



CHANEL

Youth of Coco

At age 12 she was put in an orphanage called

“The Sisters of the Sacred Heart”,

in Aubazine, France, here she was raised by nuns, without any luxury and surrounded by women who dressed strictly in plain black and white clothes.

Even though her life didn't start out great, **this is exactly what eventually became the inspiration behind her (future) fashion.**



How did the luxury brand Chanel come to be?

Yet the story of the brand Chanel started 1883, when Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel was born.



Officially the ‘House of Chanel’ was founded in 1909

Rumor has it her iconic nickname “Coco” comes from a song she used to sing called “Qui qu’a vu Coco?”

“My fortune is built on that old jersey that I’d put on because it was cold in Deauville.” – Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel.

Around the age of 18, Coco became interested in fashion. It all really started in 1909. At the time she was the mistress of a businessman named Étienne Balsan, he gave her the financial support she needed to open a hat-making shop in Paris. Another man, one of the wealthier friends of Étienne Balsan, named Arthur Capel, is also known to have had a huge influence on the beginning of the fashion venture of Coco Chanel. Eventually she opened more shops, where she also started making clothes. The House of Chanel was officially born. Coco once told author Paul Morand that her first taste of ‘clothing success’ came from a dress she fashioned out of an old jersey. Many people asked her where she bought the dress, and her response was the offer to make the same dress for them





Perfume is the unseen,
unforgettable, ultimate
accessory of fashion... that
heralds your arrival and
prolongs your departure,”
– Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel

Coco's designs always were simple, yet elegant. She focused on women's taste for elegance, with blouses, suits, trousers, and dresses, keeping the focus on the simplicity. Additionally, she used a lot of colors like navy blue and grey, that were considered more masculine at the time. All of this made Coco Chanel different from all other designers in the 19th century, since this was a time full of luxurious, over-designed, and constrictive clothes.

The 1920's became very important for the success of The House of Chanel. Coco Chanel became a true style icon, known for her simple but sophisticated outfits, styled with great accessories. She introduced the Chanel suit, the little black dress, and of course the perfume Chanel no. 5. In 1921 Chanel became the first major fashion designer to introduce their own perfume, while also redesigning "normal" perfume packaging. Putting the, still immensely famous, Chanel no. 5 in a beautiful, simple and sleek bottle.

Another revolutionary design, the Chanel suit. Introduced in 1925, the Chanel suit was something that no one had ever seen before, at least not on women. Women in the 1920's mainly wore corsets and other confining, uncomfortable, garments. While the Chanel suit borrowed elements of men's wear, and was meant to bring comfort to women's clothing. The suit consisted of a collarless jacket and a well-fitted skirt. In 1926 Chanel introduced their first little black dress, another design ahead of the time. Black was associated with mourning, yet Chanel showed that it could be used as chic evening wear.

Return to the fashion world

Everything went great for the House of Chanel, in the 1930's Coco even designed clothes for movie stars in Hollywood exclusive requested by Samuel Goldwyn. Around 1935 she owned five boutiques and employed around 4.000 workers. But the international economic depression had a big negative impact on the company. It all got even worse with the start of World War II in 1939. Chanel was forced to shut down their stores, and fire all employees. After the war Coco Chanel left Paris, and moved to Switzerland for a while, away from the fashion world.

After being away from the fashion world for more than a decade, Coco Chanel decided to reopen the couture house in 1954, she was 71 years old at the time. Critics were unsparing in their reviews, but eventually Coco's designs won over the world again. She kept the simple and classic look of the 1920's going, and designed more classic Chanel suits, as well as bell-bottomed pants and other innovations.

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Next to fashionable clothing, Coco had been designing handbags for a while. But the bag she created in 1955 really took over the world. Since Chanel had always been about comfortability, it's no surprise that Coco wanted to design a handbag with a longer strap, so women could have their hands free to do other things. A practical bag made for women on the go; and so, the Classic Flap bag was born, being named 2.55 after the year it was designed. Decades later, this bag is probably still one of the most iconic fashion items in the world



The time after Coco

Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel passed away in 1971, but Chanel definitely lives forever. A series of different designers led Chanel's couture house before, eventually, Karl Lagerfeld was appointed "artistic director for all Chanel fashion, designer of all haute couture, ready-to-wear and accessory collections" in 1983. His visions definitely aligned with Coco's, and Karl assumed his new position with a lot of respect for the traditions that Coco Chanel set for the House of Chanel. While keeping the original values and beliefs in mind, he did want to help Chanel grow away from the "boxy suits" of the 50s and into the 80s. He started making small changes to the original designs. Examples are the iconic Chanel suit that he redesigned from denim, punk-style tweed, and bright neon wool. He helped Chanel step forward from the more conservative past.

Additionally, Karl had always been heavily involved in all campaigns and advertisements that ran while he was creative director. He is known to have photographed a lot of the campaigns himself, working with many supermodels, under which Claudia Schiffer, Vanessa Paradis, and Christy Turlington. He is also credited with promoting the branding of the logo of Chanel, making people all over the world recognize the Chanel CC logo.

Chanel kept growing and expanding their collections. For example, in 1987 the first line of Chanel watches, called the Premiere watch, was released. While in 1993 another milestone was reached with the first Chanel Fine Jewelry collection.



