

House of Worth vs Chanel

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Art History 1204: 20th Century Dress and Culture

The two articles of clothing I choose to compare and contrast were the evening gown created by the House of Worth circa 1890-1900 (*Figure 1*) and an evening gown made by Chanel circa 1928-1929 (*Figure 2*). Even though only three decades apart, these dresses have many differences due partially to innovations made in women's dress and also due to the times changing overall. Both designers were also very different aesthetically Worth staying true to a traditional upper class Parisian silhouette (Krick, 2004) while Chanel was in the business of innovation and staying current and the twenties was all about the women and her freedom to move about in garments which had never happened before this period in time (Krick, 2004).

This House of Worth dress in particular is really complex in design. From the picture (*Figure 1*), one can see that there is a tiered polka dotted floor length shift dress that has slight scalloping at the bottom of every tier almost like a cake and whose material become transparent near the bosom area and along the sleeves which also have some tiering and angular cuts of their own. This material looks to be made of a very flowy delicate fabric like chiffon and is shown in a nude color. On top of this dress is kind of an over skirt that also covers the bodice down to covering partial of the transparent sleeve complete with blue satin bows (one on each arm and one in the middle of the bodice). The material seems to have some structure so it may be made of a stiffer fabric like taffeta in a mustard color with multi colored floral appliques. The bodice has a deep v neck and when combined with the chiffon underlay they create an overall off the shoulder neckline. The bodice also looks to be corseted probably with whale boning that cinches in the waist and with the help of crinoline gave a fuller skirt that flows outward at the hips creating a silhouette that was very popular with the times. Crinoline is something designers used to make skirts appear which was a step closer to comfortably for women as crinoline a lot more

flexible than the previously popular bustle because it was usually made of fabrics like horse hair (Merriam-Webster.com, 2019). There is also a layer of the mustard colored taffeta material that covers the back of the dress that is free flowing parallel to the chiffon.

The dress created by Chanel (*Figure 2*) has a very simple silhouette. The dress contains a slightly deep v neck that leaves a large portion of the neck and chest (not cleavage per se) area open which would be a lovely palette for a necklace if in a styling session. The dress is then slightly cinched at the waist, hugs the hips and then the fabric outpours into a very flattering flared silhouette, almost like a kick flare as the seams wrap around the thigh area and end just below the private area where the material is gathered. The material featured looks to be made of silk (theMetMuseum.org, 2019) and shown in a marled or printed combination of nude and black.

At first glance these two dresses seem to be on opposite ends of the spectrum in many categories k=like color for instance the House of Worth dress in *Figure 1* is brightly colored while the Chanel dress in *Figure 2* takes a more neutral approach however there are some similarities. One similarity they have is the appreciation of a woman's natural neckline, they both have a deep v feature however one is off the shoulder with sleeves while the other has tank top esque straps and is sleeveless. Both dresses also feature a silhouette where there is tapering at the waist. The cinched waist in the dress from House of Worth (*Figure 1*) may be more extreme than Chanel's (*Figure 2*) slight taper however they both give an ode to the most traditional sought after shape for women. Lastly, both dress also have the element of flare. The flare in the House of Worth dress (*Figure 1*) is created with crinoline which again gives an extremist effect of the woman's body, while contrarily Chanel (*Figure 2*) let's the women' natural body take the

spotlight causing the very delicate material to drape over them with assistance from the slightly tapered waist.

Images



Figure 1  
Charles Frederick Worth  
House of Worth  
Evening Dress  
1890-1900  
Silk, Cotton  
Accession Number: 1993.156.1a, b



Figure 2  
Gabrielle Chanel  
House of Chanel  
Evening Dress  
1928-29  
Silk  
Accession Number: 1979.569.25a, b

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