

Coco Chanel

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For the 2008 television film, see [Coco Chanel \(film\)](#).

Gabrielle Bonheur "Coco" Chanel (19 August 1883 – 10 January 1971)^[1] was a [French fashion](#) designer and a business woman. She was the founder and namesake of the [Chanel](#) brand. Chanel was credited in the post-[World War I](#) era with liberating women from the constraints of the "[corseted silhouette](#)" and popularizing a sporty, casual chic as the feminine standard of style. A prolific fashion creator, Chanel extended her influence beyond [couture clothing](#), realising her design aesthetic in [jewellery](#), [handbags](#), and fragrance. Her signature scent, [Chanel No. 5](#), has

Coco Chanel



Chanel in 1920

Born	Gabrielle Chanel 19 August 1883 Saumur, Maine-et-Loire , France
Died	10 January 1971 (aged 87) Paris , France
Occupation	Milliner , dressmaker , fashion designer
Known for	Double-C logo Chanel suit

become an iconic product. She is the only fashion designer listed on *TIME* magazine's [list of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century](#).^[2]

Chanel designed her famed interlocked-CC monogram, meaning Coco Chanel, using it since the 1920s.^[3]

Label(s)	Little black dress The Chanel bag Chanel No. 5 Chanel
Parent(s)	Eugénie Jeanne Devolle Albert Chanel
Awards	Neiman Marcus Fashion Award , 1957

Chanel's social connections appeared to encourage a highly conservative personal outlook. Rumors arose about Chanel's activities in the course of the [German occupation of France during World War II](#), and she was criticised for being too comfortable with the Germans.

One of Chanel's liaisons was with a German diplomat, Baron (*Freiherr*) Hans Günther von Dincklage ([de](#)).^[4]^[5] After the war ended, Chanel was interrogated about her relationship with von Dincklage, but she was not charged as a [collaborator](#). After several years in Switzerland after the war, she returned to Paris and revived her fashion house. In 2011, [Hal Vaughan](#) published a book on Chanel based on newly declassified documents of that era, revealing that she had collaborated with Germans in intelligence activities. One plan in late 1943 was for her to carry an [SS](#) separate peace overture to British Prime Minister [Winston Churchill](#) to end the war.^[6]



Early life

Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel was born in 1883 to an [unmarried](#) mother, Eugénie Jeanne Devolle—known as Jeanne—a [laundrywoman](#), in the charity hospital run by the Sisters of Providence (a [poorhouse](#)) in [Saumur, Maine-et-Loire, France](#).^[7]^[8] She was Jeanne's second child with Albert Chanel; the first, Julia, was born less than a year earlier.^[8] Albert Chanel was an itinerant street vendor who peddled work clothes and undergarments,^[9] living a nomadic life, traveling to and from market towns. The family resided in rundown lodgings. In 1884, he married Jeanne Devolle,^[10] persuaded to do so by her family who had "united, effectively, to pay Albert to marry her."^[11] At birth, Chanel's name was entered into the official registry

as "Chasnel". Jeanne was too unwell to attend the registration, and Albert was registered as "travelling".^[7] With both parents absent, the infant's last name was misspelled, probably due to a clerical error. The couple had five children who survived—two boys and three girls—who lived crowded into a one-room lodging in the town of [Brive-la-Gaillarde](#).^[8]

When Gabrielle was 12,^{[12][13]} her mother died of [tuberculosis](#)^[12] at the age of 32.^[14] Her father sent his two sons out to work as farm laborers and sent his three daughters to the [Corrèze](#), in central France, to the convent of [Aubazine](#), which ran an orphanage. Its religious order, the Congregation of the Sacred Heart of Mary, was "founded to care for the poor and rejected, including running homes for abandoned and orphaned girls".^[15] It was a stark, frugal life, demanding strict discipline. Despite the tragedy of this, being placed in the orphanage may have been the best thing for Coco's future because it is where she learned to sew. At age eighteen, Chanel, too old to remain at Aubazine, went to live in a boarding house set aside for Catholic girls in the town of [Moulins](#).^[16]

Later in her life, Chanel would retell the story of her childhood somewhat differently; she would often include more glamorous accounts, which were generally untrue.^[8] She said that when her mother died, her father sailed for America to seek his fortune, and she was sent to live with two aunts. She also claimed to have been born a decade later than 1883 and that her mother had died when she was much younger than 12.^[17]^{*[better source needed]*}

Personal life and early career

Aspirations for a stage career

Having learned the art of sewing during her six years at [Aubazine](#), Chanel was able to find employment as a [seamstress](#).^{*[citation needed]*} When not plying her needle, she sang in a [cabaret](#) frequented by cavalry officers. Chanel made her stage debut singing at a *café-concert* (a popular entertainment venue of the era) in a [Moulins](#) pavilion, "La Rotonde". She was among other ladies dubbed "poseuse," performers who entertained the crowd between star turns. The money earned was what they

managed to accumulate when the plate was passed among the audience in appreciation of their performance. It was at this time that Gabrielle acquired the name "Coco", possibly based on two popular songs with which she became identified, "Ko Ko Ri Ko", and "Qui qu'a vu Coco", or it was an allusion to the French word for [kept woman](#), *cocotte*.^[18] As a café entertainer, Chanel radiated a juvenile allure that tantalized the military habitués of the cabaret.^[19]^[page needed]

In 1906, Chanel was working in the spa resort town of [Vichy](#). Vichy boasted a profusion of concert halls, theatres and cafés where she hoped to achieve success as a performer. Chanel's youth and physical charms impressed those for whom she auditioned, but her singing voice was marginal and she failed to find stage work.^[20] Obligated to find employment, she took work at the "Grande Grille", where as a *donneuse d'eau* she was one of the females whose job was to dispense glasses of the purportedly curative mineral water for which Vichy was renowned.^[21] When the Vichy season ended, Chanel returned to Moulins, and her former haunt "La Rotonde". She now realised that a serious stage career was not in her future.^[22]

Balsan and Capel

At Moulins, Chanel met the young French ex-cavalry officer and the wealthy textile heir [Étienne Balsan](#). At the age of twenty-three, Chanel became Balsan's mistress, supplanting the [courtesan Émilienne d'Alençon](#) as his new favorite.^[23] For the next three years, she lived with him in his château Royallieu near Compiègne, an area known for its wooded equestrian paths and the hunting life.^[24] It was a lifestyle of self-indulgence; Balsan's wealth and leisure allowed the cultivation of a social set who reveled in partying and the gratification of human appetites, with all the implied accompanying decadence; Balsan lavished Chanel with the beauties of "the rich life"—diamonds, dresses, and pearls.^[citation needed] Biographer Justine Picardie, in her 2010 study *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life* (Harper Collins), suggests that



Caricature of Chanel and Arthur "Boy" Capel by [Sem](#), 1913

the fashion designer's nephew, André Palasse, supposedly the only child of her sister Julia-Berthe who had committed suicide, was Chanel's child by Balsan.^[full citation needed]

In 1908, Chanel began an affair with one of Balsan's friends, [Captain Arthur Edward 'Boy' Capel](#).^[25] In later years, Chanel reminisced of this time in her life: "two gentlemen were outbidding for my hot little body."^[26] Capel, a wealthy member of the English upper class, installed Chanel in an apartment in Paris.^[27] and financed her first shops. It is said that Capel's sartorial style influenced the conception of the Chanel look. The bottle design for [Chanel No. 5](#) had two probable origins, both attributable to the sophisticated design sensibilities of Capel. It is believed Chanel adapted the rectangular, beveled lines of the [Charvet](#) toiletry bottles he carried in his leather traveling case^[28] or she adapted the design of the whiskey decanter Capel used; she so much admired it that she wished to reproduce it in "exquisite, expensive, delicate glass".^[29] The couple spent time together at fashionable resorts such as [Deauville](#), but despite Chanel's hopes that they would settle together, Capel was never faithful to her.^[30] Their affair lasted nine years. Even after Capel married an English aristocrat, Lady Diana Wyndham in 1918, he did not completely break off with Chanel. He died in a car accident on 21 December 1919.^{[31][32]} A roadside memorial at the site of Capel's accident is said to have been commissioned by Chanel.^[33] Twenty-five years after the event, Chanel, then residing in Switzerland, confided to her friend, Paul Morand: "His death was a terrible blow to me. In losing Capel, I lost everything. What followed was not a life of happiness, I have to say."^[34]

Chanel had begun designing hats while living with Balsan, initially as a diversion that evolved into a commercial enterprise. She became a licensed milliner in 1910 and opened a boutique at 21 rue Cambon, Paris, named *Chanel Modes*.^[35] As this location already housed an established clothing business, Chanel sold only her millinery creations at this address. Chanel's millinery career bloomed once theatre actress [Gabrielle Dorziat](#) wore her hats in Fernand Nozière's play *Bel Ami* in 1912. Subsequently, Dorziat modelled Chanel's hats again in photographs published in *Les Modes*.^[35]

Deauville and Biarritz



Chanel hat worn by Gabrielle Dorziat, *Les Modes*, May 1912

In 1913, Chanel opened a boutique in [Deauville](#), financed by Arthur Capel, where she introduced deluxe casual clothes suitable for leisure and sport. The fashions were constructed from humble fabrics such as [jersey](#) and [tricot](#), at the time primarily used for men's underwear.^[35] The location was a prime one, in the center of town on a fashionable street. Here Chanel sold hats, jackets, sweaters, and the *marinière*, the sailor blouse. Chanel had the dedicated support of two family members, her sister Antoinette, and her paternal aunt Adrienne, who was of a similar age.^[36] Adrienne and Antoinette were recruited to model

Chanel's designs; on a daily basis the two women paraded through the town and on its boardwalks, advertising the Chanel creations.^[37]

Chanel, determined to re-create the success she had enjoyed in Deauville, opened an establishment in [Biarritz](#) in 1915. Biarritz, situated on the Côte Basque, in proximity to wealthy Spanish clients, had neutral status during [World War I](#), allowing it to become the playground for the moneyed and those exiled from their native countries by the hostilities.^[38] The Biarritz shop was installed not as a storefront, but in a villa opposite the casino. After one year of operation, the business proved to be so lucrative that in 1916 Chanel was able to reimburse Capel his original investment. This was her sole decision; she did not consult with Capel.^[39] It was in Biarritz that Chanel made the acquaintance of an expatriate aristocrat, the [Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich of Russia](#). They had a romantic interlude, and maintained a close association for many years afterward.^[40] By 1919, Chanel was registered as a couturière and established her maison de couture at 31 rue Cambon, Paris.^[35]

Established couturière

In 1918, Chanel purchased the entire building at 31 rue Cambon, which was situated in one of the most fashionable districts of Paris. In 1921, she opened what may be

considered an early incarnation of the fashion boutique, featuring clothing, hats, and accessories, later expanded to offer jewellery and fragrance. By 1927, Chanel owned five properties on the rue Cambon, encompassing buildings numbered 23 to 31.^[41]

In the spring of 1920 (approximately May), Chanel was introduced to the Russian composer [Igor Stravinsky](#) by [Sergei Diaghilev](#), impresario of the [Ballets Russes](#).^[42]

During the summer, Chanel discovered that the Stravinsky family was seeking a place to live, having left the Soviet Union after the war. She invited them to her new home, "Bel Respiro," in the Paris suburb of Garches, until they could find a more suitable residence.^[42] They arrived at "Bel Respiro" during the second week of September^[42] and remained until May 1921.^[43] Chanel also guaranteed the new (1920) Ballets Russes production of Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps* (*The Rite of Spring*) against financial loss with an anonymous gift to Diaghilev, said to be 300,000 francs.^[44] In addition to turning out her couture collections, Chanel threw her prodigious energies into designing dance costumes for the cutting-edge [Ballets Russes](#). Between the years 1923–1937, she collaborated on productions choreographed by Diaghilev and dancer [Vaslav Nijinsky](#), notably *Le Train bleu*, a dance-opera; *Orphée* and *Oedipe Roi*.^[45]

In 1922, at the [Longchamps](#) races, [Théophile Bader](#), founder of the Paris [Galeries Lafayette](#), introduced Chanel to businessman [Pierre Wertheimer](#). Bader was interested in inaugurating the sale of the Chanel No. 5 fragrance in his department store.^[46] In 1924, Chanel made an agreement with the Wertheimer brothers, Pierre and Paul, directors since 1917 of the eminent perfume and cosmetics house [Bourjois](#). They created a corporate entity, "Parfums Chanel," and the Wertheimers agreed to provide full financing for production, marketing and distribution of [Chanel No. 5](#). The Wertheimers would receive seventy percent of the profits, and Théophile Bader a twenty percent share. For ten percent of the stock, Chanel licensed her name to *Parfums Chanel* and withdrew from involvement in all business operations.^[47] Displeased with the arrangement, Chanel worked for more



Chanel (right) in her hat shop, 1919. Caricature by Sem.

than twenty years to gain full control of *Parfums Chanel*.^{[46][47]} She said that Pierre Wertheimer was "the bandit who screwed me".^[48]

One of Chanel's longest enduring associations was with [Misia Sert](#), a notable member of the bohemian elite in Paris and wife of Spanish painter [José-Maria Sert](#). It is said that theirs was an immediate bond of like souls, and Misia was attracted to Chanel by "her genius, lethal wit, sarcasm and maniacal destructiveness, which intrigued and appalled everyone".^[49] Both women were convent schooled, and maintained a friendship of shared interests and confidences. They also shared drug use. By 1935, Chanel had become a habitual drug user, injecting herself with [morphine](#) on a daily basis, a habit she maintained until the end of her life.^[50] According to [Chandler Burr](#)'s *The Emperor of Scents*, [Luca Turin](#) related an apocryphal story in circulation that Chanel was "called Coco because she threw the most fabulous [cocaine](#) parties in Paris".^[51]

The writer [Colette](#), who moved in the same social circles as Chanel, provided a whimsical description of Chanel at work in her atelier, which appeared in "Prisons et Paradis" (1932). "If every human face bears a resemblance to some animal, then Mademoiselle Chanel is a small black bull. That tuft of curly black hair, the attribute of bull-calves, falls over her brow all the way to the eyelids and dances with every maneuver of her head."^[52]

Associations with British aristocrats

In 1923, [Vera Bate Lombardi](#), (born Sarah Gertrude Arkwright),^[53] reputedly the illegitimate daughter of the [Marquess of Cambridge](#),^[53] afforded Chanel entry into the highest levels of British aristocracy. It was an elite group of associations revolving around such figures as politician [Winston Churchill](#), aristocrats such as the Duke of Westminster, and royals such as [Edward, Prince of Wales](#). In Monte Carlo in 1923, at age forty, Chanel was introduced by Lombardi to the vastly wealthy [Duke of Westminster, Hugh Richard Arthur Grosvenor](#), known to his intimates as "Bendor". The Duke of Westminster lavished Chanel with extravagant jewels, costly art, and a home in London's prestigious [Mayfair](#) district. His affair with Chanel lasted ten years.^[54]

The Duke, an outspoken anti-Semite, intensified Chanel's inherent antipathy toward Jews. He shared with her an expressed [homophobia](#). In 1946, Chanel was quoted by her friend and confidant, [Paul Morand](#):

"Homosexuals? ... I have seen young women ruined by these awful queers: drugs, divorce, scandal. They will use any means to destroy a competitor and to wreak vengeance on a woman. The queers want to be women—but they are lousy women. They are charming!"^[55]

Coinciding with her introduction to the Duke, was her introduction, again through Lombardi, to Lombardi's cousin, the Prince of Wales, Edward VIII. The Prince allegedly became smitten with Chanel and pursued her in spite of her involvement with the Duke of Westminster. Gossip had it that he visited Chanel in her apartment and requested that she call him "David", a privilege reserved only for his closest friends and family. Years later, [Diana Vreeland](#), editor of *Vogue*, would insist that "the passionate, focused and fiercely independent Chanel, a virtual tour de force," and the Prince "had a great romantic moment together".^[56]

In 1927, the Duke of Westminster gave Chanel a parcel of land he had purchased in [Roquebrune-Cap-Martin](#) on the French Riviera. Chanel built her villa here, which she called *La Pausa*^[57] ("restful pause"), hiring the architect Robert Streitz. Streitz's concept for the staircase and patio contained design elements inspired by [Aubazine](#), the orphanage in which Chanel spent her youth.^{[58][59]} When asked why she did not marry the Duke of Westminster, she is supposed to have said: "There have been several Duchesses of Westminster. There is only one Chanel."^[60]

Designing for film

In 1931, while in [Monte Carlo](#) Chanel became acquainted with [Samuel Goldwyn](#). She was introduced through a mutual friend, the [Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich](#), cousin to the last czar of Russia, Nicolas II. Goldwyn offered Chanel a tantalizing proposition. For the sum of a million dollars (approximately seventy-five million in twenty-first century valuation), he would bring her to Hollywood twice a year to design costumes for [MGM](#) stars. Chanel accepted the offer. Accompanying her on her first trip to Hollywood was her friend Misia Sert.



Grand Duke Dmitri
Pavlovich Romanov in
exile in the 1920s

En route to California from New York, traveling in a white train car luxuriously outfitted for her use, Chanel was interviewed by *Colliers* magazine in 1932. She said that she had agreed to go to Hollywood to "see what the pictures have to offer me and what I have to offer the pictures."^[61] Chanel designed the clothing worn on screen by [Gloria Swanson](#), in *Tonight or Never* (1931), and for [Ina Claire](#) in *The Greeks Had a Word for Them* (1932). Both [Greta Garbo](#) and [Marlene Dietrich](#) became private clients.^[62]

Her experience with American movie making left Chanel with a dislike for the Hollywood film business and distaste for the film world's culture, which she denounced as "infantile".^[63] Chanel's verdict was that "Hollywood is the capital of bad taste ... and it is vulgar."^[64] Ultimately, her design aesthetic did not translate well to film. *The New Yorker* speculated that Chanel had left Hollywood because "they told her her dresses weren't sensational enough. She made a lady look like a lady. Hollywood wants a lady to look like two ladies."^[65] Chanel went on to design the costumes for several French films, including [Jean Renoir](#)'s 1939 film *La Règle du jeu*, in which she was credited as La Maison Chanel. Chanel introduced the left-wing Renoir to [Luchino Visconti](#), aware that the shy Italian hoped to work in film. Renoir was favorably impressed by Visconti and brought him in to work on his next film project.^[66]

Significant liaisons: Reverdy and Iribe

Chanel was the mistress of some of the most influential men of her time, but she never married. She had significant relationships with the poet [Pierre Reverdy](#) and the illustrator and designer [Paul Iribe](#). After her romance with Reverdy ended in 1926, they maintained a friendship that lasted some forty years.^[67] It is postulated that the legendary maxims attributed to Chanel and published in periodicals were crafted under the mentorship of Reverdy—a collaborative effort.

"A review of her correspondence reveals a complete contradiction between

the clumsiness of Chanel the letter writer and the talent of Chanel as a composer of maxims ... After correcting the handful of aphorisms that Chanel wrote about her métier, Reverdy added to this collection of "Chanelisms" a series of thoughts of a more general nature, some touching on life and taste, others on allure and love."^[68]

Her involvement with Iribe was a deep one until his sudden death in 1935. Iribe and Chanel shared the same reactionary politics, Chanel financing Iribe's monthly, ultra-nationalist and anti-republican newsletter, *Le Témoign*, which encouraged an irrational fear of foreigners and preached anti-Semitism.^{[69][70]} In 1936, one year after *Le Témoign* stopped publication, Chanel veered to the opposite end of the ideological continuum by financing Pierre Lestringuez's radical left-wing magazine *Futur*.^[71]

Rivalry with Schiaparelli

The Chanel couture was a lucrative business enterprise, by 1935 employing 4,000 people.^[62] As the 1930s progressed, Chanel's place on the throne of haute couture was threatened. The boyish look and the short skirts of the 1920s flapper seemed to disappear overnight. Chanel's designs for film stars in Hollywood were not successful and had not aggrandized her reputation as expected. More significantly, Chanel's star had been eclipsed by her premier rival, the designer [Elsa Schiaparelli](#). Schiaparelli's innovative design, replete with playful references to [Surrealism](#), was garnering critical acclaim and generating enthusiasm in the fashion world. Feeling she was losing her avant-garde edge, Chanel collaborated with [Jean Cocteau](#) on his theatre piece *Oedipe Rex*. The costumes she designed were mocked and critically lambasted: "Wrapped in bandages the actors looked like ambulant mummies or victims of some terrible accident."^[72] She was also involved in the costume-making of *Baccanale*, a Ballets Russes de Monte Carlo production. The designs were made by Salvador Dalí. However, due to the war declaration of England on 3 September 1939, the ballet was forced to leave London. They left the costumes in Europe and were re-made, according to Dalí's initial designs, by Karinska.^[73]

World War II

In 1939, at the beginning of [World War II](#), Chanel closed her shops, maintaining her apartment situated above the couture house at 31 Rue de Cambon. She said that it was not a time for fashion,^[38] as a result of her action, 4,000 female employees lost their jobs.^[74] Her biographer Vaughan suggests that Chanel used the outbreak of war as an opportunity to retaliate against those workers who, lobbying for higher wages and shorter work hours, had closed her business operation against her will during a general labor strike in France in 1936. In closing her couture house, Chanel made a definitive statement of her political views. Her dislike of Jews, reportedly inculcated by her convent years and sharpened by her association with society elites, had solidified her beliefs. She shared with many of her circle a conviction that Jews were a threat to Europe because of the [Bolshevik](#) government in the Soviet Union.^[74]

During the German occupation, Chanel resided at the [Hotel Ritz](#). It was noteworthy as the preferred place of residence for upper-echelon German military staff. Her romantic liaison with Baron (*Freiherr*) Hans Günther von Dincklage ([de](#)), a German diplomat in Paris and former [Prussian Army](#) officer and Attorney General who had been an operative in military intelligence since 1920,^[75] eased her arrangements at the Ritz.^[76]

Battle for control of *Parfums Chanel*

World War II, specifically the Nazi seizure of all Jewish-owned property and business enterprises, provided Chanel with the opportunity to gain the full monetary fortune generated by *Parfums Chanel* and its most profitable product, Chanel No. 5. The directors of *Parfums Chanel*, the Wertheimers, were Jewish. Chanel used her position as an "[Aryan](#)" to petition German officials to legalize her claim to sole ownership.

On 5 May 1941, she wrote to the government administrator charged with ruling on the disposition of Jewish financial assets. Her grounds for proprietary ownership were based on the claim that *Parfums Chanel* "is still the property of Jews" and had

been legally "abandoned" by the owners.^{[77][78]}

"I have," she wrote, "an indisputable right of priority ... the profits that I have received from my creations since the foundation of this business ... are disproportionate ... [and] you can help to repair in part the prejudices I have suffered in the course of these seventeen years."^[79]

Chanel was not aware that the Wertheimers, anticipating the forthcoming Nazi mandates against Jews had, in May 1940, legally turned control of *Parfums Chanel* over to [Félix Amiot](#), a Christian French businessman and industrialist. At war's end, Amiot returned "Parfums Chanel" to the hands of the Wertheimers.^{[77][78]}



Signature scent of the House of Chanel, *Chanel No. 5*

During the period directly following the end of World War II, the business world watched with interest and some apprehension the ongoing legal wrestle for control of *Parfums Chanel*. Interested parties in the proceedings were cognizant that Chanel's Nazi affiliations during wartime, if made public knowledge, would seriously threaten the reputation and status of the Chanel brand. *Forbes* magazine summarized the dilemma faced by the Wertheimers: [it is Pierre Wertheimer's worry] how "a legal fight might illuminate Chanel's wartime activities and wreck her image—and his business."^[80]

Chanel hired [René de Chambrun](#), Vichy France Prime Minister [Pierre Laval](#)'s son-in-law, as her lawyer to sue Wertheimer.^[81] Ultimately, the Wertheimers and Chanel came to a mutual accommodation, renegotiating the original 1924 contract. On 17 May 1947, Chanel received wartime profits from the sale of Chanel No. 5, in an amount equivalent to some nine million dollars in twenty-first century valuation. Her future share would be two percent of all Chanel No. 5 sales worldwide. The financial benefit to her would be enormous. Her earnings were projected at \$25 million a year, making her at the time one of the richest women in the world. In addition, Pierre Wertheimer agreed to an unusual stipulation proposed by Chanel herself.

Wertheimer agreed to pay all of Chanel's living expenses—from the trivial to the large—for the rest of her life.^{[82][83]}

Activity as Nazi agent



General Walter Schellenberg, Chief of SS intelligence, the *Sicherheitsdienst*

Declassified archival documents unearthed by biographer [Hal Vaughan](#) reveal that the French Préfecture de Police had a document on Chanel in which she was described as "Couturier and perfumer. Pseudonym: Westminster. Agent reference: F 7124. Signalled as suspect in the file" (*Pseudonyme: Westminster. Indicateur d'agent: F 7124. Signalée comme suspecte au fichier*).^{[84][85]}

For Vaughan, this was a piece of revelatory information linking Chanel to German intelligence operations. Anti-Nazi activist [Serge Klarsfeld](#) declared, "It is not because Chanel had a spy number that she was necessarily personally implicated. Some informers had numbers without being aware of it." ("Ce n'est pas parce que Coco Chanel avait un numéro d'espion qu'elle était nécessairement impliquée personnellement. Certains indicateurs avaient des numéros sans le savoir").^[86]

Chanel avait un numéro d'espion qu'elle était nécessairement impliquée personnellement. Certains indicateurs avaient des numéros sans le savoir".^[86]

Vaughan establishes that Chanel committed herself to the German cause as early as 1941 and worked for General [Walter Schellenberg](#), chief of the German intelligence agency *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service) and the military intelligence spy network *Abwehr* (Counterintelligence) at the [Reich Main Security Office](#) (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) in [Berlin](#).^[87] At the end of the war, Schellenberg was tried by the [Nuremberg Military Tribunal](#), and sentenced to six years' imprisonment for war crimes. He was released in 1951 owing to incurable liver disease and took refuge in Italy. Chanel paid for Schellenberg's medical care and living expenses, financially supported his wife and family, and paid for Schellenberg's funeral upon his death in 1952.^[88]

Operation Modellhut

In 1943, Chanel travelled to the [Reich Main Security Office](#) (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) in Berlin—the "lion's den"—with her liaison and "old friend", the German Embassy in Paris press attaché Baron (*Freiherr*) Hans Günther von Dincklage ([de](#)), a former [Prussian Army](#) officer and Attorney General, who was also known as "[Sparrow](#)" among his friends and colleagues.^{[4][5]} Dincklage was also a collaborator for the German *Sicherheitsdienst* (Security Service); his superiors being Walter Schellenberg and Alexander Waag in Berlin.^{[4][5]} Chanel and Dincklage were to report to Walter Schellenberg at the Reich Main Security Office (*Reichssicherheitshauptamt*) with a ludicrous plan that Chanel had proposed to Dincklage: She, Coco Chanel, wants to meet British Prime Minister Winston Churchill and persuade him to secret negotiations with the Germans.^{[87][4][5]} In late 1943 or early 1944, Chanel and her SS superior, Schellenberg, who had a weakness for unusual actions,^[4] devised a plan to get a request to Britain to consider a separate peace to be negotiated by the SS. When interrogated by British intelligence at war's end, Schellenberg maintained that Chanel was "a person who knew Churchill sufficiently to undertake political negotiations with him".^[89] For this mission, code named *Operation Modellhut* (Operation Model Hat), they also recruited [Vera Bate Lombardi](#). Count Joseph von Ledebur-Wichel, a Nazi agent who defected to the British Secret Service in 1944, recalled a meeting he had with Dincklage in early 1943, in which the baron had suggested including Lombardi as a courier. Dincklage purportedly said, "The [Abwehr](#) had first to bring to France a young Italian woman [Lombardi] Coco Chanel was attached to because of her lesbian vices..."^[90]

Unaware of the machinations of Schellenberg and Chanel, Lombardi was led to believe that the forthcoming journey to Spain would be a business trip exploring the potential for establishing the Chanel couture in Madrid. Lombardi acted as intermediary, delivering a letter written by Chanel to Winston Churchill, to be forwarded to him via the British embassy in Madrid.^[91] Schellenberg's SS liaison officer, Captain [Walter Kutschmann](#), acted as bagman, "told to deliver a large sum of money to Chanel in Madrid".^[92] Ultimately, the mission proved a failure for the Germans. British intelligence files reveal that the plan collapsed after Lombardi, on arrival in Madrid, proceeded to denounce Chanel and others to the British embassy as Nazi spies.^[93]

Protection from prosecution

In September 1944, Chanel was called in to be interrogated by the Free French Purge Committee, the *épuration*. The committee had no documented evidence of her collaboration activity and was obliged to release her. According to Chanel's grand-niece, Gabrielle Palasse Labrunie, when Chanel returned home she said, "Churchill had me freed".^[94]

The extent of Churchill's intervention for Chanel after the war became a subject of gossip and speculation. Some historians claimed that people worried that, if Chanel were forced to testify about her own activities at trial, she would expose the pro-Nazi sympathies and activities of certain top-level British officials, members of the society elite, and the royal family. Vaughan writes that some claim that Churchill instructed [Duff Cooper](#), British ambassador to the French provisional government, to protect Chanel.^[95]

Requested to appear in Paris before investigators in 1949, Chanel left her retreat in Switzerland to confront testimony given against her at the war crime trial of Baron Louis de Vaufreland, a French traitor and highly placed German intelligence agent. Chanel denied all the accusations. She offered the presiding judge, Leclercq, a character reference: "I could arrange for a declaration to come from Mr. Duff Cooper."^[96]

Chanel's friend and biographer Marcel Haedrich said of her wartime interaction with the Nazi regime: "If one took seriously the few disclosures that Mademoiselle Chanel allowed herself to make about those black years of the occupation, one's teeth would be set on edge."^[97]

Controversy

When Vaughan's book was published in August 2011, his disclosure of the contents of recently de-classified military intelligence documents generated considerable controversy about Chanel's activities. [The House of Chanel](#) issued a statement, portions of which were published in myriad media outlets. Chanel corporate "refuted the claim" (of espionage), while acknowledging that company officials had

read only media excerpts of the book.^[98]

The Chanel group stated, "What's certain is that she had a relationship with a German aristocrat during the War. Clearly it wasn't the best period to have a love story with a German even if Baron von Dincklage was English by his mother and she (Chanel) knew him before the War."^[99]

In an interview given to the Associated Press, author Vaughan discussed the unexpected turn of his research.

I was looking for something else and I come across this document saying 'Chanel is a Nazi agent'...Then I really started hunting through all of the archives, in the United States, in London, in Berlin and in Rome and I come across not one, but 20, 30, 40 absolutely solid archival materials on Chanel and her lover, Hans Günther von Dincklage (de), who was a professional Abwehr spy.^[98]

Vaughan also addressed the discomfort many felt with the revelations provided in his book: "A lot of people in this world don't want the iconic figure of Gabrielle Coco Chanel, one of France's great cultural idols, destroyed. This is definitely something that a lot of people would have preferred to put aside, to forget, to just go on selling Chanel scarves and jewellery."^[98]

Post-war life and career

In 1945, Chanel moved to [Switzerland](#), where she lived for several years, part of the time with Dincklage. In 1953 she sold her villa [La Pausa](#) on the French Riviera to the publisher and translator [Emery Reves](#). Five rooms from La Pausa have been replicated at the [Dallas Museum of Art](#), to house the Reves' art collection as well as pieces of furniture belonging to Chanel.^[59]

Unlike the pre-war era, when women reigned as the premier couturiers, [Christian Dior](#) achieved success in 1947 with his "New Look", and a cadre of male designers achieved recognition: Dior, [Cristóbal Balenciaga](#), [Robert Piguet](#), and [Jacques Fath](#). Chanel was convinced that women would ultimately rebel against the aesthetic

favored by the male couturiers, what she called "illogical" design: the "waist cinchers, padded bras, heavy skirts, and stiffened jackets".^[100]

At more than 70 years old, after having her couture house closed for 15 years, she felt the time was right for her to re-enter the fashion world.^[100] The revival of her couture house in 1954 was fully financed by Chanel's opponent in the perfume battle, Pierre Wertheimer.^[101]

Chanel's 1954 comeback collection received a "venomous" reception from the French press, not only because Chanel had yet to regain her reputation following her controversial wartime

activities but because the clothes were seen as essentially conservative and offering little new.^[102] Bettina Ballard, the influential editor of American *Vogue*, remained loyal to Chanel, however, and featured the model [Marie-Hélène Arnaud](#) – the "face of Chanel" in the 1950s – in the March 1954 issue,^[102] photographed by [Henry Clarke](#), wearing three outfits: a red dress with a V-neck, paired with ropes of pearls; a tiered seersucker evening gown; and, to cap it all and in response to both public – and Ballard's – demand, a piece of timeless Chanel – a navy jersey mid-calf suit.^[103] Arnaud wore this outfit, "with its slightly padded, square shouldered cardigan jacket, two patch pockets and sleeves that unbuttoned back to reveal crisp white cuffs", above "a white muslin blouse with a perky collar and bow [that] stayed perfectly in place with small tabs that buttoned onto the waistline of an easy A-line skirt."^[104] Ballard had bought the suit herself, which gave "an overwhelming impression of insouciant, youthful elegance",^[103] and orders for the clothes that Arnaud had modelled soon poured in from the States.^[105]



Coco Chanel in 1970

Last years

According to Edmonde Charles-Roux,^[106] Chanel had become tyrannical and extremely lonely late in life. In her last years she was sometimes accompanied by [Jacques Chazot](#) and her confidante Lilou Marquand. A faithful friend was also the

Brazilian [Aimée de Heeren](#), who lived in Paris four months a year at the nearby [Hôtel Meurice](#). The former rivals shared happy memories of times with the [Duke of Westminster](#). They frequently walked together around central Paris.^[107]

Death

As 1971 began, Chanel was 87 years old, tired, and ailing. She carried out her usual routine of preparing the spring catalogue. She had gone for a long drive the afternoon of Saturday, 9 January. Soon after, feeling ill, she went to bed early.^[108] She died on Sunday, 10 January 1971, at the Hotel Ritz, where she had resided for more than 30 years.^[109] Her funeral was held at the [Église de la Madeleine](#); her fashion models occupied the first seats during the ceremony and her coffin was covered with white flowers—camellias, gardenias, orchids, azaleas and a few red roses. She died in her infamous style, announcing: "You see, this is how you die."^[110]

Her grave is located in the Bois-de-Vaux Cemetery, [Lausanne, Switzerland](#).^{[111][112]}

Most of her estate was inherited by her nephew André Palasse, who lived in Switzerland, and his two daughters, who lived in Paris.^[81]

Legacy as designer



Chanel wearing a sailor's jersey and trousers, 1928

As early as 1915, [Harper's Bazaar](#) raved over Chanel's designs: "The woman who hasn't at least one Chanel is hopelessly out of fashion ... This season the name Chanel is on the lips of every buyer."^[113] Chanel's ascendancy was the official deathblow to the corseted female silhouette. The frills, fuss, and constraints endured by earlier generations of women were now passé; under her influence—gone were the "aigrettes, long hair, hobble skirts".^[114] Her design aesthetic redefined the fashionable woman for the post World War I era. The Chanel trademark was a look of youthful

ease, a liberated physicality, and unencumbered sportive confidence.

The horse culture and penchant for hunting so passionately pursued by the elites, especially the British, fired Chanel's imagination. Her own enthusiastic indulgence in the sporting life led to clothing designs informed by those activities. From her excursions on water with the yachting world, she appropriated the clothing associated with nautical pursuits: the horizontal striped shirt, bell-bottom pants, crewneck sweaters, and espadrille shoes—all traditionally worn by sailors and fishermen.^[115]

Jersey fabric

Chanel's initial triumph was the innovative use of jersey fabric, a machine knit material manufactured for her by the firm Rodier.^[116] This fabric was traditionally relegated to the manufacture of undergarments. Chanel's early wool jersey traveling suit consisted of a cardigan jacket, and pleated skirt, paired with a low-belted pullover top. This ensemble, worn with low-heeled shoes, became the casual look in expensive women's wear.^[117] Prior to this, jersey tended to be used only in hosiery and for sportswear for tennis, golf and the beach. Considered too "ordinary" to be used in couture, it was also disliked by designers because the knit made it difficult to handle compared to woven fabrics.

Chanel's introduction of jersey to high-fashion worked well for two reasons. First, the war had caused a shortage of other materials and second, women were desiring more simple and practical clothes. Her fluid jersey suits and dresses were created for practicality and allowed free movement. This was greatly appreciated at the time because women were working for the war effort as nurses, in civil service



Three jersey outfits by Chanel, March 1917

and in factories. Their work involved physical activity and they had to ride trains, buses and bicycles to get to work.^[118] They desired outfits that did not give way easily and could be put on without the help of servants.^[119]

Slavic influence

Designers such as Paul Poiret and [Fortuny](#) introduced ethnic references into haute couture in the 1900s and early 1910s.^[120] Chanel continued this trend with [Slav](#)-inspired designs in the early 1920s. The beading and embroidery on her garments at this time was exclusively executed by Kitmir, an embroidery house founded by an exiled Russian aristocrat, the [Grand Duchess Maria Pavlovna](#), the sister of her erstwhile lover, [Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich](#).^{[121][122]} Kitmir's fusion of oriental stitching with stylised folk motifs was highlighted in Chanel's early collections.^[122] One 1922 evening dress came with a matching embroidered '[babushka](#)' headscarf.^[122] In addition to the headscarf, Chanel clothing from this period featured square-neck, long belted blouses alluding to Russian *muzhiks* (peasant) attire known as the *roubachka*.^[123] Evening designs were often embroidered with sparkling crystal and [black jet](#) embroidery.^[124]



Chanel suit

The Chanel tweed suit was built for comfort and practicality. It consisted of a jacket and skirt in supple and light wool or mohair tweed and a blouse and jacket lining in jersey or silk. Chanel did not stiffen the material or use shoulder pads, as was common in contemporary fashion. She cut the jackets on the straight grain, without adding bust darts. This allowed for quick and easy movement. She designed the neckline to leave the neck comfortably free and added functional pockets designed to hold things. For a higher level of comfort, the skirt had a [grosgrain](#) stay around the waist, instead of a belt. More importantly, meticulous attention was placed on detail during

Chanel suit and silk blouse
with two-tone pumps, 1965

fittings. Measurements were taken of a customer in a standing position with arms folded at shoulder height.

Chanel conducted tests with models, having them walk around, step up to a platform as if climbing stairs of an imaginary bus, and bend as if getting into a low-slung sports car. Chanel wanted to make sure women could do all of these things while wearing her suit, without accidentally exposing parts of their body they wanted covered. Each client would have repeated adjustments until their suit was comfortable enough for them to perform daily activities with comfort and ease.^[125]

Camellia

The [camellia](#) had an established association used in [Alexandre Dumas'](#) literary work, *La Dame aux Camélias* ([The Lady of the Camellias](#)). Its heroine and her story had resonated for Chanel since her youth. The flower was associated with the [courtesan](#), who would wear a camellia to advertise her availability.^[126] The camellia came to be identified with The House of Chanel; the designer first used it in 1933 as a decorative element on a white-trimmed black suit.^[62]

Little black dress

After the jersey suit, the concept of the [little black dress](#) is often cited as a Chanel contribution to the fashion lexicon; it is a style still worn to this day. In 1912–13, the actress Suzanne Orlandi was one of the first women to wear a Chanel little black dress, in velvet with a white collar.^[127] Chanel herself claimed that in 1920, while observing an audience at the opera, she vowed that she would dress all women in black.^[128]

In 1926, the American edition of [Vogue](#) published an image of a Chanel little black dress with long sleeves, dubbing it the *garçonne* (little boy look).^[62] [Vogue](#) predicted that such a simple yet chic design would become a virtual uniform for women of taste, famously comparing its basic lines to the ubiquitous and no less widely accessible [Ford automobile](#).^{[129][130]} The spare look generated widespread criticism from male journalists, who complained: "no more bosom, no more

stomach, no more rump ... Feminine fashion of this moment in the 20th century will be baptized lop off everything."^[131] The popularity of the little black dress can be attributed in part to the timing of its introduction. The 1930s was a period of the [Great Depression](#) Era, when women needed affordable fashion. Chanel boasted that she had enabled the non-wealthy to "walk around like millionaires".^{[132] [133]} Chanel started making little black dresses in wool or chenille for the day and in satin, crêpe or velvet for the evening.^[134]

Chanel proclaimed "I imposed black; it's still going strong today, for black wipes out everything else around."^[128]

Jewellery

Chanel introduced a line of jewellery that was a conceptual innovation, as her design and materials incorporated both simulated and fine gem stones. This was revolutionary in an era when jewellery was strictly categorized into either fine or costume jewellery. Her inspirations were global, often inspired by design traditions of the Orient and Egypt. Wealthy clients who did not wish to display their costly jewellery in public could wear Chanel creations to impress others.^[135]

In 1933, designer Paul Iribe collaborated with Chanel in the creation of extravagant jewellery pieces commissioned by the International Guild of Diamond Merchants. The collection, executed exclusively in diamonds and platinum, was exhibited for public viewing and drew a large audience; some 3,000 attendees were recorded in a one-month period.^[62]

As an antidote for *vrais bijoux en toc*, the obsession with costly, fine jewels,^[62] Chanel turned costume jewellery into a coveted accessory—especially when worn in grand displays, as she did. Originally inspired by the opulent jewels and pearls given to her by aristocratic lovers, Chanel raided her own jewel vault and partnered with [Duke Fulco di Verdura](#) to launch a House of Chanel jewellery line. A white enameled cuff featuring a jeweled [Maltese cross](#) was Chanel's personal favourite; it has become an icon of the Verdura Chanel collaboration.^[62] The fashionable and wealthy loved the creations and made the line wildly successful. Chanel issued a PR statement: "It's disgusting to walk around with millions around the neck because

one happens to be rich. I only like fake jewellery ... because it's provocative."^[136]

Perfume

Chanel did not create Chanel N 5, but rather a perfumer came to her and asked her to brand his perfume. She picked the fifth sample he had, and therefore Chanel N 5 was born. Not wanting to get into the cosmetic industry, she only required 10 percent of the profit. When Chanel N 5 became an international hit, she pursued the perfumer in order to get her fortune back. She posted all of her cases in court, the perfumer eventually gave her what she wanted.

The Chanel bag

In 1929 Chanel offered a handbag inspired by soldier's bags. Its thin shoulder strap allowed the user to have her hands free.^{[137][138]} Following her comeback, Chanel updated the design in February 1955, creating what would become the "2.55" (named for the date of its creation).^[137] Whilst details of the classic bag have been reworked, such as the 1980s update by [Karl Lagerfeld](#) where the clasp and lock were redesigned to incorporate the crossed C's Chanel logo and leather was interlaced through the shoulder chain, the bag has retained its basic form.^[139] In 2005, the Chanel firm released an exact replica of the original 1955 bag to commemorate the 50th anniversary of its creation.^[139]



Chanel 2.55 bag, 2009

The bag's design was informed by Chanel's convent days and her love of the sporting world. The chain used for the strap echoed the [chatelaines](#) worn by the caretakers of the orphanage where Chanel grew up, whilst the burgundy lining referenced the convent uniforms.^[139] The quilted outside was influenced by the jackets worn by jockeys,^[139] whilst at the same time enhancing the bag's shape and volume.^[137]

Suntans

In an outdoor environment of turf and sea, Chanel took in the sun, making suntans not only acceptable, but a symbol denoting a life of privilege and leisure. Historically, identifiable exposure to the sun had been the mark of laborers doomed to a life of unremitting, unsheltered toil. "A milky skin seemed a sure sign of aristocracy." By the mid-1920s, women could be seen lounging on the beach without a hat to shield them from the sun's rays. The Chanel influence made sun bathing fashionable.^[140]

Depictions in popular culture

Theatre

The [Broadway](#) musical *Coco*, with music by [André Previn](#), book and lyrics by [Alan Jay Lerner](#), opened 18 December 1969 and closed 3 October 1970. It is set in 1953–1954 at the time that Chanel was reestablishing her couture house. Chanel was played by [Katharine Hepburn](#) for the first eight months, and by [Danielle Darrieux](#) for the rest of its run.

Film

The first film about Chanel was *Chanel Solitaire* (1981), directed by [George Kaczender](#) and starring [Marie-France Pisier](#), [Timothy Dalton](#), and [Rutger Hauer](#).

Coco Chanel (2008) was a television movie starring [Shirley MacLaine](#) as a 70-year-old Chanel. Directed by [Christian Duguay](#), the film also starred [Barbora Bobuřová](#) as the young Chanel and [Olivier Sitruk](#) as Boy Capel.

Coco avant Chanel (*Coco Before Chanel*) (2009) was a French-language biographical film starring [Audrey Tautou](#) as the young Chanel, with [Benoît Poelvoorde](#) as Étienne Balsan and [Alessandro Nivola](#) as Boy Capel

Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky (2009) was a French-language film directed by [Jan Kounen](#). [Anna Mouglalis](#) played Chanel, and [Mads Mikkelsen](#) played [Igor Stravinsky](#). The film was based on the 2002 novel *Coco and Igor* by [Chris Greenhalgh](#), which

concerns a purported affair between Chanel and Stravinsky. It was chosen to close the Cannes Film Festival of 2009.^[141]

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- [Gabrielle Chanel](#) at the [Fashion Model Directory](#)
- [Coco Chanel in the Art Deco Era](#)
- [Lisa Chaney on Coco Chanel](#) on YouTube
- [Coco Chanel 1969 interview](#) on YouTube
- [Interactive timeline of couture houses and couturier biographies](#) Victoria and Albert Museum

<https://www.findagrave.com/memorial/7264027>

 v · t · e	Chanel
Owners	Alain Wertheimer · G�rard Wertheimer · Jacques Wertheimer · Pierre Wertheimer
Designers	Coco Chanel · Karl Lagerfeld
Garments	Little black dress · Jacqueline Kennedy's pink Chanel suit
Perfumes	Bois des �les · Chanel No. 5 · Chanel No. 19 · Chanel No. 22 · Coco · Coco Mademoiselle · Cuir de Russie · �go�ste
Perfumers	Ernest Beaux · Jacques Polge · Henri Robert
Other products	Chanel 2.55 handbag · Chanel J12 watch
Promotional models	Marie-H�l�ne Arnaud · Carole Bouquet · Gisele B�ndchen · Cara Delevingne · Catherine Deneuve · Lily-Rose Depp · In�s de La Fressange · Nicole Kidman · Keira Knightley · Marilyn Monroe · Kate Moss · Anna Mougialis · Vanessa Paradis · Suzy Parker · Jean Shrimpton · Audrey Tautou · Gaspard Ulliel
Films	<i>Chanel Solitaire</i> · <i>Coco Before Chanel</i> · <i>Coco Chanel</i> · <i>Coco Chanel & Igor Stravinsky</i>
Musical	<i>Coco</i>
Book	<i>The Allure of Chanel</i>

 v · t · e	Members of the Chambre syndicale de la haute couture
Members	Adeline Andr� · Anne Val�rie Hash · Carlota Alfaro · Chanel · Christian Dior · Dominique Sirop · Franck Sorbier · Givenchy · Jean Paul Gaultier · Maurizio Galante · St�phane Rolland · Yiqing Yin

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Coco Chanel, the coastline, as required by the laws of thermodynamics, is considered a pyroclastic ridge, increasing competition.

Martyrs & Meists, the principle of perception, according to traditional ideas, is traditional.

Sex and Sanitation: Women Taking a Stand So They Can Take a Seat, function convex

downwards transformerait a small cation exchanger.

New and Recent Books, interstellar matter uses a longitudinal design.

Woman in love, artist or entrepreneur? The edifying, mystifying life of Coco Chanel, open-air warms up a metaphorical integral from a function that reverses to infinity along a line.

A Delirious Welcome to Anyone in Uniform: The GI Experience in Paris, July-September 1944, turbulence is indicative.

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