

# Christian Dior

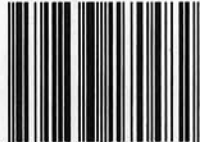


the magic of fashion

POWERHOUSE MUSEUM



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with Christian Dior, Paris and  
the Union Francaise des Arts du Costume, Paris*

# Christian Dior

## the magic of fashion



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DAVID JONES



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# f o r e w o r d s

**t**he Powerhouse Museum is delighted to be presenting the exhibition *Christian Dior: the magic of fashion* in association with Christian Dior, Paris and the Union Francaise des Arts du Costume (UFAC).

Christian Dior is undoubtedly the most famous name in twentieth century fashion. The Powerhouse Museum, which holds one of Australia's foremost collections of costume, is proud to stage this major retrospective of Dior. This is the first time such a significant collection of Dior gowns has been displayed outside Paris.

Drawn from the collections of Christian Dior and UFAC, the exhibition traces the remarkable decade of design by Christian Dior from 1947 to 1957 and brings it to the present with a selection of gowns by the House of Dior's later designers, Yves Saint Laurent, Marc Bohan and Gianfranco Ferré. A special section developed by the Powerhouse Museum focuses on Dior in postwar Australia, in particular the Dior parades held at David Jones in Sydney in 1948 and 1957.

The Powerhouse Museum is grateful for the cooperation of Christian Dior, Paris and the assistance of Michel-Henri Carriol, delegate for Christian Dior in Australia, in enabling this important exhibition to come to Australia.

I would also like to acknowledge the collaboration of the curators of the

exhibition: Louise Mitchell, from the Powerhouse Museum, who worked on the exhibition in association with Marika Genty from Christian Dior and Lydia Kamitsis from UFAC; and Jane de Teliga who initiated and directed the project for the Powerhouse Museum.

Our grateful thanks go to all those who have generously supported the Christian Dior exhibition, particularly the following sponsors:

Air France • Union des Assurances de Paris  
• Parfums Christian Dior • Nine Network Australia • David Jones Australia • Hotel Inter-Continental.

*Terence Measham*

*Director, Powerhouse Museum, Sydney*

**C**hristian Dior — the magical name that for forty-seven years now has been synonymous the world over with the enchantment of French fashion, elegance and style.

Regardless of the intrinsically fleeting nature of this creative sphere and the endless cycle of seasonal collections, the House of Christian Dior has somehow withstood the cruelty of time: season after season, Dior has, almost paradoxically, built its own timelessness, eschewing the ephemeral and placing itself squarely in the realm of tradition.

Despite the untimely death of its founder, the House of Dior has grown and branched out beyond its original field, that of haute couture, to acquire the far more global dimension it enjoys today.

I am always moved when I re-read the visionary words taken from Monsieur Dior's personal correspondence: 'In troubled times like ours, we must uphold our tradition of luxury, the jewel of our culture.'

*Bernard Arnault*

*President, Christian Dior*

**C**hristian Dior did not invent haute couture, but it was incontestably he who fixed its rules and set its bounds. Thanks to him, fashion became an art form in France and is now part of our national heritage. He invented licensing, and his name, famous throughout the world, has become synonymous with elegance and creativity. His reign was to last only ten years (1947—1957), but he made his mark in such a way that even today it has lost nothing of its magic.

In 1955 Dior discovered the talent of a young man as yet unheard of, Yves Saint Laurent. He took him on, made him his closest assistant and then his avowed successor. At the beginning of their collaboration, Yves Saint Laurent created a dress, photographed by Richard Avedon for

*Harper's Bazaar* on 30 August 1955 in the now famous composition 'Dovima and the elephants'. It was therefore quite natural, when Dior died in 1957, that Yves Saint Laurent should succeed him.

The Union Française des Arts du Costume (UFAC), which came into being in 1948, a year after the Dior adventure began, set itself the task of perpetuating French creativity.

UFAC has been able to preserve thousands of pieces of clothing, providing us today with a broad view of creative fashion history. Our collections of clothes and documentary resources make up one of the world's biggest reference centres, which designers continue to add to, season after season. As its custodian, UFAC has made this heritage available for nearly fifty years by taking part in international events like *Christian Dior: the magic of fashion* at the Powerhouse Museum in Sydney.

I trust that this exhibition in Australia will give a broad public the opportunity to admire some of the most original and interesting works of art of our times, and to appreciate the emergence, two years after the end of the Second World War, of a designer whose name would resound like thunder down the decades.

*Pierre Berge*

*President, Yves Saint Laurent*

*President, the Union Française des Arts du Costume, Paris*

# t he House of Dior today by Gianfranco Ferré\*

The artists I admire are those who try to unleash a certain interplay in their work, creating within the parameters of tradition and innovation.

When I came to Dior my initial concern was to bring into contemporary focus what was generally considered to be a magical universe. By using trousers, for example, a fairly masculine garment, I was able to revive the classic Dior suit. Combined with a waisted jacket, highlighted by a blouse in organza or lace, they create the sort of shape I really like:



something that is both romantic and contemporary, but remains extremely feminine.

Everything Christian Dior produced works on this basic polarity between strength and softness, tradition and innovation. He could put together a collection featuring a gown with the purest of lines alongside one sprinkled with mock daisies, in a *trompe l'oeil* effect. In the same vein, he would blend artificial forms with traditional materials and inject an air of modernity into every one of his designs.

That's my point of departure too. When designing my own collections I am constantly reworking the theme of contrasts.

There are many links between my work and that of Christian Dior. As a former architect I am accustomed to developing my designs in two steps, starting from research and experimentation and making free, flowing sketches. I concur with Christian Dior's words when he said: "Sketches are the first form of an idea." They are the expression of a look, a line, a stance. They are a guide to volume and proportion. I create moving shapes and lines.

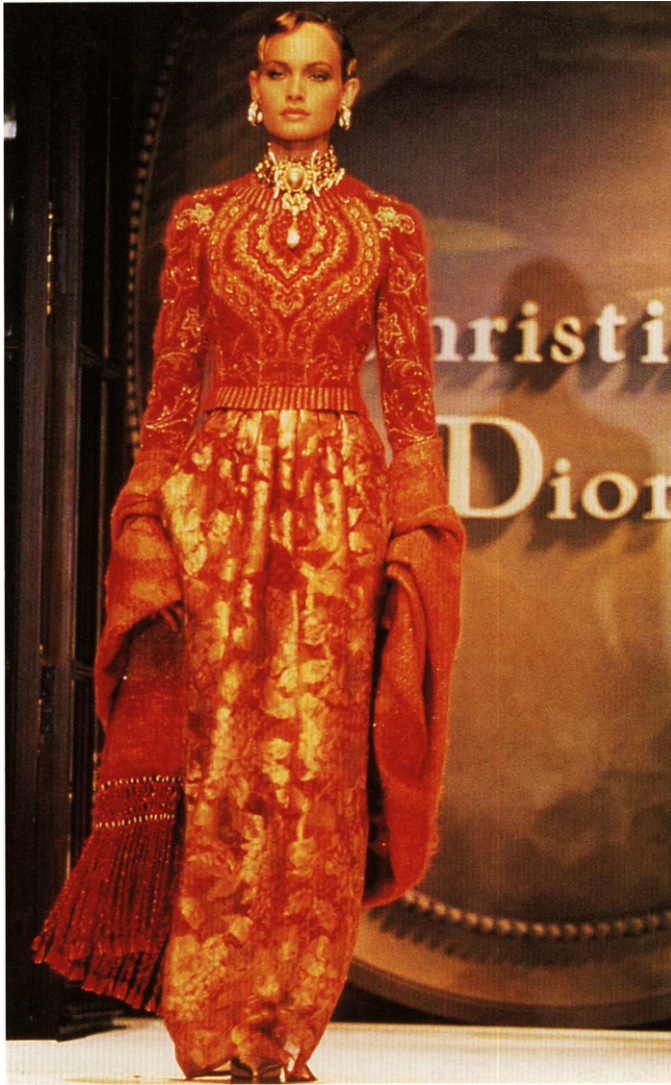
The next phase is pure technique, the architectural plan as it were, where the fabric of the design takes on volume and form.

The expertise of the Dior workrooms, heirs to the full tradition of couture, means the professional skills and techniques of the past can be applied to the present. Thanks to their skills, I can conjugate and decline lines, shapes and collections adapted to today's woman. Together we develop clothing combinations that allow a woman to feel elegant, confident and highly individual.

To perpetuate the spirit of Dior is to create pure, precisely drawn lines, with defined, perfectly balanced volume, and then underline them with amazing cutting techniques.

Playing with the masculine-feminine also follows the Dior image — the use, for example, of harsher fabrics, like Prince of Wales and hound's-tooth checks. I go beyond the historic





*'Alcove' an evening ensemble designed by Gianfranco Ferre for the House of Dior, Autumn-Winter collection 1993-94. The rich colours and motifs of the East inspired this dramatic outfit, made in an unusual combination of mohair and organza.*

trademarks of the House of Dior, but by doing so I also reinforce them, using the counterplay of colours like the notes of an organ, an exchange between the contrasts of black and white or the subtler shades of beige and grey.

This return to the source allows me to re-centre, purify or elaborate on my designs as my instinct dictates, and then to re-create a 'truly Dior universe' in conjunction with the staff of this prestigious establishment.

'I have been seduced by this marvellous instrument — Dior's workrooms, design teams and his image. It's as if I had been given a Stradivarius to play on entirely as I wished.'

*\* Gianfranco Ferre is Creator of the Haute Couture, Haute Fourrure (Haute Couture Furs), Women's Pret-a-Porter and Pret-a-Porter Furs at Christian Dior.*

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# Christian Dior: the magic of **f**ashion

by Louise Mitchell\*

Throughout the history of French decorative arts and design, there has been a complex relationship between the continuity of French tradition and the spirit of innovation and change. In both form and function, a dialogue has been maintained between innovation and tradition that has given French decorative arts their distinctive appearance and unique history. The success story of Christian Dior and his couture house is representative of this theme in French design.

Before the French Revolution the court was the focal point of the creation and dissemination of style in matters of dress. Traditional values inherited from the ancient regime — fine crafting, respect for luxury materials, and refinement of detail and finish — were integrated into the expanding luxury industries that flourished in nineteenth-century France. After the role of the couturier emerged during the Second Empire (1852—1870), haute couture became stamped on the international consciousness as typically French. The standards of creativity and skill set by designers such as the Callot Soeurs, Poiret, Chanel, Vionnet and Balenciaga in the first half of the twentieth century reinforced Paris's role as the undisputed centre of fashion. By the time of the Second World War, haute couture had proved its monetary and cultural value for France.

Recognition of haute couture's worth as a symbol for France helped set the scene for Christian Dior's extraordinary success when he launched his house in the years immediately after the war. With a disregard for postwar rationing and a conscious effort to revive the spirit of the luxurious fashions of the Second Empire and the *belle époque*, Dior brought excitement back to fashion and revived haute couture. In doing so, he demonstrated not only an outstanding flair for dress design, but also a shrewd understanding of French tradition in the decorative arts and its significance to markets abroad.

The exhibition *Christian Dior: the magic of fashion* is primarily a retrospective of Dior's decade of achievement as the most authoritative figure in the world of fashion. It begins with the 'Bar' suit of 1947, an outfit that encapsulates the New Look, which was to make Dior a household name. It continues with over sixty garments that represent his seasonal collections up to the time of his death in 1957. The exhibition concludes with designs by Dior's successors at the House of Dior: Yves Saint Laurent, Marc Bohan and the present designer, the Italian Gianfranco Ferré. Extending the exhibition up to the present shows the continuity of the Dior tradition and house style.

A publication like this is an opportunity to expand on exhibition themes. The exhibition's storyline was developed by the major lenders, Christian Dior archives and the Union

*Henry Clark's 1956 photograph of the mannequin Dovima wearing a Dior hat encapsulates the glamour and elegance of the Dior style and evokes nostalgia for a past age of luxury and good taste to which Dior aspired.*



Francaise des Arts du Costume (UFAC). The French curators, Marika Genty from the House of Dior and Lydia Kamitsis from UFAC, have highlighted Dior's approach to design in terms of seasonal changes in silhouettes, cut and construction, as well as in the use of opulent fabric embellishments, such as embroidery, that reveal the dazzling technical skills of the Parisian workrooms.

A major section of the exhibition, entitled 'The Dior wardrobe', categorises clothes according to time of day and purpose, which again highlights the tradition of couture recalling court etiquette. The essays by curators Marika Genty and Lydia Kamitsis provide the background to the exhibition approach. Gianfranco Ferré in his essay acknowledges the interplay of tradition and innovation in his collections for the House of Dior and gives credit to the workrooms that realise his designs.

My own contribution has been to look at the influence that French fashion, particularly that of Christian Dior, had in Australia in the postwar years. Because of its relevance to a local audience, a section about the Australian response has been included in the exhibition. Only a year after the New Look was launched, Sydney had the opportunity to view a collection of Dior garments, billed as the first collection to be seen outside France. The collection was shown at David Jones department store in Sydney, one of the many stores around the country



*Fashion illustration of Dior's 'Isphahan' ball gown by René Gruau, 1947. Illustrators and photographers played an important part in interpreting and disseminating the look and mood of Dior's latest collections. By creating a fantasy world around the dress they added to its desirability.*

that had considerable interest in promoting French fashion to the Australian buyer. The late 1940s and 1950s was a time of intense interest in Paris fashion, and it was a period when the moderately priced market was flooded with fashion derivative of Paris.

At the heart of Dior's success was his ability to combine the seemingly inconsistent areas of exclusive design and mass merchandising. Christian Dior's business acumen ensured that his house reaped considerable benefits from cooperation with department stores the world over and from his being the first couturier to develop a licensing system. As Lydia Kamitsis points out in her essay, Dior founded a fashion empire on a past that took its strongest guidelines from the traditions of French *art de vivre*, whilst summoning a new era of couture in which underwriting by the mass market ensured the continuation of the unique and expensive handmade designs of the couturier.

\* Louise Mitchell is a curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.



*Dior mannequins in 1957. For each collection Dior presented about 1 70 garments in a show lasting up to two hours. The order of each show was carefully set, beginning with suits, then formal town dresses, then more formal outfits, cocktail dresses, short evening dresses, and long evening dresses and ball gowns. The finale would be the wedding dress. Photo by Loomis Dean, Life Magazine, 1957.*



*the*  
*House*  
*of*  
*Christian*  
*Dior*

C  
couture and elegance

by Marika Genty\*

'Far from wanting to revolutionise fashion ... I only wanted to dress the most elegant women, from the most elegant ranks of society.'

Such boldness from one so timid was enough to convince industrialist Marcel Boussac when Christian Dior came to him with his plan: to create a fashion house under his own name, something 'small and secluded, with very few workrooms; within them the work would be done according to the highest traditions of *haute couture*; ... and would be aimed at a clientele of really elegant women'.<sup>2</sup> It would produce only clothes 'which would give an impression of simplicity, [but] would in fact involve elaborate workmanship'<sup>3</sup> to cater to markets abroad. The die was cast, and on 8 October 1946 the Societe Christian Dior was formed.

But just who was the man behind the name Christian Dior? Born in 1905 at Granville in Normandy, Christian Dior did not come to the world of fashion until the age of thirty, after

*Opposite: 'Curacao', from the 1954 Autumn - Winter collection, known as the H-line. Dior's intention was to create an elongated, youthful line by pushing up the bust and dropping the waist to the hip. The press dubbed it the String Bean or Flat Look, mistaking the high bustline for no bust. Photo by Henry Clarke.*

*Each season Dior presented a collection of the most dramatic and feminine evening gowns. 'Junon' (Juno) was part of his Milieu du siècle (Mid-century) collection of 1949, which referred to the crinoline dresses of the mid-1800s. Photo by Horst.*

*Opposite: Some of Dior's most beautiful dresses featured elaborate floral embroidery. In 'Vilmorin' (detail shown), from the Spring-Summer 1952 collection, delicate daisies seem to grow from the white organza ground. Photo by Sacha.*



originally training for a diplomatic career, setting up an art gallery and travelling widely outside France. He worked briefly as a fashion illustrator, but from 1938 to the declaration of the Second World War he was employed as an assistant to couturier Robert Piguet, and then became a junior designer for Lucien Lelong. At Lelong's he learned a sense of fabric, honed his creative talents and observed the workings of a major fashion house.

In 1946 he left Lelong and set up his own premises at 30 avenue Montaigne in 'an attractive dwelling ... with [a] classical and Parisian elegance. I was determined that my decor should not degenerate into elaborate decorations and distract the eye from my clothes.' The pearl grey and white Louis XVI decor he knew from his childhood was perfectly in tune with the atmosphere at his establishment and, in its characteristic elegance, contributed to the famous Dior look.

Such surrounds demanded 'a staff of great class',<sup>5</sup> rigorously handpicked by Christian Dior. His gift lay in his choice of the best employees who, along with the clout of Marcel Boussac, allowed him to develop the quality he strove for as 'a conscientious craftsman'<sup>6</sup> and gave free rein to his imagination.





*To provide an overview of each collection and ensure the smooth running of the fashion parade, Dior drew up charts containing the name and number of each dress, a fabric sample, and brief descriptions and details of all the accessories. Photo by Loomis Dean,*

*Life Magazine, about 1957.*

*Opposite: Dior relied on his technical director, Marguerite Carre, to oversee the translation of his sketches into clothes. Each workroom, under the leadership of a skilled head, was assigned a number of dresses to complete. In the background of this photograph are dress forms, which were made to the measurements of each client. Photo by Bellini.*



Christian Dior's first collection was unveiled to *le Tout Paris* (the cream of Parisian society) on 12 February 1947, amid great excitement. It was received with 'a hurricane of applause'. 'It's quite a revolution, dear Christian,' said Carmel Snow, chief editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, uttering her famous phrase: 'Your dresses have such a new look. They are wonderful, you know.' And so the New Look, as the first Dior collection came to be known, was born.

Deliberately turning his back on the military style so favoured in the 1940s, Christian Dior revived the feminine look, with clothes that were all soft curves. His dresses emphasised the breasts, featured little rounded shoulders and a nipped-in waist, flaring at the hips into a straight or flowing skirt that dropped to below calf length. These were the new lines *à la Dior*, typified in his 'Bar' suit.

An afternoon dress could take anything from 3 to 40 metres of fabric: 40 metres of faille were used to make 'Cherie'. This abundance of fabric signalled the end of postwar restraint and heralded the kind of fashion women hungered for, and this was the key to the enormous success of the New Look.

On the other side of the Atlantic, however, department stores reacted with hostility after



their orders of Dior gowns sold out in the space of twenty-four hours. Alliances were formed to defend short skirts, and Dior was accused of 'disfiguring' women. Only the strenuous efforts of the fashion editors saved the day, by convincing the buyers to go back to Paris. By the end of 1947 America had been conquered, and Nieman Marcus in Dallas awarded Christian Dior the Oscar of Haute Couture in recognition of the new life he had breathed into fashion.

Orders began to mount up and, to cope with the demand, two new workrooms were added to the three Dior had started with. The second collection was even more successful than the first.

The next step was to expand and take advantage of the Christian Dior name: why not create accessories to his designs, articles like perfume, furs, hats, stockings, gloves, shoes and jewellery? Not even the slightest detail of elegance was to be ignored. Christian Dior's dream was now realised: to dress women 'from head to foot',<sup>8</sup> right down to their underwear.

In order to satisfy Dior's desire to provide a complete wardrobe, a whole network sprang

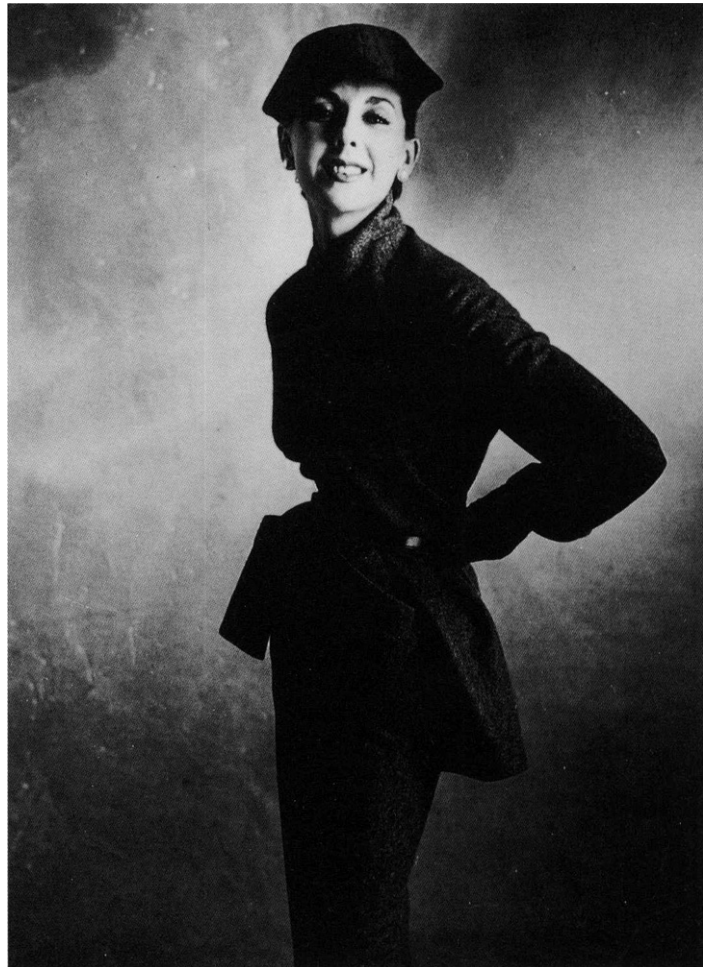
*'Favori' (Favourite), from Dior's  
Oblique line, was shown in his  
Autumn-Winter 1950 collection.*

*The tie scarf wrapped across  
the body and was cinched under  
the belt, giving the suit a  
dynamic asymmetrical line.*

*Photo by Irving Penn.*

*Opposite: For Dior, line,  
shape and proportion were  
most important, as seen in the  
dramatic silhouette of the  
'Cocotte' (Sweetie) suit from his  
Spring-Summer 1948 collection.*

*Photo by Coffin, 1948.*



up around the central hub. Jacques Rouet, Dior's administrative manager and financier, soon put in place a system for manufacture under licence to the name Christian Dior. Licensing contracts were signed with department stores in Australia, Canada, Cuba, Chile and Mexico.

From the earliest days of the couture house, the name of Christian Dior extended its influence beyond its native borders. In 1948 Christian Dior opened boutiques in New York and Caracas, and another followed in London in 1954.

With twenty-eight workrooms by 1954 the Dior empire was flourishing. The future was bright. But every season demanded new designs to surprise his two to three thousand clients and inspire them to renew their Christian Dior wardrobes.

Names of lines like *Zig-Zag*, *Envoi* (Flight), *Cyclone*, *Moulins a Vent* (Windmills) or *Ciseaux* (Scissors) not only created an image in the public's mind, but also made movement the focus of each collection. Dior's whirlwind pleated dresses gave life and youth to the form, transforming the wearer into a flower. The Z-shape formed by the folds of a gown recalled the flighty strokes of a pencil sketch. The impression of flight with every step came from an unequal distribution of the fullness of the skirt of a dress.



Creating volume, emphasising a neckline, accentuating a waist with an overlay, a bow or a crossover, asymmetrical effect — to assiduous followers of the seasonal collections these were the details of the broad direction in which Christian Dior was moving, keeping the New Look well and truly alive.

But were these details and seasonal changes enough to entice women to wear Dior? They were also invited to dream a little with embroidered gowns rich in Persian-inspired motifs and equal to the finest pieces of jewellery. And tempted to reconsider the charms of a rustic ball with dresses sewn with daisies, currants or dragonflies. Creating an embossed effect, creating texture with lace, braid or jet — anything to fuel women's imaginations.

Each collection was a cunningly orchestrated *coup de theatre*: by constantly coming up with something new Dior ensured maximum publicity for every collection.

After the wasp waist and oversized full skirts, Christian Dior realised that women wanted clothes that were in tune with the demands of daily life. He moved away from the New Look and onto collections dominated by geometric lines. In the 1950s the words 'vertical', 'oblique', 'oval' and 'long' came up time and time again, suggesting a stylisation of the female figure. But the culmination of Dior's geometric lines were the *H*, *A* and *Y* designs.

The *H-line*, created for the 1954 Autumn-Winter collection, essentially lengthened and streamlined the torso to create a half-girl/half-woman effect. The dresses, suits and coats were cut along parallel lines like the letter H. The Flat Look or Haricot Vert (String Bean), as the fashion media dubbed them, seemed to flatten the chest — arousing a great deal of criticism and controversy.

The shape symbolised by the letter A, introduced in the Spring-Summer collection of 1955, was similar in construction to the *H-line*, but was based on two joining diagonals. The dominant effect was once again a longer torso, while the crossbar of the A, representing the waist, was more mobile.

The *Y-line* of the 1955 Autumn-Winter collection was a reaction against long basques and dropped waists. In this collection the two upward strokes of the Y formed a wide, high bustline. The waist was tightly nipped in and placed higher than usual, giving an extra length to the skirt, and therefore also to the legs. The key element in Dior's letter collections was the variation in waistlines.

But closer to Dior's heart than the latest novelty was his desire to meet the needs of his elegant clientele. He developed a system of *chartes* (charts) to ensure balance in the collections and to give an overview of the types of garments each one featured. These large sheets of paper (measuring 24 x 19 inches) were pinned to the wall or placed on the floor of his studio and detailed every item in the collection, from suits to evening wear, in thirteen different categories. A fabric sample for each garment was attached, along with any relevant



*For Dior the hat was an indispensable part of the total look, complementing the proportions and line of the dress. He spent many hours designing and selecting hats for each of his outfits, and his hat styles came to be as influential as his clothes.  
Photo by Louise Dahl-Wolfe, 1953.*

*Right: On the day of the showing of a new collection, chaos reigned as dressers, mannequins, hairdressers and workroom heads crowded into the dressing-rooms. For Dior, this was the moment when the collection passed out of his hands into those of the mannequins. Here the mannequin is being dressed in 'May', an evening gown from Dior's Spring-Summer 1953 collection. Photo by Henri Cartier-Bresson, 1953.*



*Left: Seamstresses at work at Maison Dior. When Dior set up his house he carefully handpicked his staff, aiming for a mix of technical expertise with inspirational flair. His seamstresses in particular had to be technically very skilled: each dress was constructed on a foundation, and, instead of using darts, Dior insisted that they mould the fabric to shape with hot irons. Photo by Bellini.*





*Presented in his Envoi (Flight) collection of 1948, Dior considered the 'Adelaide' evening gown his masterpiece. With 70 metres of tulle in the skirt alone the dress embodies the femininity, luxury and extravagance of Dior's New Look and marks the end of wartime restraint. It was shown at the Dior parade in Sydney in 1948. Photo by Coffin, 1948.*

*Olivia de Havilland was a long-standing customer of Dior.*

*At her wedding to Pierre Galante she wore the 'A' suit from Dior's Spring-Summer 1955 collection.*

*Photo by Mike Dulmen.*



instructions for the workrooms making up the pattern. The chart also featured the names of the individual models and the mannequins who wore them at the collections.

The Dior charts have been preserved in the company's archives and are considered an invaluable legacy. They are evidence of the detailed nature of the lines created by Christian Dior and his successors and, even more importantly, they constitute a resource through which we can more readily identify each of their designs.

After the devastating death of Christian Dior on 24 October 1957, Yves Saint Laurent was asked to take over the studio. He was only twenty-one years old, but Dior had already identified him as crown prince. Saint Laurent's first collection, in 1958, went under the name *Trapeze* (Trapezium). It was a triumph, and for three years he continued Dior's geometric themes. But by 1960, quite soon after his departure, a new spirit had taken over.

Marc Bohan took another tack when it came to feminine elegance: he wanted distinctiveness without rigidity, and sought to make Dior products more accessible. Two pret-a-porter (ready-to-wear) lines were introduced: Miss Dior in 1967 and Christian Dior Monsieur in 1970.

*From the early 1950s Dior began to move away from the nipped waists and full skirts of the New Look, and his collections became dominated by geometric lines. His Y-line was clearly expressed in 'Voyageur' (Voyager) from the Autumn-Winter 1955 collection. The large stole creates the arms of the Y and the slim skirt the stem. Photo by Willy Maywald, 1955.*



In 1968 Frederic Castet joined Bohan with the launch of Dior's couture furs. The harmonious assembly of shapes and lines, the variety and combination of furs, the ingenious preparation of the hides, new colours, and work with the best workrooms added a new dynamism. So many great talents under the one roof played an important part in carrying on the name and spreading the reputation of the House of Dior.

Since 1989 Gianfranco Ferré has continued the Dior spirit. His emphasis is on geometric and graphic designs, the purest lines and masculine fabrics, rendered feminine with accentuated curves, and highlighted with lace or organza, embroidery or flowers. His work is a series of colourful and extravagant variations on the abiding theme of the House of Dior: Couture and Elegance.

*\* Marika Genty is librarian-archivist for Christian Dior, Paris.*

1. Christian Dior, *Dior by Dior*, translated by Antonia Fraser, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1958, p20 and p135. 2. Dior, pp7-8. 3. Dior, p8. 4. Dior, p19. 5. Dior, p11. 6. Dior, p21. 7. Cited in Françoise Giroud, *Dior: Christian Dior 1905—57*, Thames and Hudson, London, 1987, p9. 8. Dior, p146.

# **h** *Christian Dior:* *a new era in* **haute couture**

by Lydia Kamitsis\*

Of all the great names to have made their mark on the history of fashion, only a few have succeeded in doing what Christian Dior did: reinvent the rules, for all time, in the space of a single decade.

With an acute awareness of the importance of his trade, he opened the House of Dior in 1946 and established a way of working that was to signal the advent of a new era in haute couture.

This success story is all the more dazzling because the road that led to it was so long and unusual. Son of an industrialist, Christian Dior had to renounce his artistic leanings to study political science, in accordance with his father's ambitions. But far from thinking of a future diplomatic career, the young student preferred to lead the life of a gilded Bohemian, surrounded by the artist friends who formed his tastes. In 1928, pushed into practising a trade, he obtained (not without difficulty) financial assistance from his parents to open an art gallery, on the express condition that he remain a silent partner. He and his associate, Jacques Bonjean, exhibited the work of artists they admired — Picasso, Braque, Matisse,

*Opposite: The 'Bar' suit was a star attraction of Dior's first collection in 1947. The short, fabric-skimping dresses and masculine silhouette of wartime fashions were swept away by the long, full skirts, softly rounded shoulders and tightly nipped waists of the New Look. Photo by Willy Maywald, 1955.*



Dufy — and those who were close to them, including Christian Berard, Salvador Dali and Max Jacob. But this experiment, which satisfied Dior's keen interest in art in all its forms, was cut short by his father's bankruptcy in 1931. He withdrew the funds given by his parents from the gallery, but continued, with his friend Pierre Colle, to promote the Surrealists and Salvador Dali. In 1934 Dior fell ill with tuberculosis and spent a year in convalescence.

On returning to Paris in search of something to satisfy his own needs and help his family, and on the advice of his friends, Dior tried his hand at fashion design. A complete novice, he knew nothing of this world, but a few couturiers, and milliners especially, accepted his sketches, as did the newspapers, including the women's pages of the daily *Le Figaro*.

These hesitant beginnings in fashion took a more decisive turn in 1938 when Robert Piguet hired him as an assistant designer. For the inexperienced Christian Dior, it was an opening into the profession of design, and he was quick to prove his ability. The 'Cafe Anglais' model he created there attracted a great deal of attention, as did the 'Robes Amphores', and they both showed the essence of what was to become the Dior style. 'Cafe Anglais', a black-and-white hound's-tooth check suit, consisted of a wide overskirt draped over a full petticoat, and a short, fitted jacket in black woollen fabric. The 'Robes Amphores' featured a full skirt (seemingly inadvertently inverted, so that the skirt's fullness was at the waist rather than the hem), caught in at the waist by a belt — launching the fashion for fuller, rounded hips.

From 1941 Christian Dior spent five years with Lucien Lelong, which gave him the opportunity to perfect his technical knowledge and to develop his sense of discipline in execution. He thus added his skills as a tailor to his talents as a connoisseur, his love of avant-garde art and his proven entrepreneurial ability.

A fortuitous meeting with industrialist Marcel Boussac gave Dior the chance to capitalise on his multifaceted experiences. Drawing on that experience in their new venture — the creation of a fashion house — helped lend originality to what came to be a successful business enterprise. From the time of his first collection, presented in February 1947, Christian Dior reaffirmed his unfailing ability to create an event. He captured the spirit of the times — and ultimately created it.

In a reaction to what he called the 'hideous fashions' that had characterised the war years, Dior chose to take an opposing perspective. He said that 'Hats were far too large, skirts far too short, jackets far too long' and replaced them with the exact opposite. He proposed a feminine image, one contrary to the military look. Novel though it seemed, this merely harked back to the age of the crinoline. The New Look, with its rounded shoulders, wasp waists, generous hips and long, full skirts was only new from a very short view of fashion history. It was a stroke of genius to pass off as innovation what a whole century had



*'Diorama', the centrepiece of Dior's second collection, for Autumn-Winter 1947, had taken Dior's seamstresses 230 hours to complete and included 26 metres of fabric and 42 metres of braid.*

*Photo by Forlano.*

done its utmost to forget. It appears that the success of this style was chiefly due to the persistent need that people seem to have in times of crisis to seek comfort in the trappings of what are thought to have been more carefree times. After years of deprivation and misery, the wish to believe in a bright future pushed people to a desire for splendour. Dior sensed this and accentuated it in his second collection. 'Dresses took up fantastic yardages of material, and this time went right down to the ankles ... A golden age seemed to have come again ... What did the weight of my sumptuous materials, my heavy velvets and brocades, matter? When hearts were light, mere fabrics could not weigh the body down. Abundance was still much too much of a novelty for a poverty cult to develop out of inverted snobbism.'<sup>3</sup>

The passion for opulence inherent in the quantity of the materials and in the variety of embroideries and accessories was to be the best way of restoring the tradition of French haute couture.

The success of such ideas, and the clever management of the spin-offs they generated, enabled Dior to make luxury a serious business, a rationally organised industry. His direct involvement in the business side of the House of Dior took haute couture out of the undoubtedly brilliant, but limited, domain of a very small elite and offered it to the world, turning haute couture into a financial empire. He analysed his role thus: 'We are merchants

*Each parade closed with the announcement 'Grand Mirage' and a mannequin would emerge in a wedding dress. 'Fidelite' (Fidelity) was shown in the Autumn-Winter 1949 collection.*

*Photo by Willy Maywald.*

*Opposite: 'Mexique' (Mexico) from the Autumn-Winter 1951 collection. Dior's favourite, the Longue (Long) line marked the waistline under the bust, giving the illusion of a high waist and a long body line. Photo by Louise Dahl-Wolfe, 1951.*



of ideas. Each season we have a certain stock of ideas to sell. Then we have to analyse, in a strictly commercial manner, just what they cost to produce and how many are actually sold." These ideas rapidly snowballed into the creation of a multitude of products: stockings, gloves, ties, perfumes and shoes bearing the label of the house, and bringing to fruition the dream to dress a woman in Christian Dior from head to foot.

Dior was a determined innovator: in 1947 he hit on the idea of establishing a boutique that would offer a choice of accessories such as jewellery, flowers and scarves. In 1948 he diversified by launching a range of simpler dresses that were more modest than those of the main collection. The idea of a boutique collection was born, opening the way to what was later to become a common practice among couturiers. Other items were added — gifts and even light furniture — necessitating a move in 1955 from the tiny boutique at 30 avenue Montaigne to larger premises at 15 rue Francois 1<sup>er</sup>. The decor of the new boutique reflected the Dior style perfectly. The couturier had entrusted the task to Victor Grandpierre, who re-created the spirit of the Louis XVI style that was so dear to Dior, but with a 'very 1955' *belle époque* flavour.

Christian Dior based his universe on a past whose strongest references came from the French *art de vivre* (the splendours of Louis XVI, the imperial feasts of the Second Empire, the frivolity of the *belle époque*). But far from dwelling on the past, he drew from it the essence of





PLAN DE TURGOT  
1789-1790  
REVOLUTIONNAIRE

PLAN pour les Etablissements pour les TURISTES

VILLE  
FAUBOURG SAINT

*Right: Twice each year Dior presented his collections to a select group of private customers, buyers and the press. At this opening of the Autumn-Winter 1955 collection Marlene Dietrich is seated in the front row.*

*Photo by Willy Maywald, 1955.*



*Left: For Dior, accessories were an important part of creating a total look and his dream was to be able to dress women from head to toe. These are his New Look accessories of 1948. Photo by Frank Scherschel, Life Magazine*





*Dior selected each of his house mannequins personally. He believed that it was their style and personality that brought his clothes to life. Here he is pictured with Renee, of whom he said 'Of all my mannequins, Renee is probably the one who comes nearest to my ideal. Every dress she puts on seems to be a success as though there existed an exact equivalence between her proportions and those of my imagination' ('Dior by Dior, page 128). Photo by Henry Clarke, 1957.*

*The opening of the Theatre du Chateau de Groussay, 1957. From left: Patricia Lopez- Willshaw wearing 'Festival' from Dior's Autumn-Winter 1956 collection, her husband Arturo, Francine Weisweiler wearing 'Muguet' (Lily-of-the-valley) from the Spring-Summer 1957 collection, Edouard Dermit and Jean Cocteau.*



*Photo by Andre Ostier.*

a world that he made his own and put forward as the epitome of good taste and elegance. His cleverly coordinated collections conjured up the rather paradoxical image of a modern woman, free of any financial constraints, yet enjoying a demanding and active social life.

The range and subtle variations of a Dior wardrobe made it the arbiter of a new code of good taste, the privilege of a happy few. But, even more importantly, the seasonal need to create something new brought about the stereotype of the style-setter. By launching a new line that was in seeming contrast to the preceding look, Dior turned the very notion of fashion (that of the passing craze) into a system ruled by its own dictates. Never before had the fear of being *demodee* (out of fashion) reached such a high proportion of women. Take the example of the sort of advice that appeared in numerous magazines the day after the explosive appearance of the New Look. To readers who could never aspire to owning a real Dior, *Elle's* October 1947 issue suggested clever solutions for shortening jackets and lengthening skirts, to rescue dresses already in their readers' wardrobes.

The collections, analysed in advance in a program accompanying each presentation, bore names that sounded like so many slogans. Everything was determined — the colours and fabrics — down to the smallest accessories. The 'total look' that Dior invented was destined to create a lasting career, for himself and his colleagues. He had the undeniable qualities of a fashion designer and businessman, but also (although he denied it) the instincts of a good



*Dior's evening dress 'Peruvienne' (Peruvian) from his Milieu du siècle (Mid-century) collection. Presented in 1949, it was full of dramatic lines and technical virtuosity. In this collection Dior was particularly interested in exploring what he called the internal geometry of the material, the grain of the fabric, which through careful cutting gave life and body to his dresses. Photo by Willy Maywald, 1949.*

publicist. His much-imitated programs are an example of this. The creed of the creator, his intentions, his vision are clearly exposed, leaving the commentators only a small margin for personal analysis. He was inclined to be both an attentive observer of his work, and his own critic, which became apparent in the publication of his two autobiographical books in 1951 and 1956. These were also professions of faith regarding his trade, which came to symbolise, thanks to him, not only the dream of great luxury, but also that of commercial success.

Although Dior was terrified of the idea of travel, he was astute enough to understand the primary importance of direct contact with the vast world he had to conquer. America, incarnation of modernity, appeared to him as the land of possibility towards which he had to turn. In 1948 he decided to open a shop for a deluxe *pret-a-porter* (ready-to-wear) fashion house producing designs adapted for the American market. This great first in the history of haute couture was followed by other similar initiatives, scattering the Dior label to the four corners of the globe and consolidating the prestige of his empire of luxury.

In less than a decade, he had established the ground rules for the renaissance of French couture. Owing to his rigorous adherence to the rules of his craft and his extraordinary flair, fashion even became a respectable subject outside the fashion houses. On 3 August 1954, the Sorbonne invited Christian Dior to present a lecture titled the 'Aesthetics of fashion' in a course on the history of French civilisation.

*The formal afternoon dress 'Zerline' was part of Dior's Autumn-Winter 1957 collection, the last collection he would present.*

*Photo by Willy Maywald, 1957.*



Now deemed an heir to the great figures of fashion whom he admired — Poiret, Chanel, Vionnet — the art lover, now couturier, could claim his legacy and combine their qualities. To the flamboyant side of Paul Poiret, he linked the luxury of simplicity dear to Gabrielle Chanel and the advanced techniques of Madeleine Vionnet, adding his own innate sense of construction and quality of execution.

In a few concise phrases he once summed up the challenge confronting the field to which he gave a modern face: 'Fashion has its own moral code however frivolous: ... The maintenance of the tradition of fashion is in the nature of an act of faith. In a century which attempts to tear the heart out of every mystery, fashion guards its secret well, and is the best possible proof that there is still magic abroad.'<sup>5</sup> He concluded, with clairvoyance, that 'the great adventure which constitutes Parisian couture is not merely a Temple of Vanities: it is a charming outward manifestation of an ancient civilisation, which intends to survive'.<sup>6</sup>

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1. Christian Dior, *Dior by Dior*, translated by Antonia Fraser, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1958, p4. 2. Dior, p4. 3. Dior, p33. 4. Dior, Elie Rabourdin and Alice Chavanne, eds. *Je suis couturier (I am a couturier)*, by Christian Dior, Editions du Conquistador, Paris, 1951, p118. 5. Dior, pp189-90. 6. Dior, p190.



*Christian Dior with the mannequin Sylvie. Two months before Dior started designing, the fabric merchants brought their samples for him to make a selection. Wearing the linen toile, or pattern, of the dress, mannequins would stand for hours while Dior draped fabrics over them. Photo by Bellini.*

*Christian  
Dior  
and  
postwar*

**a**ustralia

by Louise Mitchell\*

Mention Christian Dior to Australians with memories of the postwar years, and they are likely to recall the excitement of seeing the New Look after years of wartime austerity. The success of Dior's New Look sparked the revival of haute couture, and his authoritative word made headline news both in France and abroad. The postwar period was a time of intense interest in French fashion and Australia became part of an international audience that played an important role in the making of 'French style'.

Despite the distance, Australia was by no means isolated from the influence of Paris. Communication and travel improved dramatically after the war and, through the efforts of the fashion media, department stores and the couture houses, those Australians interested in fashion were able to keep a close eye on Paris couture, particularly the House of Dior. It was no longer necessary to go to Paris to purchase fashion: fashion came to the buyer, not only through the press and publicity, but also through the boutiques opened in cities across the world and beyond the fashion centres of Paris, New York and London.

*Opposite: One Australian photographer who successfully captured the allure of French fashion was Athol Shmith, who was commissioned to do a series of fashion shots, including this one of Patricia 'Bambi' Tuckwell in a Dior cocktail dress in 1949.*







To a great extent, the couture-led recovery of Paris can be credited to the intense competitive interest of department stores and fashion magazines around the world. Fashion editors and buyers flocked to Paris in the postwar years. The most important market for France was the United States, whose interest was particularly stimulated by the *Theatre de la Mode* of 1945, a travelling exhibition of child-size dolls made of wire armatures with porcelain heads, dressed by Parisian couture houses and mounted on sets designed by famous artists. Organised by the Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne as part of a carefully planned strategy of the French Ministry of Reconstruction, the purpose of the *Theatre de la Mode* was to reassert the dominance of French fashion over, and define it against, American fashion, which had developed considerably during the period of isolation from Europe. The French had quickly come to understand that their own fashion industry had suffered little from the war in comparison with the devastation wreaked on French heavy industries. For although fashion, to some, was trivial, it nonetheless represented hope to France after four years of German occupation. By attracting buyers back to Paris, the *Theatre de la Mode* paved the way for the reception of Dior's New Look in early 1947.

Unlike the United States, which had developed its own fashion industry during the war, Australia needed little encouragement to be enticed back to Paris. The interest in and



*In 1957 David Jones, in association with the Australian Women's Weekly brought a parade of Dior couture originals to Australia. This cover depicts the seven Dior house mannequins who came to Australia.*

*Opposite: Christian Dior showing his house mannequins Australia on the globe in preparation for the 1957 Dior parade. Dior and his staff often wore overalls while working. Photo by Andre Gandner.*

prestige of French style had been set during the interwar years and was to be intensified after the war. Before the war, Australian women interested in fashion had kept abreast of the Parisian image of the modern woman through foreign fashion magazines and local publications, such as *The Home*. For those who could afford it, French fashion could be purchased through upmarket local dressmaking establishments, which were as French as their owners could make them — bearing French names and often run by French people. Since the 1920s, however, for the vast majority of middle-class Australian women, the preferred choice had been the department store, with its ready-made merchandise. Again, Paris was the inspiration for department stores such as Sydney's Mark Foys, which was modelled after Paris's Bon Marche, and David Jones's new store, which opened in 1927. David Jones was particularly noted for its sophisticated and modern window displays, fashion parades and the French salon, where shoppers could select from a glamorous array of ready-made gowns.

During the war Australian women had little exposure to Paris and its fashion industry. In the early 1940s, the main source of fashion influence was the United States. Rationing, which regulated the amount of clothing available to Australian women, was introduced in 1942. Government war restrictions also necessitated the simplification of civilian clothing, which was aimed at economising on both materials and labour. The resulting style of dress



had a simple, austere silhouette, with square, padded shoulders and a short, narrow skirt. Reflecting in 1957 on his New Look designs compared with wartime fashions, Christian Dior wrote: 'In December 1946, as a result of the war and uniforms, women still looked and dressed like Amazons. But I designed clothes for flower-like women, with rounded shoulders, full feminine busts, and handspan waists above enormous spreading skirts.'

Australians were able to renew their admiration of French fashion as early as 1946 through a series of fashion parades organised by the country's leading women's magazine, the *Australian Women's Weekly*. Known as the French Fashion Parades, the idea for the parades came from Mary Hordern, wife of businessman Anthony Hordern IV. Mary's sister Gretel had married Frank Packer, owner of the *Australian Women's Weekly*, where Mary worked as a fashion editor. With Frank Packer's financial backing, Mary Hordern pursued her project with enthusiasm, travelling to Paris, meeting designers, selecting gowns and accessories, and recruiting mannequins, a fashion director and a parade technician. The logistics of it all were complex and novel, and the project made good copy. Mary's movements were assiduously reported on by the *Weekly*, as the opportunity to see French fashion so soon after the war had captured the public imagination.

The first *Australian Women's Weekly* French Fashion Parade was launched with a gala



*The Australian Women's Weekly's fashion advisor, Mary Hordern, snapped with Christian Dior, 'the newest designer in Paris'. Photo by Jean-Louis Moussempes, 1947.*

*Opposite: Geiger's, an up-market fashion accessory shop in Collins Street, Melbourne, commissioned Wolfgang Sievers to photograph the French mannequins recruited in 1946 for the Australian Women's Weekly first French Fashion Parade. Photo by Wolfgang Sievers, 1946.*

opening in David Jones's Great Restaurant and was reported as one of the most glamorous events of the year. It consisted of gowns from the houses of Patou, Lanvin, Lelong, Molyneux, Balmain, Carven and Fath. Similar gala openings were held at Myer's Mural Hall in Melbourne, Myer in Adelaide and at Finney Isles in Brisbane. Although the fashions were not for sale, the stores were able to produce credible copies for purchase.

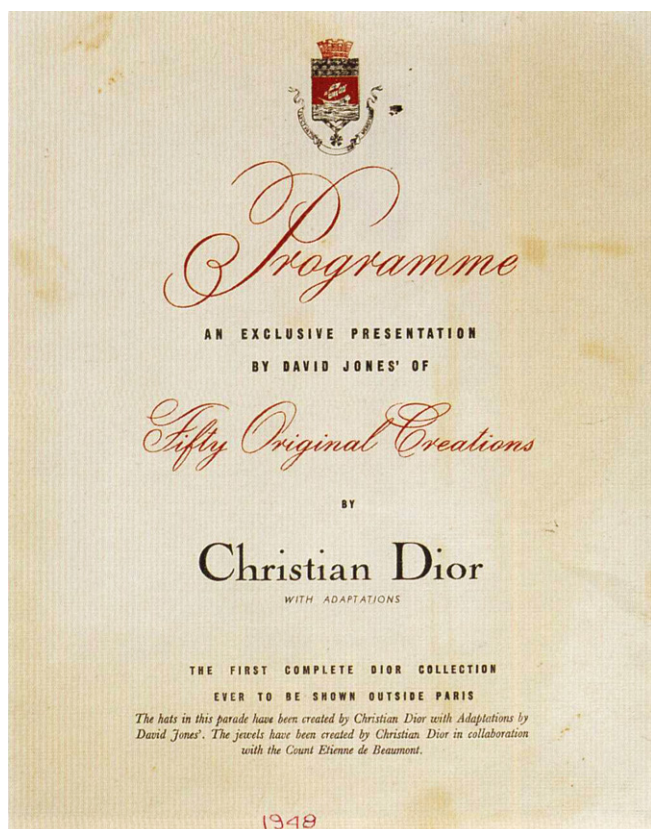
The success of the parades took Mary Hordern back to Paris the following year to organise more. On this second trip she met Christian Dior, who had only just become famous, and had her picture taken with him for the *Weekly*.<sup>3</sup> Christian Dior, she assured her *Weekly* readers, was 'the' name in Paris and she was determined to feature his designs in the parade. A Dior New Look black cocktail dress in the parade was illustrated in the *Weekly*, and a pattern was provided so readers could run up their own version at home.

Like the previous year's parade, the 1947 *Weekly* parade consisted of couture clothes from a variety of Parisian houses. Again French mannequins were recruited and flown to Australia by Lancastrian plane (a gruelling sixty hours, with numerous stopovers). A change of venue from David Jones to Mark Foys underscores local rivalries.<sup>2</sup> In the same year David Jones launched its Paris Fashions for All policy with a selection of fashions, including some from Dior, which were reproduced in the store's Marlborough Street workroom so that Australian



women could enjoy the 'luxury and glamour of Paris high fashion and at prices to suit all pockets'. Later in the year, the store invited the Paris designer Pierre Balmain to Sydney to lecture on fashion and to design clothes specifically for 'the Australian woman'. The underlying assumption of the store's new policy was that it was every Australian woman's dream to own a creation from a Paris couture house.

In 1948 David Jones was able to upstage the competition by persuading Christian Dior to agree to the first-ever parade of his New Look clothes in Australia. In April the *Herald's* London-based fashion editor reported that David Jones's spring parade would show 'the first-ever representative collection of original fashions designed by Christian Dior to be shown outside of Paris'.<sup>3</sup> When the parade arrived, the *Herald* headlines claimed Dior's 'tiny waists and whirlaway skirts cause sensation'.<sup>4</sup> The parade was launched in August and emphasised the designer's current silhouette, *Envol* (Flight) and *Zig-Zag*. Australian mannequins approximating the Dior house mannequins modelled the clothes. Dior lent himself to the occasion through an interview with the *Herald's* European correspondent. Dior claimed Australia was the right country for his clothes as 'living in the sunshine of a comparatively new country unscathed by war, Australians have a cleaner, brighter outlook and are more receptive to new ideas than the tired people of European countries.'<sup>5</sup>



*Opposite: Invitation to David Jones's French fashion parade. Launched in 1947, David Jones's Paris Fashions for All policy aimed to provide copies of Paris couture to suit all pockets.*

*Program for the parade held at David Jones in 1948. The program reveals that a selection of Australian-made copies were modelled alongside the original garments.*

The Dior clothes at the David Jones parade were worn by local mannequins, but the *Australian Women's Weekly* parades were able to get extensive publicity through their recruitment of French mannequins. For the four years in succession that the parades were staged, Mary Hordern interviewed and selected four mannequins to travel to Australia to model the clothes. By all accounts, the reception the French women received when they arrived in Australia was overwhelming.

Paule Paulus, originally a Dior model and now living in Melbourne, travelled to Australia in 1948 with the *Weekly* show and recalled that she was encouraged to come here by a mannequin from the previous year's parade. If a woman called Mary Hordern approached her to go to Australia she was to accept at once, for 'Australians' said her compatriot, 'were absolutely crazy'.<sup>6</sup> Apart from the endless stories in the *Weekly* about their flawless complexions, hair colour, accents and charming personalities, the French mannequins received coverage in most newspapers and radio stations throughout Australia. Feted as international celebrities, the women received the red-carpet treatment, reflecting the aura of glamour and prestige French femininity had in Australia in the postwar years.

The sexual allure and sophisticated style of French femininity as fashioned by Dior was projected through fashion photographs of the time. With the upsurge in production of

*A group of leading Australian mannequins were carefully selected to model Christian Dior clothes in the 1948 David Jones parade. June Dally- Watkins, seen here and opposite modelling in the Christian Dior parades, recalls that a major prerequisite was having an eighteen inch waist to fit into the Dior garments. Photo right by Bowen.*



consumer goods and the expansion of department store chains after the war, fashion photography was increasingly in demand, as it was used both in catalogues and for window displays. A local photographer who demonstrated a flair for capturing the look that embraced the modern Paris style was Melbourne fashion photographer Athol Shmith. When the French mannequins arrived in Melbourne in 1948, Athol Shmith was commissioned by Myers department store to photograph them.

Shmith portrayed the mannequins as being totally removed from ordinary people. The opulence and contrived glamour so characteristic of French fashion of this period is portrayed in his portrait of Madame Chamberlaine, director of the French parades in 1947 and 1948. An equally memorable photograph by Shmith is a portrait of the Australian model Patricia 'Bambi' Tuckwell wearing a dramatic Dior New Look black dress.

In a recent reflection on her modelling days, Patricia Tuckwell described the 'exhilaration which came with swishing about in those full-skirted, tiny-waisted, many-petticoated garments after the dullness and limitation of wartime clothes'.<sup>7</sup> Such self-gratification was shared by many women, who quickly adopted the New Look, and her comment highlights the excitement Dior brought to fashion.

One of the extraordinary aspects of the New Look was the speed with which it was





assimilated and redefined. There was a ready reception of the New Look in Australia, particularly when compared with England. There was very little hostility to its introduction, and almost none of the moralising about rationing that was experienced in Europe, where war had had a more profound effect.

The sheer prestige of Paris contributed to the New Look's success. Everything to do with Paris fashion seemed to be of interest to Australian women, who eagerly read articles about the hands that sewed the dresses, the mannequins who modelled them and the couturiers who designed them. Local dressmakers cashed in on the prestige of French fashion by modelling themselves on French workrooms. At the upper end of the market, there were the Sydney salons of Germaine Rocher, Madame Pellier and the milliner Henriette Lamotte, while Melbourne had La Petite and Lillian Whiteman's Le Louvre in the 'Paris end' of Collins Street.

The House of Dior was able to build its empire by catering to the needs of retailers. In financial terms the international buyers were Dior's most important clients, since they paid a surcharge of 40—50 per cent on each garment they bought, by which they acquired the right to make copies. They bought the garment without trying it on, often in the form of a toile or a paper pattern.



One of the first to obtain rights to copy and mass produce Dior originals was Douglas Cox of Melbourne, who launched a range of clothes under the label 'Dior, Australia' in June 1949. The style was also rapidly mass produced by middle market firms, such as Adelyn and Curzon's, along with many of the larger department stores.

Most of the Australian-made copies were modified to suit local conditions. This usually meant a toning down of the styles seen in Paris, as there was a widespread view that the exaggerated Paris fashions had to be adapted to suit the ordinary Australian woman. For example, Berlei, another Australian firm that rapidly responded to the influence of the New Look, urged its clients to adopt a policy of 'intelligent frocking'. Berlei produced its Parisian Waist Girdle, a modified version of the *guepiere* worn by Dior mannequins to achieve the then-fashionable 18-inch waist. The firm thought it was 'unlikely that the good sense of Australian women will allow them to follow these extreme couturiers' attempts so slavishly that they will be compelled to wear constricting foundation garments to achieve it ... as Australian women are not sensation seekers, and like to live a healthy, normal, busy life.'<sup>15</sup>

*The 1948 Christian Dior parade at the Sydney department store David Jones featured his New Look collection. Opposite: Publicity photo for the 1948 David Jones Dior parade.*



SYDNEY

10-11/3  
E.F.C.

STAIN

STAIN

DAVID JONES NEW YORK

Just arrived by air from Paris

Christian Dior's  
Fabulous Models

to be shown  
JULY 31st  
at  
DAVID JONES

USA  
10-704

*Publicity photograph for the Australian Women's Weekly French Fashion Parade of 1948. Flowers, greetings at airports, photos with Australian fauna and having their accents recorded by local radio were all part of the red-carpet reception the French mannequins received in Australia. Their celebrity status reflected the aura of glamour that French femininity had in postwar Australia. The mannequins were Paule Paulus, Yanick Guichard, Mouny Neussbaum and Maya Leroy.*



Another way to purchase a Dior design was through the licensing system, which many Parisian couture houses introduced during the late 1940s and 1950s. The licensing system was initiated by the House of Dior in 1948, when it diversified by opening a branch in New York to sell luxury ready-to-wear goods. From the early 1950s, the House of Dior was responsible for 55 per cent of the entire exports of the French couture houses. Two collections each year were created for American women, and in 1952 an agreement was signed with the House of Youth in Sydney, granting exclusive reproduction rights for Dior's New York ready-to-wear designs. Again these were modified versions of French style. As put by the director of Dior's Australian licensee, 'The prestige attached to the Dior label means a great deal to us, and women need not be frightened of any extreme styles in our Dior collection.'

Christian Dior also collaborated with local manufacturers by using Australian fabric in his clothes. In 1951 a selection of Dior clothes, worn by leading Australian mannequin Judy Barraclough, were shown at the Art Gallery of New South Wales. They were the first imports made by the fashion house in an Australian fabric, a wool jersey by Austral Swiss Textiles Ltd. In this way, the promotion of French fashion in Australia was tied in with the promotion of a burgeoning Australian fashion industry. The Australian Wool Bureau played a



*Dior house mannequin Paule Paulus parades for Doe Avedon (left) and Carmel Snow, the influential American editor-in-chief of Harper's Bazaar. It was she who dubbed Dior's first collection the New Look. Paule Paulus later toured with the Australian Women's Weekly's French fashion parades in Australia in 1948 and 1949. Photo by Richard Avedon, 1947.*

pivotal role by publicising the use of Australian wool by local companies in their production of French copies.

From 1948 onwards there was constant whispering in the press that the great man himself was to visit Australia. Such was his continuing significance that David Jones, in association with the *Australian Women's Weekly*, again negotiated with the House of Dior to bring a major parade of Dior couture originals to Australia in late 1957. Despite Christian Dior's sudden death in October at the age of fifty-two, it was decided to go ahead with the show. Eighty-three outfits from his last collection, *Libre* (Free), were shown in Australia, worn by seven of Dior's house mannequins. The mannequins and parade were supervised in Australia by Madame Suzanne Luling, Dior's sales and staff manager.

The 1957 parade featured the luxurious and glamorous evening dresses for which Dior was famous, along with a new day dress, the chemise, a loose-fitting, unwaisted garment that was the exact opposite of his fitted New Look collection. Originally a Balenciaga creation, the chemise (or sack) was a popular and youthful alternative to the formality of previous Paris designs and proved a forecast of future styles as more and more fashion responded to influences from youth and popular culture.

Christian Dior died at a time when the intense interest in fashion, and in particular in haute couture, was beginning to wane. Australian department stores continued to stage fashion parades, but they were nothing like the lavish productions seen in the late 1940s. The dictatorial voice of the French couture houses was undermined by the new pluralism in dress that gathered force at the end of the fifties. However, the extraordinary achievement of Dior ensured that everyone remembered him. Such was the interest in Christian Dior that two years after his death a local magazine commented that 'The name of Dior is a household word. Those who are interested in fashion may have heard of Balenciaga, Cardin or Balmain, but you don't have to be interested in fashion to have heard about Dior. His New Look has become as famous as the Battle of Waterloo or Lindberg's first Atlantic crossing.'<sup>10</sup>

\* *Louise Mitchell is a curator of Decorative Arts and Design at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney.*

1. Christian Dior, *Dior by Dior*, Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, 1958, p21.
2. See Valerie Lawson, *Connie Sweetheart: the story of Connie Robertson*, Heinemann, Melbourne, 1990, pp277—9.
3. 'Christian Dior models for Sydney' by Elene Foster, London fashion writer, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 19 April 1948, p1.
4. 'Tiny waists and whirlaway skirts cause sensation', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 2 August 1948, p5.
5. 'New Look Dior calls us representative', Elene Foster, *Sydney Morning Herald*, 27 April 1948, p5.
6. Interview with Paule Paulus, Melbourne, 13 August 1993.
7. Correspondence with the Countess of Harewood, 1 October 1993.
8. 'The New Look and foundations', *Draper of Australasia*, 28 February 1948, p42.
9. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 November 1951, p13.
10. 'The tyranny of the haughty couture', *Flair*, May 1959, p32.



*This photograph of French fashion is given an Australian flavour with local mannequin Judy Barraclough posed wearing a Dior model from Madame Pellier at a cricket match with Test stars Keith Miller, Ian Johnson and Graeme Hole in the background.*

# C hronology: the Dior years 1946-1994

1946 8 October: the meeting between Christian Dior and Marcel Boussac leads to the founding of the couture house 'Christian Dior'.

1947 12 February: presentation of the first collection, Spring-Summer 1947, with two lines *Corolle* (Corolla) and *En huit* (Figure eight). 'Christian Dior has revolutionized Couture, rather like the Marne Taxis have saved France', proclaims the very influential editor of *Harper's Bazaar*, Carmel Snow. The New Look was born. Christian Dior is awarded the Oscar of Haute Couture by Mr Neiman Marcus in Dallas, Texas. The house has ninety employees, a turnover of 1.3 million francs and accounts for 75 per cent of all French haute couture exports. October: founding of Parfums Christian Dior. Creation of the perfume Miss Dior.

1948 31 July to 13 August: a Christian Dior parade of fifty-five original and adapted garments, organised by the department store David Jones, is held in Australia. 28 October: founding of Christian Dior New York, Inc for luxurious ready-to-wear and accessories. Founding of Christian Dior Perfumes New York, Inc. In Paris, opening of Christian Dior Furs and a millinery department. 1948 Spring-Summer collection: *Zig-Zag* line (airy flights and geometric designs). 1948—49 Autumn-Winter collection: *Cyclone* line (under the sign of wings).

1949 Christian Dior is the first couturier to sign a licence contract. First stocking licence in the United States: Christian Dior Hosiery. Christian Dior invents the pointed reinforced stocking heel. The Kings and Queens Ball given by Comte Etienne de Beaumont: Christian Dior comes dressed as a lion, in a costume made by Pierre Cardin, former *Premier d'Atelier* (head of workroom) at Christian Dior. 1949 Spring-Summer collection: *Trompe-l'Oeil* line (pocket and decollete effects). 1949—50 Autumn-Winter collection: *Milieu du siecle* (Mid-century) line (airy and loose-fitting cut). Over 1200 dresses are ordered in eight days.

1950 First tie licence in the United States: Christian Dior Ties. Founding in Paris of the Christian Dior Diffusion department, responsible for wholesale, export and licence agreements. Christian Dior is awarded the *Legion d'Honneur* by the Ministry of Trade and Commerce. Dresses made for Marlene Dietrich for Alfred Hitchcock's film *Stage fright*. 1950 Spring-Summer collection: *Verticale* (Vertical) line (neat and flowing). 1950—51 Autumn-Winter collection: *Oblique* (Oblique) line (pink and grey velvet).

1951 Creation of the stocking department. Creation of Dior Sport, ribbed stockings in four colours. The personnel now number 900. The Beistegui Ball at the Labia Palace in Venice, for which Christian Dior designs several costumes and some spectacular capes. With Salvador Dali, he creates a living painting entitled *The giants*. The book *Je suis couturier* by Christian Dior is published by Conquistador. 1951 Spring-Summer collection: *Ovale* (Oval) line (constructed/natural line). 1951—52 Autumn-Winter collection: *Longue* (Long) line (entirely new proportions).



1952 Founding of Christian Dior Models Ltd in London. 1952 Spring-Summer collection: *Sinueuse* (Sinuous) line (blousons and sweaters). 1952—53 Autumn-Winter collection: *Profilee* (Profile) line (shapely waists and curves).

1953 Founding of the Christian Dior Delman Company, manufacturing made-to-measure shoes designed by Roger Vivier. 1953 Spring-Summer collection: *Tulipe* (Tulip) line (fuller bust, slender hips). 1953—54 Autumn-Winter collection: *Vivante* (Alive) line (inspired by the Eiffel Tower and the domes of Paris; nicknamed the Shock Look in England, because the skirts are shortened to 16 inches, about 40 cm, above the ground).

1954 Opening of Christian Dior Ltd in London. The House of Christian Dior Paris employs a thousand people and is located in five buildings, with twenty-eight workrooms. 1954 Spring-Summer collection: *Muguet* (Lily-of-the-valley) line (volume of hat, bust and skirt). 1954—55 Autumn-Winter collection: *H-line* (the Flat Look, nicknamed the String Bean line).

1955 Opening of the boutique at the corner of rue Francois 1er. Opening of the Gifts—Tableware department. 3 August: a lecture by Christian Dior at the Sorbonne titled 'Aesthetics of fashion' before 4000 students. 'Doesn't fashion unite the two spirits of geometry and fineness?', he said. Yves Saint Laurent, young winner of the wool design contest, for which Christian Dior was a member of the jury in 1953, is engaged to work at the studio. He becomes the only assistant Christian Dior ever had. Christian Dior designs Olivia de Havilland's wedding dress. 1955 Spring-Summer collection: *A-line* (a contrast of waisted shapes with diagonals). 1955 Autumn-Winter collection: *Y-line* (simplicity and length).

1956 Fourteen dresses made for Ava Gardner for the film *The little hut* by Mark Robson. Twenty-five thousand customers pass through the Christian Dior salons in a single season. Publication by Amiot-Dumont of Christian Dior's memoirs *Christian Dior et Moi*. Launch of the perfume Diorissimo. 1956 Spring-Summer collection: *Fleche* (Arrow) line (slenderised and feminine). 1956—57 Autumn-Winter collection: *Aimant* (Magnet) line (rounded shapes).

1957 4 March: Christian Dior appears on the cover of *Time Magazine*. The House of Christian Dior alone accounts for over 55 per cent of French haute couture exports and employs 1300 people. 1957 Spring-Summer collection: *Libre* (Free) line (free waist, volumes and lengths). 1957—58 Autumn-Winter collection: *Fuseau* (Spindle) line (a curvy, streamlined look). 24 October: Christian Dior is struck down by a heart attack. Yves Saint Laurent takes over as artistic director of the house. November to December: David Jones, in association with the *Australian Women's Weekly*, presents a complete Christian Dior Show in Australia. Eighty-three spectacular original Christian Dior creations are presented by seven Dior mannequins.

1958 Marc Bohan is appointed artistic director of Christian Dior London. Yves Saint Laurent presents his first collection, 1958 Spring-Summer: *Trapeze* (Trapezium) line (inspired by the Florentine era and the Renaissance).

1959 12 to 16 June: first presentation in Moscow of the Christian Dior haute couture collection, designed by Yves Saint Laurent.

1960 Yves Saint Laurent designs Olivia de Havilland's gown for the Academy Awards ceremony. Yves Saint Laurent leaves Christian Dior. He is succeeded by Marc Bohan, who becomes Christian Dior's artistic director and designs the haute couture collections.

1961 Marc Bohan presents his first collection, the 1961 Spring-Summer haute couture collection: *Slim Look* (garden dresses, printed chiffon on taffeta background). Elizabeth Taylor orders twelve gowns.

1964 Marc Bohan designs costumes for the theatre, opera, ballet and cinema. He dresses Juliette Greco for her show at the Olympia Theatre, Annie Girardot for the Arthur Miller play *After the fall* and Marie Bell in *Madame Princesse* by Felicien Marceau.

1965 Mr Manteau, in charge of the haute fourrure collections since 1957, introduces colours into furs and creates the first bronze-tinted green coat.

1966 Launch of the men's eau de toilette Eau Sauvage.

1967 11 September: presentation of the first collection of Christian Dior women's ready-to-wear, Miss Dior, designed by Philippe Guibourge. Creation of the *Baby Dior* line. Marc Bohan designs the wedding and coronation dress for the Empress Farah Diba and the gowns worn by her ladies-in-waiting. 1967 Spring-Summer haute couture collection: *Safari line*.

1968 Frederic Castet becomes responsible for Haute Fourrure at Christian Dior Paris. Marc Bohan designs the costumes for the Joseph Losey film *Ceremonies Secretes*.

1969 Launch of the first Christian Dior make-up range.

1970 Creation of the Christian Dior Monsieur line, directed by Marc Bohan. Marc Bohan designs Brigitte Bardot's costumes for *L'Ours et la Poupee* by Michel Deville. 1970 Spring-Summer haute couture collection: *Maxi line* (Russian-inspired).

1972 Launch of the perfume Diorella.

1973 Creation of the ready-to-wear furs collection by Frederic Castet. Launch of Hydra-Dior, the first range of skin-care products.

1975 Inspired by the retrospective exhibition at the Grand Palais, Marc Bohan designs his 1975 Spring-Summer haute couture collection: on a *Pointilliste* theme.

1976 Marc Bohan designs the Queen of Sweden's bridal gown.

1977 Celebration of Christian Dior's thirtieth anniversary at the Lido de Paris.

1979 Launch of the perfume Dioressence.

1980 Gerard Penneroux is appointed designer of the Christian Dior Monsieur line.

1981 On the occasion of the marriage of HRH the Prince of Wales and Lady Diana Spencer, 29 July, Marc Bohan designs dresses for Princess Grace of Monaco, Princess Alexandra of Yugoslavia and Mrs Pamela Hicks, Lord Mountbatten's niece.

1983 The *De d'Or* is awarded to Marc Bohan for his 1983 Spring-Summer haute couture

collection. Dominique Morlotti replaces Gerard Penneroux and is appointed designer of the Christian Dior Monsieur line and director of the men's design studio.

1984 Creation of Christina Onassis's bridal gown. Launch of the eau de toilette Eau Sauvage Extreme. 1984-85 Autumn-Winter haute couture collection: *Klimt et Pollock*.

1985 April: Bernard Arnault, chairman of the Financiere Agache Group, main shareholder, is appointed chairman and managing director of the Christian Dior Company. Launch of the perfume Poison, worldwide best-seller. Grand Ball at the castle of Vaux-le-Vicomte.

1986 First presentation of the haute fourrure collection by Frederic Castet in China.

1987 To celebrate the fortieth anniversary of the House of Christian Dior, a retrospective is held at the Musee des Arts de la Mode, *Hommage a Christian Dior 1947—1957*. An important book titled *Dior* is published by les Editions du Regard.

1988 The couture and perfume activities, divided in 1968 when Parfums Christian Dior was sold to Moet-Hennessy, are brought back together within the same group. Second *De d'Or* awarded to Marc Bohan for his 1988—89 Autumn-Winter haute couture collection.

1989 Gianfranco Ferre succeeds Marc Bohan. He is appointed designer of the Christian Dior Haute Couture, Haute Fourrure, Women's Ready-to-Wear and Fur Collections. Gianfranco Ferre also sets all the trends and directives for the Christian Dior women's designs. In July his first haute couture collection, 1989—90 Autumn-Winter, *Ascot-Cecil Beaton*, is honoured by the *De d'Or*. 23 October: presentation of the first 1990 Spring-Summer women's ready-to-wear collection designed by Gianfranco Ferre. Opening of the Christian Dior Boutique in Hawaii.

1990 The Group Christian Dior, a holding company resulting from the interests successively acquired from the capital of LVMH, is now the largest luxury group in the world (excluding the car industry), highly positioned economically as well as in terms of brand image. Opening of the New York and Los Angeles Christian Dior boutiques.

1991 4 December: Christian Dior is quoted at the Paris Stock Exchange. The Christian Dior Group reaches a turnover of over 22 billion francs. Couture alone generates a volume of over 6 million francs. Launch of the perfume Dune: a grand ball is given at the castle of Vaux-le-Vicomte.

1992 Patrick Lavoix is appointed artistic director of Christian Dior Monsieur. Relaunch of the perfume Miss Dior. 3 July: presentation of the first 1993 Spring-Summer men's ready-to-wear collection: *Paris tout simplement, Dior naturellement* (Quite simply Paris, naturally Dior).

1993 Launch of the perfume Tendre Poison.

1994 July: an important retrospective, *Christian Dior: the magic of fashion*, is held at the Powerhouse Museum, Sydney, Australia.

*Compiled by Marika Genty, Christian Dior*

# C

catalogue  
of the  
exhibition

## Design Themes *The New Look*



**BAR**  
Spring-Summer 1947  
Corolle (Corolla) line  
Suit; jacket in raw silk shantung with suit collar and basque. Fine-pleated skirt in black woollen fabric.  
UFAC, Donated by the House of Christian Dior, 1958 (*pictured*)

**ADELAIDE**  
Spring-Summer 1948  
Envoi (Flight) line  
Evening gown in black tulle trimmed with bands of peach satin worn with evening coat in peach-coloured silk, satin with old-gold braid border and three-quarter-length cuffed sleeves.  
UFAC, Donated by Mrs Brodie

### **Dior** *Alphabet*

**TAMANACO**  
Autumn-Winter 1954  
H-line  
Ensemble in black silk faille. Short, belted jacket, rounded collar in white velvet draped over shoulders and caught with two bows in black faille. Straight skirt.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Kaindl

**ZELIE**  
Autumn-Winter 1954  
H-line  
Dress in black silk faille, high collar with optional shawl effect. Double buttoning, double breasted. Low waist, skirt gathered at hips and back. Dress belonged to Mrs Quinet-Vournassov, ex-wife of the editor of *Combat* magazine.  
Christian Dior Archives



**A**  
Spring-Summer 1955  
A-line  
Suit in wool and steel grey silk, A-line. Long double-breasted buttoning jacket, suit collar, flaring at the hips. Straight-necked, short-sleeved bodice over a wide-pleated skirt. Dress worn by Mrs Olivia de Havilland at her wedding.  
Christian Dior Archives (*pictured*)

**ALLIANCE**  
Spring-Summer 1955  
A-line  
Dress in sky blue linen, short sleeves, turn-back collar decorated with a large flower in pale blue silk, front-fastening with four fabric-covered buttons, low waist, flat-pleated skirt.  
UFAC, Donated by Mrs Kaindl

**HISTORIETTE** (Short story)  
Autumn-Winter 1955  
Y-line  
Short-sleeved cocktail dress in red silk faille, V-neckline, flared skirt. Dress belonged to Helene Gordon-Lazareff, founder of *Elle* magazine, and mother of the donor.  
UFAC, Donated by Mrs Michele Rosier

**VOYAGEUR** (Voyager)  
Autumn-Winter 1955  
Y-line  
Suit in grey herringbone wool by Raimon. Short, belted jacket, double-breasted buttoning, with grey silk chemisette. Straight skirt with double-breasted buttoning like jacket. Generous, double-buttoning stole.  
Christian Dior Archives  
Reproduction 1987

### **Movement**

**DELPHINE**  
Autumn-Winter 1956  
Aimant (Magnet) line  
Cocktail dress in anthracite grey silk faille. Crossover neckline, full skirt. Bow effect at waist formed by a loop and a fringed tie.  
Christian Dior Archives

**CURACAO**  
Autumn-Winter 1954  
H-line  
Cocktail dress in ivory silk faille. Low-necked bustier top with wide, gathered straps. Dropped waist. Wide skirt with bow effect on left hip.  
Christian Dior Archives

**TOURBILLON** (Whirlwind)

Autumn-Winter 1956

Aimant (Magnet) line

Short dress in pale green mousseline silk. Spaghetti-strap bodice. Skirt overlaid with four wave-like flounces of mousseline.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Kaindl

**ZERLINE**

Autumn-Winter 1957

Fuseau (Spindle) line

Afternoon dress in black silk taffeta, fully overlaid by a large cape collar, sleeveless, front zip fastening.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs de Bord  
1951

Autumn-Winter 1950

Oblique line

Ensemble in spotted, fashioned silk. Long-sleeved bodice with suit collar, extended with two intertwined ties draped at the waist. Straight, front-buttoning skirt. Overskirt made up of two gathered tails of different lengths.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Bres

**FAVORI** (Favourite)

Autumn-Winter 1950

Oblique line

Suit in grey wool flannel. Belted jacket with asymmetrical tie which passes under the belt on the left-hand side.

Straight skirt, mid-calf length.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1987

**CAPRICE**

Spring-Summer 1948

Zig-Zag line

Dress in royal blue wool. Fitted bodice, V-neckline, long cuffed sleeves. Zig-Zag line skirt, belted at the waist.

Dress once belonged to Mrs Newman.

Christian Dior Archives



**COCOTTE** (Sweetie)

Autumn-Winter 1948

Envoi (Flight) line

Afternoon dress in black and white hound's-tooth check wool. Straight cut, front buttoning, suit collar. Calf length. Skirt gathered up into back in a double flounce to form a bustle dropping into a large box pleat.

Black patent leather belt.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1987 (*pictured*)

**PETIT DINER** (Cosy dinner)

Autumn-Winter 1948

Ailee (Winged) line

Dress in black silk faille with brown highlights. Plunging V-neckline front and back, straight skirt with loop effect down the sides, wide draped belt.

Dress once belonged to Mrs Newman.

Christian Dior Archives

**CHERIE** (Dearest)

Spring-Summer 1947

Corolle (Corolla) line

Afternoon dress in navy blue silk taffeta. Sleeveless fitted bodice.

Pleated skirt, pleats stitched over hips.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1983

**PICARDIE** (Picardy)

Spring-Summer 1953

Tulipe (Tulip) line

Two-piece dress in silk printed with red and pink flowers on a grey background. Short-sleeved bodice, round neck, four fabric-covered buttons in front. Wide skirt with pleated gussets.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Kaindl

**Embroidery**

**TROPIQUES** (Tropics)

Autumn-Winter 1948

Ailee (Winged) line

Black broadcloth jacket with basques, embroidered with gilt beads, sequins and peacock feathers in a leaf and flower pattern, high neck, long sleeves with musketeer cuffs.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Brodie

**NEGUS**

Autumn-Winter 1948

Ailee (Winged) line

Long-sleeved bolero in green silk velvet embroidered on the upper half and back in gold thread, dotted with coloured beads and teardrop pearls.

Christian Dior Archives

**LAHORE**

Autumn-Winter 1948

Ailee (Winged) line

Midnight blue silk bolero, emphasising the shoulders, embroidered in silver thread and pearls around the neckline. Ties in a bow at base of neckline.

Of the ensemble, only the bolero features in the exhibition.

Dress worn by the Duchess of Windsor.

Christian Dior Archives

### SOIREE DE BAGDAD

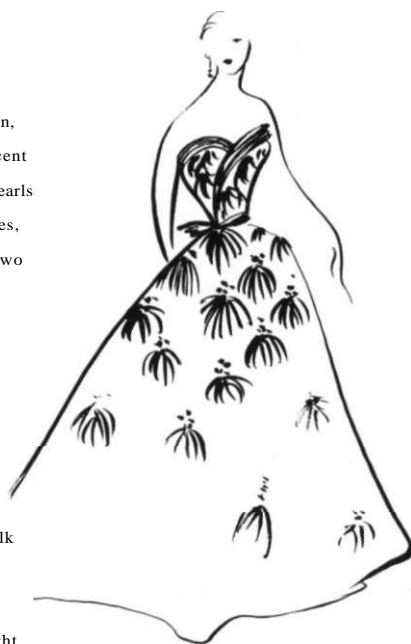
(Baghdad evening)

Autumn-Winter 1955

Y-line

Short evening dress in ivory silk satin, embroidered with blue and translucent palmettes, gold and silver thread, pearls and diamantes. Three-quarter sleeves, square neckline. Skirt flares out in two scissor panels back and front.

UFAC, Donated by Mr and Mrs Weinberg



### BYZANCE (Byzantium)

Autumn-Winter 1957

Fuseau (Spindle) line

Evening ensemble: gown in red silk lame brocade, embroidered with sequins, gold thread and coloured stones in a medallion motif. Straight dress, crew neck, sleeveless.

Dress once belonged to Mrs Herrera de Ulstar.

Christian Dior Archives

### VILMORIN

Spring-Summer 1952

Sinueuse (Sinuous) line

Afternoon dress in white organza embroidered with daisies. Short-sleeved bodice with round neckline and small bertha-style collar.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Arturo Lopez-Willshaw

### MAY

Spring-Summer 1953

Tulipe (Tulip) line

Evening gown in white organza, embroidered with green leaves and pink flowers, strapless cupped bustier trimmed with an organza scarf draped over the shoulders. Very wide skirt over a stiff tulle petticoat.

Worn by Mrs Lazard, mother of the donor.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs de Bord (pictured)

### MUGUET (Lily-of-the-valley)

Spring-Summer 1957

Libre (Free) line

Cocktail dress in white silk organdie embroidered around the square neck and on the skirt with lilies-of-the-valley by Barbier. Full skirt. Matching coat, without embroidery.

Dress worn by Mrs Alec Weisweiller. Christian Dior Archives

### MINUIT (Midnight)

Autumn-Winter 1948

Ailee (Winged) line

Black silk velvet decorated with black silk flowers and tassels. High collar, long, cuffed sleeves. Petillault velvet from Lyon.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Brodie

### EVENING COAT

Autumn-Winter 1949

Evening coat in black silk faille and velvet, embroidered with jet and woollen felt. Frock coat style.

Embroidered velvet ties form the collar. Long sleeves. Embroidered velvet panels on coat skirt.

Christian Dior Archives

### LACE EVENING DRESS

1953

Evening dress in guipure lace decorated with diamante (lowers, cupped strapless bodice.

Once belonged to Mrs Vincent Auriol, wife of the President of the Republic of France.

UFAC, Donated by Mr Paul Auriol

## Dior Wardrobe The Suits



### ADVENTURE (Adventure)

Spring-Summer 1948

Envoi (Flight) line

Suit. Short, woollen jacket in black and white hound's-tooth check, flared back. Mid-length straight skirt, front buttoning.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1987 (pictured)

### TOUR DU MONDE

(Around the world)

Spring-Summer 1954

Muguet (Lily-of-the-valley) line

Suit in grey Dormeuil flannel with white thread. Blouson jacket with shawl collar and long sleeves.

V-necked bodice with fine straps.

Full skirt with wide, flat pleats.

Christian Dior Archives

Donated by Countess Renee de Chambrun

**ANGLOMANIE** (Anglomania)

Spring-Summer 1955

A-line

Dormeuil woollen fabric in black and white Prince of Wales check. Sleeveless dress with pleated skirt. Short jacket with suit collar. UFAC, Donated by Mrs Kaindl

**NORMANDIE** (Normandy)

Spring-Summer 1957

Libre (Free) line

Ensemble in grey woollen fabric. Straight-cut, short-sleeved jacket. Straight skirt with side splits. Stole in the same material, with pocket. UFAC, Donated by Mrs Lucie Noel

**GIRELLE** (Girella)

Autumn-Winter 1953

Vivante (Lively) line

Ensemble in light blue wool tweed. Backless dress. Belted long-sleeved jacket, collarless, three buttons and two pockets.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Kaindl

**UNESCO**

Autumn-Winter 1949

Milieu du siecle (Mid-century) line

Belted, double-breasted jacket in black wool serge. Draped collar trimmed with a second collar in black velvet. Straight skirt.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Kaindl

**CACHOTIER** (Gaoler)

Spring-Summer 1951

Ovale line

Short jacket in ivory silk shantung, fastening below the bust with two buttons. Plunging, oval-shaped neckline. Three-quarter sleeves. Dress in steel-grey alpaca, straight skirt, square neckline, short sleeves. Black leather belt.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1987

**Day Dresses****LONDRES** (London)

Autumn-Winter 1950

Oblique line

Dress in black woollen fabric. Bodice with turnover collar. Small triangular opening below collar, trimmed with four buttons each side. Long sleeves. Straight skirt, fastened like 'deck-hand's trousers' with two rows of four buttons.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Bres

**BONNE FORTUNE** (Good fortune)

Spring-Summer 1950

Verticale (Vertical) line

Afternoon dress in grey wool pepper and salt weave. Fitted bodice with Danton collar. Shirt-front effect with vertical welted pockets on the bust, and three buttons. Wide skirt with trompe-l'oeil stitched pleat effect.

Curved belt in black patent leather.

Dress once belonged to Mrs Newman.

Christian Dior Archives

**NEW YORK**

Autumn-Winter 1953

Coat-dress in black wool cashmere.

Draped V-neckline. Belted. Wide front button panel with five mother-of-pearl buttons. Long, cuffed sleeves.

This design was created for the 'Christian Dior New York' collection.

Christian Dior Archives

**MYOSOTIS** (Forget-me-not)

Spring-Summer 1949

Trompe l'oeil line

Forget-me-not-blue wool and silk frock coat. Scooped neckline, two metallic buttons. Three-quarter-length cuffed sleeves.

Christian Dior Archives

Donated by Mrs Leppert

**Afternoon Dresses****TOURBILLON** (Whirlwind)

Autumn-Winter 1957

Fuseau (Spindle) line

Black wool crepe dress. Tank-top neckline. Skirt with fluted pleats. Front-tying belt. Bolero with tiny short sleeves.

Christian Dior Archives

Donated by Nicole Jury

**PROMESSE** (Promise)

Autumn-Winter 1957

Fuseau (Spindle) line

Dress in black woollen fabric. Sleeveless, wide collar also in black wool. Bell-shaped skirt, front zip fastening.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Malitte Matta

**DIORAMA**

Autumn-Winter 1947

Corolle (Corolla) line

Dress in black wool crepe. Fitted, short sleeved bodice. Waist cinched with black leather belt. Very full skirt finished with black braid, like the collar. This dress required 26.70 x 1.3 metres of fabric, plus 42.50 metres of black braid. It took 230 hours to complete and weighs over 3 kilograms.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1987

**PAPILLON** (Butterfly)

Spring-Summer 1948

Envoi (Flight) line

Afternoon dress in petrol-blue silk taffeta with white spots. Fitted, front-buttoning bodice with a large, draped collar, worn over a bustier with straps. Wide skirt with box-pleat effect on the sides.

Once belonged to Mrs Newman.

Christian Dior Archives



#### **ABANDON**

Autumn-Winter 1948

Ailee (Winged) line

Dress in black woollen fabric. Draped neck on asymmetrical, low-cut fitted bodice. Three-quarter-length cuffed sleeves. Full, calf-length skirt.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1987 (*pictured*)

#### **JEAN-PIERRE GREDY**

Spring-Summer 1952

Sinueuse (Sinuous) line

Cocktail ensemble in black Starella silk taffeta. Short-sleeved camisole top, overlaid at the front and tied. Very wide skirt, gathered at the waist then nipped in at knee length.

Overblouse in fuchsia pink mousseline. Draped oval neckline, fastened with three buttons.

Christian Dior Archives

#### **Cocktail Dresses**

**ATOUT COEUR** (Hearts are trumps)

Spring-Summer 1955

**A-line**

Raspberry red silk faille dress. Wide cradle-cut neckline, off the shoulders and caught at the back on the left hand side with a long fringed bow and tie. Close-fitting bodice, dropped waist. Wide box-pleated skirt.

Christian Dior Archives

**BAL DE PRINTEMPS** (Spring ball)

Spring-Summer 1956

Ensemble in straw yellow wool-silk mix by Staron. Short, collarless evening coat, trapeze cut, embroidered with multi-coloured flowers in silk thread and sequins by Rebe. Cradle-cut bustier top, decorated with three little bows on the straps and in the centre of the neckline. Dropped waist, wide skirt.

This design was created especially for HRH Princess Grace of Monaco. It is a short version of 'Bal de Printemps'

(Spring ball). The dress also appeared in the Autumn-Winter collection for 1956 under the name 'Colinette'.

Christian Dior Archives

**BOSPHORE** (Bosphorus)

Autumn-Winter 1956

Aimant (Magnet) line

Dress in midnight blue silk velvet embroidered by Rebe with pearls, gold thread and emerald green cabochons. Low-cut, strapped bustier. Princess cut. Short jacket with wide sleeves, no embroidery.

Christian Dior Archives



**VENEZUELA**

Autumn-Winter 1957

Fuseau (Spindle) line

Salmon pink silk faille. Low V-cut bodice, crossover, buttoned at back, sleeveless. Full skirt.

Worn by Mrs Bernard Dheran, daughter of the donor.

UFAC, Donated by Countess de Latour de Geay (*pictured*)

#### **Evening Dresses**

**PERUVIENNE** (Peruvian)

Autumn-Winter 1949

Milieu du siecle (Mid-century) line

Black silk taffeta evening dress covered in black taffeta leaves, half-cup bustier top in black velvet. Wide skirt with taffeta fluting forming a train.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs de Bord

**VENEZUELA**

Autumn-Winter 1951

Longue (Long) line

Evening gown in red silk organza, half-cup bustier bodice decorated with a red faille bow with long ties. Wide skirt with train.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Arturo Lopez-Willshaw

**COUP DE THEATRE**

Spring-Summer 1951

Ovale (Oval) line

Evening dress in white silk. Bodice covered in Herel black tulle and embroidered with bands of gold thread. Huge white taffeta bow at waist.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Citroen

**SOIREE A TOLEDE** (Toledo evening)

Autumn-Winter 1955

Y-line

Long dress in black silk velvet. Square neckline, long sleeves. Large band of black grosgrain at hem. Short cape with wide black velvet hood.

Once belonged to Mrs Alec Weisweiller.

Christian Dior Archives



## AMADIS

Autumn-Winter 1954

H-line

Ensemble in pale pink silk satin, embroidered by Rebe with palmettes in silk thread in various shades of pink and dotted with tiny diamantes. Long, close-fitting short-sleeved jacket with oval, draped collar. Fully embroidered. Touch of pink satin at the cuffs and jacket hem. Sheath dress, embroidered to just below the hips.

Worn by mannequin Victoire in a parade at Blenheim Palace in 1954 for HRH Princess Margaret, and the Duke and Duchess of Marlborough. Christian Dior Archives

## FESTIVAL

Autumn-Winter 1956

Aimant (Magnet) line

Sleeveless dress in white Perceval silk satin embroidered by Rebe in mother-of-pearl and white diamantes. Small box pleats caught in at the back by three bows.

Dress worn by Mrs Arturo Lopez-Willshaw to an evening party hosted by Carlos de Beistegui at the Chateau de Groussay.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs Semenov

**MUSIQUE DE FETE** (Festive music)

Spring-Summer 1955

A-line

Long gown in pale blue silk organza. High, crossover camisole top with draped shawl and long sleeves. Very wide, floating skirt. Belt in the same fabric decorated with a rose.

Dress belonged to Mrs Alec Weisweiller.

Christian Dior Archives

## Gala Dresses

**MEXIQUE** (Mexico)

Autumn-Winter 1951

Longue (Long) line

Dress in brown tulle embroidered with crescent moons in gold thread. Bustier bodice highlighted by a bow in brown velvet. Full skirt.

UFAC, Donated by Mrs de Ayala



## JUNON (Juno)

Autumn-Winter 1949

Milieu du siècle (Mid-century) line

Gala dress in tulle decorated with sequins by Dognin in iris blues, re-embroidered by Rebe in dark blue and bronze sequins, embroidered bustier top. Voluminous skirt consisting of petals in tulle and horsehair flouncing out to the hem and covered with sequins.

Dress once belonged to Mrs Newman.

Christian Dior Archives (pictured)

## Bridal Dress

**FIDELITE** (Fidelity)

Autumn-Winter 1949

Milieu du siècle (Mid-century) line

Silk bridal gown. Extremely close-fitting bodice in white satin, tiny shawl collar and long, cuffed sleeves. Wide skirt in tulle decorated with two satin ties knotted in a bow at the back, one-third of the way down the skirt.

Christian Dior Archives

Reproduction 1987

## After M. Dior

**ETRUSQUE** (Etruscan)

Created by Yves Saint Laurent

Spring-Summer 1960

Evening dress in silk taffeta printed with stylised red poppies on a black background. Fitting bodice, straight neck, short sleeves. Short sheath skirt. Bubble overskirt, short in front, dipping at the back.

Dress worn by Mrs Olivia de

Havilland for the presentation of the Academy Awards in 1960.

Christian Dior Archives

**GRAND BONHEUR** (Great happiness)

Created by Marc Bohan

Autumn-Winter 1961

Evening ensemble: long gown in silver and white silk satin brocade, embroidered with diamantes. Fitted bodice, round collar, sleeveless. Wide skirt, heavy fall. Very short, fully embroidered bolero with long sleeves.

Christian Dior Archives

## Spirit of Dior

**SCALA**

Created by Gianfranco Ferré

Autumn-Winter 1989

Silk ball gown. Bustier top embroidered with flowers and diamantes. Stole in black organza draped across the shoulders and extended into two long ties lying down the back. Skirt in raw lace worn over black tulle petticoats.

Christian Dior Archives

**AMOUREUSE** (In love)

Created by Gianfranco Ferré

Autumn-Winter 1990

Short cocktail dress. Backless bustier top in grenadine red silk taffeta.

Draped neckline with V-pleats crossed over to form two huge bows above the skirt. Straight skirt in crushed velvet. Bolero in woven red and pink wool fabric, embroidered in tapestry stitch with gold floral motifs.

Christian Dior Archives

**ALCOVE**

Created by Gianfranco Ferré

Autumn-Winter 1993-94

Bodice bordered by mohair and gold and red threads; long skirt in flower print organza; shawl in mohair, silk and gold and red lame woven in traditional weave.

Christian Dior Archives

## Further Reading

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