

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

## Inside Chanel shares masculinity's influence on house styles

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*ienne Balsan introduced Coco Chanel to equestrian attire. Image credit: Chanel*

By SARAH RAMIREZ

French fashion house Chanel is taking a closer look at how the men in its eponymous founder's life inspired her style sensibilities through the latest episode of "Inside Chanel."

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"Chapter 26, Masculine as her Muse" shares glimpses of how different relationships and friendships shaped the career of house founder Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel. Today, masculine influences continue to have an impact on the Chanel brand.

"It's important for Chanel to shed light on the creative inspirations that helped inspire the founder's life," said Romey Louangvilay, communications director at **ELMNTL**, New York. "While it was viewed as traditionally male clothing' and influences, the video highlights why certain pieces or collections were designed a specific way.

"It showed the evolution of the design and how Chanel made some of these uniforms appear more elegant and regal," he said. "It's always a good thing to show how something beautiful came to fruition."

Mr. Louangvilay is not affiliated with Chanel, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. **Chanel** was reached for comment.

### Male muses

Ms. Chanel began her career as a seamstress in the village of Moulins, France cutting soldiers' uniforms.

"Not only did Gabrielle Chanel borrow elements from men's fashion to liberate women's style, she drew profound inspiration from the men in her life to unleash her talent," the film's narrator explains.

*The 26th episode of Inside Chanel examines her male influences*

As Ms. Chanel grew into adulthood, she developed a romantic relationship with tienne Balsan, who introduced her to the elegant but comfortable attire of an equestrian lifestyle.

Later, Grand Duke Dmitri Pavlovich inspired Ms. Chanel with his own interest in embroidered blouses and pelisse cloaks. Her lover's stories of the fragrances in his homeland of Russia also pushed her to create her signature

fragrance, Chanel N 5.

It was not only romantic partners that shaped Ms. Chanel's fashion designs.

Jos-Maria Sert, the husband of Ms. Chanel's friend Misia, introduced the designer to Venice, which shaped her more leisurely aesthetic. The Duke of Westminster exposed her to contemporary British fashion, which was both relaxed and sophisticated.

Male creatives including composer Igor Stravinsky, artist Pablo Picasso, writer Jean Cocteau and others also inspired Ms. Chanel through their own works.

"Her greatest inspiration, however, came from her singular vision and her freedom to live and to lead, with or without men," the narrator concludes.

"Even though it focuses on the male influencers, the video still feels very empowering for women," Mr. Louangvilay said. "It shows how a woman defied what was in' during that timeframe and elevated the look by finding creative sources from things you wouldn't expect."

Bending gender norms

Decades after the death of its founder, Chanel continues to play with themes of gender ambiguity through its designs and marketing efforts.

For its pre-fall/winter 2011 campaign, Chanel and then creative director Karl Lagerfeld highlighted the thin line between masculine and feminine.

The video, entitled "Evanescent Metamorphoses," followed model Kristina Salinovic as she transformed from an ambiguous gender to a more clearly female character. Mr. Lagerfeld accomplished this journey through clothing and accessories, making each look more feminine ([see story](#)).

More recently, Chanel launched its first makeup products for men globally.

By appealing to men beyond masculine fragrances, Chanel can reach a new market and present a forward-thinking identity. The new makeup collection is under the Boy de Chanel moniker, named for Gabrielle Chanel's lover Boy Capel, which also includes handbags ([see story](#)).

"Chanel's video of highlighting the male influencers is another example of how the brand is blurring the lines between traditional gender norms," ELMNTL's Mr. Louangvilay said. "The brand was one of the first to target men in its beauty product and by showing how what society views as female clothes comes from masculine inspirations."