

Balenciaga The Subtleties of a Dialogue

Press Kit

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Balenciaga
The Subtleties of a Dialogue

CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA

Exhibition
2025.05.23 — 2026.01.11

Demna (Balenciaga). Couture 50 – Look 17

Orange wool gabardine suit, with a tipped back collar and open shoulders.

The collar points accentuate the drape. On the front, the suit sleeves are assembled in line with the side-panel seam, and the back is in one piece



This is the first time the *Balenciaga. The Subtleties of a Dialogue* is exhibited in a museum setting. Designed to be part of the European Heritage Days and initially staged at the Kering headquarters in the former Laennec Hospital (a cultural landmark) in Paris, the exhibition is now being taken to the birthplace of Cristóbal Balenciaga and the museum dedicated to his legacy.

The exhibition features a selection of the creations of Cristóbal Balenciaga — founder of the fashion House— and Demna — artistic director of the brand until recently — the garments are displayed as artworks and are staged to isolate the details of each piece, thus allowing an in-depth analysis of the aesthetics and technique, both iconic codes of the fashion house.

Thus, the focus is on the masterly designs that add harmony to the form, balance to the pleat and pure lines to the silhouette. Each detail is examined as part of a larger whole, highlighting an innovative construction and materiality. Focusing on the micro to better appreciate the macro.

The exhibited works come from the extensive Balenciaga archive, which ranges from the first designs of Cristóbal to the more recent prêt-à-porter and haute couture collections, with the symbolic presence of a single work from the museum's collection that represents the dialogue between both institutions.

By bringing *The Subtleties of a Dialogue* to the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, the House is expressing its commitment to honouring the lasting influence of the designer from Getaria in contemporary fashion, by paying tribute to his innovative contributions and highlighting the connection with his legacy.

Cristóbal Balenciaga. Winter 1967 – Look 86

Evening cape in boiled black super gazar called "chou" worn over a long black silk cady shift dress



Balenciaga

The Subtleties of a Dialogue

From 23 May 2025 to 11 January 2026, *The Subtleties of a Dialogue* will create an exhibition narrative, covering six themes and showcasing 31 items by Cristóbal Balenciaga and Demna in an ongoing and flowing conversation between the past and present; visitors are thus offered a unique vision of the lasting technical excellence and creative wealth of the Balenciaga House.

This exhibition is the opportunity to find exchanges — sometimes obvious and at other times unexpected — between the creative lines established by Balenciaga's legacy. That is the case of some of the firm's most characteristic looks in recent times, based on reinterpreting sleeves, necklines and hoods.

These looks are exhibited in glass showcases to draw the visitor's gaze to the detail. Framed knitted patterns, pleats, bows and Cocoon silhouettes that lengthen the back and which emphasise the complexity and originality of the designs.

A selection of monochrome black pieces — a colour of particular importance and meaning for Balenciaga — in lace, gazar, sustainably produced neoprene and velvet reveal the continuity in the exploration of materials that was started by the founder of the fashion House.

The exhibition is an invitation to discover a unique harmony between the past, present and future of fashion. An understanding of the Balenciaga Archive and heritage as the basis and inspiration for new creations.

The Collar: A Case for the Neck

The neckline emphasises or blurs the separation between the body and face. As the upper edge of the silhouette, it is a decisive contribution to the garment as a whole and the fit. At the same time, it is decorative and heightens the style of the garment: a clean neckline, a stiffened collar or a rolled collar cause a lasting impression.

At Balenciaga, the neckline has very specific characteristics: it flows down towards the back and away from the neck for a longer silhouette; it can be a big and cocooning collar, or act as a frame to emphasise or blur.

This ongoing experimenting is the result of great technical skill brought back by Demna. The way in which the designer approaches the necklines is inspired by the House's legacy and starts from a certain idea of restraint and humility, of distance between the self and the other. The collars make a bold statement and most certainly lift the spirit, hinting at a conceptual and contemporary experience of anonymity.



© Mark Borthwick

Demna
Couture 50 – Look 53
Black silk faille opera cloak. The wide, gathered lapel forms a collar that wraps around the face. Topstitched flap pockets, double-slider zipper, and snap buttons on the lapel

The Three-Quarter Sleeve: Obsessive perfection

Cristóbal Balenciaga always paid attention to the sleeves, which became his private obsession. The sleeve structures and balances a silhouette: length, width, height of the armhole, straight or curved, position with respect to the shoulder and the finish of the cuff are some of the parameters with which Balenciaga has never ceased to innovate and experiment.

Accomplishing the perfect harmony requires great technical skill that Cristóbal Balenciaga achieved by means of the rigorous and meticulous work in his workshop. The quality of a sleeve demonstrates the excellence of the expertise of an haute couture house and is proof of perfectionism in the case of Balenciaga.

At Balenciaga, the sleeve comes in multiple variations and has also been a fundamental feature for Demna right from his first collections. His innovative aesthetics approaches the space in a new way which also bolsters the legacy of the House as it combines past and future, both in the meticulous workmanship and in the creativity applied.



© Tom Kublin

Cristóbal Balenciaga, 1961
Wool coat, with round neckline and dropped armholes. The minimal seams are highlighted with a double row of topstitching

The Hourglass Waist: Social Symbol

The dialectics of the Cristóbal Balenciaga waist introduced significant changes to the general cut and to this central part of the garment. The focus on the waistline, emphasising or hiding it — and the meaning that we attribute to the silhouette — has always been a social issue: Cristóbal and Demna alike observed and were engaged in the metamorphosis of our societies through their garments.

In the early 1940s, Balenciaga designed fitted suits with fullness around the hips, whose design was later adopted by his competitors. In the 1950s, he designed the Cocoon line, which would be a striking counterpoint in the history of fashion. At the end of that decade, in 1957, Cristóbal Balenciaga took his experimenting a step further with the Sack dresses; the Balenciaga waistline disappeared and the waist was hidden by the masterful architecture of the garment.

Demna continues nowadays to reflect on such innovations to the waistline. His first show as the artistic director of the fashion house, in 2015, included a nod to its roots: he opened with a redesigned Hourglass suit (fitted waist and exaggerated corsets), an iconic look that has been a hallmark of the House since then. In his collections, the designer from Georgia has softened the waistline until it has been completely lost. Yet again, he has created silhouettes defined by that absence, which have in turn become iconic pieces.



© Hiro

Cristóbal Balenciaga, 1967
Fitted suit in flecked wool, with rounded peplum
hem and buttoned-down pocket flaps

The Cocoon Back: Metamorphosis of Lines

At the end of the 1940s, Cristóbal Balenciaga started to innovate in the volume of the back. Blousy or loose fitting, the Balenciaga backs were the very opposite of the silhouettes proposed by the other couturiers of that time.

The body is away from the fabric, where a garment is created around it, combining comfort and aesthetics to reveal a structural, striking and clean silhouette.

This counterpoint, which was repeated in Cristóbal's collection, could also be seen in Demna's designs, as he returned to the dazzling silhouettes with fullness of the backs, interpreting the scales and the approaches to cutting of our time. The Cocoon line — where the silhouette is drawn in the form of a C — has a leading place in the collections of the designer from Georgia. This exercise is the basis of his research into the volume and the mutation of the body: the garment questions its humanity as it is no longer anatomically defined.



© Camille Vivier

Demna. Couture 50 – Look 22
Wrap jacket in black bull leather. The distinctive stand-up collar is crafted from a thick lining to add structure to the enveloping ensemble.

The Balenciaga Shade

Balenciaga's fondness for black is rooted in the Basque coast of his childhood, in its traditional clothing. It is a colour that represents the devotion and discretion of Balenciaga, modest and yet in turn luxurious, and intrinsically linked to the history of the fashion house and its founder.

The art of the black at Balenciaga is noted for its subtle shades to the whole garment. The vibrations and resonances of black appear as the materials play with light. Jet-black sparkling embroidery, thick and absorbent velvet, and the shine of silk satin.

Just like Cristóbal, Demna opts for black in his designs; the colour has a privileged status given its uninterrupted presence in the House's collections. The sensitive and deep black is used in the whole look and requires a precise design of the silhouette. The black figures become elegant monochrome paintings.

Both designers show their perfect mastery of this colour, both aesthetically and in the spectrum of symbols that it encompasses.



© Jet Swan

Demna. Couture 51 - Look 5

Dress made of black neoprene in varying thicknesses. The difference is offset during the gluing stage, giving the dress a smooth, flowing effect. Zippers are fitted as on surf suits. Neoprene thigh-high boots. Infinity Face Shield in molded polyurethane with glossy black varnish

Dialogues: Timeless Perspectives

Cristóbal Balenciaga and Demna have conceptual considerations in common, such as the taste for architectural constructions, the exaggerated volumes and liberating the lines of the silhouette, by means of the movement of the garment and the body becoming invisible.

This preference is in keeping with the questioning of their respective eras, the use of new materials, the monochrome as abstraction, with the desire to produce a silhouette that reflects their time (Balenciaga's tailored suit coincides with Demna's sporty looks), with the austere and monastic silhouettes compared to the life in our societies, and to the importance of the sleeve, the collar, the waist, black and the back.

Rather than a formal affinity, those two designers rather have in common the love of experimenting and the questioning of the prevailing conventions.

On the other hand, each one comes from a different background. From the small fishing village of the Basque coast in Spain – the sea, devotion, black and lace play an important role in the designs of Cristóbal Balenciaga – we move to the aesthetics of Eastern Europe, with its traditions and its recent past – the end of the Soviet block, the opening up to the rest of the world and to the liberal and western culture.

Beyond their life stories, Balenciaga and Demna reflect the essence of the garment in contemporary haute couture that requires great expertise to make and undo a permanently reshaped silhouette.

Separated by five decades, the styles of those two designers engage in a deep dialogue, sometimes obvious and at other times more subtle than the juxtaposition of the exhibited items lets us perceive.

Balenciaga Founded by Spanish-born Cristóbal Balenciaga in 1917 and established in Paris in 1937, Balenciaga revolutionized modern couture with innovations in form and technique. Since 2015, under the creative direction of Demna, the House has continued to redefine luxury through boundary-pushing collections. Today, Balenciaga encompasses women's and men's ready-to-wear, accessories, and objets d'art, seamlessly blending its storied heritage with cutting-edge modernity. The brand's pioneering ventures into digital innovation, material development, and social responsibility keep it at the forefront of contemporary fashion. In 2021, Demna brought Balenciaga's couture legacy back to life with the House's 50th couture collection — its first since Cristóbal Balenciaga retired in 1968 — setting a new benchmark for elegance and innovation.

Demna Born in Sukhimi, Georgia (former Soviet Union) in 1981, Demna fled the civil war in 1993, settling in Tbilisi. In 2001, he graduated from Tbilisi State University with a degree in International Economics and, that same year, immigrated to Germany. He pursued his lifelong ambition by enrolling at the Royal Academy of Fine Arts in Antwerp, where he won the ITS Collection of the Year award in 2004 and graduated in 2006 with a master's degree in Fashion Design. In 2014, he launched his own label, VETEMENTS, and in 2015, he was appointed Artistic Director of Balenciaga, bringing his garment-focused philosophy to the House while revitalizing the legacy of Cristóbal Balenciaga.

In 2021, Demna presented his debut couture collection, the House's first since 1968, when M. Balenciaga shuttered his ateliers. Shown in the reopened Balenciaga Couture salons, the collection heralded a new mode of creative freedom, reaffirming couture's relevance.

His innovative approach has earned him numerous accolades, including International Ready-to-Wear Designer of the Year and Accessories Designer of the Year at The Fashion Awards, International Designer of the Year and International Women's Designer of the Year at the CFDA Fashion Awards, recognition as a Leader of Change in Creativity by the British Fashion Council, and a place on Time magazine's list of the 100 Most Influential People in the World.

Demna. Winter 2016 – Look 1

Hourglass jacket in black and white mini houndstooth check wool, white fluid silk crêpe jacket and wrap skirt with a slit. Exaggerated peplum worn pointing forward in a curved silhouette with tilted shoulder pads accentuating a slim waist

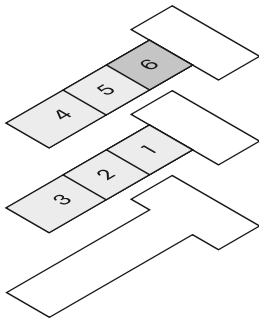


Cristóbal Balenciaga. Winter 1961 – Look 102

Evening ensemble, cape, and dress in iridescent beetle-green faille. The cape's wide, gathered lapel surrounds the neck and conceals the dress's embroidered neckline. The dress has a boat neck, with $\frac{3}{4}$ length sleeves embroidered with gold beads, blue and pink flat beads, pink rhinestones, and emerald glass beads



The Exhibition at the Museum



The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum is hosting this exhibition in conjunction with Balenciaga in a year whose programming is focused on the person of Cristóbal Balenciaga, his contributions to the history of fashion, and his legacy and influence to the present.

Thus, *Cristóbal Balenciaga: Technique, Material and Form*, the exhibition based on the museum's collection, addresses those concepts and spatially links with *The Subtleties of a Dialogue*, the temporary exhibition that completes this narrative.

The exhibition programme of the year ends in autumn with a nod to the new design through the *Transmissions* educational programme; it brings together the teachers and students from the most prestigious international fashion design schools around to an immersive experience in the philosophy, technique and context of the life of Cristóbal Balenciaga.

Transmissions showcases the designs of the students in question and emphasises the importance of researching and studying heritage fashion to pass on the technique and creativity to a new generation of designers; that completes the circle of Cristóbal's fashion — which is now heritage and in the safekeeping of the museum — and of the Legacy, kept in the collection of archives and museums, to the fashion created by the new designers.

Accordingly, the Museum is putting on an exhibition narrative that builds bridges between the heritage in its safekeeping, new creations and the context of today's society, with key cross-cutting concepts such as sustainability and diversity.

Exhibition Halls

- Cristóbal Balenciaga: Technique, Material and Form
- The Subtleties of a Dialogue

Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, inaugurated on 7 June 2011, is located in Getaria, the designer's hometown and the scene of his formative years and professional maturity, essential for understanding his contribution to the world of fashion.

In order to share Balenciaga's life and works, his relevance in the history of fashion and design and the contemporary nature of his legacy, the museum holds a unique collection. Its vast nature (over 5,100 pieces in a collection that only continues to grow, thanks to loans and donations) and its formal, chronological extension (including, for example, the designer's earliest models conserved) make it one of the most complete, coherent and interesting collections in existence today.

Another of the collections' exceptional values is the origin of the pieces. Balenciaga's great international clients were prominent social figures from the mid-20th century, such as Mona Von Bismarck, Bunny Mellon, Patricia López Wilshaw, Barbara Hutton, Princess Rethy, Grace Kelly and Madame Bricard, who wore some of the models held in the Archive.



Information

Zuriñe Abasolo Izarra
Head of Communication

zurine.abasolo@fbalenciaga.com

T +34 943 004 777

M +34 647 410 775

Aldamar Parkea 6
20808 Getaria
T +34 943 008 840
info@cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com
www.cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com

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