

IO|B

Alaïa and
Balenciaga.
Sculptors
of Shape

CRISTÓBAL BALENCIAGA MUSEOA
10 URTE / AÑOS / ANS / YEARS

“Balenciaga had knowledge of the trade, of how to cut, he knew how to sew... he was a true creator of fashion, capable of inventing a new volume, a new technique for the sleeves or the collar. Balenciaga has always influenced me. He is, without a doubt, one of the greatest fashion designers of all times.” AZZEDINE ALAÏA



Alaïa and Balenciaga. Sculptors of Shape

EXPOSICIÓN. APRIL 30 – NOVEMBER 1/2021

The exhibition *Alaïa & Balenciaga. Sculptors of Shape* running at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, coinciding with its tenth anniversary, displays more than a hundred works by both creators—Azzedine Alaïa (1935-2017) and Cristóbal Balenciaga (1895-1972)—belonging to the collections of the Fondation Azzedine Alaïa in Paris.

From the moment of showing the Maison's last collection in 1968 and closing the doors of the salons and ateliers, Cristóbal Balenciaga's creations started to transcend their material value as fashion garments which were, by definition, short-lived, to become the object of collection, lasting in time.

Starting in 1970, successive exhibitions were organised all over the world and, outside the private domain of former clients and expert collectors, Balenciaga's works began to earn appreciation as a public good.

One of those pioneer collectors was Azzedine Alaïa, who set about putting together an impressive archive over almost four decades. He himself tells how, when the Maison closed, his first steps were to acquire an important number of pieces, almost at sale price; garments he wanted to save from an uncertain fate. "Mademoiselle Renée, who worked for Cristóbal Balenciaga for decades, invited me to choose from a selection of gowns. That's when I realised that I had to do something for the history of fashion and that's when I started to collect."

Alaïa continued to collect and accumulate more and more works, not only by Balenciaga, but by other great masters such as Grès, Vionnet and Schiaparelli. Garments of an importance he especially valued, and which he believed had to be conserved and maintained beyond their time. His interest focussed on garments displaying specific techniques and his aim was to rescue from decadence or oblivion the most coveted pieces of fashion history and the name of their creators.

2016. Azzedine Alaïa
© Sylvie Delpech





Alaïa. Couture Automne-Hiver 2003
Balenciaga. Haute Couture Automne-Hiver 1954
© Julien Vidal / Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

“Alaïa’s collection, invisible for a long time, has turned out to be one of the most interesting on Balenciaga, with pieces not conserved by any other institution and of important influence on the creations of the decades of the 30s and 40s. Undoubtedly, the couturier saw in Balenciaga a source of knowledge and inspiration, just as other creators had been for Balenciaga himself, such as Lanvin or Vionnet.” notes Miren Vives, Director of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum. “It is a very interesting collection due to the criterion of the collector himself. This is not a collection put together by chance, but by the intention of a person who is, moreover, a master of the trade.”

The exhibition, curated by Olivier Saillard and Gaël Mamane, is organised by the Fondation Azzedine Alaïa in collaboration with the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum. The project is undertaken by both institutions in memory of Hubert de Givenchy, the original promoter of this idea.

“Undoubtedly, Alaïa saw in Balenciaga a source of knowledge and inspiration, just as other creators had been for Balenciaga himself, such as Lanvin or Vionnet.” MIREN VIVES

The exhibition

“In the history of fashion, these two great silent figures, immune to the effects of trends, have had a great deal to say to one another.” OLIVIER SAILLARD

Balenciaga
Haute Couture Automne-Hiver 1967
© Stéphane Ait Ouarab/Fondation Azzedine Alaïa



For the first time, the exhibition *Alaïa and Balenciaga. Sculptors of Shape* unites more than a hundred pieces by both creators in a dialogue which, under the direction of Olivier Saillard, shows a surprising number of shared elements, referring both to the creative process and to the design.

The show occupies six exhibition rooms, 1,000 m² of Museum space, and displays a total of 103 pieces (52 belonging to Alaïa and 48 to Balenciaga), in a clean and refined atmosphere, both inside showcases and out.

The exhibition boasts documentation—sketches, photographs and films—from the Balenciaga Archives Paris, as well as two audiovisual pieces about Azzedine Alaïa: an unpublished interview recorded in 2001 and edited for the occasion and a documentary made by Joe McKenna.

Similarities and differences

The exhibition, as well as highlighting unexpected coincidences, both in the creative process and in the design, both formal and biographical, shows us a number of revealing differences in the work of the two creators.

For Azzedine Alaïa, Cristóbal Balenciaga was “the most loved, the most appreciated.” The two fashion designers would share a perfect balance of measurements and volumes, a superior architecture in their coats and jackets and a never ending effort to render invisible the seams that confirm their mastery of the cut.

The importance of tailoring as the basis for their command of technique, and their subsequent formal experimentation, is one of their first common points. That review of the past and study of the garment construction is reflected in the first exhibition rooms.



Balenciaga
Haute Couture Printemps-Été 1968
© Stéphane Ait Ouarab/Fondation Azzedine Alaïa

Their shared love of fabrics, which they worked with expertise and subtlety, is insinuated in the dresses in black gauze and lace.

That colour, black, is a meeting point, a place of meticulous attention to detail, while Balenciaga's radiant fuchsia converses with Alaïa's intense red, captivating our retinas.

Alaïa y Balenciaga also shared essential subjects such as tradition and folklore, represented by the *Gitane* dress, famous among all those by Azzedine Alaïa, and close to the Spanish inspiration of Balenciaga's work.

But the similarities between both designers are not limited to the formal aspects; they even go as far as to share certain biographical aspects. Both came from environments where working in fashion was not at all easy. This meant that, when they took the step to have an own brand, they allowed nobody else to mark the time. They were true couturiers; they knew how to do it all. They liked to control the process and always remained faithful to themselves beyond the trends and seasons of the prevailing fashion.

As well as highlighting unexpected coincidences, the exhibition shows us certain revealing differences in the work of both creators. One of these is the relationship with the female body; these differences stem from a dissimilar conception of the ideal of the woman and of female beauty which, undoubtedly, corresponds to their different times.

But within that disparity there is also a certain similarity: "Alaïa was closer to the female body, he highlighted it; while Balenciaga played with volumes, moving away from it." As Olivier Saillard notes, both were capable of drawing on their own creative processes and work philosophy to build sculptural garments thanks to their unquestionable command of technique.

The designs of Alaïa and Balenciaga engage in dialogue at the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria, emphasizing the value of the timeless legacy and contribution made by these two sculptors of shape to the history of fashion.

“Alaïa was closer to the female body, he highlighted it; while Balenciaga played with volumes, moving away from it.” OLIVIER SAILLARD



Azzedine Alaïa

(1935-2017)

- 1935 Azzedine Alaïa is born in Tunis, Tunisia. His family are wheat farmers in the village of Siliana, but he lives with his grandparents in Tunis where he goes to school.
- 1950 Alaïa attends the Ecole des Beaux-Arts in Tunis. He supports his studies by sewing hems for a local dressmaker and then for Madame Richard, a French dressmaker who buys haute couture patterns from Paris to remake them for her Tunisian clients.
- 1956 Alaïa moves to Paris during the Algerian war of Independence. He lives in a small flat (*chambre de bonne*) with his friend Leïla Menchari. He works briefly for Christian Dior (under Yves Saint Laurent). A Paris-based Tunisian woman of high society, Simone Zehrfuss, introduces Alaïa to Parisian society. He meets Louise de Vilmorin, a friendship that lasted to the end of her life. With her, he meets André Malraux, Miro and Jean Cocteau.
- 1959-62 Comtesse Nicole de Blégiers gives him accommodation in exchange for looking after her children and making her clothes. In 1959 he meets his lifetime partner Christoph von Weyhe, who was attending the Ecole des Beaux Arts in Paris. As his reputation as a couturier spreads, he makes clothes for many women from French society, such as Cécile, Lina and Marie-Hélène de Rothschild.
- 1963 Alaïa moves with friend and model Rose-Marie Le Quellec to Rue de Marronniers. He buys his first important art piece, a Copte (Kopte) head sculpture previously owned by the famous Comtesse Greffulhe, who was the inspiration for Marcel Proust's Duchesse de Guermantes.
- 1964 Moves with Christoph von Weyhe to 60 Rue de Bellechasse on Paris' Left Bank, where he establishes his Maison, eventually employing 18 people for the ateliers, making clothes for private clients and commissions for other designers. He travels to Rome with Louise de Vilmorin.
- 1967 Attends at The Olympia in Paris the concert of Oum Kalthoum which marks him for the years to come.
- 1968 When the Maison Balenciaga closes down, Alaïa rescues a large part of the archive, purchasing many dresses by the great couturier. This vulnerable fashion patrimony initiates a revelation for Alaïa, and he starts his collection of exceptional masters of fashion.
- 1970 Alaïa meets Patrick Modiano, starting a lifelong friendship.
- 1971 Alaïa meets Greta Garbo and makes clothes for her. Working with Christoph as model for the shoulders, he creates coats with larger volumes and a more masculine silhouette as desired by "la divine."
- 1979 Alaïa designs for Charles Jourdan and for fashion designer Thierry Mugler's collection. Mugler expresses great admiration for the tuxedos that Alaïa creates, and includes a special note of thanks to Alaïa in the press release accompanying the collection. He strongly encourages Alaïa to create his own collections. Influential fashion editors Melka Treanton and Nicole Crassat from *Elle* magazine also encourage Alaïa to create his own Maison Alaïa. Fashion journalists Carlyne Cerf de Dudzele, Carla Sozzani, Anne Marie Périer, support his work and become lifetime close friends. Alain Bernardin, founder of the Crazy Horse, invites Alaïa to design and create

- costumes for the 23 dancers of the famous Parisian cabaret.
- 1981 Founds Maison Alaïa with Christoph von Weyhe who, while continuing his work as painter, helps Azzedine Alaïa in every aspect of the new company. Presents his first ready-to-wear collection – Spring Summer 1981 – at his studio apartment in the Rue de Bellechasse. The collection features leather garments studded with metal eyelets, skirts laced at the back, metal zips and structured leather suits as well as stretch fabrics developed for sportswear. Starts to work with model Zuleika.
- 1982 In September, with Bergdorf Goodman, Alaïa presents a show in New York. Meets Franca Sozzani and they begin a lifetime friendship. Through Jean Paul Goude he meets Farida Khelfa, a lifetime friendship.
- 1983 First official Alaïa fashion show is held in October 1983 at Rue de Bellechasse.
- 1984 Alaïa moves to 17 Rue du Parc Royal, a townhouse decorated by designer and friend Andrée Putman. Veronica Webb, Linda Spierings, and Linda Evangelista begin to show for him.
- 1985 Shows three years of designs at the Palladium in New York, with sets designed by Jean-Paul Goude, with over 50 models and over 1,000 guests, including Andy Warhol, all wearing black as requested by Alaïa. The event receives a standing ovation. The French Ministry of Culture honours Alaïa with two Oscars awards for “Best French collection” and “Best Designer of the Year.” The exhibition *Fashion 1980 -1985: A day with Azzedine Alaïa* is presented at the CAPC Museum of Contemporary Art in Bordeaux, directed by Jean-Louis Froment. Alaïa’s creations are shown together with works by artist Dan Flavin. Jean-Louis Froment was the first curator to invite Alaïa to show his work in a French Museum and the mutual admiration that the two shared led to a long-lasting friendship. Alaïa designs most of Grace Jones’ costumes for John Glen’s James Bond movie *James Bond: A View to a Kill*. For the Spring Summer 1985 collection collaborates with César.
- 1986 Naomi Campbell makes her runway debut for Alaïa. Spring Summer 1986 collection includes tube dresses made with body-hugging jersey ‘bandages’, inspired by Egyptian mummies. Alaïa becomes close friend of Tina Turner. Meets Sophie Hicks. Meets Paolo Roversi and Peter Lindbergh.
- 1987 Azzedine Alaïa acquires a 19th century warehouse at 18 Rue de la Verrerie in Le Marais neighbourhood of Paris, which he restores, creating within it his home, workshop and a boutique with furniture by his artist friend Julian Schnabel. He starts holding fashion shows here whilst the building is being restored.
- 1988 The first Alaïa shop opens in New York, with pieces designed by Schnabel. The Spring Summer 1988 collection is shown at the Rue de la Verrerie in May, two months later than other designer’s collections. From this date on, he will show when his clothes are ready and not according to the fashion calendar. Starts working with Joe McKenna. The most famous models in the world are at all his shows, Stephanie Seymour, Yasmin Le Bon, Christy Turlington, Farida Khelfa.
- 1989 Alaïa creates Jessye Norman’s tri-colour Robe for the celebrations of the 200th anniversary of all the costumes for the parade.
- 1990 Azzedine Alaïa moves with Christoph von Weyhe into Rue de Moussy.
- 1991 Collaborating with Tati, Alaïa makes a bag, a T-shirt and a pair of espadrilles. It is the first time a couturier joins a mass-market brand in a collaboration. The A/W 1991 collection is a homage to leopard print.
- 1992 Spring Summer 1992 the collection is recorded in a book by Prosper Assouline. Hafida, his beloved sister passes away. Alaïa takes a step back from fashion.
- 1995 Alaïa stops showing his collections for a few years, but continues to have private clients and sell his ready-to-wear line to a few retailers. Creates costumes for Carolyn Carlson’s ballet *Vue d’ici, the View* presented at the Théâtre de la Ville in Paris. The “powder puff” dress is used in the ballet. Azzedine Alaïa is appointed Honorary President of L’Institut Mode Méditerranée upon the invitation of Maryline Vigouroux. Collaborates with Olivier Saillard on the fashion museum Musée de la Mode de la ville de Marseille. They became very close friends.
- 1996 First retrospective of his work at the Palazzo Corsini in Florence curated by Carla Sozzani. On the occasion of the Biennale of Fashion and Art in Florence, a dress of

- Azzedine Alaïa is shown with the paintings by Julian Schnabel.
- 1997 Azzedine Alaïa exhibition at the Groninger Museum curated by Mark Wilson displays Alaïa's garments with works by Basquiat, Christoph von Weyhe, César, Pablo Picasso, Julian Schnabel and Andy Warhol.
- 1998 Publishes his book with the photographs of the most famous photographers and friends, Bruce Weber, Peter Lindbergh, Paolo Roversi, with a text by French writer Michel Tournier.
- 1999 Starts collaboration with Carla Sozzani on the development of Maison Alaïa.
- 2000 The Prada group enters in Maison Alaïa, enabling Maison Alaïa to expand. Alaïa has a solo exhibition at the Guggenheim Museum SoHo in New York with Andy Warhol *Last Supper* paintings, curated by Mark Wilson.
- 2002 Summer/Winter 2002 collection is shown in the boutique at 7 Rue de Moussy, for the first time in years.
- 2003 2003 first Alaïa Couture show features tailored jackets with crocodile skin; long-sleeved jersey tube dresses with a zip that snakes around the garment. Alaïa revisits some of his most distinct visual trademarks.
- 2004 He starts Galerie Azzedine Alaïa at 18 rue de la Verrerie. Opening his Maison to exhibit artists in the fields of art, fashion, design, photography and literature.
- 2007 Buys back control from Prada and joins the Richemont Group. Finds "Association Azzedine Alaïa" together with Christoph von Weyhe and Carla Sozzani to protect his archives of fashion, design and art with the future perspective to become a Foundation of public interest. The logo of the Association Azzedine Alaïa – the A and the two dots – has been painted by Julian Schnabel in 1996 as an homage to his friend Azzedine. In the years to follow exhibitions include: Shiro Kuramata, Pierre Paulin, Memphis Group, Andrea Branzi, Bettina, Pierre Guyotat, Kris Ruhs, Jean Nouvel and Claude Parent, Christoph von Weyhe, Richard Wentworth.
- 2011 Exhibition at the Groninger Museum *Azzedine Alaïa in the 21st century*, which then tours in 2013 to Dusseldorf, both curated by Mark Wilson. In July presents his second Couture collection, Standing ovation.
- 2013 Designs the costumes for Angelin Preljocaj's ballet *Les Nuits* created for the Montpellier Dance Festival. A retrospective in Dusseldorf *Azzedine Alaïa* curated by Mark Wilson opens at the Kunstpalast. Alaïa creates the costumes for Mozart's opera *Le nozze di Figaro* directed by Christopher Alden with the Los Angeles Philharmonic. The scenography is by Jean Nouvel. Following a number of years of closure and a complete renovation, Le Palais Galliera, Musée de la Mode de la Ville de Paris, reopens its doors with the first retrospective in Paris of Azzedine Alaïa's work, curated by Olivier Saillard. Another exhibition opens at the same time at the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris in the Salle Matisse.
- 2014 Makes an exhibition *Homage to Bettina Graziani*, one of his closest lifetime friends.
- 2015 An exhibition of Alaïa at the Galleria Borghese, directed by Anna Coliva and entitled *Couture/Sculpture* is curated by Mark Wilson.
- 2016 Joe McKenna makes a film on Alaïa's work and life.
- 2017 Alaïa presents his third Winter Haute Couture collection. Naomi Campbell opens the show. Creates custom pieces for dancers Maria Alexandrova and Blanca Li's ballet *Goddesses and Demonesses*. Collaborates with the choreographer Jonah Bokaer for his ballet *Shaharazad*. Early November presents his Summer 2018 collection. Alaïa dies in Paris on 18 November. Linda Spierings, Marpessa Hennink, Imaan Hammam, Farida Khelifa, Marie Sophie Wilson-Carr, Stephanie Seymour, Naomi Campbell, Veronica Webb, Mariacarla Boscono, Nadège and Dilone pay homage to Azzedine Alaïa in London.
- 2018 The exhibition *Je suis couturier* curated by Olivier Saillard opens in Paris at 18 Rue de la Verrerie, where Alaïa lived and worked. This marks the opening of Alaïa Museum. Exhibition *Tribute to Azzedine Alaïa* open in Seoul, South Korea. Opening in London at The Design Museum of the exhibition *Azzedine Alaïa: the Couturier* curated by Mark Wilson.



Cristóbal Balenciaga

(1895-1972)

- 1895 Cristóbal Balenciaga was born in Getaria, a small fishing village located in the north of Spain. The son of a sailor and a seamstress, in his hometown he had access to the thriving context of the summer regal vacation that was common at the beginning of the century on the Basque Coast.
- 1906 Cristóbal Balenciaga made his first dress for the Marchioness of Casa Torres, his mentor who employed his mother as a seamstress during the long summer seasons that the family spent in Getaria.
- 1907 Balenciaga moved to San Sebastián—according to the municipal census register, he resided in the capital of Gipuzkoa from this year on—and it seems logical to assume that he probably trained in some of the important fashion houses in existence at the time: surely Gómez House, New England, and Au Louvre, all of which had ties to the fashion of Paris and operated in the city of San Sebastián.
- 1911 He started working at the Grandes Almacenes Au Louvre on opening a branch in San Sebastián, earning a reputation as an excellent professional. In this establishment he would meet other employees, the Crespo sisters, who would play an important part in his business.
- 1917 Cristóbal Balenciaga started his business and creative adventure. The designer established his first fashion house known as “C. Balenciaga” at Vergara Street, Number 2, of San Sebastián. Seven years later, in 1924, after different company modifications, he moved his operations to Avenue Number 2 of the same city under the name “Cristóbal Balenciaga.”
- 1918 He founded “Balenciaga y Cía.” alongside the Lizaso sisters, creating a limited term company.
- 1924 The aforementioned company was dissolved and he moved his operations to Avenue Number 2, first floor, of the same city, under the name “Cristóbal Balenciaga.” He acquires models by Madeleine Vionnet, which he is authorised to reproduce. After Vionnet closes her doors, the designer becomes a client of Balenciaga.
- 1927 He founded “Martina Robes et Manteaux” as a second brand (Martina was the name of his mother). In October of that same year, he changed the brand to “EISA COSTURA,” once again related to his mother (whose surname was Eizaguirre), located at Number 10 on Oquendo Street in San Sebastián.
- 1933 Balenciaga opened a fashion house in Madrid, at Caballero de Gracia Street, Number 42, under the name “EISA B.E.”
- 1935 He set up a second location for “EISA B.E.” at Number 10, Santa Teresa Street, Barcelona.
- 1936 With the outbreak of the Spanish Civil War, he abandoned Spain and settled in Paris. He temporarily stopped normal business activities at his fashion houses of Madrid and Barcelona
- 1937 He moved “EISA COSTURA” to Avenue Number 2, second floor, under the name “EISA B.E.”
- 1937 In July, he registered with the Chambre, Syndicale de la Haute Couture and opened, alongside his partners Wladzio d’Attainville and Nicolás Bizcarrondo, “BALENCIAGA” Ltd. , a haute couture fashion house which would leave its mark on the history of fashion.
- 1938 Cristobal Balenciaga starts working for a select international clientele from the social, political and cultural sphere: Barbara Hutton, Mona

- von Bismarck, Meye Allende, Farah Diba, Princess de Réthy, Patricia López-Wilshaw, and Madame Bricard.
- 1939 Cristóbal Balenciaga presented a collection with a profound historicist influence which was clearly reminiscent of the fashion of the seventeenth century and the Second French Empire. The success of his “infanta” dresses was overwhelming.
- 1940 Photographers like Horst P. Horst, Man Ray, Madame d’Ora, Inge Morath and Cartier Bresson set about either documenting the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga or portraying him in the few known photographs taken of him.
- 1941 The Marchioness of Llanzol places an order for a skirt suit from the Casa EISA. This first order leads to a close friendship with the fashion designer.
- 1945-46 Balenciaga at the Théâtre de la Mode, a post-war initiative to restore the splendor of the Parisian Haute Couture in which other designers and artists participated, such as Jacques Fath, Lucien Lelong, Robert Piguet and other members of the Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture.
- 1946 Despite his reserved nature, Cristóbal Balenciaga enjoys a close relationship and friendship with two fashion journalists of the day: Carmel Snow, editor of Harper’s Bazaar, and Bettina Ballard, editor of the North American edition of Vogue.
- 1947 In February, Balenciaga presented the “tonneau” or “barrel” line, which departed from the dominating aesthetics of confined figures and emphasized fluidity in its design. This was the same year in which Dior introduced its “bar suit.”
- 1949 The first street-level boutique was opened, designed by Christos Bellos. Its decoration was marked by an austere nature, without giving up on elegance or luxury, making use of furniture and decorative elements that alluded to Spanish origin.
- 1950 André Courrèges starts working at the Balenciaga maison in Paris, as many other fashion designers would do to receive their training in later years, some of whom would find international fame, such as Emanuel Ungaro, Elias Zabaleta and Federico Forquet, among others.
- 1950 Balenciaga collaborates with Jean Cocteau in his movie *Le Testament d’Orphee*. The fashion designer was responsible for dressing actresses such as Grace Kelly, Marlene Dietrich, Ava Gardner, Brigitte Bardot and Ingrid Bergman in different film projects.
- 1951 Cristóbal Balenciaga introduced the “semi-fitted” suit (February), the “sailor” (February), and the “midi” (August). These models were reminiscent of the silhouettes of the twenties in which the waist was blurred, with Balenciaga using the shoulder line as a focal point and placing emphasis on the lower part of the dress.
- 1952 From this year on, the shop windows were designed by Janine Janet, with sculptures being created in which the products were integrated or directly invisible to the passer-by thanks to the materials used and their markedly artistic nature.
- 1952 The photographer Tom Kublin starts working regularly for Cristóbal Balenciaga, documenting his collections.
- 1953 Cristobal Balenciaga meets Hubert de Givenchy, in New York, after the party “April in Paris.”
- 1955 The “tunic” was introduced, a two-piece dress with straight, clean lines that covered the body without constricting it—an evolution of the “midi” line.
- 1956 Balenciaga decided to showcase his collections one month after the official start of the high-fashion shows alongside Hubert de Givenchy. Together they would challenge the “status quo” and delay the presentations to the press by a month, offering their clients an exclusive first look at their collections, yet losing nothing of their pre-eminence on the covers of the leading publications.
- 1956 The North American philanthropist Rachel Lambert Mellon starts acquiring models from the maison, with the mediation of Jean Schlumberger, and will soon become one of Balenciaga’s most faithful clients and, with time, a very close friend.
- 1957 The designer introduced the “sack” dress into his collections, a further step in terms of his formal experimentation—a type of evolution of the “sailor” style. Along with the fabric creator Gustav Zumsteg (Abraham), gazar was developed—a fabric with sculptural properties suitable for creations that were increasingly conceptual in nature.

- 1958 Cristóbal Balenciaga introduced the “baby doll” dress, characterized by the simplicity of its trapezoidal silhouette that got rid of the waistline, as well as “peacock tail” dresses—longer in back than in the front. The French Government awarded him the title of Chevalier de la Légion d’honneur for his service to the fashion industry. He became known by the international press as the “Master of High Fashion.”
- 1958 Balenciaga purchases the work of artist Bernard Buffet, portraying his wife Isabelle Buffet dressed in one of the creations by the couturier. Cristóbal Balenciaga was a major collector of classic and modern art and surrounded himself with art patrons Aimé and Marguerite Maeght and their circle of artists, among whom were Matisse, Miró, Bonnard, Kandinsky, Braque, Giacometti, Léger, Calder and Chagall.
- 1960 Cristóbal Balenciaga designed the wedding gown of Fabiola de Mora y Aragón, the granddaughter of the Marchioness of Casa Torres and future Queen of Belgium.
- 1962 Balenciaga began to introduce forms that were increasingly more pure and abstract. The conceptual and technical minimalism that was inherent to his career became evident in the garments he made of fabrics with a certain degree of rigidity, such as gazar silk, zagar silk, and ciberlina (a soft, wool fabric), creating abstract silhouettes and geometrical volumes based on the circle and the square.
- 1968 Cristóbal Balenciaga accepted the task of designing and producing the uniforms for Air France, his only experience with prêt-à-porter garments. He granted the only interview of his life to the magazine *Paris Match*. After this experience, he presented his first collection in February; two months later he announced his retirement, as well as the closure of all of his maisons in Paris, Madrid, Barcelona and San Sebastián. He gave the second interview of his life to the *Paris Match* magazine.
- 1969 Closure of his last fashion house in San Sebastián.
- 1971 The Bellerive Museum in Zurich (Switzerland) dedicated a first retrospective exhibition to Balenciaga, followed by many others that continue to this day.
- 1972 Balenciaga passed away in Xàbia (Alicante) on March 24, at the age of 77, and he was buried in the small cemetery of his hometown, Getaria.
- 1973 The exhibition *The World of Balenciaga*, curated by Diana Vreeland, runs at the MET in New York. A year later, the exhibition will open in Madrid, in the salons of the Palacio de Bibliotecas y Museos. Joan Miro designed the cover of the catalogue for the show, a sign of his friendship with Cristóbal Balenciaga.



1968. Cristóbal Balenciaga
© Henri Cartier-Bresson/Contacto

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum



Exterior view of the Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum in Getaria
© Cristóbal Balenciaga Foundation /
Idoia Unzurrunzaga

The Cristóbal Balenciaga Museum, inaugurated 7 June 2011, is located in Getraia, the designer's hometown and the stage for Cristóbal Balenciaga's first years of training and professional maturing. This is essential to understand his contributions to 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 3,000 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.

For more information

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Biarritz — 71km
Bilbao — 81km
Donostia/San Sebastián — 25km
Iruña-Pamplona — 97km
Vitoria-Gasteiz — 83km

GPS
43° 18' 6.92" N
2° 12' 18.77" W

