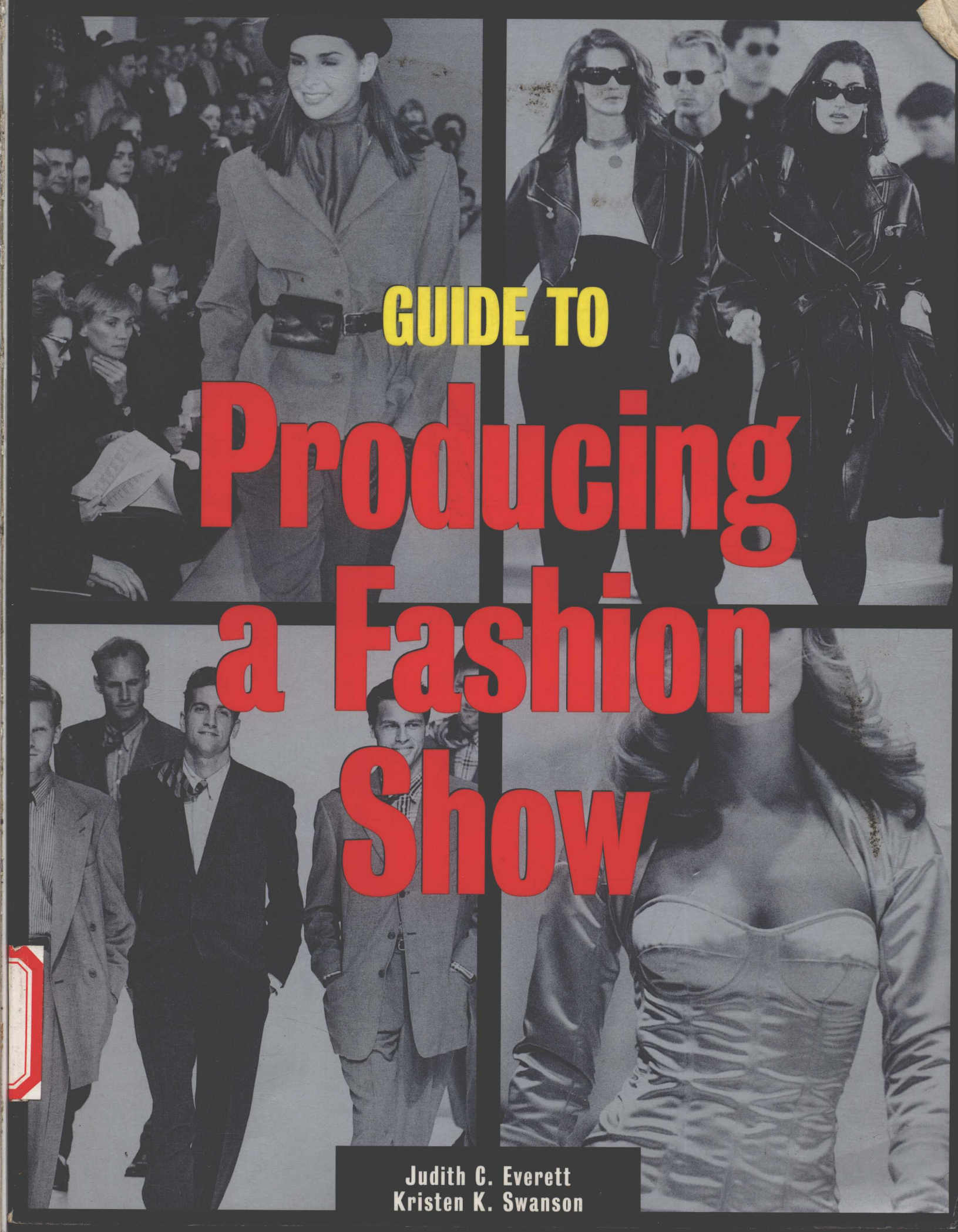

GUIDE TO Producing a Fashion Show

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Preface

The fashion show should be an entertaining and rewarding experience for the show participants and audience. It is an exciting and theatrical presentation of apparel and accessories on live models conducted on many market levels—from the haute couture designers, presenting their latest innovations, to the ultimate consumer extravaganza held by community groups and retail stores. The purpose of *Guide to Producing a Fashion Show* is to lead individuals through the process of planning and presenting a fashion show, and to outline the steps necessary for organizing a successful event.

FEATURES

We begin with a discussion on the background and development of the various types of fashion shows. This framework includes the primary purpose of producing a show—to sell merchandise. The first part of the book also traces the history of the fashion show through a review of the designers, special events, and associations that influenced its advancement. European fashion shows have set the pace for innovative and theatrical shows. The unique styles of the French, Italian and British retailers and designers—couture and ready-to-wear—are thoroughly reported.

The next section of the book outlines the steps in planning the fashion show beginning with the first stages of planning—establishing the audience, type of show, site, theme and budget. Publicity and advertising are fully outlined. Preparation of press materials and advertising for newspapers, magazines, television and radio are investigated. We have provided examples of press releases and photographs as well as step-by-step instructions on how to write press releases to assist fashion show planners with this activity.

The merchandise selection process involves pulling, fitting and preparing merchandise. Grouping merchandise in order to plan the fashion show lineup to fit the theme is also part of this activity and is fully examined. The role of the individuals who display the merchandise—models—is an important feature of how the show looks. Therefore selecting and training models is crucial. We have considered the advantages and differences between using professional or amateur models in a fashion show and the responsibilities of all the models during the fitting, rehearsal and show.

Determining whether or not to use a commentator and commentary is the focus of Chapter 8. If commentary is to be used, techniques and examples of how to write good and avoid bad commentary are provided. The theatrical stage and runway can enhance the image or theme established in the early stages of planning. Distinct patterns for runways, seating arrangements, the appropriate use of lighting and props are featured.

The last portion of the book deals with choreography that sets the dramatic opening, pace and finale for the models. Also the selection of music, live or taped, to enhance the mood of the show is addressed. The rehearsal prepares all of the individuals for a professional presentation. Here problems are ironed out and the stage is set for the actual show.

All of the advance preparation pays off on the day of the show. Participants are excited to see everything pulled together, finally having the opportunity to introduce the show to the target audience. The thrill of all activities coming together results in a truly rewarding experience for the fashion show organizers, models, designers, technical staff, and audience. We also discuss the often neglected portion of producing a fashion show—striking the stage and returning merchandise to the designers, manufacturers or retailers. Another responsibility at this point is addressed—sending thank you notes and paying promptly for services.

The last chapter of *Guide to Producing a Fashion Show* outlines the final step in fashion show production—the evaluation process. This much overlooked step in fashion show production is really the first step for the production of the next fashion show. Each time a fashion show is presented, the participants learn how to make the next show even better.

Producing a fashion show is a hands-on learning experience. It is our hope that the techniques discussed throughout this book will provide a foundation for fashion show planners to organize this enormous project and that the behind-the-scenes photographs support and enhance this information. This in-depth study of fashion show production will serve as a valuable tool for fashion professionals, instructors and students of design, merchandising, and modeling, and civic or community leaders, giving them a view of all the aspects of this dramatic and exciting event. It will interest anyone who wants to know more about *how to produce a fashion show!*

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1

The Development of the Fashion Show

Every creative element of theatrical and modern entertainment media is used in a fashion show to present the latest colors, fabrics and fashion trends in apparel, and accessories, on live models to an audience. Certainly an advantage of seeing merchandise in an exciting live presentation is that the audience can become involved. They are not seeing a "representation" of a garment in a photograph or in an illustration from an advertisement, nor are they viewing a garment on a hanger. A model on the runway is wearing all the elements of apparel and accessories. The audience can react to the total look of an outfit and visualize how they might look wearing the newest and latest developments from the fashion world.

FASHION SHOWS SELL MERCHANDISE

After designers or manufacturers create garments, accessories or beauty products, promotion and merchandising contribute to the ultimate goal of selling these products. Fashion shows are produced with one primary purpose—to sell merchandise to consumers at all marketing levels from people working in the industry (designers, manufacturers, retailers) to fashion-conscious shoppers. The fashion show helps to make an authoritative visual statement about fashion, making it one of the most exciting and dramatic forms of sales promotion.

Sales promotion is defined as any activity to help deliver the product from the producer to consumer, and is a necessary function for the creators and distributors of fashion items. Other promotional activities include: advertising, personal selling, publicity, public relations, special events, and visual merchandising.

The three major market levels for promotional activities are national, trade and retail. **National promotion** involves primary and secondary resources (manufacturers) directing sales promotion activities toward the ultimate consumer. **Primary resources** are the producers of raw materials. These primary producers typically include textile fiber and fabric firms. **Secondary resources** in the apparel industry generally are the clothing and accessory manufacturers. National promotion is used to pre-sell the consumer. It is not uncommon for a primary or secondary manufacturer to **cooperatively** produce a fashion show with a retailer to attract the consumer. Several firms participate or financially support cooperative, or co-op, promotion in the presentation of a show.

Trade promotion activities promote products from one business to another. This type of promotional activity takes a product from a primary resource to a secondary resource, a textile mill to a clothing manufacturer. It may also promote products from a secondary producer to a retailer.

Retail promotion typically involves stores promoting their products to consumers. Retailers, the main distributors of fashion items, focus their sales promotion efforts on their target consumers. Retail organizations are considered **tertiary resources**.

ADDITIONAL REASONS FOR PRODUCING FASHION SHOWS

Fashion-related organizations stage fashion shows for many reasons other than to sell merchandise. The most current fashion information such as the latest trends in apparel, silhouettes, fabrics, color, or services is transmitted to customers through this entertaining format.

Fashion shows are a type of sales promotion that involve presenting merchandise on live models to consumers. (*WWD*)

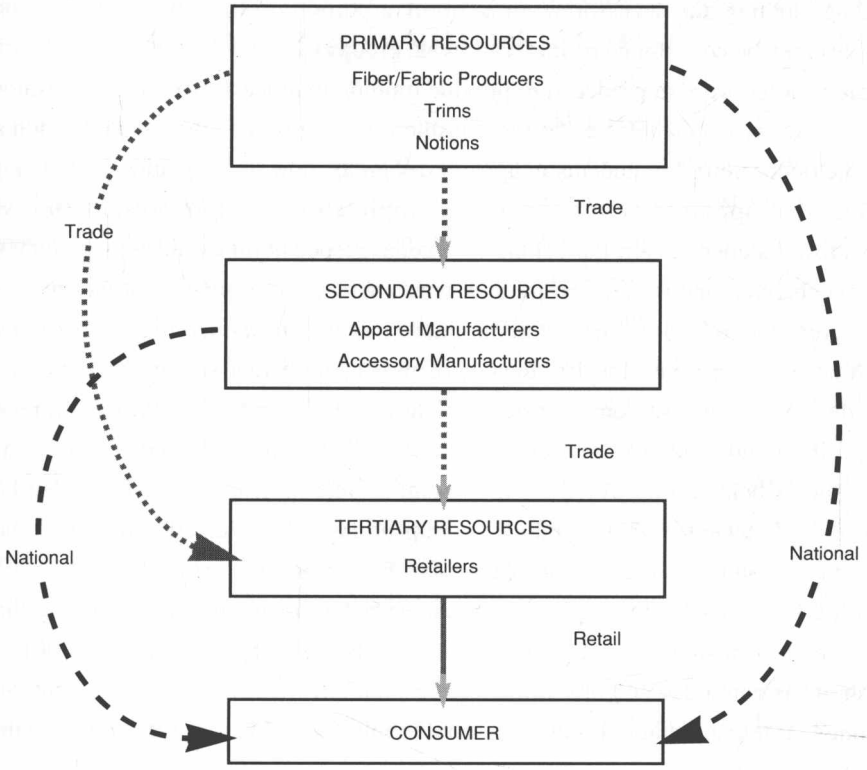


Figure 1-1
Channels of Sales Distribution

Fashion organizations want to attract new customers, build traffic, and encourage current customers to return. Retailers can use fashion shows to solidify the store's position as a fashion authority and leader in the community and promote goodwill with local, regional or national patrons. A new product or line of merchandise may be introduced to customers through a fashion show.

In order to enhance a store's image as a fashion leader and increase sales for designer merchandise, the designer of the line may be invited to the store. For example Albert Nipon was the featured guest at an in-store formal fashion show and trunk show held at Dillard's Department Store, Southwest Division. The show was produced as a cooperative venture by the designer/manufacturer and the retail store.

When a manufacturing company introduces a secondary line targeting a specific type of customer such as Claiborne for Men or Elisabeth for Plus Sizes by Liz Claiborne, consumer or trade-oriented fashion shows are used to acquaint customers with the new product.

In addition to introducing new products, retail stores want to inform their customers about the depth, range, and variety of merchandise carried. This will enable the retailer to focus on the different brands carried, features of their private label merchandise, or a special merchandise offering.

Various organizations may wish to show current fashions for a business program, for a luncheon or annual meeting. Fund-raising activities for such charitable groups as the *American Heart Association*, *Muscular Dystrophy Association*, *Planned Parenthood*, art museums, or symphony guilds may include holding an entertaining fashion show. In order to promote goodwill within a community a retail store or group of stores may support charitable groups

by lending clothing and accessories. In addition, a portion or all of the revenues from the ticket sales may be contributed to such charitable groups.

Fashion shows are also produced to provide training to at least two groups—fashion students and industry personnel. Nearly every fashion school produces an annual fashion show. This is the opportunity for students in apparel design to show their creations. Modeling students have an opportunity for a practical application of their presentation skills. Merchandising students learn the behind-the-scenes responsibilities for organization, selection of merchandise and models, promotion, presentation, and evaluation of the show.

Store personnel benefit from in-store produced training shows. During this type of show, the fashion office presents specific themes of merchandise that will be presented to customers during the next season. The training show helps to raise the staff's awareness of these specific trends and provides selling features to help market this merchandise. In-store training shows help to improve the attitude and morale of employees. They also help to increase their knowledge about products and upcoming events, greatly enhancing the personnel's loyalty and the store's identification as a fashion leader.

Fashion Show versus Style Show The contemporary name used in describing this live event presenting apparel and accessories on models is "fashion show." The use of the term "style show" is outmoded and old-fashioned. Fashion infers change and excitement. Style is something that remains static. Using the proper terminology is part of the professionalism of producing a fashion show.

Additional Reasons for Producing Fashion Shows

- Educate Consumers
- Show Latest Fashion Trends
- Attract New Customers
- Build Traffic
- Establish Retailer as a Fashion Leader
- Promote Goodwill
- Introduce New Products
- Introduce a Designer
- Introduce a Theme
- Demonstrate Merchandise Assortments
- Indicate Special Merchandise Offering
- Differentiate Brands
- Participate in a Special Event
- Train Employees or Students

THE HISTORY OF THE FASHION SHOW

The fashion show has been used by ready-to-wear manufacturers from the start of the mass production industry as a sales promotion event. However, the true inventor of the modern runway fashion show—using live models—is unknown. One of the first methods used by dressmakers to transmit fashion information to reach potential consumers, that is the women of the royal courts, was to send **fashion dolls**. Fashion dolls were miniature scale figurines wearing replicas of the latest clothing. The dolls were also known as *puppets*, *dummies*, *little ladies*, or *fashion babies*. The earliest record of the fashion doll was in 1391 when the wife of Charles VI of France sent a full-size figure wearing the innovative French court fashions of the time to Queen Anne, wife of Richard II, King of England *(Corinth, 1970, p 11)*. Although this was more like the modern day mannequin, it was called a fashion doll. Queen Anne was able to wear the garment immediately instead of having it reproduced from a miniature scale doll as was the common practice later.

Shipping dolls wearing the latest fashion trends from one royal court to another was a common practice in the European monarchy, reaching its peak during the reigns of Louis XIV, Louis XV, and Louis XVI, from the 1640s to 1790s. Even during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries it was recognized that fashion was best shown on a body, even if it was on a lifeless mannequin.

This fashion doll is shown in Russian Court Dress of the early 19th century. (Warwick Doll Museum. Copyright © Walter Scott, Bradford, England)

Designers Who Influenced Fashion Shows

Rose Bertin was the first dressmaker to be recognized by name. This French fashion creator was the dressmaker to Marie Antoinette, wife of Louis XVI. Dressmakers of the time would make up garments from a pattern, with fabric and trimming selected by the client. Despite her well known work for the queen, Rose Bertin achieved international fame with her fashion dolls that she sent to all the capitals of Europe to solicit orders. As a result of this international fame, Mademoiselle Bertin was given the nickname, *Minister of Fashion.*

The modern runway fashion show has its roots in the French Couture that began in the nineteenth century. Costume historians agree that **Charles Frederick Worth**, the English-born fashion innovator was the first couturier in France, opening his own Paris fashion house in 1858. Among Worth's revolutionary ideas was designing clothing for an individual woman, customizing the style, fabric and trimmings to the wearer. Made-to-order garments would be created for his clients from the samples in the salon. For his contributions in making the couture world nearly what it is today, Worth was given the nickname, *Father of Haute Couture.*

Worth had worked with fabrics and clothes in London before leaving for Paris in 1845. One of his first jobs in France was with Gagelin and Opigez, a retailer who sold fabrics, trimmings, coats, and shawls. It was the responsibility of the *demoiselle de magasin* (shop-girl) to show customers how the shawls looked on a living form *(Diehl, 1976, p 5)*. Marie-Vernet, an original demoiselle de magasin, who later became Madame Worth, was perhaps the first fashion model when she showed shawls and the latest Worth creations to clients.

The House of Worth called the women who wore garments for clients to see how they looked on a living and moving person, **mannequins** *(Corinth, 1970, p 14)*. Up to this point, the term mannequin had previously referred to a stationary doll or dummy used as a display fixture. As Worth became more successful, he hired more young women to model at his *maison* or fashion house. These mannequins continued to show his collections to his customers.

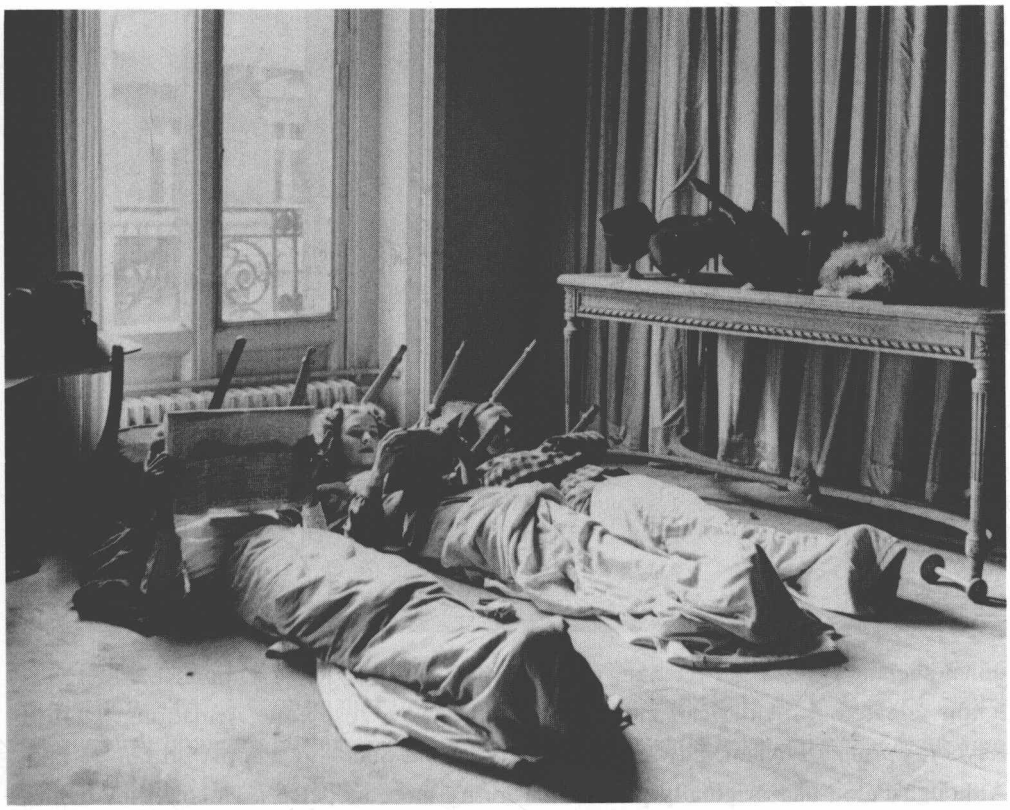
Before the end of the century several other designers opened *Maisons de Haute Couture* in the manner of Charles Frederick Worth. These designers copied the promotional innovations of Worth and featured their designs on live models. By the 1920s French designers Paul Poiret, Madame Paquin, and Jean Patou made significant contributions to the development of the fashion show.

Paul Poiret known for liberating women from the corset, opened his couture house in 1904. This designer had a knack for promotion, among his contributions were his innovative and controversial window displays. Poiret also toured, making personal appearances, to show his fashions at chic resorts. Poiret even traveled to Russia with nine mannequins. He was one of the first couturiers to parade his mannequins at the races *(Diehl, 1976, p 6)*. Such events had a positive impact on his sales and image.

The House of **Paquin** was also known for parading models at the racetrack, but Paquin also staged such events at the opera. Paquin was the first designer to introduce the finale for her events. It is said that in one show 20 mannequins were dressed in white evening gowns as a tableau *(Diehl, 1976, p 7)*. This created a positive and lasting impression at the end of the show. Finales—exciting conclusions—have become universal and important to contemporary fashion shows.

It was common practice for couture houses to show their latest collections on a predetermined opening day. These dates were established by the Chambre Syndicale so that openings of the important designers would not conflict, enabling clients and the press to view several shows. After this premiere the show would be repeated twice each day for a month, with smaller shows for private clients. The ordinary dress rehearsal, which took place the

Models pose during a 1921 fashion show for the Wells Shop of Washington D.C. This early specialty store featured corsets, brassieres, hats, and bonnets. (Reproduced from the Collections of the Library of Congress)



Lee Miller, a top *Vogue* model and World War II combat photographer, shot this photo of models relaxing before a Paris fashion show in 1945. It was one of the first shows after France was liberated. (Copyright © The Lee Miller Archives, 1992)

evening before the premiere, was held with the sales personnel and workers as the audience, giving the employees their only chance to see their labors.

Jean Patou primarily known for his contributions to sportswear and as a rival of Chanel, was associated with two important contributions to the fashion show—the press show and the use of American models in Paris. The press had been coming to report on the fashion collections since 1910. In 1921 Patou scheduled a special preview showing, the *repetition generale*, a full dress rehearsal for the influential representatives of the press, notable buyers and exceptional clients on an evening before his regular opening *(Etherington-Smith, 1983, pp 45-46)*. With the assistance of **Elsa Maxwell**, a popular party planner of the era and perhaps the first press agent, Patou converted the ordinary dress rehearsal into an extraordinary way to introduce the fashion season. The salon was festively decorated with flowers and spotlights. Guests were seated at tables with name cards and were treated to champagne, deluxe cigarettes and cigars, and sample bottles of Patou perfumes. The couturier Patou, his **premier/premiere**, head of the workroom, and his **directrice/directeur**, head of the salon, approved each model before she was allowed to show the garment to the audience. Since some fashion styles were rejected at this program, the audience observed the designer as he made his final eliminations from his collection. Patou's events led the way for the twice annual press shows held by the Paris couture throughout the twentieth century.

An American client complained that she had a hard time visualizing herself in the Patou clothing as it was shown on the French mannequins, whose figures were round compared to American figures. Patou traveled to America in 1924. With the assistance of **Edna Woolman Chase**, then editor of *Vogue* magazine, **Elsie de Wolfe**, decorator and interna-

Private clients and influential members of the press were always anxious to view the latest Chanel collections. The audience views Chanel's fashion show in 1959. (Marc Riboud/Magnum Photos)

tional socialite, **Edward Steichen**, photographer, and **Condé Nast**, publisher of *Vogue*, Patou selected six American models—Lillian Farley, Josephine Armstrong, Dorothy Raynor, Caroline Putnam, Edwina Prue, and Rosalind Stair—to return with him to Paris. Although Patou had originally planned on hiring three models, he doubled the number selected due to the favorable impression they created. The young women "of refined manner" gave prestige to the profession of modeling. They were paid $40 per week and given the opportunity to purchase ensembles from Patou for as little as $25 *(Etherington-Smith, 1983, p 82)*. The use of American models changed the ideal of international physical beauty to the thinner and more athletic shapes that these American women possessed.

Paquin's contribution to the fashion show was the finale, but it was Patou who influenced the dramatic opening. For his spring 1925 presentation, he had French and American models make their first entrance in a single file parade wearing the toile—the simple robe worn between fittings in the dressing room. He demonstrated that the physical form was the same regardless of nationality and served as the inspiration for his designs. The audience was entertained and were preconditioned to like the collection *(Etherington-Smith, 1983, p 45)*.

Fashion shows remained as fashion parades through the thirties, forties, and fifties. The quality of these fashion productions improved as did the technology in this time period. Many of these shows rivaled Broadway musicals with stage sets, lighting, music, and fabulous mannequins. This basic format remained consistent until the sixties.

The creativity and energy of the swinging 1960s led to major changes in fashion and the way it was presented. British designer **Mary Quant** was at the forefront of these changes. Certain models were known for their work in the photographic media while other models worked the runway shows. However, Quant felt that photographic models rather than runway models knew how to move around in clothes, so she selected nine of them to dance down the stairs and runway at her shop, Knightsbridge Bazaar. Since this era models have worked each field interchangeably.

Quant's staging, use of innovative props, and dancing led to more active fashion shows.