

Christian Dior
and
His Impact
on
Fashion

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Abstract

Christian Dior was an overwhelming power in the fashion industry. Beginning in 1947, he created the "new look" which modified the female outline and strayed from the wartime texture confinements following World War II. Dior was a man in the right place at the right time. He brought magnificence and fabulousness again into the dull garments worn during and after the war and restored Paris as the focal point of fashion. Dior detonated onto the Paris style scene and reintroduced womanliness and spotlight on extravagance to ladies' design. In a developing world of ready-to-wear, Dior brought high fashion back and adjusted the fashion business after a time of despair; he searched to bring sumptuous style back. Christian Dior's progressive point of view on the styles following World War II changed the manner in which the world saw design and the feel for ordinary wear; he turned into a fashion dictator.

Keywords: Christian Dior, New Look, Ready to Wear,

Introduction

Fashion is something that everyone can relate to as it concerns the population as a whole. At its bare minimum, it is just a means to legal terms as it is illegal to walk around nude. On the other hand, it is a medium of self-expression. Which is also used and seen as a way for an individual to associate with a certain group or class. A very important figure in this industry is, Christian Dior. He made a very lasting impact within a very short span of time. As he passed away when he was only 40 years old. He understood people, specifically women's desire to appear more feminine after World War II with the introduction of the New Look.

History

Christian Dior was born on January 21st in Granville on the coast of Normandy in 1905, supported by his father's highly successful fertilizer company, his family moved to Paris when he was a boy. Dior had an immense passion for art and hoped to become an architect but his father had hopes that he would become a diplomat. Dior became enrolled in political science at the École des Sciences Politiques and after graduation opened a small art gallery with financial support from his father as long as he didn't use the Dior name on the gallery door. After his father's business collapsed financially he had to find new ways to make money and he began selling sketches of designs to newspapers, he was later offered a job as a design assistant to Robert Piquet, a Swiss couturier. A year later, Dior served in the war as a French officer and when he returned to Paris he was hired by couturier Lucien Lelong. At Lelong's design house they would dress the women of Nazi and French soldiers, he worked alongside Pierre Balmain. After the success of Balmain's couture house, Dior was inspired to start his own house with the financial influence of "the cotton king of France," Marcel Boussac (Font, 2011). Boussac's

factories were standing still after the war, creating a fashion house was an ideal situation for him to get his factories back in production, he asked Dior to design for Philippe et Gaston but Dior wanted to start fresh under his own name. Boussac agreed to Dior's terms and was on board for finance, thus beginning The House of Dior. After making his name among elite Parisian women, he released his first dress collection.

New Look

In 1947 Dior released his first collection, presenting 90 different looks, titled "Corolle," denoting its flowerlike silhouettes (Martin & Koda, 1996). This collection was coined by Harper Bazaar editor Carmel Snow who referred to it as the "new look." His designs went against the wartime fabric rationing styles and used many extravagant fabrics and luxurious textiles, he used a lot of fabric. This look was identified by its rounded shoulders, cinched in waist, curved hipline, and a fuller skirt with a longer hemline (calf-length); this look was radically different from the previous wartime styles. The new-look also put Paris back on the map for fashion because people were beginning to buy luxurious clothing again and it made the textile industry flourish. Dior explained his collection, "As a result of the war and uniforms, women still looked and dressed like Amazons. But I designed clothes for flower-like women," (Parkins 2012). This look revolutionized women's dress because the limitations on fabric no longer needed to exist; He brought beauty back to the fashion industry and designed clothing with the ideals of creating fashions that emphasized the curves of a women's body. The major difference between prewar designs and the New Look is the shift from masculine clothing to a more feminine look.

An iconic image from this collection is the "bar suit" showing the style of the new look (Maywald, 1947). At first, it wasn't accepted and women actually protested (little below the knee

club) because the new look would cover their legs and because of the amount of fabric being used, once the wartime fabric shortage was over it was accepted and it became revolutionary to women's dress. The new style of dress wasn't just about the dress itself but also about the accessories you would wear along with it, these dresses were worn with sheer stockings, dainty high-heeled court shoes, and long gloves; the full skirt was balanced by a large brim hat framing the face. Society was starting to take shape again after the war and Dior's designs reflected the change.

Among his success of the new look, he continued to be successful throughout the 50s until his death in 1957. The new-look came to be at a time following the war, men were back home and ready to work and women were back to doing their womanly duties again (cooking and cleaning) this reflected the social position of the women following the war.

The 1950's

The 1950s was all about family and being home and the clothing changed because of it. Women were back at home no longer needing to work and wearing clothing that would prevent them from doing anything but womanly tasks. Society was putting women back "where they belonged," with the males back in town and working. Since women moved back into the home and started focusing on family life, the baby boom period was kick-started.

Also, the distinction of clothing and class was brought back to the table after being forgotten for the wartime periods. "The fashionable elite were now easily identifiable alongside their working class counterparts due to their highly feminine and impractical clothing"(Smith, L. 2013). Christian Dior re-established the need for haute couture and made women excited about dressing up again, his look started the new wave for dress aesthetics in the 1950s and the

feminine form. Women spent their existence catering to their men. Females in the 1950s were there to attend social gatherings and parties; they were constantly trying to further their husband's careers and make them look better. At these social gatherings women would wear cocktail dresses which is a term originally coined by Christian Dior, this is a term we still use to this day. People finally had money again after the great depression which made fashion flourish during this time; people had money to entertain again. During the 1950s ready-to-wear was becoming popular and Christian Dior made his brand more accessible to middle-class men and women by selling his "accessories" through mass production. This started a trend for other designers and increased brand awareness for Dior. Impact on Fashion.

Christian Dior turned fashion into news, and all of his collections made the front page. His designs were always sought after by the press and made women envious if they didn't wear the styles themselves. He was a huge contributor to the idealistic styles of the 1950s flattering and emphasizing the female form at every turn. Dior's fascination with structure (dating back to his hopeful architect days) stands out in his later released collections; for example the A-Line collection in 1955. The "A-line" was a skirt that was cinched at the waist but gradually widened towards the bottom, it was considered to be the most wanted silhouette in Paris. This silhouette later inspired Yves St Laurent with his Trapeze Line in 1958 and many other designers. Dior also created the "Y-line" and the "H-line" collections; the H-line collection was a slender tunic suit with a slim skirt.

Following the likes of Coco Chanel, Dior created a perfume line that later introduced his international licensing agreements; Dior began to establish his trademark which would become visible on fashion accessories such as handbags, gloves, jewelry, etc. Dior had a great impact on

several young designers at the time, not everyone was on board with the “new look” and Coco Chanel actually brought a slimmer silhouette into popularity. Givenchy and Balenciaga also created more similarly to Chanel, they started to stray from the female silhouette but still remain feminine. Without the influence of the overly feminine silhouette that Dior brought to the table, other designers wouldn’t have had a need to create opposing designs and what we wear today could have been very different because of this. (Trocchio, P. D. 2010) Christian Dior had a big impact on the career of Yves St Laurent, he was Dior’s design assistant and after Dior’s death, he became the head designer. Yves St Laurent took direction from Dior but followed the simplicity of design from Chanel and designed the “Trapeze dress” which was reminiscent of the A-line style Dior created. Yves Saint Laurent later went on to create his own fashion house which became widely popular.

Lasting Impact

The look of the feminine silhouette was made widely popular because of Dior and is a prominent feature in today’s fashion industry. He was a genius designer and his pieces are still timeless clothing articles such as the peplum top, popular in 2014, have similarities that date back to the 1947 new look with a cinched waist and accentuated hips. Many women wear clothing that will flatter their silhouette because it is seen to be “feminine and ladylike,” without Christian Dior it is hard to say what that would mean for women nowadays. The fuller skirt is no longer popular as it used to be, a slimmer silhouette is considered more popular but the cinched waist that Christian Dior brought back is still evident and is still praised by women today. One fashion trend that stands out to me is the trend “lady loafers” that are making a comeback. This was considered a very popular shoe of the 1950s (court heels), Dior showed women that it was

the appropriate shoe to wear with the new look. Every designer leaves their mark and Dior has made his mark everlasting as long as the feminine silhouette is popular.

Christian Dior's clothing line and the luxury brand continued after he died and remains a luxurious fashion line today for the elite, his legacy lives on even after his death and that is the true making of an icon. Dior not only changed the way a culture of people dressed but he shaped new ideals for feminine beauty, expressing an exaggerated form of the female body which has down the line created the male gaze and women dressing up for men. His designs were radically different from other designers at the time and he stood out from the beginning because he wasn't scared to do the unthinkable in times of trouble.

Conclusion

Undoubtedly, Christian Dior has made a significant impact on the fashion industry and without him, the direction that fashion took for women may have been vastly different. Dior brought the idea of haute couture back and re-established Paris in the fashion world after it was almost destroyed during the war. He was a designer that believed fashion should be glamorous and should emphasize the female form; he brought the fashion world out of a dark place and made it luxurious and beautiful again. Without the help of Christian Dior and his revolutionary outlook on post-war fashion, we may have never seen the shift back to the feminine form. Dior undeniably viewed fashion differently from the beginning with his love for art and how he would transmit that into his designs, he wanted his women to look like flowers and he wanted them to feel feminine again. Christian Dior will go down in history as being the man to revolutionize fashion and accentuate the female form when the fashion industry needed it the most.

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