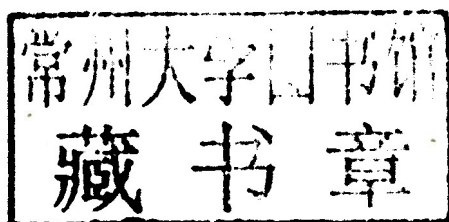


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# **fashion worlds**



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1st edition 2012

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## Content

- 007 Preface
- 018 24 Issey Miyake  
Hakata Fukuoka, Japan
- 022 52  
Shizuoka, Japan
- 024 Alter Shop  
Shanghai, China
- 028 Arzu Kaprol Gallery  
Istanbul, Turkey
- 030 Ayres  
Buenos Aires, Argentina
- 032 Bridal Magic  
Himeji, Japan
- 034 Candido 1859  
Maglie-Lecce, Italy
- 036 Capsula Multibrand Store  
Budapest, Hungary
- 040 Cornet Boutique  
Kumagaya, Japan
- 042 Creo  
Mumbai, India
- 044 Delicatessen  
Tel Aviv, Israel
- 046 DURAS Daiba  
Tokyo, Japan
- 048 Entrance Concept Store  
Bucharest, Romania
- 054 Esprit Lighthouse Store  
Cologne, Germany
- 056 Fame Agenda Docklands  
Melbourne, Australia
- 060 Fantastique Canopée  
Tokyo, Japan
- 062 Firmament  
Berlin, Germany
- 064 Folk Clothing, Brick Lane  
London, United Kingdom
- 066 Geometry  
Berlin, Germany
- 070 H&M Barcelona  
Barcelona, Spain
- 074 Hermès Rive Gauche  
Paris, France
- 078 Home/Unusual Store  
Venafrò, Italy
- 082 Horizontal Showcase  
Granada, Spain
- 084 Hostem Shop  
London, United Kingdom
- 088 Indulgi  
Kyoto, Japan

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <b>092 Karis</b><br>Hiroshima, Japan                          | <b>154 Replay Flagship Store</b><br>Milan, Italy               |
| <b>094 Kings Road Anthropologie</b><br>London, United Kingdom | <b>158 Ruti Boutique</b><br>San Francisco, USA                 |
| <b>096 KooKoo</b><br>Nicosia, Cyprus                          | <b>160 Shine Fashion Store</b><br>Hong Kong, China             |
| <b>100 The Lake &amp; Stars</b><br>New York, USA              | <b>162 Siki Im Concept Store</b><br>New York, USA              |
| <b>104 Levi's</b><br>Amsterdam, The Netherlands               | <b>164 Stills Flagship Store</b><br>Amsterdam, The Netherlands |
| <b>108 Little Joe Woman</b><br>Sydney, Australia              | <b>168 Stylexchange</b><br>Montreal, Canada                    |
| <b>110 Lurdes Bergada</b><br>Barcelona, Spain                 | <b>172 Sunrise</b><br>Amsterdam, The Netherlands               |
| <b>112 Maison Martin Margiela</b><br>Beijing, China           | <b>176 TIPS Fashion Store</b><br>Shanghai, China               |
| <b>118 Marni Beijing</b><br>Beijing, China                    | <b>180 Twister</b><br>London, United Kingdom                   |
| <b>122 Max Mara Chengdu</b><br>Chengdu, China                 | <b>182 Uniqlo Megastore</b><br>Tokyo, Japan                    |
| <b>126 Monki Carnaby Street</b><br>London, United Kingdom     | <b>184 Zara Flagship Store</b><br>Rome, Italy                  |
| <b>130 Monospace</b><br>Taipei, Taiwan                        | <b>188 Zuo Corp, Pop-up Shop</b><br>Warsaw, Poland             |
| <b>132 Nanushka Beta Store</b><br>Budapest, Hungary           | <b>190 Index Retail Spaces</b>                                 |
| <b>134 Nature Factory</b><br>Tokyo, Japan                     | <b>191 Index Architects</b>                                    |
| <b>138 NL = New Luxury</b><br>Amsterdam, The Netherlands      | <b>192 Photo Credits</b>                                       |
| <b>140 Phillip Lim Boutique</b><br>Tokyo, Japan               |  |
| <b>146 Ports 1961</b><br>Shanghai, China                      |  |
| <b>150 Puma Store</b><br>Amsterdam, The Netherlands           |  |

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michelle galindo

# **fashion worlds**

contemporary retail spaces

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## Content

- 007 Preface**
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Hakata Fukuoka, Japan
- 022 52**  
Shizuoka, Japan
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Cologne, Germany
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Tokyo, Japan
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Berlin, Germany
- 064 Folk Clothing, Brick Lane**  
London, United Kingdom
- 066 Geometry**  
Berlin, Germany
- 070 H&M Barcelona**  
Barcelona, Spain
- 074 Hermès Rive Gauche**  
Paris, France
- 078 Home/Unusual Store**  
Venafro, Italy
- 082 Horizontal Showcase**  
Granada, Spain
- 084 Hostem Shop**  
London, United Kingdom
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| <b>134 Nature Factory</b><br>Tokyo, Japan                     | <b>191 Index Architects</b>                                    |
| <b>138 NL = New Luxury</b><br>Amsterdam, The Netherlands      | <b>192 Photo Credits</b>                                       |
| <b>140 Phillip Lim Boutique</b><br>Tokyo, Japan               |  |
| <b>146 Ports 1961</b><br>Shanghai, China                      |  |
| <b>150 Puma Store</b><br>Amsterdam, The Netherlands           |  |







above: Evolution of fashion from 1500–1880.

below: Johannes Schiess, Appenzell weaver couple at work on a hand loom, around 1830. Watercolor.

## Fashion Worlds – Contemporary Retail Spaces

by Markus Hattstein

For as long as humans have lived in organized societies, clothing has represented far more than a simple means of protecting oneself from the cold or covering the body. It has always had a close and immutable relationship with ideas of self-expression, status and identity. At the same time, clothing has always been subject to changing fashions and trends, providing an easy means for individuals to compare themselves with others and make judgments on the basis of outward appearance. Attire in whatever form and context exists therefore in an arena fraught with tension, where the comfort of conformity confronts the possibility of individuality.

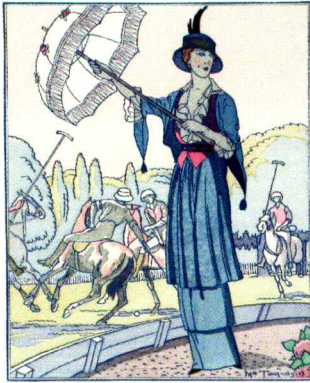
Fashion seeks to resolve this conflict by allowing individuals to both reveal and conceal themselves in the wearing of a particular garment, a garment that can also be an expression of self-image or mood, or of the individual's acceptance of a social role. These expressive elements exist alongside aesthetic ones – what will the wearer and what do others find appealing or attractive? Fashions have always been temporary and periodic – one speaks of fashion “waves” and “seasons” (the latter of which often correspond to seasons in nature), both of which imply correctly that trends and styles can experience revivals. An important question for researchers, designers and sellers of fashion concerns the influence or even the manipulation of taste: what is currently “in” and what defines individual expression as opposed to mass taste? Yet equally significant are questions such as: Who are the trendsetters? Who is creating new fashions? Who are the avant-garde and who are just the hangers-on? Fashion designers and fashion stores never leave these matters to chance, but rather employ targeted product placement and advertising to promote and sell their products, campaigns planned down to the smallest detail and orchestrated with military precision.

### Early Developments

In the Middle Ages, the role of clothing as a means of distinguishing between genders and social ranks became particularly pronounced. While the lower classes often had to make do with homemade garments to serve their practical needs, spun or stitched together out of leather, hemp or sheep's wool, the upper classes clothed themselves in velvet, silk and other stylish fabrics, indulging in expensive fashions. By this time, production centers of high-end textiles had already become established, notably in Flanders and Northern Italy, catering for the moneyed elite of Europe, for whom particular fabrics and colors were reserved. Yet with the rise of the middle classes, the locus of creativity in the world of fashion began to shift: while attire for the nobility in the Ancien Régime was generally lavish and fussy for both sexes, a divergent trend emerged in around 1800 that persisted until the 1980s. While female fashion continued to become increasingly elaborate and flamboyant, male fashion, in contrast, became simpler and more restrained. Like the aristocratic class in earlier centuries, the middle classes left questions of style to the specialists: designers dreamt up fashionable trends and couturiers created individual garments.

In the course of their emancipation, the middle classes inherited not only fashion from the nobility, but also the tendency to separate work at home from gainful employment. This was a new freedom created by new prosperity that made it possible for the head of the household to be the sole breadwinner, while the wife or mother no longer needed to seek employment outside home. Among the lower classes, however, all family members including women and children had no choice but to work to earn money, often in an enterprise run from the home. An interesting exception to this general rule that divided the classes was the textile industry – this was a form of handicraft that even women of upper classes were happy to engage in. Almost all women could sew in those days, for





AU POLO  
Robe d'après-midi de Worth.

Gazette de Bon Ton. - N° 2

Paris 1913. - Pl. X

sewing was a skill easily learned and with little operating expense. The production of clothes in the home beyond the requirements of the immediate family offered therefore an excellent opportunity to earn money, especially for young unmarried women in the lower classes. Since most of these women had no contacts in the industry, so-called "middle men" negotiated the sale of the products to wholesalers and clothing stores. These stores then sold the goods and passed customer feedback to the producers at work in their homes. After 1900, it became increasingly common to see women employed as salespeople in the womenswear departments of large stores, although they were still unable to rise to higher positions.

This system, involving individuals working from home sewing garments by hand, was surprisingly resistant to the mechanization sweeping through the rest of the textile industry in the first century after the Industrial Revolution. The first spinning machine was made in England in 1764, while 1785 saw the first fully mechanical loom. In 1805 the fully automatic Jacquard weaving loom was invented, and the spinning and weaving industries thereafter became subject to massive and rapid mechanization. Textile enterprises based in homes and small communities began to disintegrate. The artistic and highly individual creation of exclusive goods was replaced by the technically perfect mass production of identical garments. Factories were simply able to manufacture faster, cheaper and in greater quantities.

Sewing, however, remained mostly un-mechanized until after 1830 and, even then, the industry did not entirely lose its tradition of individual or one-off production. It was only in 1829 that the Frenchman Barthélemy Thimonnier (1793–1857) developed the first prototype for the modern sewing machine and established one of the first sewing machine factories in Paris, later burnt down by angry home workers. It took until 1870 before improved sewing



machine models appeared on the market, alongside new models for use in the home which became smaller and increasingly practical and portable in the decades that followed. In the meantime, home workers engaged in sewing garments were increasingly pressured to meet the demands of large textile houses, but new sewing machine models designed with such users in mind usually enabled them to do so. In 1900, there were already 200 sewing machine factories in Germany alone.

left: Maurice Taquoy, *Au Polo. Robe d'Après-Midi de Worth*, 1913.

right: Franz Xaver Winterhalter, *Portrait of the Empress Eugénie* (1826–1920), 1853.

### The Beginnings of the Fashion Boutique and Haute Couture

The fashion boutique began its rise during the second half of the 19th century, a period dominated by large department stores. In contrast to classic tailors, who produced individual pieces to order, fashion boutiques combined the broad selection of products offered by department stores with the more limited but specialized range found in specialty shops. While today's fashion stores usually focus on combining garments with shoes, belts, accessories and jewelry, pioneers of fashion stores and of haute couture were deliberate purists. Charles Frederick Worth (1826–1895), who emigrated from his native England to Paris, is generally acknowledged to be the founder of the fashion boutique and of haute couture; even today, partic-



ular characteristics of such stores can be attributed to his influence. Worth came to Paris in 1845 and worked in the prestigious Maison Gagelin, a fashion store specializing in silk. There, he met and married Marie Vernet, who, at his suggestion, often modeled the boutique's new collections of scarves and hats. This revolutionary idea – using young, attractive women to model garments and accessories – became, as we well know, a vast and successful industry. Worth was not just an excellent tailor and salesman, but also a designer – in 1855 he won first prize at the International Exhibition in Paris for a coat of his own creation.

Soon after, Worth took the risk of venturing into the sale of finished garments, rather than just fabrics, despite the fact that the manufacture of clothing was regarded much less highly than the time-honored trade in fabric. Forced to become an independent tradesman, he found himself an investor (the Swede Otto Bobergh) and founded his own fashion house (Worth et Bobergh) in 1858 in the Parisian Rue de la Paix. Soon, customers began to request replicas of garments designed by himself and showcased by his wife and other models. In this period, he was also busy producing extravagant eveningwear for the wives of various diplomats, a fact noted by the Empress Eugénie, whose influence resulted in the appointment of Worth as official fashion purveyor to the court. Before long, he was designing unique garments for the British Queen Victoria and the Austrian Empress Elisabeth ("Sisi"), the latter of whom was a revered beauty and fashion icon for her time. In the famous painting of Sisi by Franz Xaver Winterhalter (1865), she can be seen wearing a dress designed by Worth. Worth's designs were revolutionizing the world of elegant female fashion – his dresses were much shorter than previous fashions had dictated, and flowing trains were eliminated entirely in favor of waist- and hemlines that accentuated the female figure. Worth's fashion house and designs had become leaders in haute couture; notable figures from all walks of life travelled long distances to Paris just to purchase one of Worth's garments. His clothes were so expensive that even wealthy patrons often came simply to have their Worth dress updated according to the latest fashion.

At the height of his fame, Worth did not simply design in response to the demands of his customers, but also followed his own creative path, presenting his newest creations four times a year at his own fashion show. Luxury pieces designed for specific seasons or even times of day, such as the "afternoon robe," were displayed at these events. Patrons who had travelled to see the show chose a garment and a fabric from those paraded in front of them, and Worth would then produce the item according to the individual's measurements. Worth's brand did not just set the tone for the high-end styles and fashions of

this day – he had also built a fashion empire. By 1870 he employed more than 1,200 seamstresses, mostly as home workers, who produced many hundreds of garments every week. From 1867 onwards, he revolutionized his chain of distribution by producing paper patterns for buyers abroad. Worth perceived himself as a creator of fashion, more an artist of the imagination than a manual craftsman. To ensure the distinctiveness of his products, his name tag was sewn into every garment – an early, if concealed, form of brand logo. He was also one of the earliest designers of fashion to conceive his products as finished articles, rejecting any need to work with a milliner who would traditionally design accessories to complete the outfit.

### Paris Remains the Center

Paris did not only have Worth to thank for the city's continued success as the center of haute couture and of the fashion boutique. The makers of fashion and managers of fashion houses, who expanded Worth's model of production and trade, also played a significant role. Jacques Doucet (1853–1929) ran a shop in Paris for exclusive, high-end female fashion in the finest materials, and was responsible for attiring many stars of the emerging medium of film, driving haute couture to increasingly lavish, imaginative and radical levels. As a prominent art collector and accepted authority on matters of taste, he also displayed works by the Impressionists and even the young Picasso in his salon, establishing a relationship between fashion, art and lifestyle that would persist into the 21st century.

Paul Poiret (1879–1944), mentored by Worth and Doucet, established his own female fashion house in 1904, primarily selling flowing robes influenced by oriental designs. Inspired by the trend in dress reform, he created the *jupe-culotte* and designed garments that could be worn without a corset, thereby taking the female fashion industry in an entirely new direction. In 1911 he introduced his own brand of perfume to the market, named after his daughter Rosine ("Parfums de Rosine") – the first of many designer perfumes created by a fashion brand. However, it was to be his fiercest rival, Coco Chanel, who would perfect this revolutionary concept and drive Poiret out of the market.

Countless legends have sprung up concerning the life of Coco Chanel (1883–1971), icon of haute couture in the early 20th century, legends which she herself encouraged. She was the first fashion designer to market not only her products, but also herself as a "brand." From working class roots, she rose rapidly in the emerging world of fashion, opening a hat shop in Paris in 1910 and her first fashion boutique just a year later. She soon established several further outlets in Biarritz, where she secured various

Franz Xaver Winterhalter, Empress Elisabeth in Courtly Gala Dress with Diamond Stars, 1865, oil on canvas.







wealthy patrons as financial backers. In contrast to her predecessors and competitors, she was successful in her attempt to liberate haute couture from the taste for impractical opulence and prettiness that continued to inhibit its development. Instead, she created a simple and functional but elegant style of female fashion using jersey (a cotton-based material) and sharp lines to create athletic garments that allowed easy movement and accentuated the female form. By 1916, she had more than 300 seamstresses in her employ, and by 1936 her fashion empire had created 4,000 jobs. Through seeking out and establishing relationships with a range of public figures from artists to aristocrats, Chanel was able to use the free media exposure that these personalities attracted to bring her products into the public eye. Many later fashion designers noted this strategy and used it themselves to great effect. Furthermore, she cultivated excellent contacts with leading fashion magazines, frequently launching new designs in their pages where they were declared to be setting the standard for haute couture, thus establishing her brand throughout the fashion world as the epitome of modern elegance.

In 1926 Coco Chanel introduced her famous "little black dress" to the world in the magazine *Vogue*, which in 1916 had declared Coco Chanel's designs to represent the epitome of elegance. The dress, which would later become famous as the cocktail dress of the 1950s and 1960s, was short (never falling below the knee) and appropriate for a range of different occasions. In designing the

dress, Chanel was considered to have brought about the liberation of women from the corset, for which she was widely praised, despite the fact that her less successful rival Paul Poiret was perhaps more deserving of that claim. On the launch of the now world-renowned dress, *Vogue* described it as "a sort of uniform for all women of taste," implying that a mass-produced product could represent the height of elegance despite the established idea to the contrary. Chanel's fashion label was to produce not only extortionately priced individual pieces for film stars and aristocrats, but also tastefully manufactured garments for fashion-conscious women in the middle classes.

In the following years, Coco Chanel systematically constructed a fashion empire of previously unheard-of proportions. Using her connections with the German forces occupying France during the Second World War, she "Aryanized" her empire, divesting her Jewish financier Pierre Wertheimer of his share of the company. She was forced into exile in Switzerland in 1945, but returned to Paris in 1954, shortly afterwards introducing her "Chanel Suit" comprising a knitted wool cardigan and matching skirt. Worn mostly by increasingly self-confident businesswomen, the outfit enabled Chanel to re-connect almost seamlessly with her success of the pre-war years. Her brand name was by now fully established, along with her designer perfume "Chanel No 5," first marketed in 1923, and the now world-famous brand logo – the interlaced double "C" in sober black and white. Coco Chanel, who continued to design collections until her death and even stage-managed her own funeral procession of models wearing Chanel outfits, was the sole female representative from the fashion industry in *Time Magazine's* list of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century.

After Chanel's death, her brand struggled to keep pace with the fashion industry, becoming known for its collections for rich, elderly ladies rather than modern, sophisticated women. This changed again, however, when Karl Lagerfeld took on a role as designer for the Chanel brand.

The existence of a second "fashion tsar", whose collection contrasted Chanel's in many ways, guaranteed that Paris was renewed as the center both of haute couture and of fashion boutiques from 1947 onwards, once the years of war and post-war austerity that had temporarily allowed New York to become the center of the fashion world were over. This tsar was Christian Dior (1905–1957). Educated as a draughtsman in the fashion industry, he opened a fashion boutique in 1946 in the Parisian Avenue Montaigne (still the brand's flagship store today) and launched a radical ultra-feminine "New Look" at his first fashion show in February 1947. Combining flared skirts and corseted bodices with an emphasis on the female





left: Cynthia Rowley spring 2007 show, New York Fashion Week.

right: Chanel Haute Couture Fall-Winter 2011-2012 Fashion Show held at Grand Palais in Paris.

waist, Dior named the look "Corolle" (literally "corolla" or "circlet of flower petals"). In defiance of all his critics, Dior had recognized that female fashion was in desperate need of a more luxurious and carefree style after years of enforced adversity and restraint. Moreover, the very feminine, impractical "New Look" endorsed the classic, conservative conception of gender roles in 1950s and early 1960s USA and Europe.

Not only did Dior encourage the trend for affordable fashion chains and mass-produced garments, enabling the woman on the street to wear clothes inspired by the Dior style, but he also granted licenses worldwide, allowing firms to manufacture his garments. This practice eventually became the standard business model of leading fashion houses. Dior went further and extended his license to cosmetics, stockings and fashion accessories, becoming in the process something of a fashion dictator. In the following years, he introduced a new look with every new season, taken up at first by his wealthy patrons as well as every female monarch and president's wife, then by the entire fashion industry: the "Zig Zag" line, the "Lily of the Valley" line, the pencil skirt, the A-line, the H-line, the Y-line, and so on.

By 1947, Dior had already launched his first designer perfume ("Miss Dior"), the beginning of a global perfume empire alongside his empire of fashion. Dior's custom of incorporating leading designers and couturiers into his empire, allowing them to create with very few stipulations or inhibitions, was hugely lucrative, but also sowed the seeds for later rivalries. Suffering a heart attack at the height of his fame, Dior was succeeded as head designer by his assistant Yves Saint-Laurent (1936–2008), who shortly afterwards launched his own independent fashion house, competing against the Dior brand in the haute couture market. With his "Ligne Trapèze," Saint-Laurent freed women from wasp waists and stiff supports at the waist, bosom and shoulders, while retaining a certain Dior-inspired elegance. His designs contributed significantly to the new paths being pursued in the world of fashion during the 1960s – his feminine trouser suit "Le Smoking" (1967), the beatnik look, tweed suits, tight trousers and thigh-high boots all combined the concepts of emancipation and femininity, the two key ideas at the center of the 1960s revolutions, with something intriguingly androgynous. In later years, he maintained his reputation as a trend-setter with styles such as the "Nostalgia Look" and

the "Rich Peasant" or "Peasant Chic" look, as well as his perfume "Opium" (1977), which became one of the most successful scents worldwide, and his brand logo "YSL," one of the most recognizable logos of any international company. In 1999 the Yves Saint-Laurent brand was bought by the Gucci Group (now the PPR Group).

### Haute Couture and Prêt-à-porter

Despite their undeniable success, the Parisian fashion boutiques were unable to prevent the growth of fashion stores and chains worldwide that began to threaten their market dominance. Even after the First World War, and to a much greater extent after the Second, the democratization of society ushered in a new era and industry of widespread mass culture and entertainment, serving a society that, on the surface at least, was experiencing a gradual leveling of classes and ranks. New fashion houses sprang up to meet the new demand not only for mass-produced products that would satisfy mass tastes, but also for fashionable new trends that would be available to a far broader clientele than Parisian haute couture.

Since the 19th century, France's fashion empires had sought to protect their exclusivity – in 1868 the leading fashion designers in Paris had joined forces to create the alliance known today as *Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture*, which had also supported an exclusive fashion school since 1927. (It is interesting to note that corresponding chambers for *Prêt-à-porter* and male fashion were established only in 1973.) This body formulated strict, yet regularly amended criteria concerning the admittance of a fashion house or chain into their federation. The firm must have its headquarters in Paris, have a fixed number of permanent employees, produce at least 35 (reduced from 50) different unique pieces for day and eveningwear, each created by hand and by an accredited fashion designer ("Grand Couturier"), and hold a public fashion show in Paris every season (twice a year). Since 1997, a few non-French firms – Valentino, Armani and Versace – have been invited to join as accredited fashion houses and since 2001 as correspondent members, permitted to exhibit their designs and offered the possibility of becoming full members in the future. After 1945, there were at times more than 100 firms registered as members of the haute couture federation; by 1990 this had fallen to 20 and in 2011 there were just 15. The haute couture fashion shows no longer serve simply as a





above: Afghan employees working at a contemporary textile factory.  
below: Zara Flagship Store in Rome, Italy.

