

CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA

B

A TIMELESS LEGACY
COLLECTION III



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CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1960

Balenciaga Archives, Paris.
(Cover)

CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA
in Paris, on Avenue George V.
Photograph by Juan Gyenes, 1960.
National Library of Spain.
(Right)

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CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA



COLLECTION III



EVENING DRESS, 1960.
Balenciaga Archives, Paris.

Cristóbal Balenciaga. *A timeless legacy*

Cristóbal Balenciaga is unanimously regarded as one of the leading and most influential couturiers of the 20th century. A tireless perfectionist, he acquired an expert command of sewing techniques and spent his life refining the construction of his creations and introducing extraordinary innovations that allowed him to gradually evolve towards simpler, purer forms. His exceptional creative talent inspired him to design models that were audacious in both their form and aesthetics, taking the world by storm and setting the indisputable trend season after season. His command of the craft earned him the respect of his colleagues and he reigned supreme in the international haute couture world until he retired in 1968.

This exhibition aims to provide visitors with an insight in the principal characteristics of Cristóbal Balenciaga's work and demonstrate his crucial contribution to the history of fashion and design. Comprising three chronologically arranged rooms, the show examines the career of the Getaria-born couturier, from his beginnings in San Sebastian to his reign in Paris. It concludes with an analysis of his extraordinary technical legacy, which to this day continues to influence the work of the leading contemporary creators.



From the early days to consolidation

Balenciaga opened his first haute couture atelier in 1917, when he was just 22 years old. This marked the beginning of an intense period during which he opened houses in San Sebastian, Madrid and Barcelona before moving to Paris in 1936. His first Parisian collection in August 1937 met with immediate and overwhelming success. After 20 years working as a couturier in San Sebastian, he was a well-established creator, poised to conquer the world of international haute couture.

Balenciaga's creations made an immediate impact. As well as their simplicity and impeccable cut, the daring colour combinations and popular overtones of his models were regarded as both novel and exotic by the discerning Parisian public. In his collections of the late 1930s and the following decade, Balenciaga introduced some of the elements, influences and devices that would become hallmarks of his work until the end of his career. Lavish embroidery and the use of historicist details are already evident in his creations from this period.

CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA,
Donostia - San Sebastián. Ca. 1925.

Afternoon dress in black gauze and silk satin. The front has a plunging V-neck with a dinner-jacket turndown collar and is decorated with oriental-style floral motifs, embroidered with silk thread in the same colour.



BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1939.

Evening dress in white ottoman silk and navy blue piping appliqué. It has a mandarin collar with a ribbon tied into a long bow, and fastens at the front with a zip. The sleeves are puffed. The piping appliqué that decorates the front start as scrolls at the chest then run in vertical lines down the bodice. This model represents a tribute by Balenciaga to his great friend Elsa Schiaparelli, the leading exponent of the influence of Surrealism in fashion.



BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1939.

Evening ensemble: bodice and skirt in aquamarine silk satin, decorated with vegetable motifs embroidered with silver metallic thread. The focal point of the ensemble is the large turndown collar on the bodice, which is in the style of a mantelet. The model is reminiscent of the courtesan style of the 18th and 19th centuries that Balenciaga knew so well.



BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1938.

Evening *déshabillé* in brown silk satin. It fastens at the front with buttons covered in the same fabric, and has a large lapel collar and puffy leg-of-mutton sleeves. In this model, Balenciaga created a subtle interpretation of the riding habit worn by women in the 19th century.



Balenciaga reigns

The 1950s and 60s were the golden age of Cristóbal Balenciaga. After the resounding successes of the 40s, Balenciaga felt he had the authority and recognition to embark on a new period of extraordinary experiments with form and aesthetics, which were ultimately translated into some of the landmark creations in the history of western fashion.

The dresses on display in this room showcase the hallmarks that characterised Balenciaga's designs during this time. His predilection for adornment is plainly evident in the use of exquisite embroidery inspired by various sources, consistently balanced by silhouettes with extremely simple forms. Balenciaga's preoccupation with silhouettes commenced in the late 1940s and gave rise to his innovative creations of the 50s, ranging from the tunic and sack line to the "baby doll" dress. In all of these creations, Balenciaga opted for fluid lines that caressed rather than constrained the body, thus guaranteeing comfort and freedom of movement for the user. His experiments with form culminated in the 1960s with the abstraction of the female body, which was either blurred by large floral or geometric prints, or enveloped in unprecedented volumes. Meanwhile, his profound knowledge of materials and his collaboration with the Swiss manufacturer Gustav Zumsteg in the creation of new fabrics with sculptural qualities, such as gazar, allowed him to develop truly extraordinary forms.

BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1966.

Evening ensemble:
dress and mantelet in
navy blue gazar.



EISA
San Sebastián, 1959.

Cocktail ensemble: dress and jacket in black and white damask.



BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1958.

Evening dress in silk satin and embroidered machine-made tulle, both in magenta.



EISA
Madrid, 1964.

Tunic dress in black silk satin and machine-made tulle in the same colour, embroidered with sequins and glass-paste beads.



BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1960.

Evening dress in lilac silk satin, with floral embroidery in lilac, yellow and black.

The Balenciaga technique: the legacy

Cristóbal Balenciaga was admired and respected in his lifetime, achieving the status of a cult couturier. His command of technique, his consistency and his vision earned him the recognition of his most discerning colleagues, while the enduring relevance of his legacy continues to impress and inspire 21st-century creators.

From his formative years to the end of his career, Cristóbal Balenciaga dedicated himself with perseverance and diligence to developing a technique so perfect that it has yet to be surpassed. Profoundly influenced by the revolutionary sartorial innovations of the 1920s and 30s, Balenciaga gradually evolved towards a constructive minimalism that reached its pinnacle in the final collections of 1967 and 1968. In addition to his superior command of technique, Balenciaga never stopped experimenting with textiles or searching for aesthetic balance and harmony, guided consistently by his own concept of elegance as the synthesis of simplicity and audacity. Carefully chosen and minutely examined fabrics gave form to his refined creations, inspired by various historical and cultural sources.

However, Balenciaga always conceived his models in accordance with the aesthetic and practical needs of the women for whom he designed them. Their embellishment and comfort were the ultimate goals of his tireless efforts, and the fact that his customers remained faithful to him throughout his life proves that he fulfilled those goals admirably.

Coco Chanel described Balenciaga as the only authentic couturier, because, unlike his contemporaries, he was capable of designing, cutting out, assembling and sewing a dress from start to finish. Christian Dior called him “the master of us all”, and Hubert de Givenchy still refers to him as the “architect of haute couture”. His enduring legacy demonstrates that these testimonies remain as valid today as when they were first pronounced.



BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1966.

Evening dress in ecru gauze. The bodice is cut on the bias and has a V-neck at both the front and back. A drape generates volume at the front of the neckline, which is decorated with a flower, while a bow accentuates the plunge back. The skirt falls to the floor, forming a slight train.



EISA
Madrid, 1961.

Cocktail dress in white wild silk, with a floral pattern in different shades of green. The front of the dress has a cut at the waistline, straight at the front and curved at the sides, and a plunging boat neck. However, the focal point of the dress is the voluminous drape at the back.



BALENCIAGA
Paris, 1967.

Yellow wool cape with mandarin collar and yoke at both front and back. It fastens with one button at the neck and another at the yoke.



EISA
Madrid, 1964.

Straight day coat in orange rayon twill, with a jewel neckline and turndown collar. The focal points are the double row of buttons at the front and the precise cut below the chest. The vertical seams at the front conceal the pockets.

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LOCATION MAP

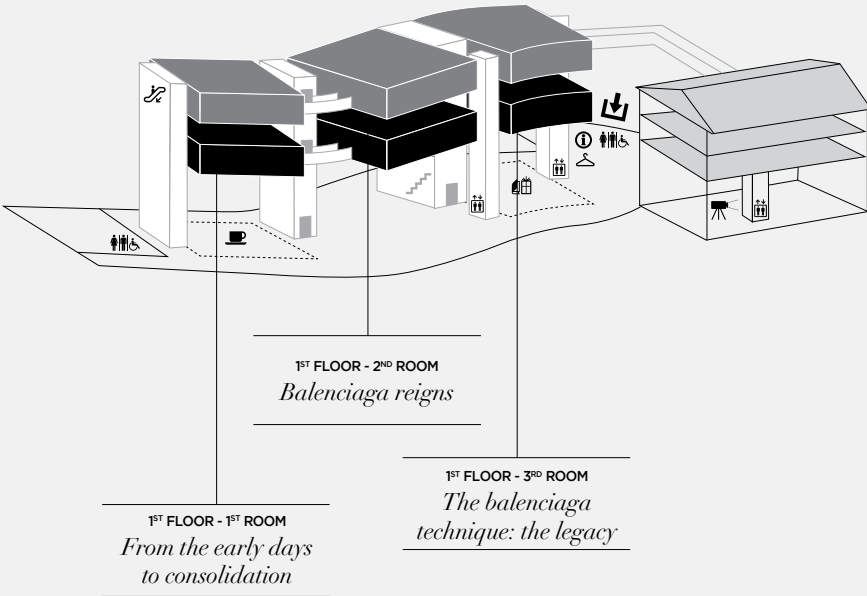
● 1ST FLOOR

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● 2ND FLOOR

TEMPORARY EXHIBITION

● ALDAMAR PALACE



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