

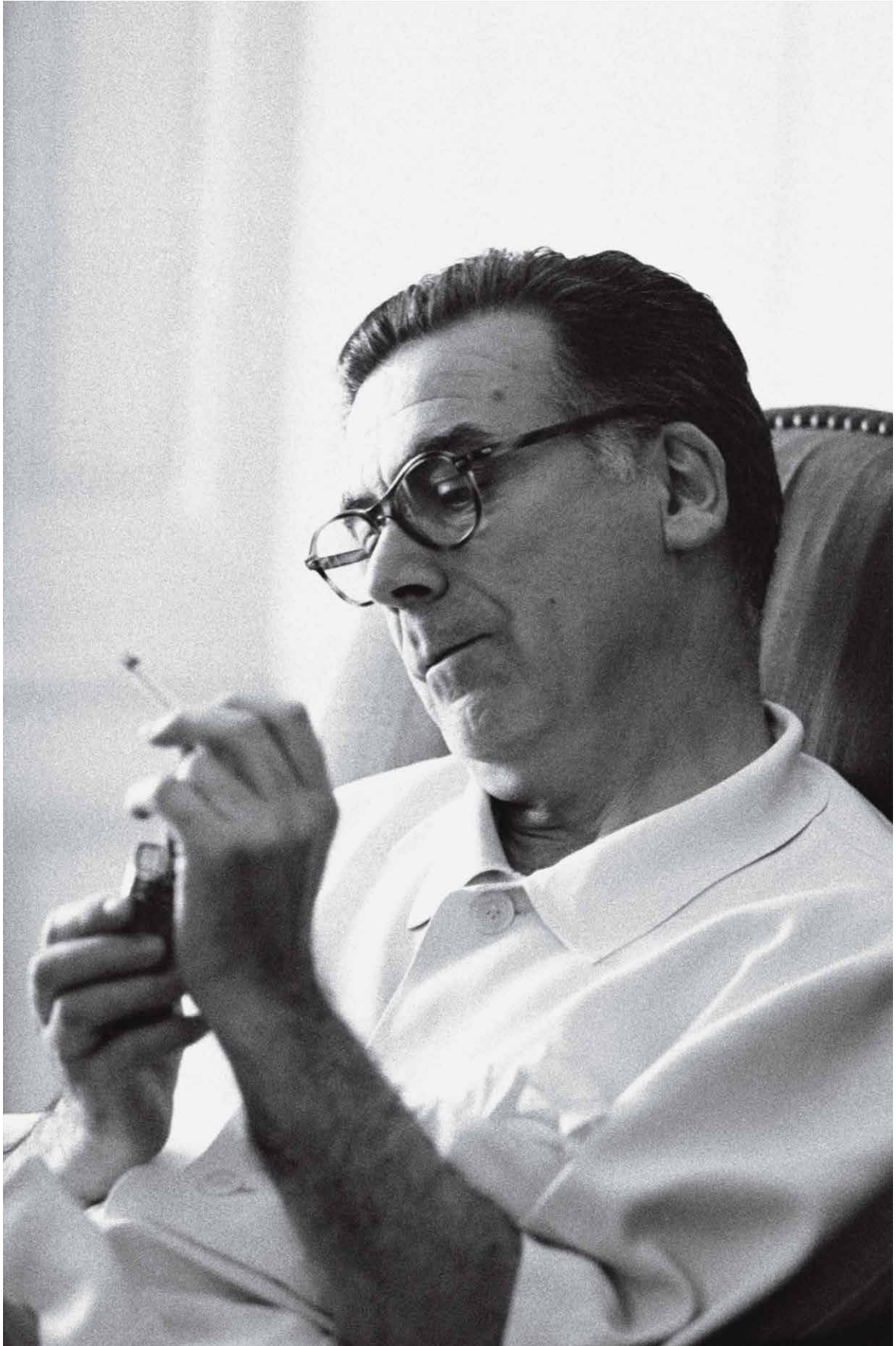
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CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

Fashion  
and Heritage  
*Cristóbal*



**Fashion and Heritage. *Cristóbal***



# Fashion and Heritage

## *Cristóbal*

EXHIBITION. 29 FEBRUARY – 21 JUNE / 2020

**Fashion and Heritage, a quasi-impossible dialogue pitting the the ephemeral against permanence, whose relevance stems from the current moment, as opposed to receiving value from the past. This conversation flows, however, when the topic at hand is Cristóbal Balenciaga.**

Since beginning the curatorial series *Fashion and Heritage* in 2018, along with the European Cultural Heritage Year, the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum decided to reflect on how Balenciaga's work went from being a fashion of the time to a museum piece.

The series was designed in cumulative fashion, integrating and assimilating previous and current research work, forming a shared chronological discourse and providing a different spotlight in each exhibition, with museography that is edited and revised in each edition. In previous proposals, we conversed with the visual references in Balenciaga's work and contextualised his work process, evolution and legacy.

125 years after Cristóbal Balenciaga's birth, "Fashion and Heritage. Cristóbal", the third and last edition of the curatorial series, seeks to evoke the man "behind the curtain", the name behind the brand, the family member, friend or boss behind the Master of Haute Couture.

Playing with the echos of past exhibitions, we will find, interspersed throughout the chronological journey in this new selection of works, different personal items belonging to Cristóbal Balenciaga. Garments, work instruments, letters, books, decorative items that invite us to ignore the myth and simply imagine Cristóbal.

CBM 2000.128ab  
Dinner ensemble in navy blue wool Opelka, Paris, 1939  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Jon Cazenave



# The Exhibition

*Fashion and Heritage. Cristobal* takes shape around a chronological journey that shows Cristobal Balenciaga's professional path, the story of the emblematic maison and the designer's creative evolution, showing a new perspective: his biography.

Cristóbal Balenciaga cultivated a certain distance from the public eye in his professional life, and absolute discretion in his personal life. The press at the time stated that he was a mysterious, unreachable man. He didn't talk to the press, he didn't deal with his clients directly (barring a handful of exceptions with friends), nor did he move about in the effervescent social, artistic and intellectual life of Paris in the mid-20th century. This distance, far from damaging his popularity, helped to make his name the epitome of exclusiveness and thus a true aspirational icon for the public at the time.

Testimonies from those near and dear to him stand out in contrast: collaborators, friends and family that knew a very different Cristóbal. Strict, but attentive, serious at work but relaxed and smiling with those close to him, demanding yet generous, a person who had the warmth and support of his family, the commitment and loyalty of his friends and the respect and devotion of his employees.

As such, the exhibition shows Cristóbal Balenciaga's work in evolution. At the same time, his possessions allow us to imagine Cristóbal himself.

In Igor Uria's words, curator of the exhibition and collections director at the Museum: "Our aim is not to make a biographical sketch, but rather to evoke the man who always remained in the shadows, behind the curtain, hidden in his shop, in executing his ideas, in the silence of creation--and perhaps ask ourselves why those specific items have reached us today, and what they tell us about him".

© Juan Gyenes. Spanish National Library.





CBM 2000.155-158  
Tools (metal awl, wooden awl, tracing  
wheel and thimble), 1968  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Jon Cazenave

## Facts

The exhibition occupies five exhibition halls, 700 m<sup>2</sup> of the Museum, and renews all garment pieces, 80 in total. The majority of them have never been exhibited before. These are new additions to the Museum collection, deposits and loans from Balenciaga, Paris Archives; Solano-Belausteguigoitia collection, Gorostola-Portocarrero collection, Astoreca collection and Medina-Balenciaga collection.

Additionally, as an epilogue to the exhibition *Fashion and Heritage. Cristóbal*, or an addition to it, a sixth room, born of a special collaboration between the Museum and the Balenciaga Archives of Paris, will be dedicated to the legacy of the master preserved at the Balenciaga maison's headquarters.

The exhibition course and the selection of pieces, as well as the spatial layout and design are the result of an innovative approach brought about by the collaboration between Igor Uria, collections director at the Museum, and Judith Clark, a renowned fashion curator, a continuation of the work undertaken when the curatorial series was begun. This time, the Centre for Fashion Curation of the University of the Arts of London is supporting the exhibition.

“In the third edition of the curatorial series *Fashion and Heritage*, the conversation held in previous editions between the collection and the facility, archive and museology, is taking on a third biographical layer. The figure of Cristóbal Balenciaga, always present through those iconic silhouettes, is shown this time around through less well-known photographic portraits and the ensemble of remaining items from his possessions. Some of them have almost become talismans or fetishes of his enigmatic persona”, states Judith Clark.





Cristóbal Balenciaga portrait  
by Man Ray  
© *Harper's Bazaar*, 1940

## Evoking Cristóbal Balenciaga

*Fashion and Heritage. Cristóbal* will therefore shine the spotlight on Cristóbal Balenciaga and the mark he left behind as a person through different items that belonged to him and are now included in the Museum collections. Along with the garments shown, the designer's personal items are exhibited, helping us to evoke his more private side. Work tools, personal items, letters and private correspondence and clothing that tell us about him as a person: his tastes, his attachments, his everyday life...

Regarding photographic portraits, from the designer's perspective, what mattered were his creations, and not his person, so he only allowed himself to be photographed on a few occasions. Some did because they were close to him, like Sarria in San Sebastian or Luis Corbellá in Madrid. Others photographed advertising campaigns for his perfumes (Louise Dahl-Wolfe and Madame D'Ora) and managed to capture him. Still others were renowned photographers at the time, like Man Ray, Inge Morath and Henri Cartier-Bresson who did photographic features on the designer for magazines, such as *Harper's Bazaar*, *Vogue*, etc.

The Museum's collections include Cristóbal Balenciaga's creations, but also the items that belonged to him and that help us to discover the different biographical, cultural and professional contexts Balenciaga lived in. Those nearest the designer (family, collaborators, workers, friends) preserved these items and have generously donated or loaned them to the Museum to be displayed.

CBM 2000.93  
Klein polo shirt in blue jersey that  
belonged to Cristóbal Balenciaga  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Jon Cazenave





Silver box marked with the initials C.B.  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Jon Cazenave

These items invite us to interpret Cristóbal, to evoke the master of couture. Throughout the exhibition, we find the chair from his shop in Paris (which Hubert de Givenchy kept for years until donating it to the Museum), his work tools (donated by his right-hand man, Ramón Esparza), the awards he received throughout the course of his life and a silver box given by his employees after the closure in 1968. They have all survived today and help us to give shape to the contours of Cristóbal Balenciaga's personality.

His impeccable wardrobe also tells us many things about the designer from Getaria. As stated by Ben Whyman, manager of the Centre for Fashion Curation: "The Material Analysis of Cristóbal Balenciaga's clothing shows the materiality (wear on clothing, abrasion and other marks) that took root as the designer's body moved with it and against the surfaces of his garments. In this way, wear on the garments gives us unexpressed clues to his life: his gestures (a hand on the chin or elegantly placed across the chest), or how he worked at the shop (his body leaning one way while studying the line of a garment). There is an inherent organic quality in his designs, and in his personal wardrobe, this is to be seen in the materiality of his own garments".

## List of personal items

- Chair from the atelier at 10 Avenue Georges V in Paris  
CBM 2000.228
- Metal awl, wooden awl, tracing wheel and thimble  
CBM 2000.155 -158
- White porcelain ashtray from the EISA salons  
CBM 1998.250
- Bound albums of magazines  
*La Moda Elegante* (1874)  
*Vogue* (1916-1919)  
*Les Idées Nouvelles de la Mode / Art. Gout. Beauté* (1922-1924)  
*Femina* (1925)  
*Blanco y Negro* (1930)  
Agustín Medina Balenciaga Collection
- Magazine rack in metal and walnut wood  
Balenciaga Arrieta Family Collection
- Dinner ensemble in navy blue wool, 1939  
Opelka, Paris  
CBM 2000.128ab
- White shirt Bel y Cía. Barcelona  
CBM 2000.95
- Neckties in silk  
CBM 2012.12-CBM 2012.61-62
- Letter handwritten to Sonsoles de Icaza  
Sonsoles Diez de Rivera Collection  
CBM 2010.04
- Letter and note handwritten to Rachel L. Mellon  
CBM 2014.537a - CBM 2014.535d
- Telegram of condolences to the wife of the fabric supplier, Labbey. 1968  
CBM 2011.145a
- Membership card of the Royal Yacht Club of San Sebastián, 1954  
CBM 2000.272
- Driving licence, 1963  
CBM 2000.273
- Leather lined suitcase with the Louis Vuitton house monogram  
Agustín Medina Balenciaga Collection
- Medal: Knight of the Légion d'Honneur, 1958  
Agustín Medina Balenciaga Collection
- Medal. Order of Isabella the Catholic, 1966  
Agustín Medina Balenciaga Collection
- Medal. Order of Civil Merit, 1968  
Agustín Medina Balenciaga Collection
- Diplomatic pouch which contained the certificate for Balenciaga addressed to the Spanish Ambassador in Paris  
Agustín Medina Balenciaga Collection
- Silver box marked with the initials C.B. A gift to the house models in Paris when the Maison closed, 1968  
Agustín Medina Balenciaga Collection

CBM 2000.228  
Chair from the atelier at 10 Avenue Georges v in Paris  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Jon Cazenave



# The Spotlight on the Archive



Photo with tissue sample, 60s  
© Archives Balenciaga, Paris

After the designer passed in Getaria in 1972, Balenciaga's brand was passed through several company groups until joining the Kering Group today. Several important figures in modern fashion have worked for the brand as creative director: Nicolas Ghesquière, Alexander Wang and, today, Demna Gvasalia. On the 125th anniversary of Cristóbal's birth, and 52 years after the maison closed its doors, the company has announced its return to haute couture.

Throughout all these years, the French company has preserved a large portion of archives on the Balenciaga Maison of Haute Couture of Paris, including garments, toiles, photographs, sketches and films. Every year, this archive is acknowledged for its great heritage and cultural importance in the European Heritage Days. The company sets the stage to highlight and bring this heritage to society with its own exhibition. It also collaborates in exhibitions on Balenciaga carried out by other prestigious entities, including the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum itself.

On the 125th anniversary of his birth, a selection of twelve *toiles* (cloth patterns) representing his creation in the 1960s, and a series of films from catwalks taken by Tom Kublin between 1960 and 1967, are exceptionally being shown in this room, a space transformed to highlight the Archive aesthetic characterising the entire exhibition.

CBM 02.1999  
Evening gown in fuchsia moiré taffeta with two ruffles.1963  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Outumuro Estudio



CBM 2000.204  
Balloon dress in black silk taffeta, 1952  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Outumuro Estudio



# Cristóbal Balenciaga's Creative Legacy

The journey through the exhibition breaks down the constant evolution in Cristóbal Balenciaga's work along a chronological timeline that includes his entire professional trajectory, interspersing the designer's personal items that belong to the Museum collections.

## Beginnings and influences (1912-1936)

Cristóbal Balenciaga began his entrepreneurial and creative adventure in San Sebastian in 1917, at a time when the city was benefiting from the seasonal presence of the Court and tourists on the Basque Coast.

When he began, he purchased, analysed and recreated creations of French haute couture, especially Vionnet, Louiseboulanger, Lanvin and Chanel. Women dressing women. As was in fashion at the time, he was drawn to other concepts and sensitivities, such as those from the East. He focused on testing different kinds of sleeves, exploring the meaning of the fabric, reducing seams, simplicity in shapes and the ornamentation of the fabric itself.

Balenciaga continued developing and expanding his brand in Spain: Madrid in 1933 and Barcelona in 1935.

## Formal exploration (1937-1951)

Balenciaga impressed the critics beginning with his first collection in the French capital, thanks to his technical mastery and creations whose Spanish airs set them apart. However, WWII broke out immediately afterward. For years, the scarcity in materials, new feminine roles and a patriotic spirit set the style for military-inspired fashion for a society pouring its efforts into the war.

CBM 02.2002  
Bridal gown in ivory silk satin  
with a lace collar and round train,  
draped at the hip, 1945  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Outumuro Estudio



The end of the conflict put French haute couture's ability to rebuild the sector to the test, with new ideas in line with better times. Balenciaga lived and participated in these contexts. In 1947, he simultaneously introduced models aligned with trends at the time: small waistlines and voluminous skirts, and new designs such as "barrel" and "balloon" lines, removed from the dominant aesthetic.

## Innovation (1952-1959)

Balenciaga's research into a new silhouette, which he began in the previous decade, came to light in 1951 when he presented designs which, instead of highlighting, blurred feminine curves, especially the waist, such as the "midi," "sailor" and "slightly fitted" design.

Some of these models are reminiscent of 1920s silhouettes, where the waistline is softened. Balenciaga used the shoulder line and bottom hem of the dress as a reference.

With them, he set forth the starting point for milestones he would develop throughout the 1950s, with "tunic", "bag" and "baby-doll" lines. Subtly, these models divorced the body from the dress, progressively placing greater importance on a third element: air.

Balenciaga, "The designer who blazed the trail for future fashion", as stated by different fashion writers at the time, took his clients on a gradual, discrete and incessant evolution toward an innovative shift in their concept of the feminine ideal.

## Purification and abstraction (1960-1968)

In the 1960s, Balenciaga's silhouettes took on a greater degree of abstraction. Large volumes, used both by tailors and by fashion designers, were based on milestones he had set in the 50s, revising the "bag", "tunic" and "slightly fitted" patterns. Some of the new silhouettes introduced during this decade are the fruit of blending these milestones to make new aesthetic models.

Conceptual and technical minimalism, inherent to his career, was clear in the enveloping fabrics he used that bore a certain rigidity, such as gazar, zaggar and ciberlina, creating abstract silhouettes and geometric volumes.

Each time, a step forward. An evolution from the previous step. This is how Balenciaga's collections changed year after year, with no improvised leaps, with consistency, gradually taking previous ideas to the extreme until achieving absolute dissolution between the woman's body and the dress.

The exhibition's journey ends in 1968 when the maison closed, also referencing the later process of granting heritage status to his work while he was still alive and after the creator passed away.

Two examples of the creative legacy of Cristóbal Balenciaga: "tunic" and "midi"  
© Nordin/Nilson, Archives of the Nordic Museum  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation





CBM 2000.131  
Evening gown in pale green silk shantung, 1961  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation/Outumuro Estudio



# The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum



Exterior view of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria  
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation /  
Idoia Unzurrunzaga

**The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, inaugurated 7 June 2011, is located in Getraia, the designer's hometown and the stage for Cristóbal Balenciaga's first years of training and professional maturing. This is essential to understand his contributions to fashion.**

In order to share Balenciaga's life and works, his relevance in the history of fashion and design and the contemporary nature of his legacy, the museum holds a unique collection. Its vast nature (over 3,000 pieces in a collection that only continues to grow, thanks to loans and donations) and its formal, chronological extension (including, for example, the designer's earliest models conserved) make it one of the most complete, coherent and interesting collections in existence today.

Another of the collections' exceptional values is the origin of the pieces. Balenciaga's great international clients were prominent social figures from the mid-20th century, such as Mona Von Bismarck, Bunny Mellon, Patricia López Wilshaw, Barbara Hutton, Princess Rethy, Grace Kelly and Madame Bricard, who wore some of the models held in the Archive.

## For more information

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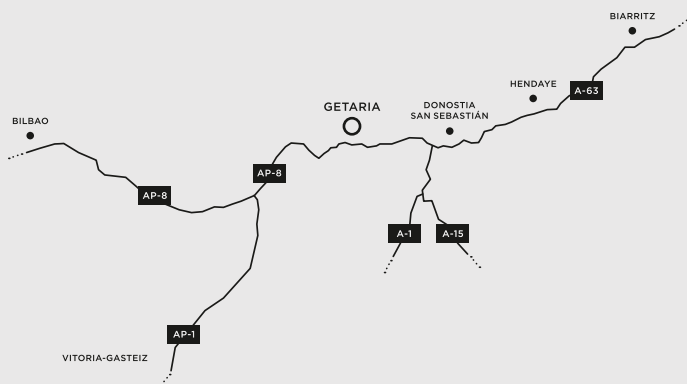
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