

Coco Chanel  
"The Woman Who Changed Fashion"

"In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different." Powerful words said by fashion icon, Gabrielle Bonheur "Coco" Chanel. Coco Chanel is an inspiration to so many in the fashion world and to young girls like me. Because of my strong interest in fashion, I look up to her as an example. She changed the fashion world and made it what it is today.

Gabrielle was born on August 19<sup>th</sup>, 1883, in Saumur, France. Her mother died when she was only six years old, so Gabrielle was raised in an orphanage for the duration of her childhood. At the age of twenty, she became a seamstress in a shop that served wealthy customers. She had a disdain for the era's frilly way of dress. At this point in time, she had no desire for fashion. Her true passion was singing. She often performed at a local music hall where her limited repertoire included a song entitled "Qui Qu'a Vu Coco" from which came her nickname-Coco. In 1909, at the age of twenty-six, Coco opened a small hat shop in Paris. It became very successful, so she moved to Rue Cambon in 1910. There she met a wealthy Englishman named Boy Capel who helped her set up a new shop in the fashionable resort of Deauville. She also opened up another shop, Biarritz, in Southwestern France, which attracted wealthy Spanish customers. She had somehow tapped into a new kind of chic...a complete deviation from the elaborate designs of Paul Poiret, the reigning king of couture.

The 1920's were a decade of fashion firsts for Chanel. During this time she created the famous, Little Black Dress. She also captured the scent of Chanel No. 5, her world renowned perfume fragrance. Coco Chanel socialized with some very famous influential people during the decade such as Pablo Picasso, Winston Churchill, and Salvador Dalí. Unfortunately, the years that followed were not as honorable. In 1939, she closed her couture house when France declared war on Germany. Coco was exiled to Switzerland following World War II because of her

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connections with Germany during the war and subsequently, spent nine unhappy years in Switzerland.

In 1954, at the age of seventy, Coco staged a brief comeback, in which she recreated some of her classics such as her quilted handbag and her black toe pumps. Throughout her design career, she endorsed perfection and neatness in her clothing style. In her suite at the Ritz Hotel in Paris, on January 10<sup>th</sup>, 1971, the fashion icon, Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel passed away.

In 1983, Karl Lagerfeld was hired as head designer of Chanel after the company spent a few years sorting things out. Currently, there are well over 100 Chanel boutiques around the world. The owners and directors insist on sole control of all products that bear its respected label, determined to maintain the image for which the Chanel name is known. Today, the Chanel Couture House is owned by the Wertheimer family and is the only large couture house to remain in private hands.

In conclusion, Coco Chanel not only impacted the fashion world during her lifetime but continues to impact it today. She was also integrated into our world history because of her actions during World War II. From rags to riches, Gabrielle Bonheur Chanel showed that anything is possible. For young girls who inspire to be part of the fashion world such as she was, she is a great role model. Coco Chanel made the fashion world what it is today.

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