

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Chanel focuses on founder's love of literature through Inside Chanel episode

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Coco Chanel, French couturier, Paris, 1937. Image credit: Chanel.

By ELLEN KELLEHER

French fashion house **Chanel** is casting a light on Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel's love of literature in a new chapter of "Inside Chanel," the brand's extensive peek at the life of its founder.

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The video is the 30th episode in this documentary web series and represents another stab by the designer to use social media for storytelling. The episode premiere coincides with the Chanel spring/summer 2021 runway show at the Grand Palais' in Paris last week.

"This episode highlights the unknown about Coco Chanel showing a more intellectual side and dives into her mind and what influenced her," said Stephanie Navarro, digital strategist with **Blue Moon Digital**, Denver. "The campaign highlights Coco Chanel's relationship with everything artistic."

Bibliophile

The video takes a nostalgic look for nearly two minutes at Ms. Chanel's fascination with books and her friendships with a number of celebrity authors of her day, from the playwright Jean Cocteau to the short-story writer Paul Morand.

A bookworm, Ms. Chanel devoured serialized novels as a child on a quest to become a heroine herself. The designer's founder later went on to read all the books recommended to her by the English polo player Arthur Edward "Boy" Capel, her lover.

Titled "Gabrielle Chanel and Literature," the video opens with shots of the French serialized novels Ms. Chanel read as a youth being flipped through and then pivots to Ms. Chanel as a young school girl.

Ms. Chanel saw reading as a retreat from her worries

The narrator's dialogue is artfully laid out as much of it appears in the video's footage, which consists mainly of a sequence of books being thumbed through.

Ms. Chanel was a fan of the classics of French, Russian and English literature. She kept the manuscripts of her friend, poet Pierre Reverdy, and financed authors whose works she admired without their knowledge.

She read "to make books something special, bound as if she were dressing them in her palette of tawny beige, black, red and gold," says the female narrator.

She read to "draw inner strength" in her garden at her villa La Pausa, at her apartment at the Ritz and at home, the narrator continues.

In the end, Ms. Chanel's love of reading failed to turn into a writing project as she refused to pen her autobiography.

Maxims like *Fashion becomes unfashionable* and *Style never* became her forte instead.



Archival footage of Coco Chanel. Image credit: Chanel

At the close of her life, perhaps against her will, Ms. Chanel became a literary figure, according to the video, and inspired more than 150 works of fiction, biography and art books.

The video closes with the image of Ms. Chanel's handprint below her surname on the front of a stark white book. "This is the dazzling novel of a heroine of her century. Signed Chanel," concludes the female narrator.

Brand storytelling

In 2019, Chanel explored its own brand history through a book that aimed to bring the exhibit experience to print.

"Chanel: The Impossible Collection" is described as a "literary museum," with a series of 100 key looks from the brand's timeline. Part of Assouline's Ultimate Collection, the book itself is a luxury good with a price point of \$895.

Author and fashion journalist Alexander Fury curated the book. It traces Chanel's impact on fashion from the work of its eponymous founder Gabrielle Chanel to the designs of late creative director Karl Lagerfeld ([see story](#)).

Another recent episode of Inside Chanel explored the founder's special relationship to the world of the arts.

In Chapter 27 of the series, viewers learn about Coco Chanel's connection to some of the great artistic masters of the 20th century. Chanel's deep connections to Stravinsky, Picasso and Valentine Hugo are also played up in the video ([see story](#)).