

FRAGRANCE AND PERSONAL CARE

Inside Chanel celebrates 100 years of its signature N 5

March 22, 2021



Chanel N5 is arguably the brand's most iconic fragrance. Image credit: Chanel

By NORA HOWE

French fashion label Chanel is shining a light on its most iconic fragrance in the latest iteration of its "Inside Chanel" video series.

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Over its lifetime, Chanel has developed brand loyalty through numerous products and relationships, but especially with its century-old fragrance. As a part of its extensive effort of exposing itself to its consumers, "Inside Chanel" takes audiences through the history and influence of the N 5 fragrance.

"Everything about this scent is special, from the seemingly simple yet meticulously minimalistic hand-sealed glass bottles showing restraint in its masculine, laboratory flask or whisky decanter like shape, to the exactness of the unique blend of natural and synthetic elements marking an era that combined the two in accord," said Rebecca Miller, founder/CEO at [ARTful Communication](#), New York. "An intervention in the history of perfume."

A century of N 5

"Inside Chanel" is refocusing its attention back onto the product itself, as the label is three months into its 100 year anniversary of its signature perfume.

"This particular video really focused on humanizing the brand by narrating some strong milestones for [Chanel] as opposed to its typical approach of featuring the aspirational lifestyle," said Dalia Strum, founder of [Rethink Connect](#) and professor at [The Fashion Institute of Technology](#), New York.

The episode begins with a narrator introducing herself as Chanel N 5, an abstract perfume by Gabrielle Chanel.

N 5, 100 years of celebrity Inside Chanel

"I am a revolution," she says. "A defining new departure in the world of perfumery, which, at a stroke, made all the fashionable fragrances of the period seem old hat.

"Gabrielle Chanel came up with a perfume like no one had ever before imagined."

Ms. Chanel produced the N 5 fragrance around the same time that cubism, Dadaism and surrealism emerged as

avant-garde styles of art. The brand and film narrator consider the fragrance an olfactory counterpart to these styles, writing a new language of scent.

"I am the first abstract perfume," the narrator continues. "I am a manifesto that of modernity.

"I am a mystery," the narrator continues. "Thanks to the magical alchemy of the aldehydes, I throw people off the scent.

"My formula is Chanel's best-kept secret and the most successful fragrance in modern perfumery," she says. "This cloak of mystery has propelled me from celebrity to posterity."

"I am the perfume of perfumes, embodied by the greatest celebrities," the narrator says.

The brand teased the fragrance's anniversary year celebration with a mesmerizing short starring its newest ambassador French actor and singer Marion Cotillard. In the film, Ms. Cotillard dances across the streets of Paris and onto a lunar landscape in a gold sequin lace gown inspired by Ms. Chanel herself ([see story](#)).

"They focused on their milestones that have not only made them successful but have also kept them iconic, which essentially captured the essence of this luxury brand," Ms. Strum said.

N 5 The Film

According to the episode, the number five was Ms. Chanel's favorite number and supposedly brought her luck since she was a child. She is said to have chosen N 5 because it was the scent in the fifth sample the one she most preferred.

"I am an icon of the 20th century," she says in reference to Chanel N 5 being the first perfume to enter the Museum of Modern Art. Pop artist Andy Warhol reproduced the Chanel N 5 bottle in a screen print in 1985 which ended up on display in the museum.

"The DNA of the brand has never wavered," Ms. Miller said. "It continues to evolve through its talented designers, its nose and its unprecedented attraction to artists in other fields who have honored it over the years by referencing it in their own work.

"This continual acknowledgement has traversed several generations, attracting a younger audience to desire to be a part of the Chanel experience," she said. "New media, with relevant content, has been an effective tool in reaching the next generation as well as the ability to create meaningful dialogues with customers."

Eau de parfum

For many luxury brands, perfume is any entry product to get consumers in the door, but some have placed an exceptional emphasis on the history and craft behind their most beloved fragrances.

French fashion house Louis Vuitton shared the intricate details and precise processes of fragrance through the eyes of one of its brand ambassadors. French actor Stacy Martin spent the day with master perfumer Jacques Cavallier Belletrud at the maison's fragrance atelier, Les Fontaines Parfumes, in the south of France.

After exploring the estate's gardens and learning new ways to apply perfume, the actress learned how to create her own custom composition using some of the best natural raw materials ([see story](#)).

In a similar approach, French fashion house Christian Dior examined the world of fragrance creation through a documentary feature film, shedding light on the mysterious craft. Directed by Clment Beauvais and Arthur de Kersauson, *Nose* follows Dior perfumer Franois Demachy on his two-year quest through fourteen countries to discover the world's most valuable raw materials.

Through the hour-long spotlight, Dior offers insight into the meticulous and creative process of its renowned fragrance composition ([see story](#)).

"Fragrance and other branded accessories are vehicles by which every age may delight in the brand's history and creativity," Ms. Miller said.