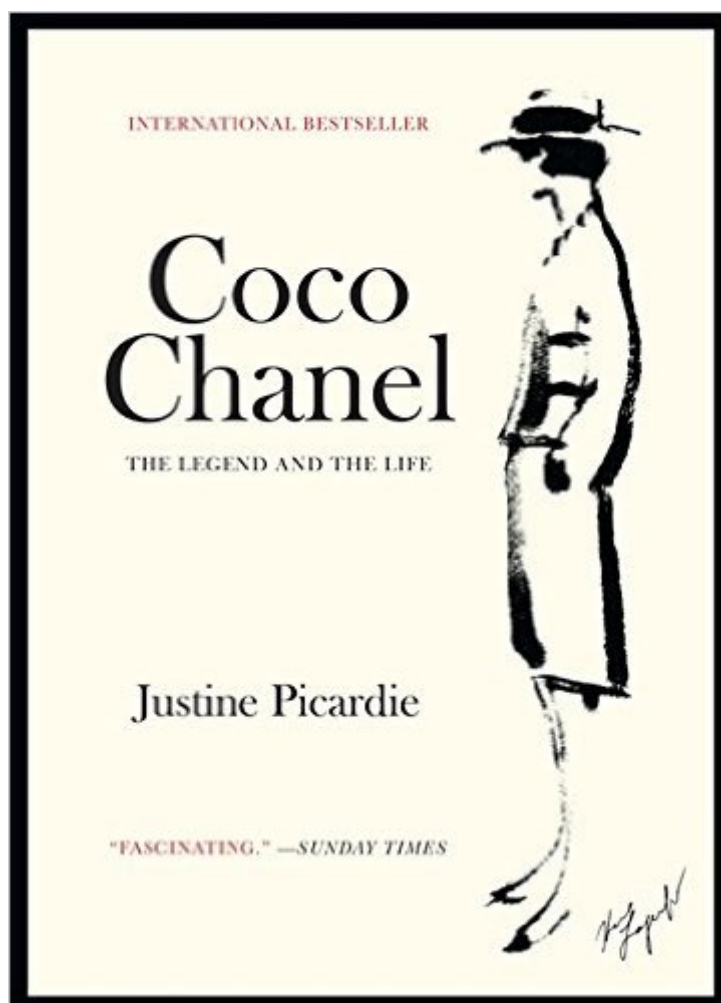


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# Coco Chanel: The Legend And The Life



## Synopsis

Sleek. Chic. Notoriously guarded. Welcome to the secret world of Gabrielle Chanel. The story of Chanel begins with an abandoned child, as lost as a girl in a dark fairy tale. Unveiling remarkable new details about Gabrielle Chanel's early years in a convent orphanage and her flight into unconventional adulthood, Justine Picardie explores what lies beneath the glossy surface of a mythic fashion icon. Throwing new light on her passionate and turbulent relationships, this beautifully constructed portrait gives a fresh and penetrating look at how Coco Chanel made herself into her own most powerful creation. An authoritative account, based on personal observations and interviews with Chanel's last surviving friends, employees and relatives, it also unravels her coded language and symbols, and traces the influence of her formative years on her legendary style. Feared and revered by the rest of the fashion industry, Coco Chanel died in 1971 at the age of eighty-seven, but her legacy lives on. Drawing on unprecedented research, Justine Picardie brings her fascinating, enigmatic subject out of hiding and uncovers the consequences of what Chanel covered up, unpicking the seams between truth and myth in a story that reveals the true heart of fashion.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

I appreciated the photos and Chanel's quotes in this book. If there had been neither, I would have become extremely bored. Nothing grabbed me. The majority of the book is based off of information Chanel told Claude Delay. If I wanted to know about her conversations with Claude Delay then I

would have read "Chanel Solitaire" by Claude Delay. Chanel's life was so mysterious and guarded it is nearly impossible to derive facts or truth. She hid the truth and was not an open book. so at the end of the book, I knew almost less about her than when I began reading the book. But one fact you can never take away is that she was one fierce woman: business and fashion wise.

Ms Picardie's research and writing style is the best biography of Mademoiselle to date! Well balanced and brings to play even more of the Mata Hari Couturier's activities during WWII. This is an in depth book. Picardie understands the complexity of Chanel's character and the tenacious and driven capability of one woman to succeed. Well written, well researched and the author beautifully unfolds Chanel's life to the reader. Every year we host an annual Coco Chanel Birthday Party to celebrate Mademoiselle's accomplishments that she gave to women. All attendees invited are women of courage. This book was very much a part of the event this year. New secrets about Chanel's WWII life were revealed and further inspiration for feminine courage emboldened the audience with individual confidence. --Laura Ponter, Concierge Jeweler

There are a ton of books out there on CoCo Chanel, this one stays clear of weaving in their personal opinions and tells the great story of her life, unbiasedly and with great detail. The pictures are wonderful, many of which I had never seen. The book itself is also very lovely and looks great on the shelf.

Coco Chanel concentrated on simplicity and practicality in the clothes she fashioned. She fashioned her own life, however, to be complicated, and she further complicated things by changing her stories (or perhaps her memories) of her past. Fashion columnist and novelist Justine Picardie has attempted to sort out Chanel's life in a satisfying biography, *Coco Chanel: The Legend and the Life* (It Books). Chanel displayed an unusual resilience, overcoming poverty and lack of parental guidance to revolutionize women's fashions, and perfume, and then retiring and starting up again as successfully as before. Picardie says that "... so much of Chanel remains enigmatic - the more you run after her, the more elusive her ghost becomes," and it is easy to see that with Chanel busy making her mark in fashion and making herself into a legend, keeping track of what's real and what's not is often impossible. Nonetheless, even if there are gaps we cannot completely close, Picardie's portrait with all of Chanel's contradictions nicely brings to life this unique artist, bon vivant, and brilliant businesswoman. Chanel was born in 1883, though of course she did not give this date in her own accounting of her origins. She was placed into a convent, and the austerity of convent life

found its way into her clothing designs. She worked afterwards as a seamstress but also as a cabaret singer. Somehow she encountered a rouÃ© who set her up as a mistress, along with other lovers, and during these years she learned skills in observation and in such essentials as horse riding. Her lovers set her up in her own Paris hat shop in 1909, and there were soon more than hats. Chanel fancied loose trousers and collarless jackets; the clothes proclaimed that women ought to be comfortable and confident in walking, riding horses, or driving. When Chanel said, "Extravagant things didn't suit me," she meant that she thought such things didn't suit any woman. Her perfume, brought out in 1921, made her an international name brand, but she regretted the agreement she had made with the manufacturer, and tried to use the anti-Jewish laws of the German occupation to claim the company for herself; she not only failed but she tarnished her reputation. She also took a Nazi lover, but got no punishment after the war. She had closed down her business when war was declared, saying, "This is not the time for fashion." She stayed out of clothing fashions, though she had a secure income from her international perfume sales. She was aghast when designers such as Christian Dior came out with extravagant fashions after the war, and disgusted with the reintroduction of corsets. She was seventy years old when she launched a comeback in 1954. The French press, perhaps because of her war record, sneered at her new line, which was a variation on the practical, attractive, and simple designs that she had done before. In the United States, however, the clothes were celebrated in an issue of *Life* magazine: "Her styles hark back to her best of the Thirties." She became copied even in France, and said of Yves Saint-Laurent that he "... has excellent taste. The more he copies me, the better taste he displays." The Chanel look has never really gone out of fashion. There was a Broadway musical about Chanel, and plenty of biographies and memoirs about her, and a couple of recent films, so interest in her extraordinary life has never subsided. Picardie's book packs many anecdotes, and lots of Chanel's own words (often funny or acid, and of course, often misleading) into a full biography. There are on these glossy pages plenty of pictures of Chanel at work, or at play on yachts or on the estates of those even richer than she, and pictures of the fashions that made her famous. Chanel succeeded with her outfits by maintaining creativity while keeping to essentials; Picardie has done just the same in a beautifully produced book.

The name Coco Chanel is synonymous with style. But what of the woman behind the name: what do we know about the woman who designed simple yet sophisticated clothes, practical but elegant bags and shoes, and presented Chanel No 5 perfume to the world? There is little simple about Coco Chanel. She was born Gabrielle Chanel on 19 August 1883 - a date that she later changed by hand

in her passport. Gabrielle Chanel was born in a poorhouse; her parents were unmarried and, according to Chanel, her mother Jeanne died of tuberculosis when Chanel was aged six. Justine Picardie suggests that Jeanne died of 'poverty, pregnancy and pneumonia' when Chanel was aged 11. According to Chanel, her father left her in the care of two unmarried aunts when he actually placed her in a convent orphanage in the village of Aubazine, where she was raised by nuns. When World War One began in 1914, Chanel moved from Paris to Deauville, and built up a business. Chanel's personal life was also interesting and unconventional. She had a succession of glamorous lovers but it seems likely that the real love of her life was Arthur 'Boy' Capel who died in a car accident in 1919. I picked up this book knowing very little about Coco Chanel and wanting to read a little more about the woman who had such an influence on style during the 20th century. It's an interesting read, beautifully illustrated and informative without being exhaustive. It intrigued me to read that Coco Chanel's favourite novel was 'Wuthering Heights', and that the austerity of the convent was a major influence on her design. By all accounts, Coco Chanel (19 August 1883 - 10 January 1971) lived a remarkable life. Jennifer Cameron-Smith

This book attempts the apparently impossible: to make sense of Coco Chanel. Unfortunately, the author jumps around in time, a modern conceit I guess, but for this already confusing situation a chronological progression might have helped. Not a good read.

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