



MISIA: THE MUSE OF PARIS

We discover the story of the enigmatic Misia Sert – Coco Chanel's closest friend and the Parisian bohemian who's still inspiring the creative world of interior décor more than 60 years after her death.

WORDS NICOLE SAUNDERS

*Thadée Natanson and Misia, c1906 by Pierre Bonnard. Natanson co-founded *La Revue Blanche* (The White Review) – a literary magazine, which featured the work of Marcel Proust, Mallarmé and Apollinaire – of which Sert was a great patron.*

DESIGN MUSE



1. Misia Paris Overseas fabric in Champagne.
2. Chanel Les Exclusifs de Chanel Misia (A\$350, from Chanel boutiques in Australia).
3. Misia Paris Palmette Art velvet in Mordore.
4. A portrait of Sert in the 1890s.
5. Misia Paris Les Clefs de L'Archipel fabric in Calusa.
6. Sert's portrait by Vuillard in the 1890s.
7. A 1887 portrait of Sert by Toulouse-Lautrec.
8. Chanel and Sert (with the dog) in the 1920s.
9. Misia Paris Bal Bullier fabric.
10. Misia Paris Palmette Art curtains.
11. Misia at her Desk, 1897, by Felix Vallotton.

A fleeting encounter at a Parisian soirée spawned a relationship that would span much of Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel's life. Chanel went on to become the centre of Paris' burgeoning fashion world, but when she bumped into Misia Sert in 1917, it was the exuberant bohemian 11 years her senior who reigned as queen of Paris. Sert – known simply as Misia to the Parisian inner circle – was hypnotised by the young milliner. She later recalled that Chanel "seemed to me gifted with infinite grace" and insisted on finding her the next day, marking the start of an intense friendship.

"Misia has been my only woman friend," Chanel would later tell French author and companion, Paul Morand. However, those in Sert's circle were all too aware that while both women inspired one another immensely, the intense bond the pair shared wasn't always friendly. According to Chanel biographer Justine Picardie, the relationship was tempestuous, often "spilling over into jealousy, and even hatred".

Both women inspired various artists and musicians within their talented coteries, and Sert never shied away from the limelight. Throughout the 1920s, Misia, an accomplished pianist, was frequently swept up in the tumultuous, often melodramatic spheres of art, music and literature – she was a generous patron and on several occasions came to the financial rescue of artistic endeavours on the verge of ruin. We may hear Coco Chanel's name more frequently these days but – having been painted by the period's artistic giants including Pierre-August Renoir,

Édouard Vuillard, Henri de Toulouse-Lautrec and Pierre Bonnard, as well as being captured in the prose of Marcel Proust – Sert's place as one of France's most important muses is firmly set.

THE LEGACY

Sert's influence on the arts and wider creative sphere has spanned decades, and once again her embodiment of 1920s Paris is providing inspiration – this time for Florence Vermelle, artistic director of Misia Paris fabrics and wallcoverings.

"In creating Misia, I wanted a brand without compromise through which we could rediscover the glamour, audacity and freedom of the 1920s," Vermelle explains. To capture the *joie de vivre* and unbridled creativity of the period Sert personified, Vermelle and her team have created a decadent colour palette and employed luxurious textures that reflect a time of indulgence. Lustrous golds and champagne hues punctuate fiery copper and amber tones that echo the passion of the time. "The name Misia was an obvious choice," Vermelle adds. "It's feminine and sensual, and evokes the gaiety and joy unique to Paris at the time."

Misia Paris is available at Textilia: textilia.co.nz; 09 302 3182.