



Chris Puttins

MAKEUP

The enduring power of red lipstick – and how to pick your perfect shade

Red alert.



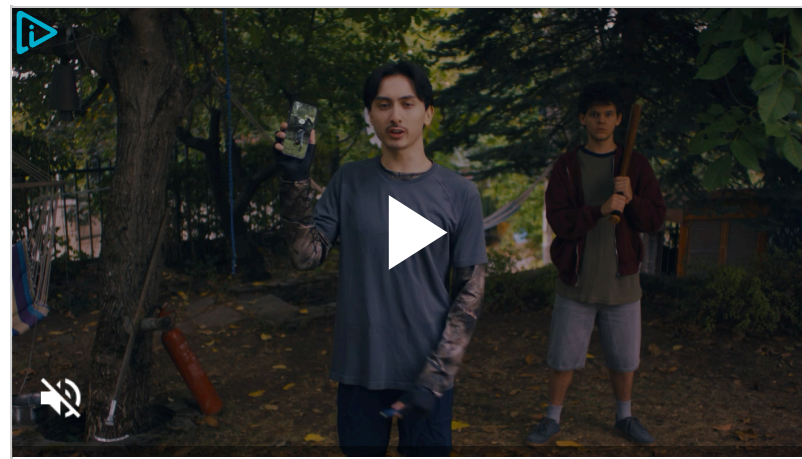
BY FIONA EMBLETON

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Dragon Girl, [Ruby Woo](#), Goldie Red and 999 – they sound like a glossy line up of Bond Girls (or Marvel villains, depending on your mood). That's the whole point of [red lipstick](#). Depending on what character energy you want to channel, red lipstick is like your – sassy, sophisticated and sometimes scandalous – alter ego.

“A red lipstick can instantly transform the way you look, feel and carry yourself,” confirms Givenchy makeup artist [Claire Mulleady](#). “While a red can tell many different stories depending on the shade and style of the lip, it always conveys a confidence.”

And in case anyone is in any doubt as to its timeless appeal, look no further than [New York Fashion Week](#), where different iterations – from a softly blurred-out [ombré lip](#) at Ulla Johnson to a romantic red pout at Alice + Olivia – gave us a tantalising glimpse into how we'll be wearing a crimson lip in spring 2025.



Learn more



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The history of red lipstick

Over the centuries, red lipstick has visually telegraphed [beauty](#), affluence, sex and rebellion. “In western culture, the colour red has long been associated with power and danger – and, by extension, the 'femme fatale',” says [Maria Costantino](#), a lecturer in cultural and historical studies at the London College of Fashion.

Historians can trace the origins of red lipstick back to Mesopotamia around 5,000 years ago. “Red lipstick has a longer history than many people may think,” says [Gregoris Pырpylis](#), creative director for Hermès Beauty. “It goes back to ancient times, when women would crush gemstones or insects and mix the pigments with oils or waxes,” he adds.

One of its earliest fans is thought to have been Cleopatra. Thanks to [Elizabeth Arden](#), it also became a symbol of defiance for the suffragettes in 1912 and, for similar reasons, red lipstick became mandatory for women who joined the US Army in WWII.