



The French *Fashion* Field Guide



MY FRENCH HUSBAND

VERSION 1.0 · OCTOBER 2026



She films. He objects.

An American wife and a French husband, in suburban Massachusetts, with three small boys and one running disagreement about butter.

Hi, I'm Elizabeth. American, born here, raised here, fluent in iced coffee, drive-thrus and dinner at 5:30. I hold the camera, I write the narration, and I keep introducing my husband to American institutions. Partly for you. Mostly for me.

This is Sacha. French, from Paris. He dresses for the supermarket the way other men dress for court, and he calls it casual. He isn't performing, and he isn't judging anyone. He really does like it here. He just occasionally meets a pair of pajama trousers at the petrol station and needs a moment.

We met in New York City, and I eventually brought him home to New England. There are three boys. You will never see their faces. You will, increasingly, hear their opinions.

The whole story: myfrenchhusband.com/my-french-boyfriend.html · Every day on Instagram: [@myfrenchhusband](https://www.instagram.com/myfrenchhusband)

He has never once called it fashion.

I grew up in Connecticut and Massachusetts, the daughter of a magazine man: my father was a publisher at Forbes, in New York. Sacha grew up in Paris, around clothes as a trade. His mother was a model with an agency, and worked for houses like Givenchy and Yves Saint Laurent. His father is in the clothing business, wholesale and retail.

You would expect a house like that to talk about fashion. It talked about fit, and one good thing instead of five. His father taught him the rules at seven, like handwashing. He still doesn't call it style. He calls it getting dressed.

What follows is how French women dress: a short list of good things, worn often, chosen once. The last three rules are for your husband.

This guide is a first edition. Tell us what we missed, and it goes in the next one.

How to use it

Each page has the rule, what is actually going on, and three things to try this week. At the back: a ten-piece week, the twelve pieces, packing for Paris, and the words.

With love, and a good coat,

Elizabeth

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One good thing instead of five.



Fewer things, bought better, worn more.
A sum, not a mood.

What is actually going on

His father, who works in the clothing trade, taught him this as arithmetic, and his wardrobe still runs on it: the price of a thing and its worth are different numbers. To be fair, the French bought a record 43 pieces of clothing each in 2025. It is a habit of good dressers, not a national virtue.

“My father considered this mathematics, not philosophy.”

HIM

Try it

- 1 Before you buy anything this month, name three things you own that it goes with.
- 2 Divide the price by the number of times you'll wear it. Buy the one with the smaller answer.
- 3 Give away one thing you bought only because it was cheap.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/what-my-father-taught-me-about-dressing.html

The coat is the outfit.



For half the year, it is all anyone sees. That is where the money goes.

What is actually going on

In central Paris more than half of all journeys are made on foot, so from October to April the coat is the outfit, and everyone you pass sees it. A wool coat in navy, camel or black for winter, a trench for the rest. The morning he told me I looked Parisian, I asked why. It was mostly the coat, he said. The silk scarf, which this spring hit a record in Google searches, is the one people pair with a trench.

Try it

- 1 If you buy one thing this year, make it the coat.
- 2 Have the one you own taken in or shortened. A tailor costs less than a new coat.
- 3 Add one silk scarf. Tie it differently and the coat is new again.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Five colours, and everything goes.



Navy, black, grey, cream, denim. Getting dressed stops being a decision.

What is actually going on

The quiet trick of a French wardrobe is that almost nothing in it goes with only one other thing. When nearly everything is navy, black, grey, cream or denim, you can get dressed in the dark. Colour comes in small doses: a scarf, a lipstick, a bag. It isn't timid. It is efficient, and it is why ten pieces can make a month of outfits.

Try it

- 1 Pull out everything you own in the five colours. That is your wardrobe. The rest is accents.
- 2 Buy the next basic in navy instead of black.
- 3 Choose one accent colour for the year, and keep it to accessories.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Repeat on purpose.



Wearing the same outfit twice in a week is unremarkable in Paris. The effort happens once, when you buy.

What is actually going on

What is sold abroad as effortless is really a small wardrobe of things that work, worn over and over, in a flat with no room for alternatives. The effort has been moved, not removed: it happens in the shop, not at seven in the morning. Repeating an outfit is the part that doesn't translate. It is also the part that makes everything else possible.

Try it

- 1 Wear your favourite outfit twice this week. Nobody will mention it.
- 2 Find your formula, the outfit you could wear every day, and write it down.
- 3 Notice how much faster the mornings go.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Buy twice a year.



France has two official sales, one in winter and one in summer, on dates the government sets.

What is actually going on

Les soldes are regulated. There are two periods a year, the state decides when they start, and only then may a shop sell below what it paid. The summer sales of 2026 began on 24 June. So the French habit is to know what you want months ahead, and wait for it. The good coat from rule two is a January purchase.

Try it

- 1 Keep a list on your phone: what you need, the size, the colour.
- 2 In the sales, buy from the list, not from the rail.
- 3 If it isn't on the list in January, it can wait until June.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

A blazer, over jeans.



Worn with jeans far more often than with a suit. The fastest way to make anything look intended.

What is actually going on

A blazer over a T-shirt and jeans is the nearest thing France has to a uniform, and navy is the safe answer and the right one. It does the work American closets give to a cardigan, a jacket and a hoodie. Put it on over whatever you are wearing and the outfit stops saying “errands” and starts saying “decided.”

Try it

- 1 Put a blazer on over what you’re wearing right now. Look again.
- 2 Push the sleeves up once. That is how it is worn on a weekday.
- 3 If it doesn’t fit at the shoulders, don’t buy it. Almost everything else can be altered.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Jeans, straight and hemmed.



Not distressed, not pooling on the shoe.
Dark or mid blue, ending near the ankle.

What is actually going on

Straight-leg jeans in dark or mid blue, with no rips, hemmed to the right length. Length is the detail that gets skipped here and never there. Cropped and ankle-length trousers reached their highest Google search interest in years this spring, which is America catching up with a rule Sacha learned at seven: trousers end where they are told.

Try it

- 1 Hem your best pair to just above the ankle bone.
- 2 Keep anything ripped for the garden.
- 3 Wear them with loafers or ballet flats this week, not trainers.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

The marinière is a uniform.



Navy and white stripes, French Navy issue since 1858. Chanel brought it ashore.

What is actually going on

The striped top became regulation dress for French sailors on 27 March 1858: 21 white stripes, each twice as wide as the navy ones. Coco Chanel saw it on the coast and put it in her shop in Deauville during the First World War, and it never left. It works for the same reason the rest of this guide works. It goes with everything in rule three.

Try it

- 1 Wear it with the blazer and the jeans. That is the whole outfit.
- 2 Choose navy stripes on cream rather than thin black on white.
- 3 Tuck in the front, only the front.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Flat shoes you can walk in.



Paris is walked, often on cobblestones. Ballet flats, loafers, ankle boots, plain white trainers.

What is actually going on

If more than half your journeys are on foot, your shoes have to manage it. Ballet flats and loafers for most days, ankle boots for winter, and plain white trainers that are not running shoes. Heels on wet cobbles are a visitor's mistake. Ballet flats are at a five-year high in Google searches, which makes this the easiest rule in the book.

Try it

- 1 Walk a mile in new shoes at home before you wear them out.
- 2 Keep running shoes for running.
- 3 Have your good shoes resoled instead of replaced.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

One good bag, and a scarf.



Everything else can be plain. These two carry the outfit.

What is actually going on

A French wardrobe saves its personality for two things: one good bag, used every day until it softens, and a scarf. The scarf does more work than any other single item. It is warmth, colour, a hair tie and a way to make last week's outfit look new. You don't need many. You need one you love.

Try it

- 1 Use your best bag every day. That is what it is for.
- 2 Learn one knot this week: loose around the neck, tails in front.
- 3 When it's too warm to wear the scarf, tie it to the bag handle.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

On ne sait jamais qui on peut croiser.



You never know who you might run into.
What French children hear at the front
door.

What is actually going on

It isn't a proverb, and you won't find it in a book of sayings. It is household instruction, passed on at the door, and in Paris it simply describes what is about to happen. On a four-block walk to the bakery you will pass a neighbour, a mother from the school gate, and someone who knows your mother-in-law. Here, the car took away the audience. You can bring a little of it back.

Try it

- 1 Dress for the walk, not for where you're going.
- 2 Check the outer layer before you leave: coat, shoes, bag. That is what is seen.
- 3 Say the sentence to yourself at the door once. See what you change.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Decide something before you leave.



Not heels, not a full face. Just one choice that is visibly yours.

What is actually going on

I once got dressed properly to go nowhere in particular, and he said I looked Parisian. Pressed for detail, he said it was the coat, and the fact that I had clearly decided something before leaving. That is the whole theory. It isn't about trying harder. It is about nothing looking chosen in a hurry. He said the line below while watching me pack, folding a single sweater for a week away.

“You do not need more. You need correct.”

HIM

Try it

- 1 Choose one thing each morning on purpose: the scarf, the lipstick, the shoes.
- 2 Lay out tomorrow's outfit tonight. It takes two minutes.
- 3 If you can't decide, wear the outfit you repeated last week.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Sportswear is for sport.



The one line that explains most of the difference between a Paris street and an American one.

What is actually going on

Leggings, joggers, hoodies and running shoes are for exercise in France, and that is the end of the discussion. Parisians will tell you that leggings worn as trousers are the quickest way to be taken for a tourist. It isn't snobbery about comfort. Soft jeans and a knit are comfortable. It is that gym clothes say you are on your way to the gym.

Try it

- 1 Go to the gym in gym clothes. Come home and change.
- 2 Find your comfortable outfit that isn't sportswear: soft jeans, a knit, loafers.
- 3 Wear it on the school run tomorrow.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

Pajamas end the day.



A pajama has one job: to mark the evening.

What is actually going on

He once saw a woman buying petrol in a dressing gown and slippers and said nothing for a full minute. His objection isn't about standards. A pajama's whole value is marking the end of the day, and wearing it to a car park at ten in the morning destroys it. He is offended on behalf of the pajama.

"She is not ill. That is the part I cannot manage."

HIM

Try it

- 1 Keep pajamas for the bedroom, and own a pair worth keeping there.
- 2 Hang a coat by the door that goes over anything, for the mornings you are late.
- 3 A silk set worn on purpose is fashion. Flannel after a late alarm is not.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-do-americans-wear-pajamas-in-public.html

Sunscreen, every day, for decades.



The least glamorous French beauty secret, and the only one with real evidence behind it.

What is actually going on

Ask what keeps French skin looking good and you will hear about creams. The honest answer is daily sun protection, applied for thirty years. French pharmacies sell it cheaply, with filters American brands cannot use, and a lighter texture gets used more generously. The rest of the pharmacy shelf is short on purpose: a gentle cleanser, thermal water, a repair balm. Biafine is for burns, not for glow.

Try it

- 1 Two finger-lengths of sunscreen for face and neck, every morning.
- 2 Look for UVA in a circle on the tube. It means the UVA protection matches the SPF.
- 3 In a French pharmacy, say *bonjour*, then describe the problem, not the product.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/is-european-sunscreen-better.html

Spend on the cut, not the blow-dry.



Coiffé-décoiffé: styled, then unstyled.
Nobody wakes up like that.

What is actually going on

French hair moves the effort to the salon. A good cut that falls into place on its own is the investment, so the daily routine can be short: washed less often, dried loosely, never straightened flat. Four months after our third boy I cut mine into a layered bob without telling him. He put his hand over his mouth, then said: chic, elegant, and it suits her. For the days it is up: a French pin, one twist, ten seconds.

Try it

- 1 Book the good haircut, and skip two blow-dries to pay for it.
- 2 Wash your hair one day less this week.
- 3 Learn to put it up with a single French pin.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-women-cut-their-hair-after-having-a-baby.html

Skin first, then a lip or an eye.



Even skin, mascara, and either a strong lip or a defined eye. Rarely both.

What is actually going on

The French order is the American one reversed: skin first, which is why the pharmacy matters so much, and colour second. Foundation you can see is considered a mistake. The standard face is even skin, mascara and one feature. The compliment a French woman wants is that she looks well, not that she looks done. Whatever else she has had done, she won't tell you. That is a choice, not a secret.

Try it

- 1 Swap foundation for a tinted moisturiser for one week.
- 2 Pick the day's feature in the morning: the lip or the eye.
- 3 Find your French makeup look: three questions on the site.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/french-makeup-look.html

The belt agrees with the shoes.



Brown with brown, black with black. If they disagree, it is usually the belt.

What is actually going on

This was the first rule his father taught him, at seven, in front of a mirror, adjusting his collar. It is the easiest rule there is, two items and one agreement, so it is the one to teach a husband first. It costs almost nothing: a brown belt and a black one, in roughly the finish of his shoes. Then you never have to mention it again.

“Clothes speak to each other. My job is to make sure they agree.”

HIM

Try it

- 1 Check his belt and shoes on the way out. Say nothing. Just look.
- 2 Buy him one brown belt and one black, to match his shoes.
- 3 Make it his rule, not yours. Tell him a Frenchman said so.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/what-my-father-taught-me-about-dressing.html

Trousers end where they are told.



Higher than America thinks. The hem just touches the shoe.

What is actually going on

Ask a tailor for little or no break, so the trouser meets the shoe and stops. From April to October Sacha also shows his ankles, loafers and no socks, on a schedule he keeps without consulting the weather or his wife. That one comes from Cap Ferret, near Bordeaux, where he spent his summers.

“Trousers end where they are told, which is higher than this country believes.”

HIM

Try it

- 1 Take his two most-worn trousers to a tailor. Ask for a clean hem, almost no break.
- 2 Shorten one pair first, so he can see the difference.
- 3 In summer, loafers and no socks. Invisible socks if he insists.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-do-french-men-dress-so-well.html

One blazer, one sweater.



One good jacket does the work of nine.
The sweater is insurance, and it is never worn.

What is actually going on

One good navy blazer does what American closets give to nine jackets, and it is never wrong. The sweater over the shoulders, *le pull sur les épaules*, is there in case the Atlantic changes its mind. His has crossed an ocean and never once been worn through its own sleeves.

“I mow an American lawn in loafers.”

HIM

Try it

- 1 Buy him one navy blazer before anything else.
- 2 Drape a crew-neck over his shoulders, sleeves loosely knotted. Never call it a look.
- 3 Give away two jackets he never wears.

The long version: myfrenchhusband.com/why-do-french-men-dress-so-well.html

The ten-piece week.

Seven days, ten pieces, no shopping. The fastest way to find out what you actually need.

<i>Monday</i>	Take everything out. Keep the ten pieces that fit you best, in your five colours. <i>Rule 3</i>
<i>Tuesday</i>	The blazer, the marinière, straight jeans, flat shoes. <i>Rules 6 to 9</i>
<i>Wednesday</i>	Wear Tuesday again. Nobody will notice. <i>Rule 4</i>
<i>Thursday</i>	Change the top. Add the scarf. <i>Rule 10</i>
<i>Friday</i>	Hair up with one pin. A lip or an eye. <i>Rules 16, 17</i>
<i>Saturday</i>	Errands on foot if you can, dressed for the walk. No leggings. <i>Rules 11, 13</i>
<i>Sunday</i>	Write down what you missed. That is your list for the sales. <i>Rule 5</i>

If the mornings went faster, that was the point.

Twelve pieces. And his six.

What comes up again and again in a French wardrobe.
Most of it you already own in some form.

HERS

- ☐ A wool coat: navy, camel or black
- ☐ A trench
- ☐ A navy blazer
- ☐ Straight jeans, dark or mid blue
- ☐ A crew-neck knit in navy or grey
- ☐ A marinière
- ☐ A cardigan
- ☐ A white shirt
- ☐ Three good T-shirts
- ☐ Loafers or ballet flats
- ☐ Ankle boots, and plain white trainers
- ☐ One good bag, and a silk scarf

HIS

- ☐ One navy blazer
- ☐ A crew-neck sweater, for the shoulders
- ☐ White and blue shirts
- ☐ Trousers hemmed with almost no break
- ☐ Loafers
- ☐ A brown belt and a black one, to match the shoes

Tick what you own. Whatever is left is the list for the sales.

Ten pieces for Paris.

Locals say the same few things give visitors away. Leave them at home and you will be asked for directions.

PACK

- ☐ A coat or a trench, depending on the month
- ☐ A blazer
- ☐ Two knits, one of them striped
- ☐ Straight jeans
- ☐ One pair of trousers or a skirt
- ☐ A white shirt and two T-shirts
- ☐ Ballet flats or loafers you have walked in
- ☐ Ankle boots, from October
- ☐ A silk scarf
- ☐ A small folding umbrella

LEAVE AT HOME

- ☒ Leggings as trousers
- ☒ A beret
- ☒ Joggers and hoodies
- ☒ Chunky or neon trainers
- ☒ Heels for the cobblestones

Expect fifteen to twenty thousand steps a day. Autumn and winter are often wet. Layers beat a big coat.

The rules don't have an age.

One of the most searched questions about French style is how to dress like a French woman over sixty. The answer is the same twenty rules. A few just matter more each decade.

At 30

The ten-piece week, and the five colours. Build the habit before the closet fills.

At 40

The coat, and a tailor. Fit does more than any new purchase.

At 50

Fewer, better things, and the cut. Spend on the hair, not the blow-dry.

At 60 and after

The scarf, the good bag, the flat shoes you can walk in. Colour near the face, and skin first.

Every age dresses for the walk to the bakery. That is the whole idea.

Words you'll want in the shop.



A small phrasebook for getting dressed in French.

Wear

La marinière *the striped top*

French Navy issue since 1858.

Le pull sur les épaules *the sweater on the shoulders*

Never worn through the sleeves.

Une tenue *an outfit*

Une tenue correcte, a respectable one.

Hair

Coiffé-décoiffé *styled, then unstyled*

The goal. Not the same as messy.

Une épingle à chignon *a hairpin*

The French pin.

Shop

Les soldes *the sales*

Twice a year, on dates the state sets.

Le prêt-à-porter *ready-to-wear*

Saint Laurent opened Rive Gauche, rue de Tournon, in 1966.

Skin

La crème solaire *sunscreen*

Look for UVA in a circle.

L'eau thermale *thermal spring water*

Pleasant after the sun or a flight. Not a treatment.

Say them badly, with confidence. They will correct you either way.

He has looked in my closet. He has notes.

Five quizzes and tools for getting dressed and getting ready. About a minute each, and a verdict.



Is Your Closet
French or
American?



How Parisian Are
You?



Your French
Makeup Look



Your French Hair
Routine



Your French
Pharmacy
Skincare Routine

TAKE A QUIZ

All of them: myfrenchhusband.com/quiz.html

The rest of the story is on the site.

The long versions, with his commentary.

Why do Parisian women dress up to buy bread?

The pavement theory, and the French wardrobe. myfrenchhusband.com/why-parisian-women-dress-up.html

What my father taught me about dressing

Sacha, in his own words. myfrenchhusband.com/what-my-father-taught-me-about-dressing.html

Why do French men dress so well?

Seven years old, a mirror, a collar. myfrenchhusband.com/why-do-french-men-dress-so-well.html

Is European sunscreen better?

The filters, the label and how much to use. myfrenchhusband.com/is-european-sunscreen-better.html

What to actually buy in a French pharmacy

The short shelf, in French. myfrenchhusband.com/french-pharmacy-what-to-buy.html

Le Bulletin

Our letters: the stories behind the films, and his verdict.

SOURCES, CHECKED OCTOBER 2026

Refashion, 2025 overview (via FashionUnited, June 2026): 43 clothing items per person in France in 2025. · Le Club des juristes, July 2026: France's law against ultra-fast fashion, advertising ban and eco-penalty. · The Local, 2026: France's regulated sales periods; summer 2026 from 24 June. · French Navy regulation of 27 March 1858 and Chanel in Deauville (Wikipedia, Marinière). · Institut Paris Région 2024 (via Euronews): 53.3% of central Paris journeys on foot. · Google, spring 2026 fashion and beauty search trends: ballet flats, silk scarf, cropped trousers, French pin. · World in Paris, 2026: what locals say gives visitors away.

LE BULLETIN

The good stuff doesn't fit in a reel.

*You are on the list for our letters. They
are letters, not broadcasts, and we read
every reply. Tell us which rule your
husband would deny.*

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