



Christian Dior, itinéraire d'un couturier au travers des collections du musée



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MUSÉE CHRISTIAN
DIOR GRANVILLE

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LVMH
NORMANDIE COLLECTION

Christian Dior
COUTURE

Christian Dior
PARFUMS

Ground floor

Entrance hall

From the Dior home to the Christian Dior museum

“[The house] stood on a cliff, deserted at the time but which has since been entirely built on, in the middle of quite large grounds (now a public garden), planted with young trees that grew with me against the winds and tides.”

Built at the end of the 19th century, the *Les Rhumbs* villa was bought by Christian Dior's parents in 1906, a few months after the birth of their son. His father, Maurice Dior, managed the prosperous family fertiliser production business in Granville. His mother, Madeleine, supervised the transformation of their home and took charge of landscaping the garden. Large amounts of soil were added to this rocky ground to help improve its appearance. In his youth, Christian Dior saw himself as an architect, and was already showing his creativity alongside his mother when he designed the fish pond, the pergola and the modernist-style garden furniture. In 1911, the Dior family moved to Paris, from then on only returning to Granville for the three summer months. The 1929 crisis brought an end to Maurice Dior's fortune, forcing him to sell *Les Rhumbs*, which was bought in 1938 by the Granville town authorities. The municipal council planned to demolish the house and build a terrace in its place, but the project was interrupted when the Second World War broke out.

During the 1980s, the idea of making *Les Rhumbs* into a site dedicated to the memory of Christian Dior emerged, under the leadership of curator Jean-Luc Dufresne (1949 - 2010), a distant cousin of the fashion designer. Thanks to the creation of the museum's managing association, *Présence de Christian Dior*, along with renovation and development work, the family house was adapted to display the museum's collections, opening to the public in 1997. Fragments of Japanese-style frescoes on the entrance hall ceiling, the fireplace, the mirror and the elegant French doors in the lounge remain from the time when the Dior family resided in the house.

Today, chosen items from the collections are displayed in the *Christian Dior, A Career in Couture* exhibition. This diverse selection evokes the fashion designer's journey, from his childhood in Granville to his death in 1957. The haute couture garments and accessories show how strongly he was influenced by Granville, his childhood home and its garden.

Winter garden

“Since my mother adored green plants, without the slightest concern for harmony a 1900 metal-framed conservatory was added to the front of the house: the winter garden. Years later, when I moved to Paris, my first wish was to find a house with a winter garden.”

The winter garden allowed the family to enjoy the view of the garden, especially in winter. In summer, they took advantage of the garden, settled comfortably in rattan chairs on the terrace overlooking the ocean, or in the rose garden designed by Madeleine Dior. As a child, Christian Dior was passionate about horticulture. He was influenced by the memory of the fragrant flowers in Granville when he decided to launch the Dior perfume division in 1947.

Main lounge

The Belle Epoque: From Paris to Granville

“[Granville] was, for nine months of the year, a peaceful little port, and in the three summer months, an elegant Parisian neighbourhood.”

In Paris, Christian Dior saw the final hours of the *Belle Epoque*, and the carefree world and lifestyle that were swept away by the First World War. The capital sparkled with the tempting offerings of dressmakers, jewellers or milliners on Rue de la Paix or Place Vendôme. The future fashion designer, who was friends with various artists and writers of his time, started out running a gallery, in association with Jacques Bonjean then Pierre Colle.

In summer in Granville, elegant women with graceful silhouettes strolled around in lawn or white lace dresses, protected from the sun by veiled hats and wide parasols, on the Plat Goussier promenade. The childhood memory of Madeleine Dior's elegance would constantly inspire Christian Dior as a fashion designer, and has often influenced his successors to evoke the *Belle Epoque*.

Maurice Dior's office

Maurice Dior: Enterprising spirit

Christian Dior inherited his entrepreneurial qualities from his father, Maurice Dior, and a sense of material values from his family's roots in farming. The dazzling success of the fashion house was undoubtedly down to Christian Dior's understanding of his label's need for powerful commercial development. In the space of a few years, the fashion house extended its empire to cover all continents, setting up branches and establishing a system of licences controlled from the offices on Avenue Montaigne in Paris.

Grandmother's lounge

Flowers: an endless source of inspiration

“Having inherited my mother's passion for flowers, I was happiest in the company of plants and gardeners, (...) more than anything, I loved learning by heart the names and descriptions of flowers in the Vilmorin-Andrieux colour catalogues.”

It was in Granville, in the sheltered garden of the *Les Rhumbs* villa, that Christian Dior's fascination with the world of flowers began, passed down to him by his mother, Madeleine. The theme of flowers inspired the designer in 1947, when he created his first collection, with the flared, tulip-like Corolle silhouette: “I drew flower-women: soft shoulders, blossomed full busts, slender waists like vines and wide skirts blooming like corollas.”

Dior's floral muses stayed with him continuously in his creations. In 1953 for his Spring-Summer collection, he chose the line name *Tulipe* (Tulip). In 1954, the name of his Spring-Summer collection, *Muguet*, referred to his lucky flower, lily of the valley, which decorated shoes, scarves, hats and dresses. Roses, Christian Dior's favourite flowers, which evoked the memory of the garden in Granville, featured as a print on the *Rose France* dress in the Spring-Summer 1956 collection.

From Yves Saint-Laurent to Maria Grazia Chiuri (the current creative director at Dior), flowers have remained an inexhaustible source of inspiration.



Salade, CD JIC 1960 © Bernard Cheisy, coll. ville de Granville



Pastrelec, CD JIC PE 1956 © Bernard Cheisy, coll. ville de Granville

First floor

Jacqueline's bedroom *Christian Dior before 1947*

“Although I remained very far from the ‘milieu’ dear to Francis Carco’s heroes, I had, for almost ten years, been delighting in my place in the world of couture. I was a designer for Lucien Lelong, which earned me a very good living.”

The 1929 crisis created problems for Christian Dior’s gallery venture, so he turned to making fashion sketches to earn money. This was how he entered the world of haute couture. He worked as a pattern cutter for fashion designer Robert Piguet then couturier Lucien Lelong, from 1941 to 1946. As well as being a fashion designer, he worked for cinema, particularly for films set in the Belle Epoque: Roland Tual’s *Le lit à colonnes* (1942), Claude Autant-Lara’s *Lettres d’amour* (1942), and René Clair’s *Le silence est d’or* (1947).

Parents’ bedroom and grandmother’s bedroom *Birth of the House of Dior*

After the Second World War, Christian Dior wanted to launch his own fashion house, so that he could express himself *“with total freedom”*. His meeting with textile industrialist Marcel Boussac, who owned a fashion house into which he wanted to *“breathe new life”*, was crucial. Taking his fate in hand, Dior managed to convince Marcel Boussac to give him the means to open his own fashion house. The House of Dior was officially founded on 15 December 1946, at 30 Avenue Montaigne in Paris: a prestigious address of which Christian Dior had dreamed.

Attentive to the smallest details in putting together “his” fashion house, he was just as demanding when choosing his team, bringing in childhood friends from Granville: Suzanne Luling, director of shows, sales and communication, and Serge Heftler-Louiche, creator of the Parfums Christian Dior company. Four other colleagues, including three women, made up his “inner circle”: Mitzah Bricard, a muse *“who lives for elegance alone”*; Marguerite Carré, workshops director and *“Lady Couture herself”*; Raymonde Zehnacker, *“my second self, or rather my perfect complement”*; and finally Jacques Rouët, administrative and financial director, then manager and president. This almost familial (or at least friendly) atmosphere, which was important to Christian Dior, certainly contributed to the success of his fashion house. This was also partly down to Carmen Colle, manager of the first Dior boutique and widow of gallery owner Pierre Colle (an associate of Dior’s).



Christian Dior © Association With Mayuudi / AUMGP Paris 2020

Central display case 1947: *The New Look* revolution

“We were emerging from a period of war, of uniforms, of soldier-women built like boxers. I drew flower-women: soft shoulders, blossomed full busts, slender waists like vines and wide skirts blooming like corollas. (...) I emphasised the waist, the volume of the hips, I accentuated the chest. To enhance my designs, I lined almost all the fabrics with percale or taffeta, going back to a long-abandoned tradition.”

Soft and bold lines, slender silhouettes and elongated skirts: on 12 February 1947, Avenue Montaigne saw the birth of Christian Dior’s ideal woman. Breaking free from the restrictions of the war, the designer’s creations returned to a nostalgic, Belle Epoque femininity, inspired by the elegance of his mother, Madeleine. The editor-in-chief of the American fashion magazine *Harper’s Bazaar*, Carmel Snow, called it a revolution, christening the collection the *New Look!* Christian Dior restored the international prestige of French Haute Couture. He then set himself the challenge of creating ever more successful and original lines, adapting his fashions to the evolutions of modern life. Season after season, the revolution continued. Christian Dior constantly kept his work fresh. When he died in 1957, the House of Dior alone accounted for half of French Haute Couture exports. Over sixty years after his death, Dior remains one of the most famous French names in the world.

Saphir, Christian Dior HCMI 1951 © Benoit Croisy, coll. ville de Granville

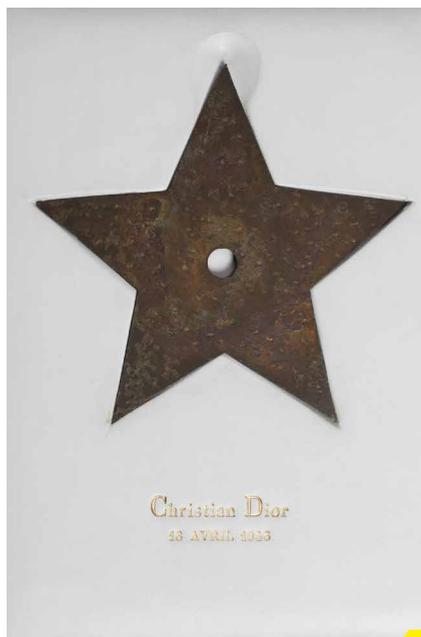
Diablesse, Christian Dior HCMI 1947 © Benoit Croisy, coll. ville de Granville



The Dior star

Christian Dior was very superstitious and believed in signs of fate. He did not make important decisions without consulting his fortune teller.

The star was Christian Dior’s ultimate lucky charm. It was the sign he was waiting for and came across at nightfall on 18 April 1946, on Rue du Faubourg-Saint-Honoré, when he found this metal object that had probably fallen off a carriage wheel. For Christian Dior, it was the omen that persuaded him to seize the opportunity of Marcel Boussac’s backing to open a fashion house in his own name. He would keep it hanging on a ribbon in his design studio all his life. He had it reproduced in pendant size, in gold, for all his employees who had been with the company over ten years. Jacques Rouët, former President of the House of Dior, donated it to the Christian Dior Museum before he died, in 1996.



© Benoit Croisy, coll. ville de Granville

Bedrooms of Christian, Bernard and Raymond

Expertise and accessories

“Current fashion is very much about the overall line; from the shoes to the hat, the silhouette is a whole”.

From 1947, Christian Dior enlisted the top specialists to help create not only his Haute Couture garments, but also his accessories. For shoe design, he worked with Ferragamo, with Perugia in 1948, then with the firm Delman. During this period, Dior opened a footwear department and recruited Roger Vivier as a pattern cutter. “[In] the Dior-Delman shoe shop, my friend Roger Vivier puts shoes on the most elegant feet in the world, thus helping me achieve my dream of dressing a woman in ‘Christian Dior’ from head to toe.” Roger Vivier co-signed Christian Dior shoes from 1958 to 1963, when Charles Jourdan took over.

For his hats, Christian Dior called on Maud et Nano, Maud Roser, Sygur and Isotta Zerri. Dior hats would later bear not the signature of the milliners, but the hat label “Christian Dior Chapeaux”.

The fur division was founded in 1948 and Frédéric Castet was appointed head of this department when he joined the House of Dior in 1953. From 1957, he developed Haute Couture and ready-to-wear collections, and in 1968 he created the “haute fourrure” (fine fur) department, then ready-to-wear fur in 1973.

Fine jewellery was designed in collaboration with Roger Scemama, Mitchel Maer, Francis Winter, Gripoix, and Roger Jean-Pierre, while Kramer Jewelry Creations produced jewellery for the American market from 1948. In 1955, the House of Dior signed a global licence contract with Henkel & Grosse of Pforzheim. Today, Victoire de Castellane is creative director of Dior’s jewellery division.

Embroidery was primarily entrusted to René Bégué (Rébé), who donated some of his beautiful creations to the Christian Dior Museum in 1988.

Catherine’s room

The House of Dior on the international scene

As an enterprising designer, Christian Dior made sure that his fashion house achieved international expansion, as shown by the many labels created for the market outside of France. His creations served as ambassadors for French elegance all over the world, and their beauty was enhanced by the models who wore them.

Christian Dior’s first fashion show outside of France took place in Venice in 1947 and the second was in Australia the following year. However, he wanted a presence in the United States, to sell luxury ready-to-wear fashion. On 28 October 1948, a branch of Christian Dior, Inc. opened on the corner of 5th Avenue and 57th Street, in Manhattan.

Two collections per year were presented in New York, offering around 130 exclusive designs, inspired by the Parisian collections: *“The aim is to adapt certain designs to the needs of American manufacturing, meaning for a bigger customer base. Ordinarily, that starts with simplifications, but working on an idea that has already been tried and tested quickly leads to a search for new and different elements. You get bored of copying yourself; so subtly, a transition style is born. The New York collection is no longer that of Paris.”*

Second floor

Linen room

The workshops

“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.”

A prolific designer, Christian Dior was constantly generating new ideas. In two or three days, he would produce several hundred drawings, forming the basis for the future collection. Then he would hurriedly send them to the workshops, *“for the sketches to become dresses”*. The workshop *premières* (heads) then had the delicate mission of deciphering the designer’s wishes: he wrote that *“the workshops are decoders of hieroglyphs.”*

At the heart of the Dior fashion house, tucked away inside 30 Avenue Montaigne, the *fou* (soft garments) and *tailleur* (tailoring) workshops continue this tradition. Each workshop is directed by a *première* (head), helped by two *secondes* (deputies) and a *modéliste* (pattern cutter or pattern maker). The *fou* workshop is devoted to making fluid, floaty garments: blouses, dresses or skirts in light materials such as silk, muslin, organdy or voile. The *tailleur* workshop focuses on more structured garments such as coats, jackets and trousers in ratine, serge, or more frequently alpaca woollen mixes.

Based on the sketch, the workshops make an initial prototype called a *toile*. Cut and sewn in white cotton and linen fabric, in order to express the architecture of the garment, this is tested, positioned, pinned and interpreted on the workbenches and on dummies of the famous Stockman brand.

The definitive fabrics, embroidery and all the components of the garment are then assembled according to this *toile*, to fit the measurements of the model who will wear the design on the catwalk. This will be the basis for tailor-made orders for customers, known as *“repetitions”*, such as the Autumn-Winter 1956 dress (*Aimant* line) in this display case, which was an order from a customer who wanted to combine the cut of the *Zémire* design (Autumn-Winter 1954 collection, *H*Line) and the fabric of the *Chrysanthème* dress (Autumn-Winter 1955 collection, *Y*Line).

The wedding dress

Traditionally, haute couture fashion shows end with the wedding dress: a custom that began in the 1950s. As with the design worn to open a fashion show, it is a privilege to model the wedding dress.

Christian Dior followed this tradition: *“Modelling is Claire’s vocation; she loves her job and it would pain her to stop doing it. She has been married for years, but out of all my models, she is still the one who best embodies the young bride. It is a difficult role and there is a superstition attached to it. It is a custom of the seamstresses working on this gown to sew a little of their hair into the hem, so that they will find a husband in the coming year, but the ‘young ladies’ claim that the woman who models the wedding dress is doomed never to marry.”*



Défilé Christian Dior du 8 avril 1957 à Chicago © Anonyme, droits réservés

21 January 1905

Birth in Granville. Christian Dior was one of five children of Maurice and Madeleine Dior.

1911

The Dior family moved to Paris. The *Les Rhumbs* villa became a summer holiday home. During the First World War, the family took refuge there.

1925

With his mother, Christian Dior designed the pond, pergola and garden furniture, which have been faithfully recreated.

1920s

In Paris, he mixed with artistic circles. His friends included the painter and set designer Christian Bérard, the poet Jean Cocteau, and the musicians Erik Satie and Henri Sauguet.

1928

He opened an art gallery, together with Jacques Bonjean. He exhibited artists including Picasso, Braque, Matisse, Dufy, Christian Bérard and Salvador Dalí.

1932

He partnered with the Pierre Colle Gallery.

From 1935

Christian Dior sold his fashion sketches to various milliners and couturiers. Like René Gruau, future illustrator for Parfums Dior, he worked for Le Figaro.

1938

He became a pattern cutter for fashion designer Robert Piguet, for three seasons.

1942

Christian Dior joined the team of fashion designer Lucien Lelong, becoming his lead pattern cutter for four years.

1946

In December, Christian Dior opened his own fashion house, funded by industrialist Marcel Boussac.

12 February 1947

Presentation of the first Christian Dior Haute Couture collection. The *New Look* was a real revolution in the history of fashion.

1947

Birth of the first Dior perfume, *Miss Dior*, created by Paul Vacher. Serge Heftler-Louiche from Granville, a childhood friend of Christian Dior, was the first director of Parfums Christian Dior.

1947-1957

Christian Dior created twenty-two Haute Couture collections, constantly developing and adapting his own lines. He conquered the whole world, thanks to the development of licences and the sale of Haute Couture patterns to approved workshops in numerous countries.

24 October 1957

Christian Dior died suddenly of a heart attack in Montecatini, Italy. He was buried in Callian, in the French department of Var.

Between 1957 and the present day, there have been six creative directors: Yves Saint-Laurent (1958-1960), Marc Bohan (1961-1989), Gianfranco Ferré (1989-1996), John Galiano (1997-2011), Raf Simons (2012-2016), and today Maria Grazia Chiuri.

All quotations are our own translations of extracts from Dior's autobiographical work: *Christian Dior et moi*, 1956.