

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Inside Chanel's latest episode explores brand's first couture shop

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Inside Chanel goes to Biarritz to dive into brand history. Image credit: Chanel

By DANNY PARISI

French fashion house Chanel is taking a look back at the opening of one of its first couture stores in Biarritz with the latest episode of its Inside Chanel series.

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The episode, similarly to the rest of the series, uses the life of Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel as a way of exploring the history of the label and the founder's experiences that shaped the brand into what it is today. Older legacy houses such as Chanel have the advantage that they can mine their own history for engaging content to educate customers on the brand's values.

"It is always a good idea for heritage brands to take a fresh look at their own archives and find new ways to tell and re-tell their story," said **Thomai Serdari**, a professor of luxury business marketing at New York University, New York. "Far from showcasing vanity, brands approach their younger followers, who perhaps have not been initiated into the brand story yet neither fully nor completely, with sensitivity and a genuine interest in forming a bond.

"The bond stems not from the story told, which after all is well documented elsewhere, but rather from the medium chosen to tell the story," she said. "If Chanel's entire Biarritz chapter can be narrated in 2.5 short minutes, so be it. Good writing and tight editing will do the trick."

Ms. Serdari is not affiliated with Chanel but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Chanel** was reached for comment.

Couture shop

The latest episode of Inside Chanel, the 23rd in the series, is called "Biarritz" after the small town in the Southwest of France.

During World War I, this town became a haven for displaced aristocrats from across Europe. Wealthy businessmen, nobles from a dozen countries and even princes came to Biarritz to escape the conflict.

It was here, at this time, that Ms. Chanel was able to open her first couture house with the help of an infusion of

money from her lover Boy Capel. The shop was such a success that Ms. Chanel was able to pay him back in full just one year later.

Inside Chanel: Biarritz

Ms. Chanel purchased a sumptuous old mansion, hired 60 women to work as seamstresses and brought her sister Antoinette from Paris to help run the place. From there, Chanel's empire truly took off.

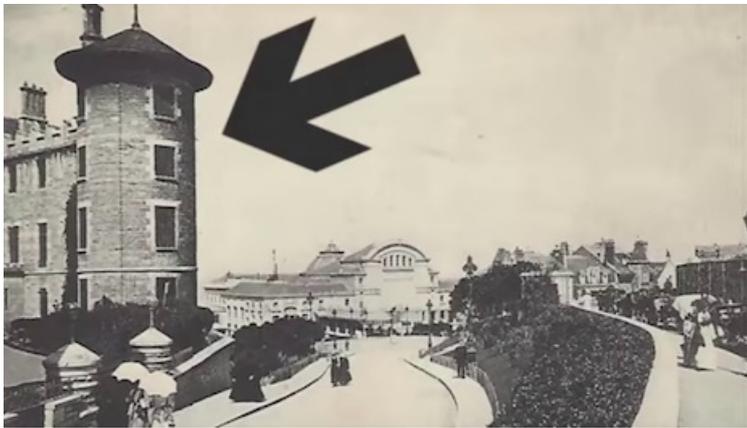
The video utilizes the same visual style as previous episodes in the series, combining archival footage with stylized graphic animations to illustrate Coco Chanel's story.

Lasting legacy

Inside Chanel has always been a way for Chanel to explore its own history, mining the many decades of its existence for new digital efforts that educate customers on the brand's history and values.

What is smart about Chanel is that it strikes the right balance between preserving the brand's long legacy and not becoming stagnant. On the flipside, chasing after the latest trend may be appealing for luxury marketers in an ever-changing world, but doing so can risk the loss of a brand's core identity.

For Diego Della Valle, chairman and CEO of Tod's, luxury brands' strengths lie in their legacy and the heritage they build up over many years. Speaking at the Financial Times Business of Luxury Summit on May 21, Mr. Della Valle warned that brands can dilute that legacy if they reinvent themselves too drastically and too frequently ([see story](#)).



Chanel's Biarritz couture shop. Image credit: Chanel

Chanel has also felt confident enough recently to release its financial earnings for the first time. Chanel has revealed that its sales totaled \$9.62 billion in 2017, an increase of 11 percent from the previous year.

While its status as a privately owned company means that Chanel does not have to publicize its results, the house opted to publish its financial figures for the first time in its history. In interviews with Reuters and The New York Times, Chanel chief financial officer Philippe Blondiaux noted that by voluntarily publishing the results, the house was not planning to go public or seek acquisition, instead intending to stay private for the long-term ([see story](#)).

The brand will likely continue to use Inside Chanel as a way to bring in both new and loyal customers by highlighting the pedigree of the label that is now more than a century old.

"Legacy brands would greatly benefit from revisiting their history to highlight parts of the iconic founder's personality or life that might have been previously neglected or not fully developed," Ms. Sedari said. "There is always a challenge of course and that is to find a medium that can reach the intended audience and an aesthetic that perfectly fits that of the brand, while also ensuring that the message encapsulates the brand's authenticity."