

CLASSIC DRIVER

Celebrating vintage motor culture with A Piece of Chic

Lead

Inspired by 1930s and 1940s motorcycle culture and driving gear, Sébastien Chirpaz has revived the spirits of motor racing with his fashion label A Piece of Chic. Now the nostalgic aviator jackets, heavy wool sweaters and artful scarves are available in the Classic Driver Shop.



Sébastien Chirpaz's silhouette may be familiar to you if you've strolled through the alleys of the Le Mans Classic, or if you're one of the aesthetes who attend his annual vintage ski festival, the Alpine Classic in the resort of Chamrousse near Grenoble, which combines Telemark, vintage vehicles and swing.

This talkative and passionate character is both a free spirit – curious about everything, and with many lives and facets – and a purist; someone who doesn't want to compromise on his values. As he says: "my clothes are honest, they don't cheat".



As he explained to us, there was nothing predestined about the creation of [A Piece of Chic](#): "The adventure began in 2012 after several lifetimes. After my studies to become an agronomist, I was drawn to the world of high-level snowboarding. I moved to London for work and spent most of my weekends in Camden Market sourcing vintage products. I then worked for six years in video-game marketing before focusing on fashion. At the age of 40, I wanted to create beautiful scarves, but without any particular entrepreneurial ambition".



So what were his main influences? "I've always been fascinated by the beginning of the 20th century," he says. "A time when explorers, pioneers, motorcyclists and drivers, men and women alike, challenged themselves with a mixture of adventure, danger and elegance. The scarf was their essential accessory. I wanted to make people want to wear scarves again, and through this gesture inject the values of extravagance, audacity and singularity into a world that lacks them." He concludes with the motto: "make your everyday life an epic story."



Then, Sébastien adds: "the scarf is also a tribute to the elegant clothing of scooter boys and mods. Last but not least, being based in Lyon, the capital of silk for thousands of years, I wanted to work with this unique material to highlight our know-how and industrial heritage."

The scarves were such a success that Sébastien decided two years later to extend his creative universe to quality knitwear made in Roanne, France. But as he reminds us: "A Piece of Chic is not a clothing brand, it's above all about promoting an art of living, a subtly nostalgic universe, a heritage: that of motor-racing, where sportiness and challenges go hand-in-hand with a certain elegance – an era when people took their time."



Sébastien continues: "I also wanted to rehabilitate the use of noble and resistant materials. I truly believe that 'the devil is in the detail'. This is why we mostly manufacture our products in France by calling on quality craftsmen who perpetuate the know-how and our artisanal heritage. It allows us to produce in small quantities and in a reasonable and responsible way with very little stock and therefore no need to sell at all costs."

For instance, this year has seen the launch of sports jackets that are reminiscent of A1 aviator jackets, but instead of being leather, they're made from Burel wool – a very strong, warm and heavy fabric from Portugal, which was traditionally used to make the snug, waterproof capes worn by shepherds. This new garment is already a bestseller and it illustrates well the form and function of A Piece of Chic clothes, mixing style and robustness for outdoor expeditions on a motorbike or at the wheel of a vintage roadster.





Sébastien has also added an expedition jacket to his clothing line, inspired by the ‘Smoke’-type jackets worn by mountain troops and other skiers in the ‘30s and ‘40s. This jacket is made of windproof cotton fabric from British Millerrain (England). His quest for more meaningful clothes attracts a loyal clientele, particularly in Germany and Switzerland, where the heritage clothing market is strong, both through online sales and resellers.

But this isn’t enough for Sébastien, who loves inspirational, global-minded experiences that combine heritage and patrimony, sporting challenge and elegance. He adds with a smile: “Of course, at the end of the day, what matters is having fun with like-minded people.” After the Alpine Classique, Sébastien launched a challenge called l’Intrépide: an indoor race for pre-1930 motorbikes, organised at the Salon du Deux Roues motorbike show in Lyon.



It’s this desire for more extreme adventures that has led Sébastien to offer new experiences: “We’ve launched the Escapade this year, mixing a stay in the middle of nature in canvas tents with travel trunks and long rides on pre-war motorbikes. After long days on the bikes on dirt roads with river crossings, we enjoy chic evenings by the fireside. It’s a real adventure, from which you come back tired but with stars in your eyes.” Think ‘Out of Africa’ vibes in the mountains of the Auvergne and you’ll get an idea of what it’s about.

As you may have realised, we’ll be hearing a lot more from Sébastien Chirpaz in the future, with more intense, no-compromise events likely – mostly with pre-war motorbikes, but probably some with cars: he confess a love for pre-war cars, and especially cycle cars!

Photos: Rémi Dargegen © 2021

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