

# FRENCH FASHION



- Since the 17<sup>th</sup> century, fashion has been a key cultural and industrial export of France.
- Modern “haute couture” originated in Paris in the 1860’s.
- Paris is considered one of the fashion capitals of the world



*Napoleon's Coronation* by Jacques-Louis David



- Many of the world’s top designers and fashion houses have been French:  
**Coco Chanel, Christian Dior, Louis Vuitton, Lanvin, Chloé, Hermès, Guy Laroche, Yves saint Laurent,** and shoe designer **Christian Louboutin**

# Brief History of Fashion from 1858 – 1960's

**1858** Englishman Charles Worth establishes first haute couture fashion house in Paris

**1906** Paul Poiret establishes fashion house; creates harem pants; first couturier to launch perfume, "Rosina"

**1913** *Gabrielle "Coco" Chanel opens boutique in Deauville, France; revolutionizes and democratizes women's fashion with tailored suits, chain-belted jerseys, quilted handbags; the most copied fashion designer in history*

**1914-1918** World War I prompts women to work in factories, offices; women wear pants; military cut influences clothes

**Early 20s** Madeleine Vionnet creates flowing, feminine clothes, including the chiffon handkerchief dress; creates cowl neck, halter top; sets trends in 1930s

**1926** Knee-length hemlines mark new high

**Late 20s** Elsa Schiaparelli opens Paris boutique; pioneers use of zippers, shoulder pads, unusual buttons; favors bright colors, including "shocking pink"

**1930** Tennis star Rene Lacoste known as "le Crocodile," manufactures a versatile new tennis shirt. It features an embroidered crocodile, believed to be the first instance of a designer logo to appear on a garment.

**1940-1945** World War II forces many Paris couture houses to close

**1947** Christian Dior reestablishes Paris as fashion center; revives haute couture; replaces wartime austerity with the glamour of the "New Look" with tight waist, stiff petticoats, billowing skirts

**1950** Shoes have pointed toes, stiletto heels

**1954** Cristóbal Balenciaga introduces "semi-fit" dresses with soft, round shoulders; is the classic designer of the 1950s

**1960s** Early 1960s Pierre Cardin becomes first designer to license his name for various products; is first to create ready-to-wear lines

**1962** Yves St. Laurent opens fashion house; often uses ethnic inspirations; remains most classic modern designer, heir to Chanel, Balenciaga





## *Haute Couture vs. Prêt-à-Porter*



**Haute Couture** is the business of designing, creating, and selling custom-made, high fashion women's clothes.

**Prêt-à-Porter** is the fashion term for clothing marketed in a finished condition, in standard clothing sizes (in casual usage, **off the rack** or "off-the-peg").

- To be called a haute couture house, a business must belong to the Syndical Chamber for Haute Couture in Paris, which is regulated by the French Department of Industry. Members must employ 15 or more people and present their collections twice a year. Each presentation must include at least 35 separate outfits for day and eveningwear.
- Every haute couture house also markets prêt-à-porter collections, which usually prove to be more profitable since more people can afford them.

# Haute Couture

Haute Couture houses generate more than \$1 billion in annual sales and employ close to 5,000 people, including 2,200 seamstresses. Workers often specialize in one area, such as feathers, fabric, buttons, shoes, etc.

Made from scratch for each customer, haute couture clothing typically requires three fittings. It usually takes from 100 to 400 hours to make one dress, costing from \$26,000 to over \$100,000. A tailored suit starts at \$16,000, an evening gown at \$60,000.

Today only 2,000 women in the world buy couture clothes; 60% are American. Only 200 are regular customers.

Despite the small market, designers maintain haute couture operations partly because the prestige helps sell other products, such as perfume, cosmetics, and their ready-to-wear lines available in stores.



# *Prêt-à-Porter*

- Ready-to-wear clothing is often more practical and informal
- Ready-to-wear collections are usually presented by fashionable couture houses each season during Fashion Week.
- Collections for autumn/winter are shown early in the year, usually around February, and spring/summer collections are shown around September. Paris, London, Milan, and New York host the most famous fashion weeks.



- French fashion designer whose was extremely modern for her time, introduced menswear-inspired fashions, and quest for expensive simplicity made her the most important figure in the history of 20<sup>th</sup> century fashion. Her influence on haute couture was such that she was the only person in the field of fashion to be named on TIME Magazine's 100 most influential people of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

- Coco Chanel introduced her signature cardigan jacket in 1925 and signature "little black dress" in 1926. Most of her fashions had a staying power, and didn't change much from year to year -- or even generation to generation.



# Coco Chanel



Coco Chanel

*"In order to be irreplaceable  
one must always be different."*

- Read her story -



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