

# CHRISTIAN DIOR



McCord  
MUSEUM

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## THE COUTURE REVOLUTION

— EXHIBITION FROM SEPTEMBER 25 TO JANUARY 3 —

# CHRISTIAN DIOR

EXHIBITION PRODUCED BY



PRESENTED BY

HOLT RENFREW  
OGILVY

## ABOUT THE EXHIBITION

The exhibition focuses on the creations of the first decade of the haute couture house of Dior created by the famous French couturier Christian Dior. It presents the origins and characteristics of the the haute couture house of Dior under the aegis of its founder and covers the period from 1947 to 1957. It provides a captivating insight into the creative process and the mechanics of Parisian haute couture industry after the Second World War. Visitors will have the opportunity to discover the expertise and techniques that underpin the worldwide success of New Look.



Name: *Avril*  
Line: A Spring-Summer 1955  
Occasion: Two-piece garden party dress Atelier flou: Jane  
Mannequin: Lucky  
Textiles: Silk organza, silk embroidery by Abraham  
ROM 962.18.A-B  
Gift of Mrs. Philippe Hecht  
Photograph by Laziz Hamani

# ABOUT THE HAUTE COUTURE HOUSE OF CHRISTIAN DIOR

The haute couture house of Christian Dior opened in Paris at 30 avenue Montaigne, on February 12, 1947. This exhibition looks at the first decade of the designs, accessories, and perfumes created for a “clientele of habitually well-dressed women.” It explores the construction and materials to understand how the House reinvented modern dressmaking by reviving forgotten historical skills and fusing them with unprecedented designs, cuts, and materials. It highlights the artisans, designers, manufacturers, and businessmen who pioneered new luxuries and business models that help explain how, in ten short years and only 22 collections, Christian Dior accounted for over five percent of all French exports and created a new ideal of femininity.

## ABOUT CHRISTIAN DIOR

Christian Dior was born January 21, 1905, in the Normandy town of Granville, to a family that had made its fortune manufacturing fertilizer. His parents hoped he would become a diplomat, so he gave up his dream of becoming an architect and enrolled in the Paris Institute of Political Studies. However, after leaving school, he opened an art gallery with Jacques Bonjean in 1928. In 1931, Christian Dior’s mother died and his father went bankrupt. The next year, he joined forces with gallery owner Pierre Colle. The years that followed were difficult, marked by illness and financial challenges. Encouraged by his friends, Dior, a gifted artist, learned fashion illustration and sold his sketches to milliners, couturiers and newspapers like *Le Figaro*. He became an assistant for designer Robert Piguet in 1938, and then began working for Lucien Lelong in 1941.

In 1946, with backing from entrepreneur Marcel Boussac, he founded the House of Dior. On February 12, 1947, Dior debuted his hugely successful first collection, revolutionizing the world of fashion. Dubbed the «New Look,» his silhouettes of flared skirts and corseted waists transformed the old rules of fashion and femininity. Within days, the international press had made Dior into a household name. The couturier immediately expanded his business by creating perfumes and accessories for the global market, starting with the United States in 1948. Upon his death in 1957, Christian Dior was the most famous couturier of his time.

## WHAT IS THE NEW LOOK?

Seventeen months after the end of the Second World War, Christian Dior presented his first collection. It swept away the wartime, masculine style with padded shoulders and knee-length skirts, replacing it with an ultra-feminine silhouette that accentuated the bosom and waist, and featured soft shoulders and long, full skirts. Carmel Snow, editor of *Harper’s Bazaar*, dubbed it the “New Look.” Christian Dior said it was the “look of peace... it reflects the times.”

The New Look was also a new *feel*, quite unlike wearing wartime fashions. Fitted cloth hugged and securely wrapped the torso and arms. Excessive yardage had a sensuous weight as long skirts moved fluidly when walking and pooled luxuriously when sitting. *Vogue* announced that, “Dior spread the thought that every woman in a Dior dress, or even a copy of a Dior dress, was a figure of fashion.”

# WHAT DOES THE EXHIBITION CONSIST OF?

The exhibition features some 51 garments, including 40 from the extensive fonds of Dior couture in the Royal Ontario Museum's (ROM) permanent collection and 11 dresses from the McCord Museum's Dress, Fashion and Textiles collection, along with one hundred or so objects, photographs and videos from the era chronicling the peerless expertise of Paris haute couture in the 1950s, an industry whose reputation was raised by the House of Dior.

## THE ATELIERS

Haute couture ateliers, or workrooms, are organized around the methods and skills needed to transform fashion sketches into three-dimensional garments. The *flou* (dressmaking) relies on techniques of draping and the manipulation of delicate silks and lightweight chiffons and lace. The *tailleur* (tailoring) requires different techniques to mould and shape heavier textiles such as wool.

## DAYTIME

Christian Dior's daytime suits and dresses were designed for women on the move. Prioritizing precision tailoring over draping, he made sure the Dior woman looked sleek and feminine and was not hindered by her clothing.

Day suit, Pentecote,  
Christian Dior, Spring-Summer 1950 Collection.  
Gift of Dorothy C. Lindsay,  
M966.96.15.1-3 © McCord Museum



## LATE AFTERNOON – EVENING

Christian Dior's late day dresses were masterpieces of femininity and ingenuity that fused history and modernity. He introduced the cocktail dress in various lengths, and borrowed ideas from modular sportswear, suggesting an overskirt could also be worn as a cape.

Late afternoon dress, Topaze,  
Christian Dior, Fall-Winter 1951 Collection.  
Gift of Margaret Rawlings Hart,  
M967.25.87.1-2 © McCord Museum





## EVENING

Christian Dior's designs drew upon historical styles that reflected great moments in French design and society. He loved the 18th century, with its panniers (side hoops) and classical revival influences; the Second Empire (1852-1870), with off-the-shoulder dresses and wide crinolines; and the Belle Époque (1871-1914), with elongated, corseted torsos and daring décolletages. He drew freely from all, creating ravishingly elegant gowns.



Name: *Palmyre*  
Line: Profilée Autumn-Winter 1952  
Occasion: Evening dress  
Atelier flou: Simone  
Mannequin: Alla  
Textiles: Celanese acetate satin by Robert Perrier; 35 various gold thread, beads, Swarovski crystals, embroidery by Ginisty et Quévolle  
ROM 970.286.3  
Gift of Mrs. M. James Boylen  
Photograph by Laziz Hamani



Evening dress, *Cygne Noir*,  
Christian Dior, Fall-Winter 1949 Collection.  
Gift of Margaret Rawlings Hart,  
M967.25.9.1-3 © McCord Museum

## MAKING DIOR

During the 1950s, Paris couturiers acted as powerful influences on the seasonal colours, textures, and silhouettes. Less recognized are the *fournisseurs*, craftspeople and manufacturers in the ancillary trades who played an essential part in the creation of an haute couture garment. They supplied imaginative, whimsical, historical, and modern textiles, laces, ribbons, embroideries, beads, sequins, coloured and metal threads, pleats, artificial flowers, and buttons. Christian Dior understood these historic and symbiotic French industries and, for each collection, worked with hundreds of them to realize his unique designs.

## SHOPPING DIOR

Christian Dior astonished the public and press with his first haute couture collection that was also presented with coordinated accessories, creating an “entire costume picture.” He wanted all women to be elegant, regardless of finances, by following three basic rules: simplicity, good taste, and grooming.

To this end, the firm sought out the most creative designers, craftspeople, and manufacturers to produce a range of unique and exclusive luxuries for sale in the Boutique and by licensed retailers worldwide. The House of Dior maintained prestige by controlling the production, publicity, and distribution of its expanding global empire that, by 1953, was worth \$15 million (USD).

## A MONTREAL CLIENT

Many of the Dior dresses, gowns and suits in the McCord Museum collection belonged to Margaret Rawlings Hart (1910-2007). Growing up in Montreal, she attended local private schools before going to London and Paris to complete her education. She enjoyed competitive figure skating at the Montreal Winter Club and skiing in Europe. Following her marriage to Lawrence M. Hart in 1939, they moved to Washington for her husband’s military career.

Mrs. Hart was passionate about art, antiques, and flower arranging, as well as elegant clothing. When she and her husband moved back to Montreal, it was the postwar boom in French couture exports to North America. She became a preferred client for bonded models, purchasing more ensembles by Dior than by any other designer. The dresses she donated to the McCord Museum reveal a variety of creative alterations for her lifestyle and figure.



Evening dress, Ombre,  
Christian Dior, Fall-Winter 1948 Collection.  
Gift of Margaret Rawlings Hart,  
M967.25.89.1-3 © McCord Museum

# THE McCORD'S DRESS, FASHION AND TEXTILES COLLECTION

The McCord Museum holds the largest collection of Canadian garments and accessories. Its Dress, Fashion and Textiles collection consists of over 20,000 items made or worn in Canada over the past three centuries. The custodian of many examples of mid-20th century high fashion by Montreal, Canadian and international designers and couturiers, the McCord preserves the heritage of the development of Montreal's apparel industry and retail clothing sector. The Museum's collection now has 50 dresses signed Dior, all obtained by donation.

## CHRISTIAN DIOR CONTEST

The public is invited to take part in the contest for *Christian Dior*.

### PRIZES

#### First prize

##### **A dream trip for two to France in the footsteps of Christian Dior**

Two round-trip tickets to Paris with Air France and a four-day, three-night stay in Normandy with a Dior tour giving you access to a multitude of cultural tourist attractions (valued at \$6,875).

#### Second prize

##### **A personalized shopping experience at Holt Renfrew Ogilvy with a style expert and a \$5,000 gift card.**

The experience includes a lunch for two at Café Holt and two treatments in a Dior Prestige suite (valued at \$5,500).

#### Third prize

##### **A Dior gift basket**

The basket includes the book *Christian Dior: History and Modernity, 1947 - 1957*, an exhibition poster, an exhibition-themed notebook and an annual membership to the Museum (valued at \$127).

To participate, sign up online at [www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en](http://www.musee-mccord.qc.ca/en)



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