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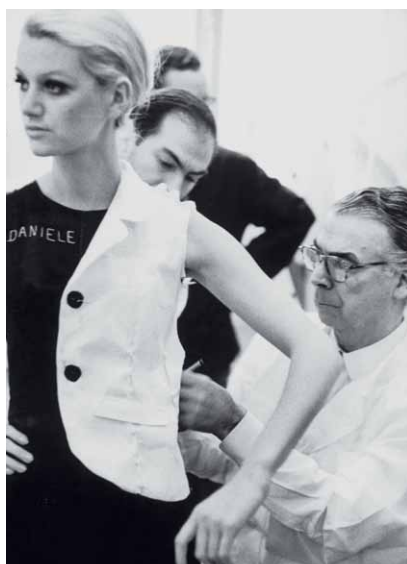
CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

Cristóbal  
Balenciaga,  
Fashion and  
Heritage

Conversations

# Cristóbal Balenciaga, Fashion and Heritage

EXHIBITION. 24/03/2018 – 27/01/2019



**Fashion and Heritage,  
an almost impossible  
dialogue which juxtaposes  
the ephemeral with the  
permanent, articles whose  
duration is but a moment  
in time, compared to others  
which receive their value from  
the past. A conversation which  
nevertheless flows when the  
subject is Cristóbal Balenciaga.**

This year, 2018, European Year of Heritage, marks the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary since the retirement of the Master of Haute Couture in 1968. An opportunity to reflect on the heritage value of Cristóbal Balenciaga's work from the moment of closing his salons in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona and San Sebastián.

This is the starting point of the exhibition *Cristóbal Balenciaga, Fashion and Heritage*, the moment when Balenciaga's creations left the streets and salons to inhabit the archives, galleries and museums. No longer lending beauty to bodies to become admired as beautiful in themselves. Leaving the covers of the fashion magazines for those dedicated to art, losing their exclusive patina to become accessible to all publics in all social circles.

In this dialogue of Fashion and Heritage we want to follow both roads, precisely taking 1968 as the year of their confluence. One runs from that date until today, revealing to the public the path of patrimonial consolidation intimately linked to our reason to be as a museum, and the other, starting in 1917 – opening date of his first atelier in San Sebastián – until the moment his maisons close their doors, in order to understand Balenciaga's creative progression, evolution and revolution.

A conversation undertaken by the Museum with Judith Clark, eminent fashion curator. The exhibition discourse and the selection of pieces that accompany it, added to the spatial conceptualisation and its design are the result of the collaboration between the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum and the British curator.

The exhibition is based on the museum collections, with the indispensable support of Archives Balenciaga, Paris (Balenciaga SA, KERING group).

Cristóbal Balenciaga at work. Year 1968.  
© Henri Cartier-Bresson / Magnum Photos / Contacto

# The exhibition

“ Why? What is Balenciaga’s contribution? What makes him different? What makes him revolutionary, timeless, architectural, modern? Why is his work considered as heritage? We believe that these are questions the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum must endeavour to answer through its exhibition area, which is why we want this exhibition to function as a space of reference and context just like any other Balenciaga exhibition/collection outside the Museum.”

MIREN VIVES, Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa



Perfection, timelessness, vanguardism, or simply art, are concepts often used by his professional colleagues, the specialised press or fashion history experts to identify the work of one of the 20th century’s most influential designers, making Balenciaga a cult couturier in his own time.

Balenciaga, Fashion and Heritage invites us on a diachronic tour showing us how the work of the couturier evolved in its successive stages while aspiring to become a benchmark exhibition for understanding and taking an in-depth look at the heritage generated by Cristóbal Balenciaga: where he came from, what he contributed in his day and what he transmits to us today.

The chronological discourse, comprehensive and contextualised, constructed from the heritage perspective of the Museum collection on which the exhibition is based, is conceived as an open, living and growing proposal which will, in the future, include new layers of knowledge.

In this spirit, *Cristóbal Balenciaga, Fashion and Heritage* exhibition aims to present a double understanding of Balenciaga’s work: its meaning as the Fashion it was and as the Heritage it is today.

Cristóbal Balenciaga launched the «sailor look» in February 1951.  
© Center for Creative Photography,  
The University of Arizona Foundation/  
VEGAP, Gipuzkoa, 2018  
Photograph: Louise Dahl-Wolfe

“ We want to retrace the history of the Maisons and Balenciaga’s creative evolution so that, in its context, the public will understand his legacy in technical, aesthetic and conceptual terms, and we also want to show how that history and that evolution, the focus of our constant research work, is not yet finished, nor has its story been told in full.”

MIREN VIVES, Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

For all of these reasons, this exhibition is a work in progress, just like the Museum collection. That’s why it is presented as an intermediate space between the timeless and the permanent, as a conversation between the Exhibition and Conservation functions, between the Balenciaga collection and its research, between the discourse and its museography, between the museum and its public.

### A few details

The exhibition occupies 900m<sup>2</sup> of Museum space from March 24, 2018 until January 27, 2019, and features eighty articles including items of clothing, documentation and patterns. Of the sixty pieces of clothing, four come from the Archives Balenciaga in Paris, and around half had never been exhibited before.

The exhibition is organised chronologically into 4 themed areas, an outstanding part of which is a biography whose milestones are related to the discourse and characteristics of the Museum collection. These areas look at the beginnings and influences (1917–1937), formal exploration (1937–1951), evolution and revolution (1951–1959) and refinement and abstraction (1960–1968) in the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga.

The selected pieces take us through Balenciaga’s creative process: the formal exploration based on his command of technique and fabric, the innovation on introducing new silhouettes to the way clothes were worn and, with these, new ways of approaching women, and the evolutionary perfection that characterises his work in a constant cycle of progression which was to last throughout the master’s career.

These are accompanied by other resources: documents, images, objects, patterns, sketches, fabrics, connect us to the context of his life and profession.

Technology too is present, enabling interactive exchange thanks to high resolution digitalisations allowing us to observe the detail of a piece, view it in 360°, study infographics on its technical construction, or the App offering a variety of themed options.







# Conversations

“ The exhibition reconfigures some of the museum spaces and identifies tools associated to the aesthetic of contemporary archives in a play on associations: the drapes used at the new Balenciaga store in Los Angeles, the choice of historical elements in stone, the compilation of former exhibitions which now constitutes a characteristic trait of the courses given at museums, the numerous legacies/voices of this project, are included as details and assignments maintaining, at the same time, the garment and its evolution at the centre of the exhibition.”

JUDITH CLARK



The Museum establishes a dialogue with Judith Clark, exhibition-maker and professor of Museology at the London College of Fashion, to address an exhibition that highlights the aspect behind the heritage value of the pieces telling this story and the preliminary research and conservation work thanks to which they are now a part of this exhibition.

Clark's installation is formulated as a conversation between this focus of the Museum and her own contribution to the project, which consists of considering, from the exhibition design, connections and references to earlier museologies which, paying tribute to Balenciaga, evolve and revolutionise these monuments of the history of clothing.

Thus, on their way round the exhibition, visitors will see the work through the eyes, for example, of Diana Vreeland, Mari Andrée Jouve, Pamela Goldwing, Kaat Debo, Miren Arzalluz, Hamish Bowles or Olivier Saillard, among the many creators, researchers and fashion historians who have sought new approaches to Balenciaga's legacy and are shown along the route as props.

Sketch for museum display.  
© Judith Clark Studio



Plastic dress made for the exhibition.  
© Judith Clark Studio

The exhibition aesthetics evoke the clean white atmosphere of the archive and restoration laboratories, with the constant presence of the conservation materials and working methods of that interior, the private Museum space, normally invisible to the visitor, and therefore rather mysterious and romantic.

## About Judith Clark

Judith Clark is an exhibition-maker and curator. She is Professor of Fashion and Museology at the London College of Fashion (LCF) and runs the MA Fashion Curation. Originally from Australia, Judith spent most of her youth in Rome. She moved to London to study architecture at the Bartlett. In 1997, she opened her own costume gallery in West London, the first non-profit experimental space dedicated to the exhibition of clothing. Since then, Clark has curated 40 exhibitions, particularly including *Chloé. Attitudes*, *Anna Piaggi: Fashion-ology* and *Spectres: When Fashion Turns Back*. She gives numerous conferences on fashion and on how to exhibit garments. Her latest publication *Exhibiting Fashion: Before and After 1971*, written with her friend and colleague, Professor Amy de la Haye, gives an opportune perspective of the rise in exhibitions on fashion.

Dress with peacock train, 1958.  
©Archives Balenciaga, Paris





# The creative legacy of Cristóbal Balenciaga

The discourse of this exhibition looks closely at the continuous evolution in Cristóbal Balenciaga's work over a chronological thread taking in his complete professional trajectory. The curatorial focus suggests that what gives Balenciaga's work its heritage value is that it is the result of a creative process based on a magnificent command of technique and matter, that it consistently explores, develops, evolves and maximises an idea, a conception of the feminine which is materially expressed in new and revolutionary silhouettes.

## Beginnings and influences (1917-1937)

Cristóbal Balenciaga begins his entrepreneurial and creative adventure in San Sebastián, at a time when the city is enjoying a heyday prompted by the seasonal visits of the court and the tourist popularity of the Basque Coast. In those early days he purchases, analyses and recreates the French haute couture creations, particularly by Vionnet, Lanvin or Chanel. Women who dress women. He is attracted, following the trend of the time, by other conceptions and sensitivities such as those coming from the East. He focusses his attention on trials with different kinds of sleeves, on exploring the meaning of fabric, on minimising seams, on simplicity of shape and on ornamentation of the fabric itself.

## Formal exploration (1937-1951)

Balenciaga immediately impresses critics with his first collection in Paris, thanks to his technical command and proposals of Spanish flavour which set him apart from others. However, World War II breaks out immediately afterwards and for a number of years the scarcity of materials, the new roles of women or the patriotic spirit mark a military-inspired fashion for a society committed to the war effort.

The end of the conflict tests the capacity of French Haute Couture to start rebuilding the sector with new ideas in keeping with the better times. Balenciaga lives and participates in these contexts. In 1947 he simultaneously presents models mirroring the tendency of the moment: slender waists and voluminous skirts, as well as new proposals such as the "barrel" and "balloon" lines which move away from the overriding aesthetics. Some of these models are reminiscent of silhouettes from the twenties where the waistline was less accentuated, with Balenciaga drawing the eyes to the shoulder and hemline of his dresses.

These factors lay the foundations for his benchmark creations in the 50s with the "tunic", "sack" and "baby-doll" lines; models in which he quietly proceeds to bring



about a revolutionary divorce between the body and the dress, lending progressively more importance to a third element: air.

Balenciaga, “The couturier who sets the pace for the fashion future”, as noted by the different fashion writers of his time, leads his clients by means of a gradual, discreet and incessant evolution to an innovative change in the female ideal.

## Refinement and abstraction (1960-1968)

In the sixties Balenciaga’s silhouettes take on greater degrees of abstraction. The ample volumes, found both in tailor making and dressmaking, draw on his groundbreaking creations of the 50s, revising the patterns of the “sack”, the “tunic” and the “semi-fitted” garments. Some of the new silhouettes present during that decade come from the combination of these cutting-edge creations to configure new aesthetic references.

Conceptual and technical minimalism, inherent to his career, are obvious in the wraps made in fabrics of a certain rigidity, such as gazar, zagar and sable, creating abstract silhouettes and geometric volumes based on the circle and the square.

One step at a time. An evolution of the previous version. That’s how Balenciaga’s collections change year after year, with no improvised jumps, with consistency, gradually pushing earlier ideas to the extreme until obtaining absolute dissolution of the female body and the dress.

In 1968 Cristóbal Balenciaga announces his decision to retire. After 52 years of continuous work, presenting an average of 200 new creations every season, age and fatigue are enough in themselves to justify this step. “A dog’s life” – he would confess in the only interview he gave in his life. (Paris Match, 1968).

But also, the important social, political and cultural changes of the time: May 1968 in France, the Prague Spring, the missile crisis, the race riots or protests against the Vietnam war... make it almost inevitable. In that new society of ‘68, faster moving and more immediate, more revolutionary and spirited, *prêt-à-porter*, had democratized fashion.

Balenciaga accepts the commission to design and produce the uniforms for “Air France”, his only foray into this new tailoring mode of pre-established sizes. After the experience, and faithful to himself, he decides to abandon the world of which he no longer feels himself to be a part.

By then, the dimension, presence, influence, recognition and prestige enjoyed by Balenciaga have become such that many see his last collection as the end of an era.



Two samples of Cristóbal Balenciaga’s creative legacy: «midi» and «baby-doll».



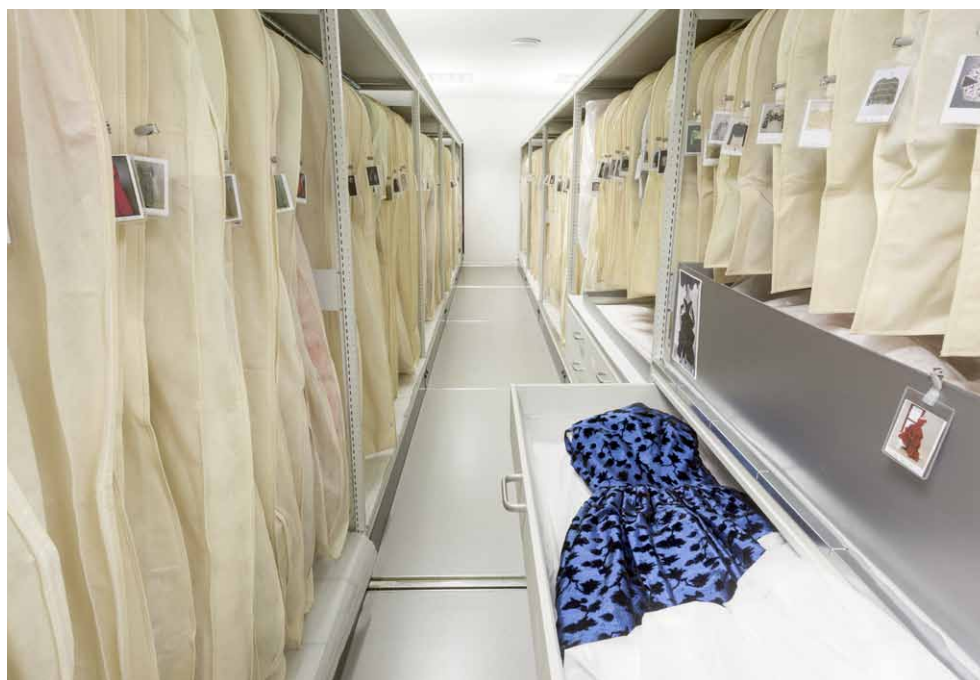
Uniforms for Air France hostesses, 1968.  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

# Exhibitions dedicated to the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga

Cristóbal Balenciaga retires in 1968. After 52 years of continuous work, presenting more than 200 new creations every season, the end of an era emerges with the appearance of *prêt-à-porter*, leading to the closure of his salons and the end of activity at his ateliers in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona and San Sebastián.

From then on, the first private – often studio – collections start taking shape, with numerous exhibitions running all over the world: organised by the fabric creator Gustav Zumsteg – who worked closely with the couturier – a first exhibition is dedicated to him at Zurich’s Bellerive Museum in 1970. A year after his death, in 1973, the fashion editor Diana Vreeland organises the first major retrospective at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, the museum to which Cristóbal Balenciaga himself had donated part of his creation before retiring.

Below are many more up until the most recent: *Balenciaga, l’oeuvre au noir*, at the Musée Bourdelle in Paris, *Balenciaga Shaping Fashion* at the Victoria & Albert and *Rachel L. Mellon Collection* at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa last year.



Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum storerooms. © Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa Photograph: Iñigo Ibáñez

LIST OF EXHIBITIONS

- Bellerive Museum, *Cristóbal Balenciaga*, Zurich, 1970.
- Metropolitan Museum of Art, *The World of Balenciaga*, New York, 1973.
- Palacio de Bellas Artes of Madrid, *El mundo de Balenciaga*, Madrid, 1974.
- Musée Historique des Tissus, *Homage à Balenciaga*, Lyon, 1985.
- Fondation de la Mode, *Cristóbal Balenciaga*, Tokio, 1987.
- Palacio de la Virreina of Barcelona, *Homenaje a Balenciaga*, 1987.
- Palacio Miramar, *Homenaje Internacional a Cristóbal Balenciaga*, San Sebastián, 1987.
- National Gallery of Victoria, *Balenciaga: Masterpieces of Fashion Design*, Melbourne, 1992.
- Museo Nacional de Escultura, *Cristóbal Balenciaga*, Valladolid, 2000.
- Kutxaespacio del Arte, *Paristik Donostiara. Balenciaga*, San Sebastián, 2001.
- IVAM Instituto Valenciano de Arte Moderno, *Carta de amor a Cristóbal Balenciaga*, Valencia, 2001.
- Fundación Cristóbal Balenciaga, *Cristóbal Balenciaga y la marquesa de Llanzol*, Getaria, 2004.
- Fundación Cristóbal Balenciaga, *Balenciaga: El lujo de la sobriedad*, Getaria, 2006.
- Musée des Arts Décoratifs, *Balenciaga Paris*, Paris, 2006.
- Meadows Museum, *Balenciaga and his Legacy*, New Haven, Texas, 2006.
- Château de Haroué, *Cristobal Balenciaga, Philippe Venet, Hubert Givenchy au château des princes de Beauwau Craon*, Paris, 2010.
- Queen Sophia Spanish Institute, *Balenciaga: Spanish Master*, New York, 2010.
- Fine Arts Museum of Bilbao, *Balenciaga. El diseño del límite*, Bilbao, 2010.
- De Young Fine Arts Museum of San Francisco, *Balenciaga and Spain*, San Francisco, 2011.
- Palais Galliera, *Cristóbal Balenciaga: Collectionneur de mode*, Paris, 2012.
- Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, *Balenciaga y la Alta Costura en Barcelona*, Getaria, 2013.
- Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, *El arte de Balenciaga*, Getaria, 2014.
- Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, *La experiencia del lujo*, Getaria, 2015.
- Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa and Cité Internationale de la Mode et la Dentelle, *Balenciaga a través del encaje*, Calais 2015, Getaria, 2016.
- Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, *Carbón y Terciopelo: Miradas de Ortiz Echagüe y Balenciaga sobre el traje popular*, Getaria, 2016.
- Victoria & Albert Museum, *Balenciaga, Shaping Fashion*, London, 2017.
- Palais Galliera, *Balenciaga, l'œuvre au noir*, Paris, 2017.
- Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, *Rachel L. Mellon Collection*, Getaria, 2017.



Cristóbal  
Balenciaga at his  
Paris *maison*.  
© Juan Gyenes.  
Biblioteca Nacional  
de España





# Biographical Milestones

## BEGINNINGS AND INFLUENCES (1917–1937)

- 1895 Cristóbal Balenciaga was born in Getaria, a small fishing village located in the north of Spain. The son of a sailor and a seamstress, in his hometown he had access to the thriving context of the summer regal vacation that was common at the beginning of the century on the Basque Coast.
- 1906 Cristóbal Balenciaga made his first dress for the Marchioness of Casa Torres, his mentor who employed his mother as a seamstress during the long summer seasons that the family spent in Getaria.
- 1907 Balenciaga moved to San Sebastián – according to the municipal census register, he resided in the capital of Gipuzkoa from this year on – and it seems logical to assume that he probably trained in some of the important fashion houses in existence at the time: surely Gómez House, New England, and Au Louvre, all of which had ties to the fashion of Paris and operated in the city of San Sebastián.
- 1917 Cristóbal Balenciaga started his business and creative adventure. The designer established his first fashion house known as “C. Balenciaga” at Vergara Street, Number 2, of San Sebastián. Seven years later, in 1924, after different company modifications, he moved his operations to Avenue Number 2 of the same city under the name “Cristóbal Balenciaga”.
- 1918 He founded “Balenciaga y Cía” alongside the Lizaso sisters, creating a limited-term company.
- 1924 The aforementioned company was dissolved and he moved his operations to Avenue Number 2, first floor, of the same city, under the name “Cristóbal Balenciaga”.
- 1927 He founded “Martina Robes et Manteaux” as a second brand (Martina was the name of his mother). In October of that same year, he changed the brand to “EISA COSTURA”, once again related to his mother (whose surname was Eizaguirre), located at Number 10 on Oquendo Street in San Sebastián.
- 1933 Balenciaga opened a fashion house in Madrid, at Caballero de Gracia Street, Number 42, under the name “EISA B.E.”.
- 1935 He set up a second location for “EISA B.E.” at Number 10, Santa Teresa Street, Barcelona.
- 1936 With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, he abandoned Spain and settled in Paris. He temporarily stopped normal business activities at his fashion houses of Madrid and Barcelona.
- 1937 He moved “EISA COSTURA” To Avenue Number 2, second floor, under the name “EISA B.E.”.

## EXPLORATION WITH NEW LINES (1937–1951)

- 1937 In July, he registered with the Chambre, Syndicale de la Haute Couture and opened, alongside his partners Wladzio d’Attainville and Nicolás Bizcarrondo, “BALENCIAGA” Ltd. , a *haute couture* fashion house which would leave its mark on the history of fashion.

- 1939 Cristóbal Balenciaga presented a collection with a profound historicist influence which was clearly reminiscent of the fashion of the seventeenth century and the Second French Empire. The success of his “infanta” dresses was overwhelming.
- 1947 In February, Balenciaga presented the “tonneau” or “barrel” line, which departed from the dominating aesthetics of confined figures and emphasized fluidity in its design. This was the same year in which Dior introduced its “bar suit”.
- 1949 The first street-level boutique was opened, designed by Christos Bellos. Its decoration was marked by an austere nature, without giving up on elegance or luxury, making use of furniture and decorative elements that alluded to Spanish origin.

EVOLUTION Y REVOLUTION (1951–1959)

- 1951 Cristóbal Balenciaga introduced the “semi-fitted” suit (February), the “sailor” (February), and the “midi” (August). These models were reminiscent of the silhouettes of the twenties in which the waist was blurred, with Balenciaga using the shoulder line as a focal point and placing emphasis on the lower part of the dress.
- 1952 From this year on, the shop windows were designed by Janine Janet, with sculptures being created in which the products were integrated or directly invisible to the passer-by thanks to the materials used and their markedly artistic nature.
- 1955 The “tunic” was introduced, a two-piece dress with straight, clean lines that covered the body without constricting it – an evolution of the “midi” line.
- 1956 Balenciaga decided to showcase his collections one month after the official start of the high-fashion shows alongside Hubert de Givenchy.
- 1957 The designer introduced the “sack” dress into his collections, a further step in terms of his formal experimentation – a type of evolution of the “sailor” style. Along with the fabric creator Gustav Zumsteg (Abraham), gazar was developed – a fabric with sculptural properties suitable for creations that were increasingly conceptual in nature

- 1958 Cristóbal Balenciaga introduced the “baby doll” dress, characterized by the simplicity of its trapezoidal silhouette that got rid of the waistline, as well as “peacock tail” dresses – longer in back than in the front. The French Government awarded him the title of *Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur* for his service to the fashion industry. He became known by the international press as the “Master of High Fashion”.

PURIFICATION AND ABSTRACTION (1960–1968)

- 1960 Cristóbal Balenciaga designed the wedding gown of Fabiola de Mora y Aragón, the granddaughter of the Marchioness of Casa Torres and future Queen of Belgium.
- 1962 Balenciaga began to introduce forms that were increasingly more pure and abstract. The conceptual and technical minimalism that was inherent to his career became evident in the garments he made of fabrics with a certain degree of rigidity, such as gazar silk, zagar silk, and ciberlina (a soft, wool fabric), creating abstract silhouettes and geometrical volumes based on the circle and the square.
- 1968 Cristóbal Balenciaga accepted the task of designing and producing the uniforms for Air France, his only experience with *prêt-à-porter* garments. He granted the only interview of his life to the magazine *Paris Match*.
- 1969 Closure of his last fashion house in San Sebastián.
- 1972 Balenciaga passed away in Xàbia (Alicante) on March 24, at the age of 77, and he was buried in the small cemetery of his hometown, Getaria.



# The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum



Exterior view of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria.  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa.

**The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, opened on 7 June 2011, is located in the town where the couturier was born, in commemoration of those early years of his professional training and maturing in order to understand his contributions to the world of fashion.**

With the aim of explaining Balenciaga's life and work, his relevance in the history of fashion and design, and the contemporaneity of his legacy, the Museum houses a unique collection. Its large size – almost 3,000 pieces which continue to rise in number thanks to loans and donations – and its wide-ranging formal and chronological extension – including, for example, the earliest existing models by the couturier – make this one of the most complete, consistent and interesting of its kind.

Another of the collection's exceptional values lies in the origin of the pieces. It goes without saying that Balenciaga's major international clients were outstanding social figures in the central decades of the 20th century: Mona Von Bismarck, Bunny Mellon, Patricia López Wilshaw, Barbara Hutton, Princess de Réthy, Grace Kelly and Madame Bricard all wore some of the models now featuring in the Archives.

# Practical Information

More information:

Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum Communication

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M 647 410 775

## MUSEUM OPENING HOURS

JUNE, SEPTEMBER AND OCTOBER

Tuesday - Sunday, 10:00 - 19:00h

JULY AND AUGUST

Monday - Sunday, 10:00 - 19:00h

NOVEMBER - JANUARY

Tuesday - Sunday, 10:00 - 15:00h

## GUIDED TOURS

The Museum runs free guided tours lasting for one hour on weekends and public holidays. During the months of July and August guided tours will be programmed daily.

Mornings, 11:00h and 12:30h.

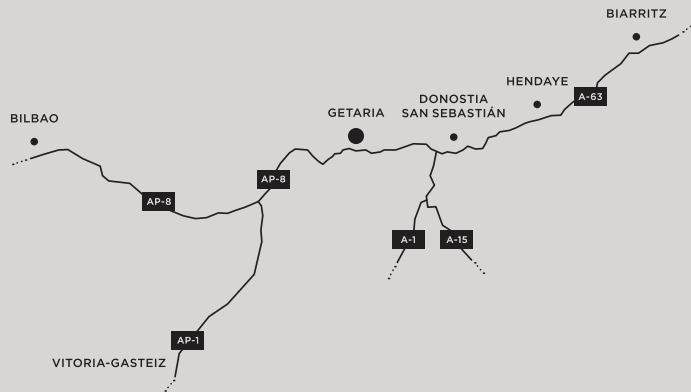
Afternoons, 17:00h (March-October)

Private tours are available all year round.

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## CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

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Biarritz — 71km  
Bilbao — 81km  
Donostia/ San Sebastián — 25km  
Iruña-Pamplona — 97km  
Vitoria-Gasteiz — 83km

GPS  
43° 18' 6.92" N  
2° 12' 18.77" W

