



MUSÉE CHRISTIAN DIOR - GRANVILLE

## Exhibition

# Christian Dior, visionary designer

New selection from the museum's collections

6 APRIL - 3 NOVEMBER 2024

Christian Dior's childhood home, now a museum dedicated to the fashion designer's life and work, brings recognition to his hometown as the source of inspiration for an individual journey with a global impact. From Granville to Paris, London and America, Christian Dior left his mark wherever he went, just as these places shaped him. Christian Dior's carefree childhood years in the town of Granville made him who he was, both as a man and as the designer he became in Paris. The fashion house that he founded in the French capital quickly became a major attraction, and soon, the Dior name was synonymous with Parisian elegance all over the world. This dazzling international success was built on skilful adaptation to the demands and tastes of customers outside of France.

Across the villa's three floors, the three sections of this exhibition tell the story of this journey and demonstrate Christian Dior's creativity, so greatly influenced by his childhood in Granville. The pieces on display are mostly from the Christian Dior Museum's collections. Historical context is provided by items on loan from the *Musée d'art et d'histoire de Granville* (the Granville Museum of Art and History) or from individuals. There are also contemporary pieces inspired by the designer's hometown and family history, on loan from Dior Héritage.

### In Granville, between land and sea

In the safe haven of *Les Rhumbs*, the villa that was his childhood home, between Granville's festivities and dips in the sea, Christian Dior developed a love of flowers, passed down by his mother. He was happier lost in catalogues from the Parisian seed seller Vilmorin Andrieux than he was reading any novel.

Flowers provided inspiration for the first Dior haute couture collection in 1947, with the "Corolla" silhouette resembling a circle of flower petals, in a first implicit tribute to the designer's childhood garden. This floral influence continued throughout the 1947-1957 decade and has appeared ever since in the creations of Christian Dior's successors. For example, the *Bonne Année* dress created for the autumn-winter 1957-1958 collection (*Fuseau* "Spindle" line), with its delicate, silver hibiscus flower embroidery, is displayed together with a bustier dress embroidered with multicoloured flowers created by Maria Grazia Chiuri for the spring-summer 2021 ready-to-wear collection. Inspired by motifs from the seed catalogues that the designer enjoyed reading as a child, several decades later Dior's homeware department, Dior Maison, released the "Granville" tableware collection (2021).

It was also in Granville, at a fete, that Christian Dior first met a fortune teller, who made a significant prediction: “You will find yourself penniless, but women bring you luck and they will be the key to your success. They will earn you great profits and you will have to cross oceans many times” (translated from *Christian Dior et moi*, 1956). From that moment forth, signs, omens and predictions would be very important for him, particularly the sign that led him to launch his own fashion house in Paris in 1946.

The legendary metal star that Christian Dior kept as a lucky charm all his life, which he found when he stumbled on it in a Parisian street not long before starting his fashion house, is displayed in the winter garden at Les Rhumbs. The lily of the valley, a symbol of good luck, appeared on many designs and accessories, and today’s designers also integrate it into their collections with creativity and imagination. Kris Van Assche, creative director of the menswear division Dior Homme from 2007 to 2018, included a men’s suit decorated with this flower in the autumn-winter 2014-2015 collection.

### The New Look revolution in Paris

In a Paris still marked by the hardship of the war, Christian Dior reconnected with the style of the Belle Epoque, creating dresses that recalled the luxury and femininity of times gone by. From a multitude of sketches, he built his collection. A selection of these sketches, some of which were drawn before 1947, provide a glimpse into the designer’s creative process: “*I sketch everywhere: in bed, in the bath, at the table, in the car, walking, in the sun, under the lamp, by day, by night*” (translated from *Christian Dior et moi*, 1956).

The first collection, presented on 12 February 1947 and christened the “New Look” by an American journalist, set the tone for those that followed, with multiple variations bearing evocative names: *Cachottière* (“Secretive”, autumn-winter 1950-1951, *Oblique* line), *Saphir* (“Sapphire”, autumn-winter 1951-1952, *Longue* line) and *Mutine* (“Rebellious”, autumn-winter 1954-1955). The unity of colour in these designs – black – emphasises their shape and its importance, closely connected to that of the cut: “a well-cut dress is a dress containing few cuts” (translated from *Christian Dior et moi*, 1956).

After the white toiles (initial prototypes) were made, the garments were brought to life in the most fabulous fabrics. Their patterns and colours served Christian Dior’s desire to be a dream-maker, with the help of talented creators like Andrée Brossin de Méré, known for her bold, high-quality fabrics. A selection of samples with animal, floral or architectural motifs ignites the imagination: these would become suits, ball gowns or cocktail dresses.

Dedicated to creating a harmonious silhouette, Christian Dior opened a boutique called Colifichets on the ground floor of 30 Avenue Montaigne, where ladies could be dressed from head to toe. As well as accessories, ready-to-wear clothing was soon made available. Thus, in 1955, the “Christian Dior boutique” label was born. It is illustrated in the exhibition by a bustier cocktail dress in turquoise silk satin, embroidered with metallic golden thread, pearly shells, birds and beads. Shoes, gloves, handbags, jewellery and tights from all periods show the spirit that Christian Dior breathed into his fashion house. Perfume, the “final touch” in an outfit, also appears among all these accessories, including Dior’s iconic first perfume, “*Miss Dior*”, created in 1947. Common motifs of the Dior fashion house, including the amphora, the bow and houndstooth, can be seen on bottles and presentation boxes.

In return for the prestigious glow that the fashion house cast on Paris, the city provided many sources of inspiration. For example, *Amour* (“Love”, spring-summer 1955), a short dinner dress, represents the *A* line, directly inspired by the shape of the Eiffel Tower.

## Christian Dior, enterprising spirit

Christian Dior was not just an artist, but also an astute businessman. In just ten years, he breathed new life into the fashion industry, imposing his own aesthetic ideals, expanding through foreign licenses, using local suppliers, adapting to a varied clientele and opening stores in America thanks to the support of the French and international press. Collections were created especially for customers outside of France, who wanted to adopt the Parisian style while maintaining local differences.

The *Croisière* (“Cruise”) collections, designed by Christian Dior from 1948, appealed to international customers with a taste for travel. More relevant than ever, these collections and the fabulous accompanying fashion shows take us to California (2018), Mexico (2019) and Morocco (2020), places that have inspired these creations and where they are often showcased.

One of the many destinations that inspired Christian Dior was Japan. From his childhood at Les Rhumbs, this country fuelled his creativity, and it has done the same for the creative directors who have followed him. *Surprise* (autumn-winter 1955-1956 collection, *Yline*), a salmon-coloured silk brocade tunic and skirt set, is reminiscent of Japan. With its shape and pattern, it reminds us of the designer’s fascination with this distant country, which also inspired another great 20th-century creator, Charlotte Perriand. Two Dior pieces that belonged to her are being displayed for the first time, thanks to a donation from her daughter in 2023. A finely crafted silver jewellery cabinet gifted by the Empress of Japan to Simone Noir (the first haute couture saleswoman at Dior from 1947) illustrates both the work of Japanese artists and the close relationship between Japan and the Dior fashion house.

## The Christian Dior Museum: A museum and a historical site

As France’s first museum to be entirely devoted to a couturier, the Christian Dior Museum (*Musée Christian Dior*) has a unique history. Located in the fashion designer’s childhood home, it owes its existence to the popularity of the exhibition *Christian Dior, l’autre lui-même* (“Christian Dior, the Other Himself”) held at the Granville Museum of Modern Art in 1987 to celebrate the fashion house’s fortieth anniversary. The visitors’ enthusiasm encouraged Christian Dior’s former colleagues, family and friends to put together a collection, which has continued to grow, to be studied and to be shared with the public via temporary exhibitions.

Brigitte Richart,  
exhibition curator  
curator of the Christian Dior Museum (Musée Christian Dior)

## PRACTICAL INFORMATION

Open from 6 April to 3 November 2024

Until 30 September: every day from 10:00 to 18:30. Last admission at 17:45.

From 1 October: Tuesday to Sunday and every day during French school holidays, 10:00 to 12:30 and 14:00 to 18:00. Last admission at 11:45 and 17:15.

Full price: €10

Concessions (disabled visitors, job-seekers, students, teachers): €7

Free for children under 12 years old

Annual pass: €25

Buy tickets online at [www.musee-dior-granville.com](http://www.musee-dior-granville.com)

Inter-museum offer: each ticket for the Christian Dior Museum entitles you to a reduced-price ticket (to be claimed within one week) at the Richard Anacréon Modern Art Museum.

### Your contact

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