

*Book Club Kit*



A NOVEL OF  
**COCO  
CHANEL**





## *a note from the author*

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Dear Readers,

The Queen of Paris is the thrilling story of Gabrielle (Coco) Chanel’s hidden life in Nazi occupied Paris during WWII—as discovered in recently unearthed war time files.

I knew I would have to write this book when, several years ago, I first came across photographs of those files. The information in the documents conflicted with everything I thought I knew about this glittering, glamorous woman—one of the richest in the world. But cold facts don’t always tell the whole story. Shocked and fascinated, during my research for this book I found the facts of Chanel’s life during those war years slowly emerging.

But I also found myself wondering ‘why’ she took the path she took—not to excuse or judge, but to understand the evolution of her thoughts. For insight, I knew we must also look through the shadows of her past. Through historical fiction, by linking Chanel’s actions and decisions during the war years to brief, but pertinent flashes from her past, I believe The Queen of Paris reveals a deeper truth, like light cutting through darkness. Many biographies of Coco Chanel exist. But this is a story I don’t think you’ve heard before. I have tried not to judge. In the end dear reader, I leave that to you.

*—Pamela Binning Ewen*



## *Discussion Questions*

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1. Gabrielle (Coco) Chanel spent her childhood years in an orphanage, abandoned by her father. At the age of seventeen she left the orphanage for a sewing job in the nearby village of Moulins, where she also sang at night in a cabaret. It wasn't long before she was swept away by a wealthy, married playboy, Etienne Balsan, to live with him in his chateau, Royallieu, in the district of Compiègne, region of Picardie, in northern France. A long string of lovers followed in Etienne's wake, including Boy Capel, the love of her life. Today Coco's iconic image is of a strong, indomitable woman who forged her way to success alone. How was your own opinion of Chanel affected—if at all—by the fact that the sparks which lit the flame of her career depended upon the goodwill of wealthy, older men?

2. It's no secret that Mademoiselle Chanel was known to be anti-Semitic, yet Coco never accepted that was so. She did enter into partnership with a Jewish man early in her career, one of the most important alliances in her life. And when Colette's husband, Maurice was arrested by the Gestapo in the story, immediately she responded to Colette's plea for help. How do you think she rationalized her denial? And do you think her reasoning has broader application, even today?



# THE QUEEN OF PARIS

*Pamela Binning Ewen*

*A novel of*  
**COCO CHANEL**

## *Discussion Questions*



3. Historical records evidence Coco's agreement to spy on behalf of Nazi Germany during WWII, an act which was treason against the country she loved. On the other hand, Andre's life was at stake, as well as her business, legend, and legacy—control of her iconic perfumes. What decision do you think you'd have made in that situation, putting yourself in Coco's place? Do her reasons excuse her? How did your opinion of Coco change over the course of the novel?
4. Coco seemed to distance herself not only from the horrors Parisian Jews suffered all around her during the war, but also from deep attachments to most people as she grew older. An example of the latter was her relationship with her younger brothers, and to a great extent to her sisters, both of whom committed suicide. What do you think is the most important event contributing to this part of her personality? Why do you think she seemed to relate differently to Alyce in the end?
5. Is there a quote from the book that particularly stood out to you? Why?
6. Was there a scene from the book that stuck with you and haunted you? If so, which scene, and why?
7. What surprised you the most about Coco's life?
8. Try to describe the theme of the book in one sentence. Can you sum it up in one word?



*Eat*

credit: <https://sugargeekshow.com/recipe/french-almond-macaron-recipe/>

## *a Classic Parisian Treat*

### **Ingredients**

- 2 oz (57 g) almond flour
- 4 oz (114 g) powdered sugar
- 1 pinch salt
- 2 oz (57 g) egg whites aged overnight in the fridge and brought to room temperature
- 1/8 tsp (1/8 tsp) cream of tartar
- 1 oz (28 g) granulated sugar
- 1/2 tsp (1/2 tsp) vanilla extract
- 1 drop gel food coloring

### **Buttercream**

- 1 ounce pasteurized egg whites
- 2.5 ounces powdered sugar sifted
- 2.5 ounces unsalted butter
- 1/4 teaspoon vanilla
- 1 pinch salt

### **Equipment**

- Food Scale
- Stand Mixer
- Sifter
- Parchment Paper
- Piping Bag
- 802 Round Piping Tip
- Food processor



*Eat*

*credit: <https://sugargeekshow.com/recipe/french-almond-macaron-recipe/>*

## **Instructions**

1. Preheat oven to 300°F and line a 1/2 baking sheet with the macaron template and parchment paper or use a silicone macaron mat with built in template.
2. Sift together the powdered sugar, salt, and almond flour, twice if not blended. Pulse the mixture in a food processor 8-10 times to make the almond flour mixture even finer and texture and to blend the ingredients together.
3. Whip the egg whites on low to frothy consistency and slowly add the sugar in thirds while mixing on low.
4. Once the egg whites turn white and you can see some lines forming in the surface from the whisk, add cream of tartar, whipping on medium until soft glossy peaks form.
5. Add the vanilla (and food coloring if desired) to the meringue during the soft peak stage.
6. Then continue whipping on medium-high until you get stiff but shiny peaks that start gathering and bunching on the inside of the whisk.
7. Add 1/3 of your almond mixture to the meringue. Fold your spatula under the batter and around the edges and then cut through the center until almond flour is mixed in. Continue with the rest of the almond flour and folding until homogenous.
8. Gently press the spatula on top of the batter while you turn the bowl to take out some of the air from the meringue. Continue folding around the outside edge until the batter forms a ribbon and moves like lava.
9. Your meringue is ready when it forms a ribbon off the spatula and the batter that settles almost dissolves all the way back into the rest of the batter but still leave a bit of a line.
10. Place parchment paper onto your sheet pan. Pipe small rounds about 1" in diameter.



*Eat*

credit: <https://sugargeekshow.com/recipe/french-almond-macaron-recipe/>

## **Instructions, Cont.**

11. Drop the pan onto the table 5-6 times from about 5" above the table to release bubbles. Use a toothpick to remove big pockets of air trapped under the surface. Use a very small amount of water on your fingertip to smooth any rough spots.
12. Allow them to dry, uncovered until a crust forms on the surface. About 15-60 minutes or until a dry film develops over the surface of the cookie. For humid areas put a space heater nearby to help dry the cookies faster.
13. Bake at 300°F for about 10-15 minutes or until lightly browned. Smaller cookies will bake in 10 minutes, larger cookies will need to bake longer. If not quite baked, bake for an additional 1 minute. Cooled cookies should pull away from the parchment paper without sticking. If they do stick, they were not baked enough.
14. Let cool fully before removing from the parchment and filling with buttercream. Cookies can be stored in the refrigerator for up to 5 days. Shells can be frozen for 6 months in an airtight container.

## **For the Buttercream**

Place egg white, powdered sugar and salt in the bowl of a stand mixer and whip on high for 5 minutes. Then add in softened butter and vanilla and whip until light and creamy.

### **\*Note**

*You can replace the vanilla with any other type of flavoring that you desire*



# Drink

credit: <https://www.liquor.com/recipes/sidecar/>

## *Coco's favorite cocktail*

Cocktails became all the rage right before, during, and then after WWII. In *The Queen of Paris*, I've written that Coco loved the cocktail "Sidecar". Different stories exist as to when and where the Sidecar was invented, but most agree it was invented at the Hotel Ritz. According to different sources both French and English bartenders claim to have invented the recipe. Perhaps it was named for a side-car motorcycle? Some think it's a descendent of an old New Orleans drink made of Brandy Crusta. Who knows? Maybe Hemingway drank it when he 'liberated' the Hotel Ritz and the bar when the Allies liberated Paris in WWII.

### **Ingredients**

- 1.5 oz Brandy, or Cognac (the more expensive, the better, according to experts)
- .75 oz. Cointreau.75 oz. fresh lemon juice
- Garnish: Orange twist
- Garnish: Sugar rim

### **Instructions**

1. Coat the rim of a coupe glass with sugar and set aside.
2. Add all ingredients into a shaker with ice and shake.
3. Strain into the prepared glass.
4. Garnish with an orange twist.



# Behind Chanel



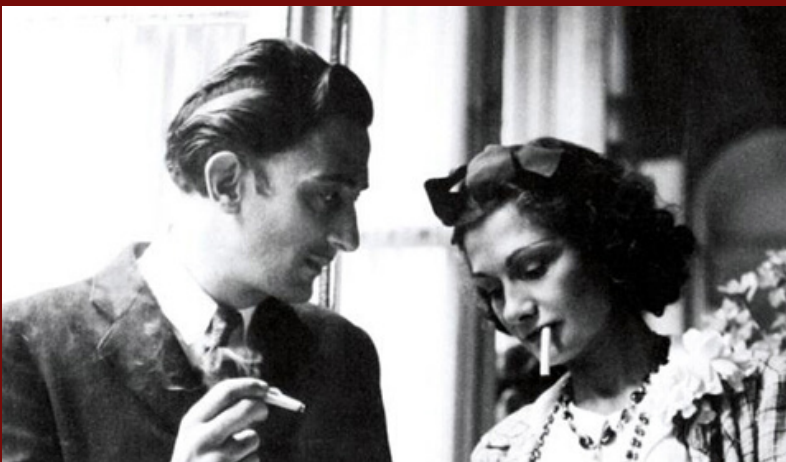
Coco outside her first shop at 21 Rue Cambon in Paris. She opened the store in 1910.

<https://pursuitist.com/chanel-to-expand-historic-paris-store/>



Coco and Etienne Balsan.

<https://www.whosdatedwho.com/dating/coco-chanel-and-etienne-balsan>



Coco and Boy Capel.

<https://fashionistastales.blogspot.com/2016/02/a-story-of-designer-coco-chanel.html>

# Behind Chanel



Coco in her suite at the Ritz hotel in Paris, 1937.

(This photo was published in Harper's Bazaar in 1937.)Credit...Photo François Kollar © Ministère de la Culture - Médiathèque du Patrimoine, Dist. RMN

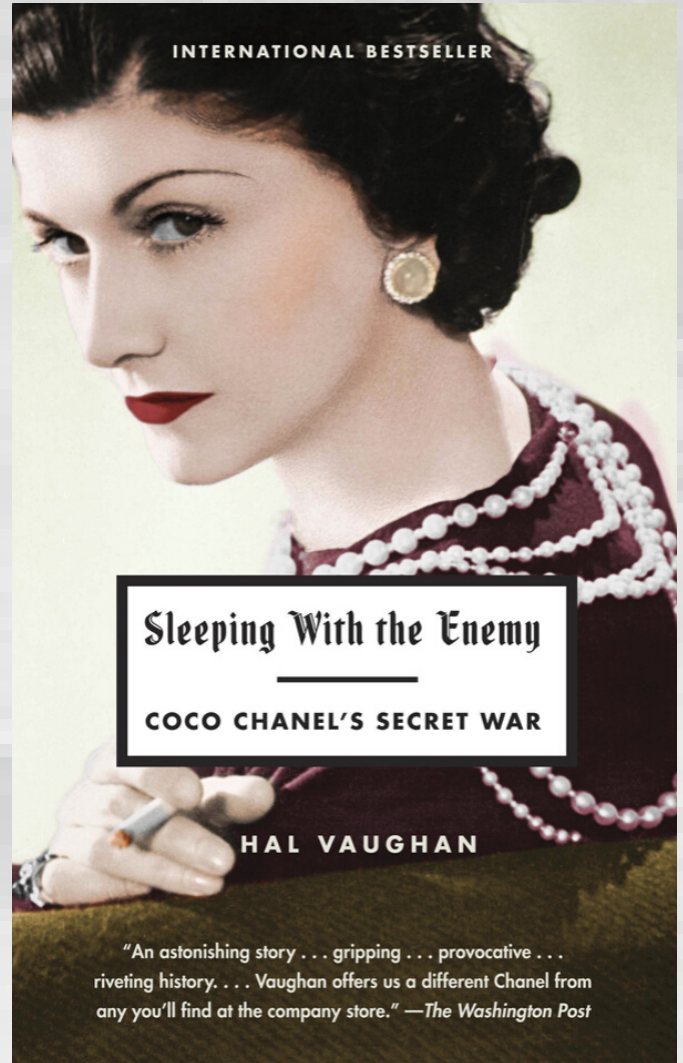


Coco in her suite at the Ritz hotel in Paris. (You might recognize this view from the cover of *The Queen of Paris*).

<https://miista.com/coco-channels-past-ethics-vs-style/>

## For Further Reading

It was Hal Vaughn's non-fiction book on Chanel, *Sleeping With The Enemy* (Random House, 2012), that caused me to want to write *The Queen of Paris*. Chanel is an icon world-wide, but this book gave me a completely different picture of the woman, different in the extreme from anything I'd ever read. Vaughn's book offers photographs of formerly secret war files. As a newsman, foreign correspondent, and documentary film producer throughout his life, he's done ground-breaking research for his subject. He set out the facts. But I went to work on the research and found I wanted to write more about the woman inside. This is why I wrote Coco's story as historical fiction. I wanted to tell her story as it was during the Nazi occupation—not as it should have been. I wanted to lay it out for the reader to judge. Sometimes fiction can reveal even greater truth than facts.



*Sleeping With the Enemy*  
by Hal Vaughan

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