

# After a fashion

These books explore the wide world of style from individual wardrobes to glamorous streets of Paris



ILLUSTRATION • RYAN DEAN CORT

Are you Christmas shopping for stylish friends? You could get them a gift certificate to their favourite store, but there's not a lot of wow factor there. So try this.

Package the gift certificate inside a book about fashion or style. There are a few classics I consider required reading. And there are always new releases at this time of year. Here are some books that might pique your interest.

**WOMEN IN CLOTHES**

"Women in Clothes" is a literary anthology that draws on hundreds of women who share their feelings about clothes. I was intrigued with the concept of a book created by three authors and "639 others."

Sheila Heti, Heidi Julavits and Leanne Shapton put more than 50 questions into a survey. Their Skype conversation to



Lynn Haddrall

launch the book reveals how they chose the questions, meant to probe why we dress the way we do. Participants answered those questions in very personal ways. Some used photographs and illustrations; others wrote testimonials or conducted interviews with friends.

In the Skype conversation, Julavits says: "I don't check out men on the street. I check out women. I am always checking out women because I love stories, and women in clothes tell stories. For years I watched other women to learn how I might someday be a woman with a story."

The 515-page book tells fascinating

stories. A recurring Collection feature exhibits themed photos. Subjects range from cashmere sweaters, jean jackets and friendship bracelets to handmade guitar straps, lipstick blots and unworn necklaces. Some of the odder Collection items include gum chewed over the course of one week, bobby pins and spare buttons.

"Women in Clothes" is a popular Christmas choice because "it's fun, smart and definitive," said David Worsley, co-owner of Words Worth Books in Waterloo.

"I think people really responded to the easy format and the gravitas behind it," he said. Editors and writers have "asked hundreds of women a series of questions around their own style and wardrobe, and addressed their choices, aspects, and opinions, in micro and macro terms. The result is a grab bag of formats, and riffs on



fashion (and) style." The survey questions, described by the authors as "ever-evolving," are printed right after the introduction. I spent a lot of time just pondering that list, which includes queries like:

- Do you think you have taste or style?
- What is your cultural background and how has that influenced how you dress?
- What are you trying to achieve when you dress?
- How does how you dress play into ambitions for yourself?
- If you had to live in one country or culture or era, fashion-wise, what would it be?
- Was there a time in your life when your style changed dramatically?

Such a wide-ranging list of questions naturally gives way to a plethora of answers in many different formats. One of my favourite responses is a feature called Mothers as Others where women share a photograph of their mothers before they had children. I was reminded of some treasured photographs of my mother before she had three children.

I wouldn't recommend reading "Women in Clothes" in one sitting. Take your time. Savour it and there will be inspiration long past the holiday season.

**COCO CHANEL – THE ILLUSTRATED WORLD OF A FASHION ICON**

If you've got a younger reader in mind, with a flair for fashion or graphic design, check out "Coco Chanel – The Illustrated World of a Fashion Icon."

This book isn't heavy with text. It's an illustrated story chronicling Chanel's life

through the detailed drawings of Megan Hess, who started her career in graphic design. Hess's work has included illustrations for the popular "Sex and the City" book and portraits for publications such as Time and Vanity Fair.

Hess says she has been "endlessly fascinated and inspired by the little French orphan girl who single-handedly reshaped women's wardrobes, and created the fashion staples we still wear today."

Her extensive knowledge shines through in historical notes and in her decision to illustrate primarily in black and white with pops of red, blush and gold. These are all signature Chanel hues.

The 207-page book plants carefully selected bon mots from Chanel, such as:

- "In order to be irreplaceable one must always be different."
- "Fashion fades; only style remains the same."
- "The best colour in the whole world is the one that looks good on you."
- "Fashion is architecture. It is a matter of proportions."

I can see this book under the tree for someone who appreciates fashion classics and has an interest in design and fashion illustrations.

Chanel may be the designer whose name most often comes to mind when we think of high French style, but French women are known for their street style as much as for fashion runways.

My last two recommendations are about the special je ne sais quoi that French women exude, strolling the cobblestoned streets of Paris.





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**HOW TO BE PARISIAN WHEREVER YOU ARE – LOVE, STYLE, AND BAD HABITS**

“How to be Parisian” features four French women reflecting on style and fashion. Anne Berest, Audrey Diwan, Caroline de Maigret and Sophie Mas are friends who share their unfiltered views on life in the City of Light.

“Our aim here is to give you an insight into the quintessentially Parisian art of being a woman,” they write. “We’re methodical and yet shambolic, proud and yet self-deprecating, loyal and yet unfaithful.”

There’s a section for everyone in this 253-page book. They offer advice on how to hold a dinner party, with recipes such as Lemon Chicken and Pot-Au-Feu. There’s style advice about cultivating your signature item. Whatever it is, trench coat or purse, it must look amazing on you, and never be gaudy or loud. And they have lots of tips for ways to spend time “the Parisian way.”

Some sections are risqué — the ABC’s of Cheating — while others are reflective, such as the advice in Take Your Time.

One section has pictures and details about celebrated Parisiennes who are not actually from Paris. You may also get a kick out of the French Words Used in English (adieu, à la mode, cuisine) and vice versa (boss, cool, nerd).

**PARISIAN CHIC, A STYLE GUIDE BY INES DE LA FRESSANGE WITH SOPHIE GACHET**

“Parisian Chic” adds insight to any style library.

De la Fressange is a former Chanel model and style muse to Karl Lagerfeld and other designers. She’s among several French women, including Brigitte Bardot and Catherine Deneuve, who have allowed their likenesses to be used in the bust of Marianne, the national symbol of the French Republic and Goddess of Liberty.

Full of street cred, de la Fressange teamed up with fashion journalist Sophie Gachet to create a personal style guide exploring the

chic of Parisian women.

The 239-page book has a fun feel. Photographs and playful illustrations abound. Five blank pages at the end of the book provide space to jot down your thoughts or must-see destinations on a trip to Paris.

De la Fressange reveals that she wasn’t born in Paris. The 59-year-old style icon started life in Saint-Tropez, but she says anyone can learn the secrets of Parisian style, which is “an attitude, a state of mind.”

The Parisian Fashion chapter shares her favourite shopping spots and includes the website for each. Shops range from well-known classics (Petit Bateau) to specialized stores such as Nessim Attal, where you can order open-toed sandals in the style, colour and leather of your choice.

Style advice in “Parisian Chic” extends into the home. If you have been to Paris, you know that living accommodations can be small. De la Fressange offers tips on decorating, using her apartment as an example.

“My apartment covers 750 square feet (large for the centre of Paris), but I’m not the only person who lives there. Storage is essential and every possible corner of space is used (under the sloping attic ceilings, under the bed, under the stairs.) Find clever double uses for your objects – I store my dogs’ food in a chest that doubles as a bench.”

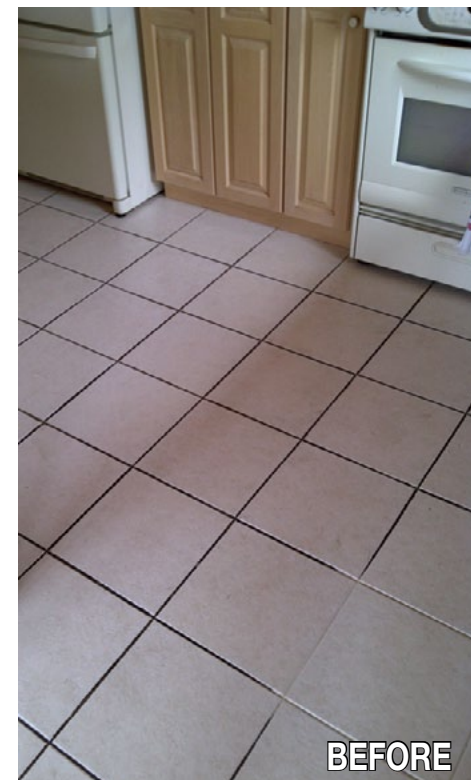
De la Fressange ends by recommending where to sleep when visiting Paris. Categories include Rustic Charm, Pure Left Bank, Relaxed Chic With Children and Back to the Belle Epoque.

Here’s a nugget from “Parisian Chic”: feel good in what you wear. This simple advice fits nicely with the rest of the guidance offered here. “The Parisian knows her shape, what suits her and what matches her lifestyle,” de la Fressange writes.

That’s a good place to start for any stylish person, even if they don’t live in Paris.

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