

Frist Center for the Visual Arts

EXHIBITION GUIDE

The golden age of COUTURE

Paris and London 1947–1957



June 18–September 12, 2010

Exhibition organized by
the Victoria and Albert
Museum, London





Evening dress by Pierre Balmain. Printed silk, 1957. *L'Officiel*, March 1957. © L'OFFICIEL 1957

This booklet invites you to discover more about the garments and related objects on display in *The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–1957*.

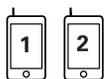
Please use the numbers listed in this guide and beside each object in the gallery to guide you through the exhibition.

The Golden Age of Couture: Paris and London 1947–1957

The launch of Christian Dior’s New Look in 1947 marked the beginning of a momentous decade in fashion history, one that Dior himself called the “golden age.” Celebrating the end of war and the birth of a new era, it set a standard for dressmaking and high fashion that has rarely been surpassed. In Paris, couture houses such as Balenciaga, Balmain, and Fath attracted worldwide attention for elegance and glamour. London was renowned for formal state gowns by court dressmakers and impeccable tailoring by Hardy Amies and other designers. The production of couture was important to the prestige and economy of both France and Britain. While traditionally catering to wealthy private clients, the couture houses also sought new markets. As the decade progressed, they created perfumes, opened boutiques, and licensed their designs to foreign manufacturers. By the late 1950s, the leading couture houses had become global brands.

Contents **Number**

Introduction	1–2
Postwar and the Théâtre de la Mode	3–6
The New Look	7–14
The World of Couture	
Paris Dressmaking	15–26
Balenciaga	27–31
Textiles	32–41
Embroidery	42–50
Underwear	51–63
London Tailoring	64–68
Lady Alexandra	69–76
Ready-to-Wear	77–90
Boutique and Accessories	91–115
Zémire	116–118
Miss Virginia Lachasse	119
Tailoring	120–141
Cocktail and Early Evening	142–157
Photography and Illustration	158–188
Evening and Ballgowns	189–220
The Legacy	221



Our audio guide for this exhibition is presented on iPod touches, which are available for pick up in our grand lobby. Audio guides are always free to all Frist Center members.

1 Christian Dior (1905–1957) “Ecarlate” Formal Afternoon Dress

Autumn/Winter, 1955–56, Ligne Y
Paris
Silk faille by Bianchini Férier
V&A: T.25-2007 (ID 1)



The society photographer Cecil Beaton described Dior as “the Watteau of fashion.” Although Dior created a couture house that defined a new era of commercial success for French couture, his designs evoked an older, more formal, and romantic era. The smooth silhouette of this dress is formed by underpinnings and petticoats. The fringed fabric knot is inspired by nineteenth-century dress.

2 Michael Donéllan, also known as Michael of Carlos Place (1917–1985)

Suit
1954
London
Worsted wool
Given by Dr. Vivienne Cohen
V&A: T.52:1, 2-1997 (ID 2)



Dior and other French couturiers greatly admired British tailoring. This suit by Donéllan combines a masculine perfection of fit with feminine dressmaking touches such as the blouse-like collar of the jacket. In his reserved designs and his concern for sculptural form, Donéllan was said to be “the Balenciaga of London.”

Postwar and the Théâtre de la Mode

In 1939 there were seventy registered couture houses in Paris, including the grand establishments of Chanel, Schiaparelli, and Balenciaga. This flourishing industry was disrupted by the wartime occupation of Paris. Private clients dispersed, international sales almost ceased, and many couturiers closed. The Germans planned to move couture to Berlin but Lucien Lelong, president of the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne, couture’s regulating body, objected, saying, “It is in Paris or it is nowhere.”

Toward the end of the war, in a time of great hardship, the Paris couturiers created the Théâtre de la Mode. This was an exhibition of approximately two hundred dolls dressed in the latest styles and arranged in theater sets designed by artists such as Christian Bérard and Jean Cocteau. The Théâtre toured to Britain, Scandinavia, and the United States between 1945 and 1946, raising funds for war victims and promoting French fashion.

Jeanne Lafaurie (active 1925–1958) Doll

1945–46
Paris
Doll: wire, plaster, and hair
Dress: synthetic jersey
Accessories: suede; hat by Maud et Nano; shoes by Casale; bag by Mabilille; gloves by Dumont
Maryhill Museum of Art (ID 3)

After the war, Paris fashion became increasingly feminine. By skillfully draping the fine jersey and cinching the dress in at the waist, Lafaurie anticipates the New Look.

Marcelle Chaumont (1892–1990) Doll

1945–46
Paris
Doll: wire, plaster, and hair
Coat-dress: linen, with synthetic crêpe panel and crêpe piping
Accessories: hat by Le Monnier: straw and silk; shoes by Bunting: leather; buttons by Desrués
Maryhill Museum of Art (ID 4)

Chaumont was one of the few fashion houses to start up during the war, in December 1940. Mme Chaumont had worked for Madeleine Vionnet, who retired as war was declared, and took over many of her staff. While the coat is expertly tailored, a challenge on this scale, the buttons are too large.

Lucile Manguin (active 1928–1960) Doll

1945–46
Paris
Doll: wire, plaster, and hair
Suit: wool; hat by Manguin: straw and velvet; shoes by Vedrennes: suede; bag by Vedrennes: suede; umbrella by Vedrennes: wool and wood
Maryhill Museum of Art (ID 5)

During the war, Manguin created practical outfits for cycling and traveling by public transport. This miniature ensemble, with its umbrella and shoulder bag, reflects her pragmatic approach. Square shoulders and concise tailoring epitomize the semi-military silhouette of the war years.

Lucile Manguin (active 1928–1960) Doll

1945–46
Paris
Doll: wire, plaster, and hair
Dress: velvet top, organza, and lace appliqué skirt
Maryhill Museum of Art (ID 7)

Scale was a factor in creating the outfits for the Théâtre de la Mode dolls. Here a narrow lace trim is used cleverly to create a bold, geometric pattern across the skirt.

The New Look

Christian Dior launched his couture house on February 12, 1947, and became an overnight sensation. His voluptuous collection was the antithesis of masculine wartime fashions. Instead, the designs featured sloping shoulders, a full bust, and a cinched-in waist above full, long skirts. The collection was christened on the spot by Carmel Snow, editor of American *Harper's Bazaar*, as the "New Look." London couturier John Cavanagh described the style as "a total glorification of the female form." The amount of fabric required to create a New Look garment caused outrage in Britain, for rationing was still in place. The collection was shown in secret to Queen Elizabeth and other members of the royal family at the French Embassy in London. Although initially condemned by the British Board of Trade, the New Look gained widespread popularity, particularly after Princess Margaret, attracted by its femininity and youth, adopted it.

7



Christian Dior (1905–1957) "Bar" Suit and Hat

Spring/Summer, 1947, Ligne Corolle et en Huit
(remade by Dior ca. 1955)

Paris
Suit: jacket, silk shantung by Bianchini F rier; skirt: wool cr pe
Hat: straw
Given by Christian Dior
V&A: T.376&A, B-1960; T.377-1960 (ID 8, 9)

"Bar" is one of the most important designs from Dior's first collection. The tight-fitting jacket has padded hips which emphasize the tiny waist. The long pleated wool skirt, backed with cambric, is exceptionally heavy.



8

Christian Dior (1905–1957) "Maxim's" Restaurant Dress and Hat

Spring/Summer, 1947, Ligne Corolle et en Huit

Paris
Dress: wool with silk velvet bow with boned and corded silk petticoat
Hat: tulle
Choker: velvet ribbon with glass
Given by Mrs. David Bruce
V&A: T.116&A, B-1974 (ID 11–13)

"Maxim's" also featured in Dior's first collection. It was named after the famous belle  poque Parisian caf  frequented by high society. Dior said, "I wanted to employ quite a different technique in fashioning my clothes. I wanted them to be constructed like buildings."



Christian Dior (1905–1957)

Coat and Hat

Autumn/Winter, 1947–48, Ligne Corolle

Paris
Coat: silk
Hat: cellophane with ribbon trim
Hat worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. D. M. Haynes and Mrs. M. Clark
V&A: T.197-1997 (coat) and T.156-1982 (hat) (ID 16, 17)

The complex artistry of Dior's garments demanded a high level of dress-making skills. The sleeve and back panels of this silk coat are cut in one, the exaggerated pockets emphasize the hips, and the shoulder seam is set forward, ensuring a smooth, feminine, sloping shoulder.

9

Christian Dior (1905–1957)

"Go mon" Coat

Autumn/Winter, 1947–48, Ligne Corolle

Paris
Wool and silk
Worn by Margot Fonteyn
The Fashion Museum, Bath and North East Somerset Council (ID 18)

Dior often combined light- and heavyweight fabrics. This fitted coat has insets of pleated silk taffeta at the back to add volume and movement. It belonged to Margot Fonteyn, who was a dedicated client of Dior. One of her Dior evening gowns can be seen later in this exhibition.

10

Christian Dior (1905–1957)

"Green" Afternoon Ensemble

Spring/Summer, 1947, Ligne Corolle et en Huit

Paris
Skirt and blouse: silk twill
Hat: imitation straw with velvet flowers
Skirt and blouse given by Mrs. Joseph Alsop; hat worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. D. M. Haynes and Mrs. M. Clark
V&A: T.115&A-1974 (skirt and blouse) and T.155-1982 (hat) (ID 14, 15)

Not all of Dior's early designs relied on complex underpinnings. This unlined two-piece achieves volume through a draped scarf effect at the back. Dior typically countered his close-fitting bodices with Magyar sleeves. Cut in one with the bodice, they gave ease of movement.

11

Hardy Amies (1909–2003)

Dress

1947
London
Printed cotton
Given by Enid Fennemore
V&A: T.236-1984 (ID 19)

The fabric was made in Manchester for export to the West African market. During the war the Board of Trade actively promoted the cotton industry, working closely with the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers, whose "top ten" included Hardy Amies. The bustle bow is a device to add volume with the minimum of fabric.



12

13 Hardy Amies (1909–2003) Suit

1947
London
Worsted wool
Given by Mrs. Benita Armstrong
V&A: T.38&A-1966 (ID 20)



Although this curvaceous suit has the small waist and wide hips typical of the New Look, the square shoulders recall wartime styles. Amies, like many London tailors, created custom garments in close consultation with his clients. In this case, his client may have resisted a complete “New Look” change in style.

14 Hardy Amies (1909–2003) Coat

1948–49
London
Coat: wool lined with silk, with metal buttons
Hat (designed by Alice Camus): straw
Coat given by Mrs. Benita Armstrong; hat given by Mrs. P. Pepper
V&A: T.35-1966 (coat) and T.34-1985 (hat) (ID 21, 22)

Despite fabric shortages, London designers such as Amies created tailored coats and suits in the spirit of the New Look. The fullness of this winter coat and the warm color reflect the new optimism in fashion.

The World of Couture

This section of the exhibition focuses on the production of couture. Each house was named after its creator and had a characteristic style. Some lasted for generations, others only as long as their founders were alive. A leading house such as Dior employed hundreds of people. On the ground floor there was a boutique and upstairs a luxurious grand salon for showing the seasonal collections. A personal saleswoman (*vendeuse*) attended to each client, while fitters, tailors, and seamstresses toiled away behind the scenes. The London couture trade took Paris as its model. Many British designers trained in Paris, and although London could not compete in terms of output, its fashion and textile industry became increasingly profitable. For France, the couture industry was vital to the economy. In 1949 Dior alone provided 5 percent of France’s national export revenue.



Francis Marshall. Sketchbooks (detail),
1950–51. Pencil on paper. V&A:
Francis Marshall Archive

Paris Dressmaking

The Paris dressmaking schools—Les Ecoles de la Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne—were established in 1929 to train a skilled workforce of *petites-mains* (seamstresses) for France’s vast fashion industry.

In the early 1950s, a leading Paris house would typically employ between 500 and 850 staff in its different departments. The *tailleur* workshops created suits and coats. The *fou* workshops made blouses, skirts, and dresses. The dressmakers worked the delicate fabrics entirely by hand. Christian Dior described them as having “doigts de fées” —fairy fingers.

15 Pierre Balmain (1914–1982) *Dress and Petticoat*

Ca. 1950
Paris

Dress: silk grosgrain with machine-made Swiss embroidery
Petticoat: boned silk net and silk
Given by Mrs. G. Sachet
V&A: T.349&A-1975 (ID 31, 32)



Balmain, like Dior, worked for Lucien Lelong before opening his couture house in 1945. By 1956, he had six hundred employees and twelve couture workrooms. This “jeune fille” summer dress has a boned petticoat, showing the care given even to the undergarments. Ginette Spanier, Balmain’s directress, remarked, “If a seam is not quite right, that is a matter of life and death.”

16 Christian Dior (1905–1957) *“Norvège” Short Evening Dress*

Spring/Summer, 1957, Ligne Libre
Paris

Organza, lined with layers of silk and net
Given by the Baroness Antoinette de Ginsbourg
V&A: T.122&A, B-1974 (ID 33–35)

The lightweight organza of these skirts and bodice floats on a complex under-structure. Built-in corsetry was typical of couture garments, particularly for evening wear. In this instance, even suspenders for stockings are included.

17 Francis Marshall (1901–1980) *Sketchbooks*

1950–51
Paris and London
Pencil on paper

V&A: Francis Marshall Archive (ID 46, 47)

A “croquis,” or preliminary sketch, could be taken in a few moments after the fashion show or between fittings. Marshall, an English il-

lustrator, said, “The first few years at Dior were pandemonium, clothes were snatched off the mannequin’s backs by frantic buyers. No sooner had you started sketching her than she was rushed off somewhere else. There was no room to draw and four artists might be working on the landing of a staircase constantly buffeted by vendeuses or even Dior himself running up and down stairs.”

Ascher Ltd. *Textile Samples*

London
All given by Zika Ascher

The couturiers favored screen-printed rayons and silks for summer day wear and shot organza for cocktail and evening dresses. Some textile manufacturers commissioned fine artists as well as designers to make designs for them.



18–26

Designed by Philippe Julian *Printed Organdie*

1945–48
V&A: T.150&A-1988 (ID 37)

18

Designed by Gerald Wilde *Screen-printed Rayon*

1947
V&A: T.157-1988 (ID 38)

19

Designed by Lida Ascher *Screen-printed Cotton*

1949
V&A: T.159-1988 (ID 39)

20

Designed by Cecil Beaton *Screen-printed Cotton Organdie, “Beaton Rose”*

1950
V&A: T.178&A-1988 (ID 40)

21

Screen-printed Silk

1946
V&A: T.146-1988 (ID 41)

22

Block-printed Silk, “Rose Pompon”

1953
V&A: T.182&B-1988 (ID 42)

23

24 *Screen-printed Silk, “Blue Bird”*

1953

V&A: T.183-1988 (ID 43)

25 *Screen-printed Silk Chiffon, “Babouchka”*

1954

V&A: T.184A&B-1988 (ID 44)

26 *Shot Organza in Different Colorways*

1956

London

V&A: T.194&A to H-1988 (ID 45)

Balenciaga

Cristóbal Balenciaga was regarded by many, including Christian Dior, as the master couturier. He moved to Paris from Spain in 1937, but throughout his career maintained workshops in Spain under the name of EISA.

Balenciaga was the most exclusive fashion house in Paris, and clients were admitted only after a personal introduction. Percy Savage recalled that the grand houses were “rather awe-inspiring. The atmosphere was like going into a high class museum or a church. There was a silence.”

Hubert de Givenchy said, “Balenciaga’s couture was not only a style of dress but a code of conduct. He took the old-fashioned view that a woman should confine herself to a single couturier.” Countess Mona Bismarck dressed exclusively in his designs, down to gardening shorts, and locked herself in her room for three days when he retired.

27 *Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)* *Suit*

Autumn/Winter, 1948

Paris

Wool with velvet collar

The Fashion Museum, Bath and North East Somerset Council (ID 73)

From 1947 onwards Balenciaga offered two styles: the first fitted and in line with the hour-glass shape of Dior’s New Look, the second semi-fitted or loose. This suit can be seen later in this exhibition in the photograph *Elise Daniels with Street Performers* by Richard Avedon.

Harper’s Bazaar

November 1948

V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 77)

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)

Hat

Ca. 1950

Paris

Organza

Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark

V&A: T.169-1982 (ID 75)

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)

Hat Box

Ca. 1950

Paris

V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 76)

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972) for EISA

Dress

Autumn/Winter, 1957

Spain

Given by Mrs. S. Hammond

V&A: T.234-1982 (ID 74)



This dress is a feat of minimal cutting, with few seams but great complexity. The skirt is cut from the same piece of fabric as the sack back and the sleeves. Cecil Beaton wrote, “Balenciaga uses fabrics like a sculptor working in marble.”

Textiles

Couture garments required high quality, innovative textiles and trimmings. French couturiers were extremely skilled in the use of soft, draping fabrics (*fou*). British couturiers were expert in tailoring firmer textiles.

Each season, manufacturers from all over the world would arrive at the couture houses with fabric samples or lengths. They developed a close working relationship with their clients and sometimes collaborated with them in developing new fabric types and eye-catching designs.

By the early 1950s, rationing and shortages had eased off. Both natural and synthetic fibers featured in couturiers’ collections and the twice-yearly features in major fashion magazines.

32



John Cavanagh
(1914–2004)

Evening Dress with Sketch and Chart

Spring/Summer, 1953,
Coronation collection

London
Evening Dress
Silk brocade designed by Oliver Messel for West Cumberland Mills (Sekers)
Given by Lady Cornwallis, and worn by her to the Coronation celebrations
V&A: T.294-1984 (ID 48)



33

Paper Charts with Textile Samples

Given by John Cavanagh

V&A: Cavanagh Archive (ID 49)

34

Sketch

Given by John Cavanagh

V&A: Cavanagh Archive (ID 50)

Couturiers worked from sketches and textile samples to create new designs. This Cavanagh sketch shows his initial concept for an evening dress. As the working chart shows, it became no. 47 in his 1953 spring collection. The silk was made in England by the innovative textile firm West Cumberland Mills. Its Hungarian-born owner, Miki Sekers, commissioned the design from the stage designer Oliver Messel.

35

Letter to Buckingham Palace

1953

Lent by the Sekers family (ID 51)

36–38

Bilbille & Cie.

Silk Samples for Hind Robinson

Paris
Bradford College Textile Archive

Textile agencies in Paris provided an information service by subscription. Each season they produced an overview of the forthcoming colors, textures, and fiber mixes, often using textiles that featured in the couture collections. Hind Robinson of Bradford had a subscription with Bilbille & Cie. and received booklets of samples every two months. This helped them to organize the manufacturing of their own textiles for wider markets.

36

Booklet, from the Collections of Jean Dessès and Raphael

November 1950

(ID 54)

37

Booklet

November 1950

(ID 55)

Folder

Winter 1953–54
(ID 56)

Textile Samples Ascher Ltd.,

1950s

London

All given by Zika Ascher

The manufacturers of luxury textiles made ranges appropriate for different seasons and occasions. They experimented with cotton, rayon, silk, nylon, wool, and mohair. These novel lightweight mixes were used for winter coats and dresses.



Sample Book, “Mancha”

1959

V&A: T.203-1988 (ID 57)



Sample Card

1950s

V&A: T.75-1985 (ID 59)

39

40

Textile Samples

1957–58

Mohair/wool/nylon mix

V&A: T.195 to 201-1988 (ID 58, 60–63)



41

Embroidery

Paris was the home of a luxury trade in fashion goods. Entire streets were devoted to glove makers, shoemakers, and furriers, while feathers, ribbons, buttons, and floral accessories were worked by hand in small workshops, much as they had been since the eighteenth century.

Each season, embroidery specialists created a spectacular range of samples. Once selected, a design remained for the exclusive use of the couturier. Hubert de Givenchy said these samples served as “the springboard to creation.”

Gowns that were to be embroidered were usually simply cut to show off their sumptuous surface detail. Their embellishment required meticulous patience, for as Christian Dior explained, “a ball dress may be entirely covered with millions of paillettes, or pearls, each one of which has to be put on separately.”



Antonio del Castillo (1908–1984)

for Lanvin Castillo

Evening Dress

1957

Paris

Silk zibeline by Staron; embroidered by Lesage with chenille-work, sequins, beads, and stones

Given by the Countess of Drogheda

V&A: T.284-1974 (ID 65)

Lesage's embroidery was inspired by that found on eighteenth-century waistcoats. Concentrated on the bodice, it creates a lower, "trompe l'oeil" neckline while leaving the skirt quite plain.

42

Christian Dior (1905–1957)

"Bosphore" Short Evening Dress

Autumn/Winter, 1956, Ligne Aimant

Paris

Silk velvet, embroidered by Rébé with pearls, gold thread, and cabochons

Worn by Mrs. Eugenia Niarchos and given by

Mr. Stavros Niarchos III

V&A: T.119-1974 (ID 66)



43

Pierre Balmain (1914–1982)

Evening Dress

Ca. 1950

Paris

Silk organza with ostrich feathers, sequins, and rhinestones, lined with silk, silk tulle, and a stiff nylon petticoat

Worn by the Hon. Mrs. Pleydell-Bouverie and given by Miss Karlake

V&A: T.176-1969 (ID 64)



44

This evening dress was made for a court ball. The pieces were embroidered and finished with feather-work by different workshops, then reassembled. The process of transforming a plain garment to the star of a collection could take as long as a month.

François Lesage (born 1929)

Embroidery Samples

1948–56

Paris

Lesage Archives, Paris

Lesage inherited his family embroidery business in 1949. Since then he has continued to create about three hundred samples each season, using the same traditional techniques. A precise line drawing is made on a piece of tracing paper, then "pricked." The paper is then attached to the fabric and a fine powder dusted through the holes to mark the outline of the design.

45–50

Antonio del Castillo. Evening Dress, 1957. Silk zibeline by Staron; embroidered by Lesage with chenille-work, sequins, beads, and stones. V&A: T.284-1974

45 Simone Mirman (1912–2008)

Hat

1950s
London
Silk twill with lace and beads
Given by Lady Rosemary Pickering
V&A: T.264-1984 (ID 71)



46 Rébé Hat

Ca. 1950
Paris
Velvet with sequins and beads
Given by Miss Catherine Hunt
V&A: T.111-1970 (ID 72)



47 Embroidery Samples 1950s

For John Cavanagh (1914–2003)
Paris and London
Various silks, chiffons, net, and machine-embroidered lace, embroidered with sequins, silk thread, beads, and brilliants; fabric made by Staron and Bianchini Fériér
Given by John Cavanagh
V&A: Cavanagh Archive (ID 70)

48 Gold Foliate Pattern Autumn/Winter, 1955–56

Gold metal thread with braid work, artificial pearls, and sequins; with mink fur on silk satin ground (ID 69)

49 Sprig of Gold Flowers Autumn/Winter, 1948–49

Gold metal thread, sequins, and paillettes on fine linen ground (ID 68)

50 Sprigs of Purple Flowers Autumn/Winter, 1955–56

For Pierre Balmain
Silk threads, ribbon, and appliqué work, with sequins and paillettes on silk satin ground (ID 67)

John Cavanagh trained in both Paris and London and, like many London designers, used luxury fabrics from France.

Underwear

A couture outfit usually included meticulously constructed undergarments. They were either integrated into the structure of the garment or made separately.

After the war, couturiers often used firm underpinnings, such as boned corsets, and tulle and horsehair petticoats. They placed extra padding on the hips and bust to ensure a womanly “New Look” figure.

As the 1950s progressed, foundation and support garments became increasingly sophisticated. Lightweight materials such as nylon and new stretch fabrics ensured greater comfort while maintaining a fashionable silhouette.

Corsetière Edith

Corset

1950s
London
Nylon, rayon, and cut-velvet lace, with elasticized panels, boning, and integral stocking suspenders; center back zipper closure
Given by Caroline Wren
V&A: T.137-2000 (ID 89)



51

Berlei

Corset

1957
London
Nylon and lace, with elasticized panels, boning, and underwire; center back hook and eye closure
Given by Mrs. V. A. Ward
V&A: T.16:2-1991 (ID 97)

This ready-to-wear corset was worn underneath a wedding gown made from a Jacques Fath “original model” dressmaking pattern.

52

Waspie

1947
London
Elastic, with boning lined with velvet; hook and eye closure
V&A: T.213-1996 (ID 88)

The waspie emerged in Paris during the war. It helped to achieve the narrow waist essential to the New Look. In London, while rationing was still in place, corsets were forbidden except on doctor’s orders.



53

54 J. Roussel *Corset*

1948
Paris
Elasticized cotton, hook and eye closure
Given by P. Wilson
V&A: T.110-2001 (ID 90)

J. Roussel had branches on the Boulevard Haussmann in Paris and also on Regent Street in London. It specialized in exclusive corsetry made from a very fine elastic knit fabric called “gaine.”

55 Rigby & Peller *Corset Brassiere*

1950s
London
Nylon and lace, underwired
Given by Rigby & Peller
V&A: T.634-1995 (ID 91)



Established in 1939, Rigby & Peller is one of the few companies in London that still makes bespoke corsetry by hand.

56 Rigby & Peller *Corset Brassiere*

1950s
London
Nylon, underwired
Given by Rigby & Peller
V&A: T.629-1995 (ID 92)

57 Rigby & Peller *Brassiere*

1950s
London
Nylon and net, underwired
Given by Rigby & Peller
V&A: T.599-1995 (ID 93)

Lightweight nylon and fine underwiring provided support without cumbersome padding.

58 Rigby & Peller *Brassiere*

1950s
London
Nylon and lace, underwired
Given by Rigby & Peller
V&A: T.604-1995 (ID 94)



Rigby & Peller *Brassiere*

1950s
London
Nylon and elastic with detachable straps, fully wired around the cup
Given by Rigby & Peller
V&A: T.610-1995 (ID 95)



Kestos *Strapless Brassiere*

Ca. 1953
London
Lace over nylon, with elasticized panels, boning, and underwired padded cups; front hook and eye closure
Given by Ruth Sheradski
V&A: T.294-1977 (ID 96)

Ruddock *Roll-on Girdle*

Late 1950s
London
Elastic, with boning down the center front panel and integral stocking suspenders
V&A: T.212-1997 (ID 98)

Christian Dior (1905–1957) *“Colette” Corset*

1950s
Paris
Elastic, with lace and velvet decoration and integral stocking suspenders
Given by Caroline Wren
V&A: T.140-2000 (ID 99)

This heavy-duty, ready-to-wear corset was given to the V&A following the closure of a London lingerie shop. It is unworn.



Jacques Fath (1912–1954) *Petticoat*

1952
Paris
Nylon and net with boned cotton bodice and padded bra
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.183A-1974 (ID 87)

This couture petticoat was worn under a black silk taffeta cocktail dress.



59

60

61

62

63

London Tailoring

Before the Second World War, bespoke fashion in London was mainly the work of tailors and court dress-makers. With the creation of the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers in 1942, the small community of couture designers—twelve as opposed to forty-seven in Paris—gained increasing recognition.

The Paris couture system of unifying design and production under one roof set a template for London couturiers, as did the French practice of showing biannual collections. The London fashion houses, centered on Mayfair and Savile Row, became known for their practical, beautifully made tailoring. In 1946 the journalist Alison Settle described London couture as “clothes which have social confidence.”

64 Digby Morton (1906–1983) *Dress and Jacket, 1947–48*

London
Wool with velvet trim and leather belt, lined with silk;
tailored by Roger Brinès
Given by Mrs. Benita Armstrong
V&A: T.37&A, B-1966 (ID 23, 24)

Hardy Amies said of Morton, his “philosophy was to transform the suit from the strict *tailleur*, or the ordinary country tweed suit with its straight up and down lines, uncompromising and fit only for the moors, into an intricately cut and carefully designed garment that was so fashionable that it could be worn with confidence at the Ritz.”



65 John Cavanagh (1914–2004) *Sketches with Fabric Samples*

Mid-1950s
London
V&A: Cavanagh Archive (ID 28)

66 Marcel Fromenti (1886–1969) *Illustrations for The Lady Magazine*

1950s
London
Given by the editor of *The Lady*
V&A: E. 1538, 1591-1954 (ID 29, 30)

British Vogue
September 1949
V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 26)

67

British Vogue
March 1949
V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 27)

68

Fashion Show

The collections were presented first to the fashion press, then to commercial buyers from Europe and America who paid a subscription, and then to private clients. Each garment was made specifically for the house model who wore it, so that it fit perfectly and looked its best. In London in 1954 a house model earned about £8 (\$13) a week, before tax. She would get her hair styled for free and be provided with shoes and stockings for work.

In France, every garment was photographed and registered by name or number at the Chambre Syndicale. Beginning in 1952, each couture collection was copyrighted for one season. Anyone caught copying a design without paying for it was prosecuted, but this was difficult to enforce.



Labels inside the bodice of “Zemire” evening dress by Christian Dior, 1954. V&A: 24-2006

Lady Alexandra: A Couture Client

Lady Alexandra Howard-Johnston (later Lady Dacre) was the wife of the Naval Attaché to Paris. She required an extensive wardrobe for the many formal dinners and state functions that she had to attend.

A couture client would go to private showings of the fashion collections and then place her order with her personal *vendeuse*. This often long-term relationship was an important one. A good *vendeuse* ensured that the garments fit correctly and were appropriate for the client's age, taste, and lifestyle.

Lady Alexandra dressed exclusively at Jacques Fath. The designer lent her evening and day dresses each season, aware of the publicity that this would give his house. "If there was a Fath dress I wanted to keep, I could pay sale price at the end of the season. I was not allowed to go to any other couturier, but I did not want to—Fath was perfection."

69 Jacques Fath (1912–1954) Evening Dress with Train

1953
Paris
Satin with velvet trim, lined with cotton net
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.177-1974 (ID 81)

70 Jacques Fath (1912–1954) Evening Dress

1950
Paris
Watered silk taffeta with chiné spots
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.174&A-1974 (ID 79)



In 1971 Lady Alexandra wrote to Cecil Beaton, "I can date the white taffeta evening dress exactly because I had it when I was expecting my youngest child—he is now twenty-one—it was not changed in any way except that it could be let out. Afterwards, it was altered by Fath to fit my normal size."

71 Jacques Fath (1912–1954) Day Dress

1949
Paris
Printed cotton
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.179-1974 (ID 80)



This dress is secured by a set of intricate fastenings. The swag (stiffened with net) crosses over on the front; the skirt opens on the left back side and fastens with a series of hooks.

Jacques Fath (1912–1954)

Dress and Jacket

1954
Paris
Wool and Lurex
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.178&A-1974 (ID 78)



Lady Alexandra commissioned this outfit from Fath, shortly before he died, for her second marriage to Hugh Trevor-Roper. She told Cecil Beaton, "the dress made for my wedding to Hugh was made up on the wrong side of the material (my idea because the color of the right side did not suit me) and that dress was worn and worn."

Jacques Fath (1912–1954)

Hat

Ca. 1950
Paris
Mohair and felt
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.187-1974 (ID 82)



Jacques Fath (1912–1954)

Hat

Ca. 1950
Paris
Wire and net with sprays of artificial flowers in cotton and paper
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.191-1974 (ID 83)



Jacques Fath (1912–1954)

Hat

Ca. 1950
Paris
Plaited nylon straw, with petersham bow
Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre
V&A: T.174B-1974 (ID 84)

Letters from Lady Alexandra to Cecil Beaton

1971
London
V&A: Registered Papers (ID 85)

In 1971 Lady Alexandra gave some of her couture clothes to the photographer Cecil Beaton. He was assembling a large collection of fashionable garments to be given to the V&A and displayed in his exhibition *Fashion: An Anthology*. The V&A has kept Beaton's correspondence with designers, royalty, and leading socialites of the day.



72

73

74

75

76

Ready-to-Wear

The traditional focus of couture was the creation of high fashion garments for private clients. After the war, sales to department stores and wholesalers became increasingly important. Buyers purchased fabric toiles and paper patterns, or even original models. These designs could be copied only a limited number of times.

Some designers created ready-to-wear collections specifically for the export market, using the mass-production and sizing methods developed in the United States. In 1948, a year after launching his house, Christian Dior opened on Manhattan's Fifth Avenue. "The dresses will be designed with one eye on US tastes and the other on the limitations of machine production," wrote *Time* magazine.

77 Jacques Heim (1899–1967) *Day Dress*

Ca. 1950, Heim-Actualité
Paris
Linen with roundels of straw plait "buttons"
Worn by Miss Martita Hunt and given by
Miss Catherine Hunt
V&A: T.117-1970 (ID 100)



Heim introduced his Jeunes Filles line in 1936 and the Heim-Actualité ready-to-wear collection in 1950. This was sold in outlets in the south of France. *Women's Wear Daily* described him as "basically an innovator in business. He didn't want to be called a designer, but rather an editor of clothes."

78–81 Various couturiers for Dorville *Miniature Dresses*

Ca. 1950
London
All given by David Sassoon

These dresses come from the ready-to-wear company Dorville. They were made by the couture houses to show what the finished garments would look like without the expense of creating a full-size model.

78 Mme Grès (1903–1993) *Evening Dress*

Silk jersey
V&A: T.20:1-2007 (ID 102)

79 Jacques Fath (1912–1954) *Day Dress*

Pleated silk tussah
V&A: T.19-2007 (ID 103)



Christian Dior (1905–1957) *Cocktail Dress and Jacket*

Fine wool with polka dot silk
V&A: T.18:1, 2-2007 (ID 104)



80

Dior of London *Jacket (Part of an Ensemble)*

Ca. 1955
London
Silk
V&A: T.85:3-1992 (ID 105)

In 1954 Dior opened a branch in London. This was soon followed by others in South America, Canada, and Australia. The quality of garments produced was somewhere between French couture and high-end ready-to-wear.

81

Toiles

82–85

Calico toiles were created as prototypes for original designs before they were made up in expensive fabrics. They were also sold to manufacturers.

Christian Dior (1905–1957) *Toile for a Skirt*

1954
Given by B. Neville
V&A: T.225-1962 (ID 107)



82

Mink stole, Arctic Fox Stole, and Mink Shoulder Cape

1950s
V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 111)

83

Toile for a Mink Stole with Pencil Markings and Mink Stole

1950s
V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 110)

84

Christian Dior (1905–1957) *Toile for a Fur Bolero Jacket with Label*

1950s
V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 109)

85

86 Jacques Heim (1899–1967)
*Paper Patterns and Box with Label
and Fabric Sample*

Ca. 1957

Paris

Paper and fabric

Given by Mrs. Naomi Robins

V&A: unregistered, accompanying T.133 to 145-1998 (ID 101)

The clothing manufacturer R. L. Salmon Ltd. bought the exclusive rights to make and sell Heim designs in London. The patterns included suggestions for the type of French fabrics to be used. Heim's approval was always required before the final product was put on the market.

87 Chambre Syndicale de
la Couture Parisienne
*Contract for Reproduction
Rights for a Model to be
Provided in Fabric or as a
Canvas Pattern*

August 1954

V&A: Archive of Art and Design (ID 106)



88 Life Magazine
1949

USA

Private collection (ID 113)

The American weekly magazine *Life* covered a diversity of political and social issues, including fashion, and regularly reported on the Paris collections.

89 Christian Dior (1905–1957)
Packaging for a Toile Skirt

1954

V&A: T.225A-1962 (ID 108)

90 Vogue Pattern Books
1949–57

British edition

V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 112)

The sale of home dressmaking “couture” patterns made the couturier's ideas available to a wide audience and proved to be both lucrative and popular. Many women made their entire wardrobes themselves.

Boutique and Accessories

Small shops or boutiques within the couture houses became increasingly common. They sold a range of luxury goods such as cosmetics, jewelry, knitwear, accessories, and what were called in Paris *colifichets* (trinkets). Clients might call in at the boutique following a lengthy fitting to pick up an off-the-peg blouse or some perfume.

Eventually, some houses such as Yves Saint Laurent and Pierre Cardin opened separate boutiques selling less expensive ready-to-wear designs for a growing youth market. The issue was also one of a changing social climate. Couture client Mme Fabre-Luce said, “I couldn't face interminable fittings. Of course there was an undoubted aesthetic loss. You rarely see anyone in the street who rises above the ordinary now.”



Vogue Cover (American Edition), October 1952.
Photograph by Erwin Blumenfeld. © Condé Nast

91–94 Hats

Hats were regarded as the finishing touch to an outfit. A wide choice was available, from large picture hats to tiny, feathered creations that perched on the head, secured only with a hat pin. Couture client Gloria Guinness said, “A hat must be made on your head. A ready-made hat will not be you. While I am sitting for a dress, I sit ten minutes longer and Balenciaga works on a hat.”

91 Jacques Heim (1899–1967)

Yellow Straw

1950s
Paris
Given by Mrs. Vivienne Lawrie
V&A: T.370-1996 (ID 121)



92 Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972) *Black Pleated Organza*

Late 1950s
Paris
Worn and given by Mrs. Loel (Gloria) Guinness
V&A: T.67-1974 (ID 118)

93 Aage Thaarup (1906–1987)

Pink Velvet

1950s
London
Given by Mrs. Blair Cook
V&A: T.255-1985 (ID 117)



94 Simone Mirman (1912–2008) *Horsehair Trimmed with*

Fabric Rosebuds

1953
London
Worn by Doris Langley Moore
V&A: T.113-1980 (ID 119)

Perfume

95–98

Perfume and cosmetic sales were an increasingly lucrative business for the couture houses after the war. Dior created his first perfume and lipstick in 1947, soon after the launch of his fashion house. Luxurious packaging was an essential part of beauty products. Dior even created small stage sets called “glorifiers” in which to present his perfumes.

“Diorama” Perfume Bottle and Glorifier

1950
Glass bottle by Baccarat
By courtesy of Christian Dior Parfums, Paris (ID 125)

95

“Miss Dior” and “Diorama” Perfume Bottles

1947
Glass bottles by Baccarat
By courtesy of Christian Dior Parfums, Paris (ID 124)

96

“Diorissimo” Perfume Bottle

1956
Glass bottle by Baccarat
By courtesy of Christian Dior Parfums, Paris (ID 123)



97

“Dior Rouge” Lipsticks and Glorifier

1947
Paris
By courtesy of Christian Dior Parfums, Paris (ID 122)

98

Mitchel Maer for Christian Dior

99–104

Costume Jewelry

Ca. 1952–53
Britain

Costume jewelry was made from relatively inexpensive materials. This allowed makers to be adventurous in their designs and to complement seasonal fashions. Costume jewelers collaborated closely with couturiers, who would commission collections to sell in their boutiques. The British company Mitchel Maer produced exceptionally high-quality costume jewelry for Christian Dior between 1952 and 1956.

Necklace

Glass and gilded metal
Given by Stephen Maer
V&A: M.26-1988 (ID 127)

99

100 “Unicorn” Brooch

Glass and gilded metal

Given by Stephen Maer
V&A: M.25-1988 (ID 128)



101 “Marquise” Brooch

Glass, imitation pearls, and gilded metal

Given by Stephen Maer
V&A: M.27-1988 (ID 129)

102 “Attributs d’amour” Brooch

Glass, imitation pearls, metal, and gilded metal

Given by Stephen Maer
V&A: M.28-1988 (ID 130)

103 Bracelet

Glass and metal

Lent by Mr. S. W. and Mrs. M. J. Wilcox (ID 131)

104 Bracelet

Glass, imitation pearls, and gilded metal

Given by Stephen Maer
V&A: M.50-1988 (ID 132)

105 Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973) Bracelet

Ca. 1950

Paris

Imitation pearls with a clasp set with glass stones

Given by Clive Kandel
in memory of His Late
Highness Marthander
the Rajkumar of
Pudukota

V&A: M.39-1986
(ID 133)



Roger Vivier (1913–1998)

Shoes

Paris

Vivier started working for Elsa Schiaparelli in the 1930s. He went on to work with many other couturiers and collaborated with

Christian Dior when the New Look brought

emphasis to the ankle and foot. Vivier created a number of innovative heel shapes for Dior, including the comma heel and the stiletto.



Shoe

Late 1950s

Satin

By courtesy of Roger Vivier (ID 137)

106

Shoe

Late 1950s

Satin embroidered with beads, silk, and metal thread

Given by Roger Vivier

V&A: T.453-1974 (ID 138)

107

Shoe

Late 1950s

Satin embroidered with beads, silk, and metal thread

Given by Roger Vivier

V&A: T.154A-1974 (ID 135)



108

Shoe

Late 1950s

Satin embroidered with beads, silk, and metal thread

Given by Roger Vivier

V&A: T.149A-1974 (ID 136)



109

Shoe

1954

Tulle over satin

Given by Roger Vivier

V&A: T.148-1974 (ID 134)

110



106–110

111 Advertising Fan

Ca. 1950–55

Given by Margaret Marshall
V&A: T.31-1983 (ID 126)



112 Elsa Schiaparelli (1890–1973)

Stockings

Ca. 1950–53

Paris
Nylon, with box
V&A: T.352:1, 2-1992 (ID 116)

113 Paulette Marchand (1900–1984)

Hat

1950s

Paris
Feathers and silk
Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt, and given by Mrs. D. M. Haynes and Mrs. M. Clark
V&A: T.151-1982 (ID 120)

114 Hubert de Givenchy (born 1927)

Blouse

Ca. 1956

Paris
Printed fine silk twill
V&A: T.27:1-2007 (ID 114)

Givenchy combined the spirit of the boutique with the quality of traditional couture. Like many couturiers he learned through placements at various houses before opening his house in 1951. He went from Fath to Lelong to Piguet, and then to Schiaparelli for four years, where he designed “separates” for her pioneering boutique.

115 Patou

Gloves

Ca. 1955

Paris
Silk satin with cording and suede
V&A: T.68&A-1977 (ID 115)

No well-dressed woman would leave the house without gloves. These were made in every color and fabric, according to the season and occasion.



“Zemire” evening dress by Christian Dior, 1954.
Modeled by Renee.
Photograph by Regina Relang

Zémire

By the mid-1950s, Christian Dior was producing around twelve thousand dresses a year. His house was the most successful and widely known of the postwar era, and his international sales constituted more than half the Paris couture exports.

Zémire was a design from Dior's "Ligne H" collection. The original model in gray silk satin was shown to Princess Margaret at Blenheim Palace in 1954, and it appears in a promotional film and several magazine features. A ready-to-wear version was licensed to Susan Small, a British company that made "line-for-line" copies for Harrods.

This version of Zémire is a private order and would have been very expensive. It was commissioned by Lady Sekers, wife of the British textile manufacturer, and made in an innovative synthetic fabric.

The Victoria and Albert Museum recently acquired the ensemble. It had been stored in a cellar by the Seine River in Paris and had to be cleaned and repaired before it could be displayed.

116



Christian Dior (1905–1957) "Zémire" Evening Ensemble

Autumn/Winter, 1954–55, Ligne H

Paris
Cellulose acetate, with the skirt lined with layers of silk and net

Worn by Lady Agota Sekers

V&A: T.24.1, 2, 3-2007 (ID 139)

"Zémire" is one of Dior's most historical designs. It was named after an opera by Grétry, first performed at the royal palace of Fontainebleau in 1771. Initially it was called "Fontainebleau," but this was crossed out on the chart and replaced by "Zémire."



West Cumberland Silk Mills Ltd.

Brochure with fabric samples

1952–53

Britain

Cellulose acetate and paper

Lent by the Sekers family (ID 142)

This publicity brochure contains a sample of the Sekers fabric used for Zémire. "Duchesse Dogana" yarn-dyed satin was one of the company's most popular products. It was available in a range of bright colors. Many important Paris couture designs were made in Sekers fabric, despite restrictions being placed on fabric imports by the French authorities in the early 1950s.

British Vogue

September 1954

V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 141)

117

118

Miss Virginia Lachasse

Miss Lachasse was one of a collection of fashion dolls created for a touring exhibition to raise money for the Greater London Fund for the Blind. She was based on Virginia Woodford, the leading model at the Lachasse couture house in Mayfair.

Her wardrobe shows the clothes that a typical couture client would possess. It includes lingerie, accessories, and jewelry, all made especially by exclusive London companies such as Asprey. It also has what is thought to be the smallest pair of nylon stockings ever made.

While the Théâtre de la Mode dolls of 1945–1946 functioned as ambassadors for French couture in their worldwide tour after the war, Miss Lachasse, with her equally exquisite miniaturization of fashionable dress, shows the skills of London couturiers.



Lachasse. Miss Lachasse, 1954. The Fashion Museum, Bath and North East Somerset Council. Given by Peter Lewis Crown



Lachasse (established 1928)

Miss Lachasse

1954

London

Doll: plaster and wood with painted wax head and wig by Steiner
Evening dress: silk satin by Jacqmar, embroidered with pearls and
diamanté by Paris House

Accessories: Tiara, earrings, and necklace by Paris House

Given by Peter Lewis Crown

The Fashion Museum, Bath and North East Somerset Council
(ID 143)

A. Franke & Son

Mink Coat

Warners

Corselette

Elasticized cotton and embroidered satin

Lachasse

Suit

Silk brocade

Russell & Bromley

Shoes

Leather

Dunhill

Cigarette-holder, Cocktail Cigarettes, and Lighter

Plastic, paper, and tobacco and metal

Lachasse

Gloves

Leather

Lachasse

Suit

Tweed with gold metal brooch

Lachasse

Hat

Glazed straw with feather

Warners

Corselette

Elasticated cotton with lace and boning, with ribbon
stocking suspenders

Aristoc

Stockings

Nylon

Asprey

Handbag

Leather, with purse and mirror

Tootal

Handkerchiefs

Printed cotton

Lachasse

Hat

Silk jersey

Lachasse

Top Coat

"Dream Touch" tweed by Rankine Hamilton

Lachasse

Gloves

Leather

Finnigans

Travel Case

Leather initialed VL (for Virginia Lachasse)

Yardley

Toiletries

Aristoc

Stockings

Nylon

Chelsea Bank

Stationery

Swan

Biro pen

Lachasse

Cocktail Dress

Spotted silk by Bradford & Perrier

Paris House

Necklace, Earrings, and Bracelet

Warners

Girdle and Brassiere

Elasticated cotton with lace and ribbon stocking suspenders

The Collections

The Spring/Summer and Autumn/Winter collections were the culmination of the couture house's activities. The showing followed fixed laws of precedence, beginning with day wear and ending with evening gowns. The most popular designs were referred to as "Fords." The couture house might make dozens of versions of a successful model. Certain other designs were called "Trafalgars." These were intended to draw attention to the new line and often made the covers or main pages of the magazines. "It is these models that determine the fashion of today, and also that of tomorrow," wrote Christian Dior.

Tailoring

Once a client had seen the new collection, she would place her order. The majority of commissions were for day wear and suits. Day wear included casual ensembles (*ensembles simples*), morning suits (*tailleurs du matin*), casual afternoon suits (*robes d'après-midi simples*), and sophisticated dress suits (*tailleurs habillés*). Hardy Amies wrote, "It is often forgotten that we execute orders: we do not sell clothes. If you went into the Boutique you would buy a suit, but if you walk upstairs you order a suit. At the fittings you will be able to express your desires as to the position and finish of many details. The whole process should be a harmonious cooperation between designer, tailor, and customer, with the saleswoman as a sort of referee."

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)

120

Suit (tailleur)

Autumn/Winter, 1951

Paris

Tweed lined with taffeta and silk (the skirt shortened)

Given by Miss Catherine Hunt

V&A: T.128&A-1970 (ID 175)



Balenciaga first trained as a tailor in his native Spain and was considered the most skillful of all the couturiers. While many, including Dior, designed on paper, Balenciaga worked straight on to the cloth. Cecil Beaton wrote, "He can rip a suit apart with his thumbs and remake or alter his vision in terms of practical, at-hand dressmaking."

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)

121

Suit (tailleur)

Autumn/Winter, 1954

Paris

Tweed lined with silk

Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark

V&A: T.128&A-1982 (ID 176)



Christian Dior once commented upon seeing a Balenciaga suit, "Only Balenciaga would be capable of producing such perfection."

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)

122

Suit (tailleur)

Autumn/Winter, 1954

Paris

Tweed with coiled metal buttons

V&A: T.7&A-1977 (ID 177)

Balenciaga was one of the most expensive couturiers. Suits of this type would cost around 110,000 French francs in the early 1950s, about \$3,230 today.

Hubert de Givenchy (born 1927)

123

Jacket and Dress

Spring, 1955

Paris

Wool with moiré silk panels in the skirt

Worn by Leslie Caron in the Jean Renoir play *Orvet*, at the Théâtre de la Renaissance, Paris

V&A: T.35:1, 2-2006 (ID 178)

Dior and many other couturiers designed for film and theater. Although this dress was designed to be worn on stage, it is a couture creation. The dress and jacket are made from heavyweight wool, which must have been very warm during the performance.

124 Christian Dior (1905–1957) “Batignolles” Afternoon

Ensemble (robe d’après-midi)

Spring/Summer, 1952, Ligne Sinueuse
Paris

Worsted wool

Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark
V&A: T.110&A, B-1982 (ID 179)



Despite its simple appearance, this outfit is assembled with a multiplicity of buttons and tiny snap fasteners, which required the help of a lady’s maid. Balenciaga was said to have disapproved of the complexity of Dior’s fastenings.

125 Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel (1883–1971)

Three-piece Suit (tailleur du matin)

Mid-1950s

Paris

Tweed and jersey

Worn by Anne Gunning Parker (later Lady Nutting) and given by Lord Anthony Nutting

V&A: T.123&A, B-1990 (ID 180)



After an absence of fifteen years, Chanel’s comeback collection in 1954 challenged the excesses of couture. Pat Cunningham, editor of *Vogue*, said, “Femininity had gone too far—you needed stagecoach luggage to pack your frocks in and ladies’ maids to fix the trimmings and petticoats. Chanel simplified clothes to meet modern needs.”

126 Dior of London Suit

1954

London

Wool

Given by Mrs. Elsie Rashleigh

V&A: T.499:1, 2-1997 (ID 181)

Dior set up his London branch in 1954, helped by the milliner Simone Mirman. He said that “the little black suit cannot be beaten for elegance and usefulness.” When, in the same year, the *Daily Express* organized a competition for its readers, the first prize was a Dior suit. It was lovingly preserved by the winner and donated to the V&A in 1997.

127 Jacques Fath (1912–1954) Dress (robe) and Hat

1949

Paris

Dress: hand woven wool, lined with net and silk

Hat: velvet

Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre

V&A: T.180, 270A-1974 (ID 182, 183)



This dress was made for Lady Alexandra Howard-Johnston (later Lady Dacre). The Johnston tartan was made in Scotland, using natural colors instead of synthetic dye, which would have made the yellow too bright.

Jacques Fath (1912–1954) Dress (robe) and Hat

1950

Paris

Dress: gabardine

Hat: felt

Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre

V&A: T.182, 186-1974 (ID 184, 185)



Lady Alexandra shared the physique of Fath’s mannequins and was given some of the model dresses. She wore this ensemble to the unveiling of a statue of her father, the World War One commander Field-Marshal Earl Haig.

Christian Dior (1905–1957) Hat

Ca. 1953

Paris

Velour

V&A: T.158-1982 (ID 189)

Jean Dessès (1904–1970) Dress (robe tailleur) with Brooch

1953

Paris

Woolen tweed, lined with crêpe de Chine

Ensemble worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark

V&A: T.102-1982; T130-1970 (ID 188, 190)

Mrs. Opal Holt was a dedicated couture client. Spending the winter in the Bahamas and the summer in Europe, she required clothes for every eventuality and occasion. She traveled to Paris and London each year and patronized all the leading houses. This exhibition includes six of her suits, two cocktail dresses, and two evening gowns.

Digby Morton (1906–1983) “Chesterfield” Jacket, Skirt, and Scarf with Brooch

Ca. 1954

London

Donegal tweed with velvet

Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and

Mrs. Clark

V&A: T.101&A, B-1982; T133-1970 (ID 186, 187)

Digby Morton’s suit was named after the velvet-collared coats worn by the Earl of Chesterfield in the early nineteenth century. Black-and-white checks were the height of fashion in 1954. Morton advised Mrs. Holt that this ensemble was ideal to wear at the races.



128

129

130

131

132 Lachasse (established 1928) *Suit with Blouse, Turban, and Brooch*

1954
London
Suit: wool (the skirt shortened)
Blouse: silk crêpe de Chine by Givans
Turban: jersey
Given by Mrs. Ralph Dent
V&A: T.214, &A to D-1976; T.134-1970 (ID 191-193)

The client, Mrs. Dent, was a well-to-do Londoner. Along with her daughter, she placed regular orders with Lachasse between 1938 and 1955. This New Look inspired suit cost £58.60s (\$1,940.00 today) and the hat £10.10s (\$323 today).



133 Caroline Reboux (established ca. 1885) *Hat*

1955
Paris
Velvet and braid
Given by Lady Gladwyn
V&A: T.385-1974 (ID 195)

134 Charles Creed (1909–1966) *“Toffee” Suit*

1953
London
Wool with braiding
Given by the designer
V&A: T.63&A-1966 (ID 194)

Creed's Knightsbridge premises were unusually masculine. Cavalry hats hung on the dark-paneled walls, and the salon displayed his collection of miniature Napoleonic soldiers. This passion for military uniform was translated into his couture collections. Garments trimmed with frogging, braiding, and piping became Creed signatures, along with capes, tricorn hats, and fobs in place of buttons.



135 Simone Mirman (1912–2008) *Hat*

Ca. 1952
London
Wool felt
V&A: T.112-1980 (ID 197)

Charles Creed (1909–1966)

Suit
1954
London
Wool, Given by the designer
V&A: T.62&A-1966 (ID 196)

In the nineteenth century, Creed and Worth were leading houses in Paris, but both were English in origin. Charles Creed, a grandson of the founder, left the family business and opened his own establishment in London. He lamented the lack of skilled needlewomen in England, saying, “French girls are born with threads of sewing silk running in their veins.”

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972) *Suit (tailleur du matin) with Matching Scarf and Hat*

1956–57
Paris
Suit: wool, probably supplied by Ascher Ltd.
Hat: slubbed silk
Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark
V&A: T.131&A, B-1982 (ID 198)

Balenciaga favored the dense tweeds made by Zika Ascher, the Prague-born British textile manufacturer. Most designers found such fabrics testing, but Balenciaga transcended any difficulties. Similarly, he enjoyed the challenge of creating garments for older women. In this case, the forgoing gathers of the skirt would conceal a less than perfect figure.

Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972) *Dress (robe)*

Autumn/Winter, 1957
Paris
Wool lined with silk (the skirt shortened by 7 cm in the 1960s)
Given by Mrs. Dittenhofer
V&A: T.90-1973 (ID 199)

In the 1950s Balenciaga's designs became increasingly pared down, foreshadowing the simple geometry of 1960s fashion. In this “barrel” dress the sleeves are cut in one with the yoke.



136

137

138



Christian Dior (1905–1957)

Hat
Ca. 1950
Paris
Velvet
Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark
V&A: T.159-1982 (ID 201)

139

140 Christian Dior (1905–1957)

Dress (robe)

Autumn/Winter, 1957–58, Ligne Fuseau

Paris

Flannel

V&A: T.445-1988 (ID 200)



This dress is from Dior's last collection and may have been designed by Yves Saint Laurent, who contributed thirty-five garments. Saint Laurent was design assistant from 1955 and succeeded Dior on his death.

141 Ronald Paterson (born 1917)

Suit

Late 1950s

London

Tweed

Worn by Mrs. C. Nattey and given by her mother

V&A: T.312&A-1987 (ID 202)

Paterson was known for his light handling of bulky materials. At the age of eighteen, he won first prize for a tailoring design in a competition judged by the Parisian couturier Elsa Schiaparelli. He later worked in Paris and in 1947 opened in London's Albemarle Street.



Jean Dessès. Cocktail dress, ca. 1951.
Silk, silk and nylon net, and metal zipper. V&A: t.237-1986

Cocktail and Early Evening

Day wear was followed by formal afternoon dresses (*robes d'après-midi habillées*), cocktail dresses (*robes de cocktail*), semi-evening (*demi-soir*), and short evening dresses (*robes du soir courtes*). These distinctions became simpler as the decade progressed and social codes began to break down. Cocktail dresses first appeared in the 1920s and gained a new popularity after the war. They were worn at early evening or “6 to 8” gatherings, where guests usually stood and mingled. The gowns could include complex bustles and skirt details, which would be crushed if sat on. In his book *The Little Dictionary of Fashion* (1954), Christian Dior described cocktail dresses as “elaborate and dressy afternoon frocks,” preferably in black taffeta, satin, chiffon, and wool. These confections became the personification of the “little black dress” and were often accessorized with gloves and small hats.

142 Christian Dior (1905–1957)
“Mexico” Dance Dress (robe à danser)
 Spring/Summer, 1953, Ligne Tulipe
 Paris
 Printed silk organza by Ducharme
 V&A: T.264&A-1981 (ID 203)

143 Christian Dior (1905–1957)
“Périchole” Short Evening Gown (robe du soir courte)
 Spring/Summer, 1953, Ligne Tulipe
 Paris
 Organza embroidered with sequins
 Worn by Lady Agota Sekers
 Lent by Rosie Sekers (ID 204)

This short, sequin-adorned evening dress was suitable for the theater and dinners, where full-length skirts would have been impractical. It was commissioned by Lady Sekers, wife of the British textile manufacturer. Christian Dior wrote, “For a dinner-party a short embroidered dress may be very nice, but you must only wear embroidery on suitable occasions, otherwise it is pretentious.”

Antonio del Castillo (1908–1984)
 for Lanvin Castillo
“Tuileries” Cocktail Dress (robe de cocktail)
 1957

Paris
 Stiffened net and gauze, crêpe de Chine, silk, and taffeta with felt polka dots
 Given by Lady Stella Ednam
 V&A: T.52&A-1974 (ID 206)



Several grand houses were rejuvenated by taking on new designers, though few changed their names. Lanvin had been established by Jeanne Lanvin in 1909 and became Lanvin-Castillo when the Spanish designer Antonio del Castillo was appointed as chief designer in 1950. In a fashion feature in French *Vogue* this “flamenco” dress was accessorized with a lace *mantilla* (scarf).

Caroline Reboux
Hat
 1947
 Paris
 Given by Mrs. Frank Wooster
 V&A: T.381-1974 (ID 209)

Mme Grès (1903–1993)
Cocktail Dress (robe de cocktail)
 Ca. 1955
 Paris
 Spotted net with gathered side drape
 Given by Mrs. Leo d'Erlanger
 V&A: T.245&A-1974 (ID 208)

This chic dress mimics the fashion for cocktail hats, which were often made of decorated silk and tulle and included asymmetric elements.



Simone Mirman (1912–2008)
Hat
 Ca. 1955
 London
 Velvet and net
 V&A: T.114-1980 (ID 213)

148 **Jean Dessès (1904–1970)**
*Afternoon Dress (robe d'après-midi
habillée) with necklace and bracelet*

Ca. 1955

Paris

Wool and silk taffeta

Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark

V&A: T.104-1982; M.137B-1976; M.34-1976 (ID 210–212)



Hybrid garments, suitable for both day and evening, often combined different fabrics. Here, the close fitting wool bodice has a modest high neck and long sleeves. The skirt is made of pleated silk taffeta. *Woman and Beauty* (1951) advised, “Invest your all in one good little black dress.”

149 **Pierre Balmain (1914–1982)**
*Cocktail Dress (robe de cocktail)
with necklace*

1957

Paris

Silk taffeta and tulle

Given by Lady Elizabeth von Hofmannsthal

V&A: T.51-1974; M.32J-1976 (ID 215, 216)



Dresses like this achieved their air of weightlessness by floating on a firmly boned foundation. Pleated tulle flounces and rosettes edged with ribbon spring from the lowered waist and preclude sitting down.

150 **Cristóbal Balenciaga**
(1895–1972)

*Short Evening Dress
(robe du soir courte)*

Autumn/Winter, 1958

Paris

Lace with satin bows

V&A: T.334-1997 (ID 218)



Balenciaga's “baby doll” dresses preempted the 1960s fashion for short smocks. The London tailor Charles Creed said, “The normal woman, who does not aspire to be a leader of fashion but likes to be well dressed, should resolutely avoid the extremes. If you are not the Baby Doll type, don't try to be—no matter if it is the current rage.”

151 **Yves Saint Laurent (1936–2008)**
for Christian Dior

*“Bal Masqué” Short Evening Dress
(robe du soir courte)*

Spring/Summer, 1958, Ligne Trapèze

Paris

Tulle and net with beads and satin bows

Given by the Duchess of Windsor

V&A: T.125-1974 (ID 221)

This dress was worn by the Duchess of Windsor and designed by Yves Saint Laurent for his first season following Dior's death in 1957. The young designer paid tribute to Dior's predilection for complex constructions with a boned bodice and full skirt supported by numerous layers of stiffened net and gauze.

Dior of London
Cocktail Dress

1957

London

Satin organza

Given by Mrs. William Mann

V&A: T.235-1985 (ID 219)



Dior always included a red dress in his collections. He wrote that red “is the color of life. I love red and I think it suits almost every complexion. Bright reds—scarlet, pillar-box red, crimson, cherry are very gay and youthful.” He also described bows as the “natural ornament” of a dress.

Christian Dior (1905–1957)
Shoes

Late 1950s

Paris

Satin

Given by Mrs. Loel (Gloria) Guinness

V&A: T.153&A-1974 (ID 220)



Mme Grès (1903–1993)
Cocktail Dress (robe de cocktail)

Ca. 1950

Paris

Silk taffeta lined with silk organza

V&A: T.263-1981 (ID 217)

Grès created this balloon-skirted dress by attaching the hemline to a shorter, narrow petticoat in matching fabric.

Jean Dessès (1904–1970)
*Afternoon Dress (robe d'après-midi
habillée) for Princess Margaret*

Ca. 1951

Paris

Silk

Given by Princess Margaret

V&A: T.237-1986 (ID 214)

London Illustrated reported that after her eighteenth birthday Princess Margaret began to appear in public as a “grown up personality.” “She experimented boldly with her clothes and hairstyles, and adopted the then very New Look.” The bodice of this dress is achieved by the dexterous pleating of fabric cut on the bias.

152

153

154

155

156 Michael Sherard (1910–1998)

Cocktail Dress

1958

London

French re-embroidered ribbon lace, with taffeta

Given by Mr. John Fraser and Mr. Michael Sherard

V&A: T.403-1974 (ID 207)



The *flamenco* dress was a reoccurring theme in 1950s evening wear. Sherard's version has a bell-like skirt and train made entirely of lace, his trademark fabric.

157 Gabrielle “Coco” Chanel (1883–1971) Cocktail Dress (robe de cocktail)

Mid-1950s

Paris

Silk lace, worn by Anne Gunning Parker (later Lady Nutting)

and given by Lord Anthony Nutting

V&A: T.131-1990 (ID 205)

This black lace dress was worn by the leading British model Anne Gunning. Its slender, flared shape is quite different than the conventional full skirts of most evening dresses of the time.



Photography and Illustration

The role of an editor, said Carmel Snow of American *Harper's Bazaar*, was to “recognize fashions while they are still a thing of the future. The dressmakers create them, but without these magazines, the fashions would never be established or accepted.” Photography and illustration played a key role in how fashion was perceived and portrayed. In this postwar period, however, photography began to dominate. Using natural lighting, unexpected locations, and dramatic poses, it introduced an air of modernity that fashion editors liked. It also made photographic models such as Suzy Parker and Barbara Goalen household names.

Cecil Beaton (1904–1980)

Fashion is Indestructible

1941

London

Gelatin-silver print

Suit by Digby Morton

V&A: Ph.960-1978 (ID 147)

Cecil Beaton © Sotheby's

British *Vogue's* readership soared during the Second World War. In this photograph, Beaton made a dramatic move out onto the streets, replacing the theatrical settings of the studio with the bombed ruins of London. The photograph suggests that fashion is an essential part of life, despite the war.

158

Christian Dior (1905–1957)

“Musique de Nuit” Evening Dress (robe du soir)

Autumn/Winter, 1956–57,

Ligne Aimant

Paris

Silk faille by Lajoinie, lined with black silk and stiffened net

Given by Madame de Courcel

V&A: T.124-1974 (ID 144)



159



160 Richard Avedon
(1923–2004)
**Suzy Parker in Dior, for
American Harper's Bazaar**

August 1956

Paris

Gelatin-silver print

Evening dress by Christian Dior

V&A: Ph.24-1985 (ID 145)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

The skylight of this photo studio in Paris was obscured with tar paper and plaster for years. Avedon decided to rip away these layers, allowing natural light to pour into the studio space. The flood of daylight creates an even, diffused illumination.

161 Cecil Beaton (1904–1980)
Fashion Shoot, Vogue

1948

London

Gelatin-silver print

Evening dresses by Charles James

V&A: Ph.194-1977 (ID 148)

Cecil Beaton © Sotheby's

This photograph shows Beaton's preference for theatrical settings in which models become performers in a scene of orchestrated glamour. The casual demeanors of the models belie the formality of the setting and the grandeur of the gowns.

162 Cecil Beaton (1904–1980)
The Wyndham Sisters

1950

London

Gelatin-silver print

Dresses by Hardy Amies and Ronald Paterson

V&A: Ph.192-1977 (ID 149)

Cecil Beaton © Sotheby's

Beaton often chose women from high society as his models in order to heighten the sense of luxury and opulence in the clothes they modelled. This photograph is identical in composition to a portrait painted by John Singer Sargent in 1899 of a previous generation of Wyndham sisters.

163 Irving Penn (1917–2009)
**Portrait of Cecil Beaton in
Morning Dress**

1950

London

Gelatin-silver print

V&A: Ph.061-1978 (ID 150)

© Irving Penn

Alexander Liberman, art director of *American Vogue*, was keen to steer the magazine away from “soft, wafy visions of loveliness” and towards the “graphic intensity of a news weekly.” Cecil Beaton, a veteran *Vogue* photographer, represented some of these older traditions. Irving Penn was considered part of the new generation and brought a fresh, streamlined aesthetic to the pages of *Vogue*.

Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
**Dovima with Elephants, for
American Harper's Bazaar**

1955

Paris

Gelatin-silver print

Evening dress by Christian Dior

V&A: Ph.26-1985 (ID 146)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

Lillian Bassman (born 1917)
Lingerie, for American Harper's Bazaar

1948

Gelatin-silver print

V&A: Ph.14-1986 (ID 151)

© Lillian Bassman

Bassman was one of the few female photographers on the staff of *Harper's Bazaar*. The editor, Carmel Snow, preferred to show “the buttons and bows,” but Bassman's photographs often expressed mood rather than illustrating intricate fashion details.

Lillian Bassman (born 1917)
**Barbara Mullen in Wedding Dress,
for American Harper's Bazaar**

1949

Gelatin-silver print

Wedding dress by Edward Molyneux

V&A: Ph.12-1986 (ID 152)

© Lillian Bassman

Many of the characteristics of Bassman's photographs grew out of her early darkroom experimentation. She created a method of printing photographs through tissue paper to produce soft-focus images. The skirt of this wedding dress seems to disappear into a fine mist, while the model's torso emerges in sharp relief.

Erwin Blumenfeld (1897–1969)
Cover Study: Water Effect

1953

New York

Hand-pulled dye-transfer print from original

Ektachrome transparency

V&A: Ph.233-1985 (ID 155)

© Erwin Blumenfeld

Blumenfeld shot this photograph through a pane of rippled glass, using carefully controlled lighting.

164

165

166

167



Erwin Blumenfeld (1897–1969)

Stockings

Ca. 1949
New York
V&A: Ph.33-1986 (ID 154)
© Erwin Blumenfeld

168

Erwin Blumenfeld (1897–1969)

What Looks New

1947
New York
Hand-pulled dye-transfer print from original
Ektachrome transparency
Fashion by John-Frederics
V&A: Ph.232-1985 (ID 153)
© Erwin Blumenfeld

169

In his early years, Blumenfeld was involved in the avant-garde art movement Dada. During a period of intense creative experimentation he developed new photographic processes and techniques using veils, mirrors, and filters. Here, the model's reflection, seen in a broken mirror, advertises the subtle nuances of a new lipstick range.

Erwin Blumenfeld (1897–1969)

Cover study: Décolleté

1952
New York
Hand-pulled dye-transfer print from original Ektachrome transparency
Dress by Jacques Fath, lipstick by Elizabeth Arden
V&A: Ph.229-1985 (ID 157)
© Erwin Blumenfeld



170

This image was the front cover of American *Vogue* in October 1952. It depicts the live model as a mute mannequin, creating a sense of distilled female beauty.

Erwin Blumenfeld (1897–1969)

Study for an Advertising Photograph

1948
New York
Hand-pulled dye-transfer print from original
V&A: Ph.234-1985 (ID 156)
© Erwin Blumenfeld

171

Blumenfeld's intense focus on the female face made him a natural choice for cosmetics photography. Firms such as Elizabeth Arden soon became the most powerful group of advertisers in fashion magazines, and the "face," as opposed to the complete figure, became the dominant image on magazine covers.

Photograph by John French.
Model Jean Dawnay, 1956

172 Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
*Elise Daniels at Le Pré Catalan, for
American Harper's Bazaar*

August 1948

Paris

Gelatin-silver print on Portruga paper

Turban by Paulette

V&A: Ph.19-1985 (ID 158)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

Elise Daniels' arched eyebrow takes center-stage in this photograph. In capturing her sideways glance, Avedon's fleeting "snapshot" echoes René Gruau's lipstick advertisement also on view in this gallery.

173 Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
*Dorian Leigh in Helena Rubinstein's
Apartment, for American Harper's Bazaar*

August 1949

Île St Louis, Paris

Gelatin-silver print on Portruga paper

Evening dress by Robert Piguet

V&A: Ph.15-1985 (ID 163)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

174 René Gruau (1909–2004)
Drawing for a Lipstick Advertisement

1949

Black and red bodycolor, with correction in white, over preliminary pencil

V&A: E.395-1986 (ID 159)

© René Gruau

Gruau reduced the imagery of couture to its most concentrated form. His artworks, signed with a splashy "G," and an asterisk, represent what we now call "brand images." This one was commissioned by a cosmetics firm named Rouge Baiser.

175 Jacques Demachy (1898–?)
Fashion Illustration for Harper's Bazaar

1952

Body and watercolor, charcoal and pencil, pen, and Indian ink on colored paper

Evening dress by Christian Dior

V&A: E.685-1997 (ID 161)

© Jean Demachy

Illustration had certain advantages in capturing the fashion designer's vision. The draftsman did not require bulky lighting equipment and other photographic clutter. With simple means, he could make a preliminary sketch in a few snatched moments, after the fashion show or between fittings, thus causing minimal disruption to the collection schedules.

176 Jacques Demachy (1898–?)
Fashion Illustration for Harper's Bazaar

1952

Body and watercolor, charcoal, Chinese white, pen,

and Indian ink on colored paper

Evening gown by Victor Stiebel

V&A: E.686-1997 (ID 160)

© Jean Demachy

Fashion illustration was able to convey the soft, tactile nature of fabrics in a way that photography could not. The drawings were often printed on special matte paper and bound into the magazines as inserts.

177 René Gruau (1909–2004)
Fashion Illustration for Femina

1949

Brush, black ink, and bodycolor over preliminary pencil

Evening dress by Cristóbal Balenciaga

V&A: E.397-1986 (ID 162)

© René Gruau

This drawing shows Gruau's penciled notes for the printers and the registration marks which ensured that each color was printed in perfect alignment.

178 Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
*The New Look of Dior, for American
Harper's Bazaar*

1947

Place de la Concorde, Paris

Gelatin-silver print

Suit by Christian Dior

V&A: Ph.74-1985 (ID 166)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

In one click of the shutter, Avedon manages to capture the key features of Dior's bold New Look: the wasp waist and the excessive folds of the swirling skirt. The drama is heightened by the inclusion of three passersby, one of whom breaks the illusion by glancing directly at the viewer.

179 Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
Dovima, Paris

1955

Paris

Gelatin-silver print

Suit by Christian Dior

V&A: E.1257-1993 (ID 170)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

As a photographer, Avedon managed to consistently combine visual excitement with essential fashion information. This was every editor's dream.

180 Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
**Casino, Le Touquet, for American
Harper's Bazaar**
1954

Le Touquet, France
Gelatin-silver print
Evening dress by Mme Grès
V&A: Ph.17-1985 (ID 171)
Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

Le Touquet, a coastal town in northern France, was a playground for rich Parisians. The model here is Sunny Hartnett.

181 Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
**Paris Bares the Shoulders, for American
Harper's Bazaar**
August 1956

Paris
Gelatin-silver print on Portriga paper
Evening dress by Lanvin Castillo
V&A: Ph.20-1985 (ID 172)
Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

Avedon staged this scene in the Café des Beaux-Arts, a famed Parisian bar-tabac, which had been a bohemian hangout for decades. He uses a backlight to define Suzy Parker's profile and create an ethereal glow around her hair and dress.

182 Irving Penn (1917–2009)
The Café in Lima
1948

Lima, Peru
Hat by John-Frederics, dress and jacket by Vogue Design
V&A: Ph.928-1987 (ID 165)
© Irving Penn / Condé Nast Publications Inc.

This photograph was part of a *Vogue* assignment that was shot on location in Lima. In it, Penn moves away from the artifice of the studio towards a grittier, photojournalistic approach. Though showing the dress clearly, he makes the photograph a style statement as much as a fashion document.

183 Irving Penn (1917–2009)
**The Tarot Reader, Vogue's Eye View of
Diablerie**
1949

New York
Platinum-palladium print
V&A: Ph.929-1987 (ID 164)
© Irving Penn / Condé Nast Publications Inc.

Before joining American *Vogue*, Penn had worked as a graphic designer and an art director of Saks Fifth Avenue. His design background can be seen in this composition, which is simple, direct, and modern in its economy. The platinum-palladium print process, with its intense blacks, gives an unparalleled range of tone and texture.

Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
**The Fluent Evening Line, for American
Harper's Bazaar**
August 1957

Paris
Gelatin-silver print on Portriga paper
Evening dress by Jacques Griffe
V&A: Ph.18-1985 (ID 173)
Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

Avedon captures the model Suzy Parker amid the blur and hustle backstage at the Moulin Rouge, flanked by working-class showgirls and a debonair male companion, Robin Tattershall.

Frank Horvat (born 1928)
**Fashion photograph for
Jardin des Modes**
1958

Paris
Gelatin-silver print
Fashion by Hubert de Givenchy
V&A: Ph.22-1986 (ID 174)
© Frank Horvat

Stark white Givenchy accessories are set off dramatically against the pitch blackness of the gentlemen's suits. The model's role is reduced to just a tantalizing glance.

Richard Avedon (1923–2004)
**Homage to Munkácsi, for American
Harper's Bazaar**
August 1957

Paris
Gelatin-silver print
Coat by Pierre Cardin
V&A: Ph.14-1985 (ID 169)
Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

Martin Munkácsi was a former sports photographer who introduced movement and dynamism in fashion pictures. Avedon recalled that Munkácsi's work for *Harper's Bazaar* was his first lesson in photography. "He brought a taste for happiness and honesty, and a love of women to what was, before him, a joyless, loveless, lying art."

187 Richard Avedon (1923–2004) Elise Daniels with Street Performers, for *American Harper's Bazaar*

August 1948

Le Marais, Paris

Gelatin-silver print on Portriga paper

Suit by Cristóbal Balenciaga

V&A: Ph.13A-1985 (ID 167)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

The model's awkward pose reflects the contortionist's exertions, while her fully clothed appearance contrasts with his near-nakedness.

188 Richard Avedon (1923–2004) Dorian Leigh with Bicycle Race

1949

Champs-Élysées, Paris

Gelatin-silver print

Dress by Christian Dior

V&A: E.1252-1993 (ID 168)

Photograph Richard Avedon © 2007 The Richard Avedon Foundation

Avedon creates a scene of euphoria, as the model Dorian Leigh embraces a victorious rider at the end of a fictitious Tour de France. At the same time, he highlights the key fashion points, ensuring that the model's pose reveals Dior's short sleeve and that the sun shows up the folds of the fabric.

Evening and Ballgowns

The fashion show culminated with evening dresses (*robes du soir*), dance dresses (*robes à danser*), long evening dresses (*robes du soir longues*), grand evening dresses (*robes grand soir*), and spectacular gala dresses (*robes de gala*). Traditionally, the end of the collection was marked by the wedding gown, the *robe de mariée*.

Sumptuously embroidered and accessorized with jewels, these gowns provided a glittering show at receptions and balls, the opera, or the theater. Some were commissioned for a specific occasion and worn only once.

The creation of couture was a matter of national pride, particularly in France. Christian Dior said, "My mannequins sail forth like a brilliant armada, all sails flying, going forth to conquer the world in the cause of the new fashion."

Jeanne Lafaurie. Evening Dress, ca. 1950.
Silk, silk and nylon net, metal zipper.
V&A: t.281, A&B-1974



189 **Hardy Amies (1909–2003)**
Evening Dress

Early 1950s
London
Silk satin, lined with Vilene
Given by Mrs. Lister Bolton
V&A: T.86-2001 (ID 222) 189



Heavily boned and wired, this dress is lined with stiff Vilene, a less expensive alternative to the multiple layers of silk net used by Parisian couturiers.

190 **Dior of London**
Evening Dress

Ca. 1957
London
Silk poulte
V&A: T.141-1985 (ID 223)



Dior's London branch opened in 1954. The collections were designed in the spirit of the Paris shows but for an English clientele. This wearable silk dress has a cross-over bodice and fat fabric knots, both typical Dior hallmarks.

191 **Worth London**
(active 1911–1967)
Evening Dress and Stole

Late 1950s
London
Satin
V&A: T.18:1, 2-2006 (ID 224)



The fringed fabric detail in the pleats and stole owes much to Dior, who often employed such nineteenth-century touches.

192 **Christian Dior (1905–1957)**
“Monte-Carlo” Evening Dress
(robe du soir courte)

Spring/Summer, 1956, Ligne Flèche
Paris
Chiné-printed silk taffeta
Given by Mrs. Laurie Newton Sharp
V&A: T.216-1968 (ID 229)



This short dress was worn by Laurie Newton Sharp, buyer for Harrods, for a 1956 tour to America to promote the store. It was said that she was “the sort of impeccably elegant woman who carries an invisible mirror with her.”

Worth London (active 1911–1967)
Evening Dress with Necklace

1955
London
Dupion silk embroidered with sequins and beads
Given by Mrs. Roy Hudson
V&A: T.214&A-1973; M.46X-1976 (ID 225, 226)



Worth, established in Paris in 1858 by Charles Frederick Worth, was the original, founding couture house. The London branch opened in 1911. It created refined, well-mannered garments for a predominantly English clientele.

Christian Dior (1905–1957)
“Henri Sauget” Evening Dress (robe du soir)

Spring/Summer, 1950, Ligne Verticale
Paris
Printed silk
Given by Mme Massigli
The Fashion Museum, Bath & North East Somerset Council (ID 230)

This dress was worn by Mme Massigli, wife of the French ambassador to London. She was renowned for her chic, and her arrival in austerity-stricken London in 1944 was greeted with amazement. Dior named all his collections and designs; Henri Sauget was a composer.

Pierre Balmain (1914–1982)
Evening Dress (robe du soir)

Spring/Summer, 1957
Paris
Printed and appliqué silk
Given by Lady Diana Cooper
V&A: T.50-1974 (ID 231)



This dress was worn by Lady Diana Cooper, the wife of the former British ambassador in Paris, for the Queen's state visit in April 1957. Lady Diana was a leading socialite of the time and a great friend of Cecil Beaton, who described her as a “tour de force of aristocratic beauty.” He persuaded her to donate the dress to the V&A.

Stephen Jones (born 1957)
“Jetée” Tiara

2007
Paris
Metal and glass
Lent by Stephen Jones (ID 234)

Digby Morton (1906–1983)
Evening Dress

Ca. 1954
London
Silk jersey with silk taffeta flounce, with underskirt of crêpe de Chine and matching silk jersey gloves
Given by Lady Howard Robertson
V&A: T.278&A to C-1975 (ID 233)



193

194

195

196

197

198 Victor Stiebel (1907–1976) *Evening Dress*

1955
London
Silk
Given by Lady Diana Herbert
V&A: T.6-1977 (ID 232)

British fashion magazines such as *Vogue* and *Harper's Bazaar* reported the London collections in the context of the social calendar. This included the royal garden party, Goodwood, Wimbledon, Ascot, and Cowes, as well as coming-out dances and summer balls. Worn by Lady Diana Herbert for a ball at Wilton House, this gown reflects Stiebel's interest in historical dress.



199 Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972) *Evening Dress (robe grand soir)*

Ca. 1955
Paris
Silk taffeta
Given by Miss Caroline Coombe
V&A: T.427-1967 (ID 240)

Balenciaga occasionally produced gowns that shared Dior's nostalgia for the grandeur of historical dress. Generally, however, during the 1950s his designs became increasingly abstract and restrained.



200 Hubert de Givenchy (born 1927) *Evening Cape with Gloves*

1957
Paris
Silk taffeta
V&A: T.34&A, B-200 (ID 236)

Givenchy met Audrey Hepburn during the shoot for the film *Sabrina* in 1953. He went on to design most of her film wardrobes. In *Funny Face* (1957) Hepburn wears an identical cape to this.



201 Jacob-Desmalter *Chair*

1803–13
France
Mahogany
V&A: W.10A-1987 (ID 235)

Christian Dior (1905–1957) “*Cygne Noir*” (Black Swan) *Evening Dress (robe grand soir)*

Autumn/Winter, 1949–50,
Ligne Milieu du Siècle
Paris
Silk velvet and faille by Bianchini Fériér
Given by Baroness Antoinette de Ginsbourg
V&A: T.117&A-1974 (ID 239)

This imposing gown is from Dior's sixth collection. He wrote of this time, “A golden age seemed to have come again. War had passed out of sight and there were no other wars on the horizon. What did the weight of my sumptuous materials, my heavy velvets and brocades, matter? When hearts were light, mere fabrics could not weight the body down.”



202

Hubert de Givenchy (born 1927) “*Les Muguet*” (Lily of the Valley) *Evening Dress (robe du soir longue)*

1955
Paris
Silk organdie embroidered with sequins
Given by the Viscountess de Bonchamps
V&A: T.223&A, B-1974 (ID 237)

The strapless bodice includes inset boning, so the wearer could step into the garment and not have to wear cumbersome corsets. This was standard in a couture gown.



203

Christian Dior (1905–1957) “*Soirée de Décembre*” *Evening Dress (robe du soir)*

Autumn/Winter, 1955–56, Ligne Y
Paris
Silk faille
Given by Dame Margot Fonteyn
V&A: T.118-1974 (ID 238)

Hardy Amies wrote of Dior, “He has a sure eye that respects the shape of a woman's body, given her by nature and a well-fit corset. He has a firm hand, to carve the clear outline of his clothes. He has a sharp intelligence which restrains his details to the point of starkness.”



204

Jean Dessès (1904–1970) *Evening Dress (robe du soir longue)*

Ca. 1953
Paris
Chiffon
Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark
V&A: T.105-1982 (ID 249)

Dessès's fascination with draping and classical form resulted in gowns of great technical complexity. Although the bodice appears to be soft and unstructured, it is supported by the sewn-in boning common at the time.



205

206 Jean Dessès (1904–1970)

Evening Gown

Autumn/Winter, 1948

Paris

Voiled silk velvet by Bianchini Fériér

Given by the Hon. Mrs. J. J. Astor

V&A: T.113-1974 (ID 52)



This gown was featured in French *Vogue* in October 1948. The magazine promoted both the couturier and fabric supplier by name. Bianchini Fériér had provided Parisian couturiers with luxurious silks since the late nineteenth century. The weight and textural qualities of this velvet lend themselves well to the construction and shape of Dessès' draped, bouffant style.

207 *British Vogue*

October 1948

V&A: Unregistered Collection (ID 53)

208 Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)

Evening Dress and Coat

(robe du soir et manteau)

Spring, 1954 and 1955

Paris

Dress: ribbed cotton

Coat: silk organdie

Worn by Mrs. Opal Holt and given by Mrs. Haynes and Mrs. Clark

V&A: T.126-1982; T.230-1984 (ID 241, 242)

Balenciaga uses the simplest of fabric and a pared-down cut to create a sleeveless summer gown, worn under a pea-green silk "duster" coat. Such coats were popular for evening, as they could accommodate the most fulsome evening dress underneath.

209 Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895–1972)

Evening Dress (robe du soir) and Coat

1952 and 1960

Paris

Dress: nylon organza with velvet spots

Coat: satin with jet button

Dress given by Mrs. Catherine Hunt; coat by Baroness Alain de Rothschild

V&A: T.116-1970; T.20-1974 (ID 243, 244)

The gown shows Balenciaga's preference for stiff, matte fabrics, while the heavy satin coat epitomizes the superb cut and monastic simplicity of his designs. Its only accent is a large glittering jet button.

Hubert de Givenchy (born 1927)

Evening Dress (robe du soir)

with Shoes and Bracelet

Ca. 1955

Paris

Silk brocade

V&A: T.270&A, B-1975; M.51A-1988 (ID 246–248)

Givenchy was from the younger generation of couturiers. His designs bridged the old world of haute couture and the new mood in fashion that emerged in the late 1950s. A disciple of Balenciaga, he was inspired by the Spanish designer's architectural approach to fashion.



210

Jacques Griffe (1909–1996)

Evening Dress (robe du soir)

Ca. 1951

Paris

Silk organza with cut weft

V&A: T.26-2007 (ID 245)

Griffe was one of the few couturiers to start his career in the workrooms. He began working with Vionnet in 1936, where he learned to drape and cut fabric on small wooden figures in the Vionnet tradition. After the war, he worked briefly for Molyneux. His elegant, pared down designs reflect this pedigree.



211

Norman Hartnell (1901–1979)

Evening Dress for Princess Margaret

Early 1950s

London

Silk and wool faille lined with horsehair, embroidered with sequins and rhinestones

Given by Princess Margaret

V&A: T.238-1986 (ID 250)

Apart from mourning dress, it was unusual for the royal family to wear black. Hartnell said, "As a rule, ladies of the Royal Family wear light colored clothes because such colors are more discernible against a great crowd."



212

Victor Stiebel (1907–1976)

Evening Dress

Late 1950s

London

Satin embroidered with beads and rhinestones

Given by Lady Templer

V&A: T.172-1969 (ID 260)

Lady Templer was the wife of Field Marshal Sir Gerald Templer, commander-in-chief of the British and Commonwealth forces. This is an original model gown, bought late in the season at a reduced price. The straps were added at the client's request.



213

214 Jeanne Lafaurie (active 1928–1953)

Evening dress (robe du soir)

with Necklace by May Clark

About 1950

Paris

Organdie with sequins

Given by Mrs. Loel (Gloria) Guinness

V&A: T.281&A, B-1974; Circ. 17-1961 (ID 253, 254)

Many smaller couture houses closed in the early 1950s as the number of clients decreased and the industry became increasingly dependent on export sales. This organdie dress by Lafaurie is the only example of the designer's work in the V&A's collection.

215 Pierre Balmain (1914–1982)

Evening Dress (robe du soir)

1956

Paris

Duchesse satin

Given by Lady Elizabeth von Hofmannsthal

V&A: T.49-1974 (ID 255)



The looped ribbon decoration and the crinoline skirt of this dress were inspired by eighteenth-century fashion.

216 Christian Dior (1905–1957)

“Pérou” Evening Dress and

Coat (robe du soir courte)

with Necklace

Autumn/Winter, 1954–55, Ligne H

Paris

Silk satin, the dress embroidered by Brossin de Méré with gilt and silver metal thread

Given by Mme Lopez Willshaw

V&A: T.12&A-1977; M.67:1-1997 (ID 257–259)



This dress was shown in London in the presence of Princess Margaret. The embroidery is exceptionally heavy and dense. It took six hundred hours to complete. Dior said that such a finish had to be used with great discrimination, “being so rich, it may not look young. I advise you to use it for short evening dresses, full or narrow skirted.”

217 Jacob-Desmalter

Chair

1803–13

France

Mahogany

V&A: W.10B-1987 (ID 256)

Marcelle Chaumont (1892–1990)

Evening Dress (robe du soir)

with Necklace

Spring/Summer, 1949

Paris

Hand-painted organza

Given by Mrs. Loel (Gloria) Guinness

V&A: T.92&A, B-1974; M.48Y-1976 (ID 251, 252)



Mexican-born Gloria Guinness was one of the best-dressed women of the postwar years. She was described as having “a lean figure, the profile of a latter-day Nefertiti, and hair like black velvet.”

Jacques Fath (1912–1954)

Evening Dress (robe de gala)

Spring/Summer, 1948

Paris

Silk satin, embroidered by Rébé with sequins and beads

Given by Lady Alexandra Dacre

V&A: T.184&A-1974 (ID 261)



219



Lady Alexandra wore this dress at the official visit of Princess Elizabeth and Prince Philip to Paris in May 1948. She recalled that when she arrived at the Théâtre de l'Opéra with her husband, the Garde Nationale suddenly sprang to attention. “I realized they had mistaken us for the Princess and Duke. That was the effect made by my splendid Fath.”



220

Norman Hartnell (1901–1979)

“Flowers of the Fields of France,”

Ceremonial Gown for the Queen

1957

London

Duchesse satin, pearls, beads, brilliants, faceted glass, with mother-of-pearl, and gold thread

V&A: T.264-1974 (ID 262)

Hartnell, who had been court dressmaker since 1938, designed this dress for the Queen's state visit to Paris in April 1957. The embroidery, with poppies, fleurs-de-lis, wheat sheaves, and bees (Napoleon's symbol of industry) was designed to compliment the host nation. One of the embroiderers said, “We just hoped that she always sat on plush chairs so it did not get squashed!”



The Legacy

Christian Dior's death in 1957 brought this golden age to an end. With the changing social and economic climate of the 1960s, fashion moved from the fitting rooms and ateliers into the streets and boutiques. Yet, the legacy of artistry and craftsmanship from the period 1947 to 1957 survives in the remaining grand houses of Paris and the bespoke workshops of Savile Row.

The exhibition concludes with a recent couture evening gown by Christian Dior, Paris. It is designed by London-trained John Galliano, artistic director for Dior since 1997.

221



Christian Dior,
by John Galliano

(born 1960)

Evening Dress

Autumn/Winter, 2006-07

Haute couture collection

Paris

Dress: silk crepe with embroidered silk and metal thread

Hat: feathers

Shoes: crocodile skin

Given by John Galliano

V&A: T.53;1-4-2008

(ID 263, 265, 266)



Unless otherwise indicated, all images

© V&A Images/ Victoria and Albert
Museum, London



The Frist Center gratefully acknowledges the
generous support of the following sponsors:

2010 Platinum Sponsor:



2010 Gold Sponsor:

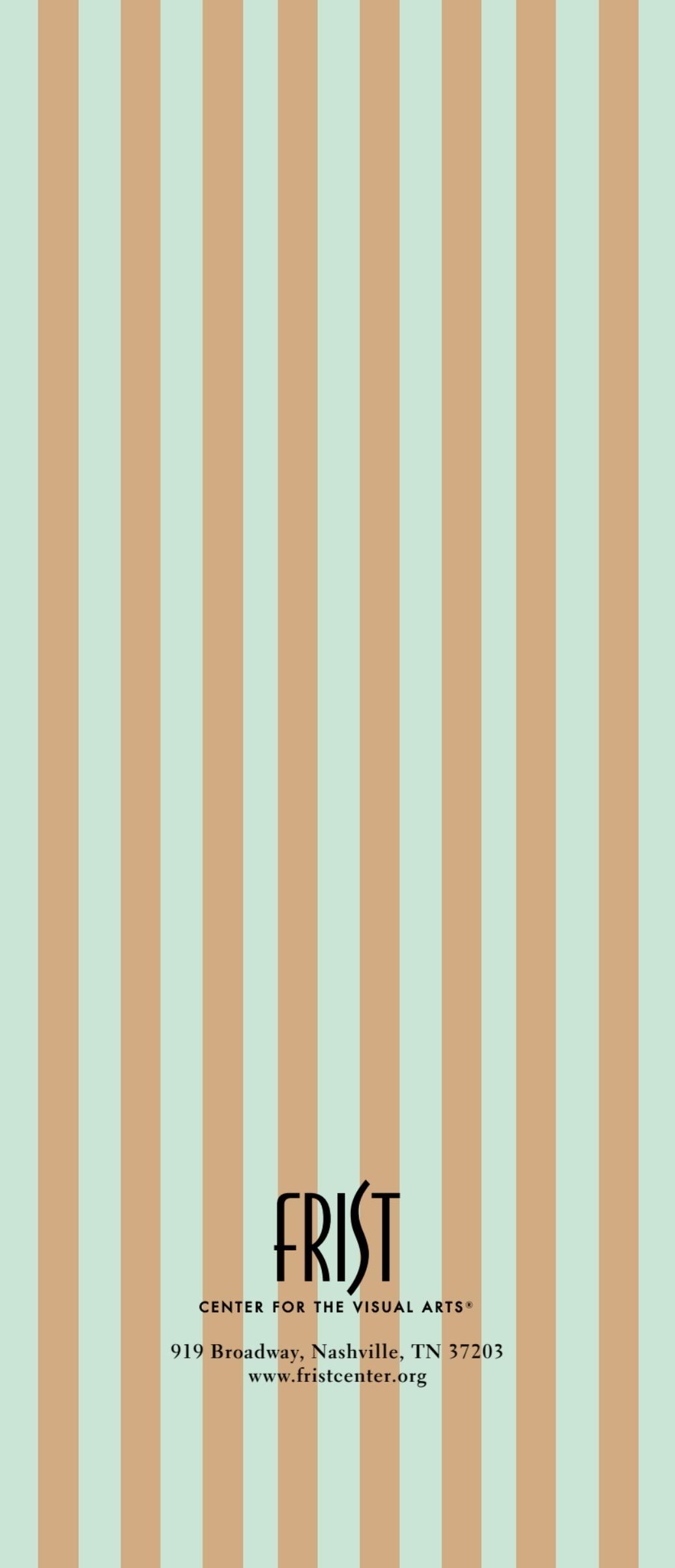


Hospitality Sponsor:



The Frist Center for the Visual Arts is supported in part by:



The background of the entire page consists of vertical stripes in two colors: a muted teal and a warm terracotta. The stripes are of equal width and are spaced evenly across the page.

FRIST

CENTER FOR THE VISUAL ARTS®

919 Broadway, Nashville, TN 37203
www.fristcenter.org