Chanel, Coco (1883-1971) Encyclopedia Article

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Chanel, Coco (1883-1971)

Modern fashion has no legend greater than Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. A strong woman, her life has inspired biographies, aphorisms, and even a Broadway musical entitled "Coco." She was one of the most powerful designers of the 1920s, using knit, wool jersey, and fabrics and styles associated with menswear to remake the modern woman's wardrobe with soft, practical clothing. She invented the little black dress in the 1920s, and in the 1920s and 1930s, she made the Chanel suit—a soft, cardigan-like jacket often in robust materials with a skirt sufficiently slack to imply concavity between the legs—a modern staple. Indomitable in life, Chanel enjoyed many affairs with important men. One affair with a German officer prompted Chanel's eight year exile in Switzerland before reopening in 1954. She died in 1971 before one of her new collections was completed. The fragrance Chanel No. 5, created in 1922, has driven the company with its reputation and profit. As the chief designer since 1983, Karl Lagerfeld has combined a loyalty to Chanel's style signatures with an unmistakably modern taste.

Further Reading:

Baudot, Francois. *Chanel.* New York, Universe, 1996.

Leymarie, Jean. *Chanel.* New York, Skira/Rizzoli, 1987.