

# Coco Chanel: Fashion Manifesto [B2]

La celebre stilista, dalle umili origini, ha creato il profumo più famoso della storia e uno stile unico e liberatorio per le donne. La sua vita e il suo lavoro sono oggetto di una mostra al Victoria & Albert Museum di Londra.



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Gabrielle Chanel was born into poverty in the Loire Valley in central France in 1883. She grew up in an orphanage, where she was taught [to sew](#), [iron](#) and [embroider](#). As a young adult she worked as a shop assistant and a café singer, where she was called Coco by soldiers in the audience. There she met wealthy men, including an Englishman called Arthur Capel. Chanel made her own hats, and Capel helped her open a [millinery](#) in Paris.

## WHAT'S IN A NAME

In 1913 Chanel opened her first boutique in the French seaside resort of Deauville. She sold hats and simple sportswear for women, such as jersey sweaters. This poor girl look attracted the attention of wealthy women who wanted [relief](#) from the corseted styles of the time. Chanel's [couture](#) business expanded into textiles, jewellery and perfumes. By the late 1920s Chanel

industries were worth millions, and employed more than two thousand people.

## **RADICAL SIMPLICITY**

In the 1920s, Chanel introduced some of her most famous designs. Her chic little black dress was so affordable and easy-to-wear, that fashion magazine Vogue predicted it would be worn by women all around the world. Coco shocked society by introducing evening trousers for women, and wearing her own hair boyishly short; many women adopted this new garçon style.

## **NUMBER 5**

One of Chanel's most lucrative products was the perfume Chanel No. 5, created with Ernest Beaux in 1921. To produce more, she partnered with businessmen Théophile Bader of the Galeries Lafayette [department store](#) and Pierre Wertheimer of the Bourjois cosmetics company. This left Chanel earning just 10 per cent of the royalties.

## **WARTIME DRAMA**

Chanel closed her [couture](#) house in 1939 with the [outbreak](#) of World War Two. During the early 1940s, she had a relationship with Nazi officer Baron Hans Günther von Dincklage, who helped free her [nephew](#), André Palasse, from a German prisoner-of-war camp. Her associations with the Nazis [tainted](#) her reputation, although more recent evidence has revealed that Chanel was also a documented member of the French Resistance.

## **LATER YEARS**

Chanel finally reopened her fashion house in 1954. She told the actor Marlene Dietrich that it was because she was "dying of [boredom](#)." That year she introduced her iconic suit design: a [collarless](#), [braid-trimmed](#) cardigan jacket with a [skirt](#). She also introduced [bell-bottomed trousers](#). Chanel

worked [well into her 80s](#). She never married, and had no children. She died in her room at the Ritz Hotel in Paris in 1971.

## CHANEL AT THE VICTORIA & ALBERT MUSEUM

The first Chanel retrospective to be [staged](#) by a major British museum, Gabrielle Chanel. Fashion Manifesto has been significantly expanded from the Paris version. It spans the seven decades of Chanel's career, with two hundred [outfits](#) on display. The oldest exhibit is a silk<sup>19</sup> sailor-collar<sup>20</sup> blouse from 1916 and the newest, a pale pink lamé dress from Chanel's final collection. Evening pieces shown include the groundbreaking evening trousers that scandalised French society. One room tells the story of Chanel's No. 5 perfume, which became a signature scent<sup>21</sup> worn by Marilyn Monroe and Andy Warhol. The show also includes a bright pink tweed two-piece worn by the actor Lauren Bacall in 1959, and a minimalist black silk trouser suit in which the fashion editor Diana Vreeland entertained<sup>22</sup> at her New York home. [www.vam.ac.uk](http://www.vam.ac.uk)

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# Glossary

- **iron** = stirare
- **outbreak** = scoppio
- **tainted** = corrompere
- **collarless** = senza colletto
- **staged** = allestire
- **outfits** = completi
- **to sew** = cucire
- **couture** = moda, alta sartoria
- **department store** = grandi magazzini
- **nephew** = nipote
- **braid-trimmed** = con rifiniture a trecce
- **well into her 80s** = fino ad oltre 80 anni
- **embroider** = ricamare
- **millinery** = modisteria
- **boredom** = noia
- **skirt** = gonna
- **relief** = sollievo
- **bell-bottomed trousers** = pantaloni a campana