

Clash of Couture

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20th Century Dress and Culture (ARTH 1204 - D434)

Dating back to the 20th century, couture has played a huge role in the history of fashion. A turning point in history; the concept of having garments made-to-order for specific clients, with multiple fittings became prevalent. The middle of the nineteenth century established the foundation of Haute Couture by the House of Worth, designer Charles Frederick Worth. In the postwar period couture developed, becoming popular amongst various fashion houses (Met Museum-Haute Couture, n.d.). Designers of this time such as Christian Dior and Cristobal Balenciaga had competing perceptions of style throughout many of their designs. Dior designed the “*Desiree*” suit in the House of Dior, in the spring of 1951. Balenciaga designed a suit in the House of Balenciaga, in ca 1920. This essay will compare and contrast women’s suits designed by Dior and Balenciaga, describe each garment, and provide background information on each designer by tying in the designer’s life experience to the work.

***Dior “Desiree” suit (figure 1)***

*Dior “Desiree” suit (figure 1)* features a women's suit made of wool, with the appropriate blazer, and pencil skirt. The blazer of the suit is single breasted, with three buttons and a notch lapel. The blazer includes full length sleeves with two button cuffs that folds back onto itself. The tortoise buttons give the blazer a sense of contrast. The blazer has angled, jetted style pockets. The hem is curved, as well as the blazers side front. The blazer features a cinched waist. This grey solid colored ensemble also features a H-line skirt with a banded waist, and extends to mid calf length.

***Balenciaga suit (figure 2)***

*Balenciaga suit (figure 2)* features a women’s suit made of wool, with the appropriate blazer, and pencil skirt. The blazer of the suit is single breasted, with five black buttons, a notch

lapel, and black front upper collar. The black front upper collar gives the blazer a sense of contrast against the grey. The blazer includes full length sleeves and diagonal cut double vent in the back. The blazers hem is straight, featuring rounded shoulders, and a cinched waist. This grey solid colored ensemble features a H-line skirt, approximately extending below the knee.

### **Similarities in Figure 1 and Figure 2**

*Dior "Desiree" suit (figure 1)* and *Balenciaga suit (figure 2)* are similar in a variety of ways. Both suits showcase the cinched waist look, as both designers believed in altering clothing to fit the female body. This cinched look gives the wearer more of a detailed figure, without feeling uncomfortable and restricted. Both suits have a notch lapel collar. The suits have full length sleeves and are single breasted with various buttons along the blazers center front. Both suits have broadened, padded like shoulders and feature H-line skirts. Both garments are made with the same heavy medium, wool.

### **Background Information on Dior**

Dior was a French couturier, known for his creations at the fashion house Dior. His fashions dominated the decade following World War II, as he was always on the edges of arts and fashion (Britannica-Christan Dior, n.d.). Of this time, he revolutionized fashion by departing from older styles to create new and improved styles. In the 1920s, his first collection put away from the modern ideology of getting dressed, as the collection was designed to liberate women from the restrictions that garments caused. In 1947, The evolution of Dior's "New Look" became prevalent as his designs featured tight fitting jackets, rounded shoulders, cinched waists, and A-line skirts. In addition to the success followed by the "New Look," he popularized new silhouettes such as the A-line, H-line and Y-line (Deutsche, n.d.). *Dior "Desiree" suit (figure 1)*

embraces the modest, yet sleek cinched waist that he originated in the late 1940s and early 50s. The suit also includes the padded shoulder effect, and H-line skirt as seen in his 1940's looks.

### **Background Information on Balenciaga**

Balenciaga was a Spanish couturier, established for his designs at the fashion House of Balenciaga. In 1937, the Spanish Civil War put a pause on Balenciaga's dressmaking establishment, and he moved to Paris to officially open his fashion house. Unlike many couturiers he draped, cut, and fit his own garments, ensuring that his hand was very precise. Highly respected throughout the fashion industry, he was knowledgeable in construction and technique, and was a perfectionist. As an innovator in womens fashion, he focused on broadened shoulders, capes, and flowing clothes without waistlines. Balenciaga's looks often had detailed backing and collars that stood away from the collarbone (Met Museum-Christobal Balenciaga, n.d.). *Balenciaga suit (figure 2)* showcases the use of broadened shoulders, a collar that stands away from collarbone, cinched waist, and unique styled backing. The suit also includes a flowing H-line skirt.

### **Conclusion**

The prevalence of couture fashion was showcased among various couturiers of the 20th century, particularly Dior and Balenciaga. The idea of designing specially made-garments for clientele became profound in the fashion houses of both couturiers. *Dior "Desiree" suit (figure 1)* embraces the modest, yet sleek cinched waist that he originated in the late 1940s and early 50s. The suit also includes the padded shoulder effect, and H-line skirt. *Balenciaga suit (figure 2)* showcases the use of broadened shoulders, a collar that stands away from collarbone, cinched waist and unique styled backing. The suit also includes a flowing H-line skirt. The main

similarity of *Dior "Desiree" suit (figure 1)* and *Balenciaga suit (figure 2)* is that they both feature the infamous clenched waist. Conclusively, a clash of couture in 20th century dress has created a segway in history, leading the way for trends and innovations of fashion today.



**Figure 1:**

Artist Designer: Christian Dior (French, Granville 1905–1957

Montecatini)

Title: "Désirée"

Date: Spring/summer 1951

Materials: Wool

Mat accession number: 1982.427.2a, b



**Figure 2:**

Artist Designer: Cristobal Balenciaga (Spanish, Guetaria, San

Sebastian 1895–1972 Javea)

Title: Suit

Date: ca. 1950

Materials: Wool

Mat accession number: 1982.402.2a, b

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