

Chanel

Fashion passes. Style remains.



044

chanel.com
CoolBrands

CHANEL

At the height of the Belle Epoque Gabrielle ‘Coco’ Chanel fashioned a brave new world, liberating women from restrictive corsets and stiff fashions to offer an elegance and stylish practicality never experienced before.

Born in 1883, Gabrielle Chanel (Coco or Mademoiselle to her friends) was a pioneering French couturier whose modernist philosophy, menswear-inspired fashions and pursuit of simplicity made her one of the defining figures in 20th century vogue.

Coco’s first foray into fashion came as a milliner in 1910. The understated elegance of her hats may not have impressed the fussily adorned ladies of the Belle Epoque – who declared them ‘unsophisticated’ – but as Coco tellingly declared in an interview in 1963, “One can never be too modern”. Believing in the value of discretion over ostentation, Coco’s was a philosophy that would come to underline everything Chanel came to represent.

During World War I, a time of great upheaval in Europe, Coco began to experiment. Plundering men’s wardrobes for ideas she deconstructed the conventions of the time using materials such as jersey – that until that point had only been used for men’s underwear – in place of dress fabrics, that, thanks to the war, were in short supply. The results were stunning creations that would determine what, and how women wore their clothes for decades to come.

Chanel became especially famous for its elegant little black dress – now a ‘must have’ item in every woman’s wardrobe – and its signature Chanel No. 5 perfume, created in 1921 by legendary parfumeur Ernest Beaux. Beaux reputedly gave Coco a set of five samples to choose from after she’d instructed him to create a fragrance “all about the scent, and nothing about the bottle”. She preferred N°5, telling him, “It will bring me luck”. In keeping with her trademark modern, elegant lines Coco designed the packaging for the fragrance; pure, austere and minimal, it has since acquired iconic status and is held up as a 20th century design classic.

Twelve years after Coco’s death, in 1983, Karl Lagerfeld took over as artistic director of the brand – a bold move given that the designer had already cultivated a particular style and had built up an impressive reputation in his own right. Lagerfeld has succeeded in paying tribute to the designs and stylish elegance of the ‘Grande Mademoiselle’ in his own definitive, witty fashion. His innovation has ensured that Chanel still features strongly among those on the cutting-edge of contemporary design.

While Chanel is perhaps best known today for its clothes, handbags and perfumes it continues to develop its range of accessories, including shoes, wallets and jewellery.

The definitive Chanel suit – comprising of a knee-length skirt and trim, boxy jacket with black trim and gold buttons – is an enduring design that has withstood the fads of modern times and is as popular now as ever. Chanel’s classic bags are instantly recognisable by the brand’s distinctive logo – an overlocking double C to represent its founders initials (Coco Chanel) – that denotes the quality, craftsmanship and above all its luxury status. The newer Cambon line features

a larger diamond quilt with an off-centre, oversized logo, while the Luxury Line, introduced in 2006 and featuring a metal chain embedded in the leather, is one of the most desired ‘it’ bags of the moment.

Fashion is no longer the privilege of Paris but a high profile global affair. While Lagerfeld may, through his haute couture and ready-to-wear collections, present tongue-in-cheek interpretations of classic Chanel designs, the brand remains universally acclaimed as a model of continuity in fashion, perfume and name.



Main image Photography by Francois Kollar

