, the question is originality, beauty and, of course, the quality of the instrument," Remenyi says. "Other musical instruments are so absolutely established in their form, because the form is the function. But the piano is furniture as well."

Remenyi notes that collaborative promotions such as the Lagerfeld piano are a wonderful confluence of beauty and style. "The idea is that you get a noted designer to make this special instrument and thus combine the world of music and commerce. ...

"Lagerfeld had never designed a piano before," he adds, "but we've had a Lalique piano designed by a famous glass blower, as well as a piano designed by Tiffany."

It may seem hard to believe, but in the rarefied world of art case instruments, the Lagerfeld is a bargain. The world's most famous Steinway art case grand piano, decorated by English artist Lawrence Alma-Tadema in the late 1800s, was sold at auction in 1997 for \$1.2-million. Another Steinway art case resides at the White House.

For some music lovers, Spillman says, it's a small price to pay for a sublime combination of music, beauty and high design. "There are people who love playing the piano and have very sophisticated home environments," he says, pointing out that Lagerfeld has one of his own. "And he plays it."

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