

French Fashion

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Why's France famous for fashion?



The association of France with fashion and style dates largely to the reign of Louis XIV (1638-1715) when the luxury goods industries in France came increasingly under **royal control** and the French royal court became the arbiter of taste and style in Europe.

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The rise in prominence of French fashion was linked to the creation of the fashion press in the early 1670s which transformed the fashion industry by marketing designs to a broad **public** outside the French court and by popularizing notions such as the **fashion "season"** and **changing styles**.



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France renewed its dominance of the high fashion industry in the years 1860-1960 through the establishing of the great **fashion press** (*Vogue* was founded in 1892), **fashion shows**, and **couturier houses** [an establishment or person involved in the clothing fashion industry who makes original garments to order for private clients].



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Fashion was put on pause during WWII due to lack of finances and an overall somber state of the country. There were strict rules about how much fabric could be used to make any one piece of clothing, and many fashion houses were closed.



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Post-war fashion returned to prominence through Christian Dior's famous "New Look" in 1947: the collection contained dresses with tiny waists, majestic busts, and full skirts swelling out beneath small bodices. The extravagant use of fabric and the feminine elegance of the designs appealed greatly to a post-war clientele.

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Since the 1960s, France's fashion industry has come under increasing competition from London, New York, Milan and Tokyo. Nevertheless, many foreign designers still seek to make their careers in France.

What is “haute couture”?

- Translates literally to high sewing/dressmaking
- high-fashion custom-fitted clothing
- The expression *Haute couture* is, in France, a legally protected name, guaranteeing certain quality standards. French couture is regulated by an industry governing body.

**WHO ARE SOME FAMOUS FRENCH
DESIGNERS?**

Christian Dior

- Born in Normandy France to a well-to-do family
- As a student, sold fashion sketches on the street outside his home
- During WWII helped design dresses for Nazi officers' wives
- In 1946 he founded his fashion house, Dior
- Dior's designs were more voluptuous than the boxy, fabric-conserving shapes of the recent World War II styles, influenced by the rations on fabric. He was a master at creating shapes and silhouettes. His look employed hip padding, wasp-waisted corsets and petticoats that made his dresses flare out from the waist, giving his models a very curvaceous form.
- Initially, women protested because his designs covered up their legs, which they had been unused to because of the previous limitations on fabric.
- The "[New Look](#)" revolutionized women's dress and reestablished Paris as the center of the fashion world after World War II.



Yves Saint Laurent

- Yves began his career by entering a fashion sketch in a contest, winning, and thus choosing to begin fashion school
- After graduating with top honors, he was hired by Dior, who named him as his successor. Dior passed away young, leaving Yves the head of the fashion house at the young age of 21.
- His first collection design as head of the fashion house was a softer version of the “new look” and saved the company from financial ruin
- In 1960 he was conscripted to serve in the army and was fired by Dior while away. Because of this he began his own fashion house.
- During the 1960 to the 1970, the firm popularized [fashion trends](#) such as the [beatnik](#) look; safari jackets for men and women; tight pants; tall, thigh-high boots; and arguably the most famous classic tuxedo suit for women in 1966, the [Le Smoking](#).



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Yves Saint Laurent

- In 1985, Caroline Rennolds Milbank wrote, "The most consistently celebrated and influential designer of the past twenty-five years, Yves Saint Laurent can be credited with both spurring the couture's rise from its sixties ashes and with finally rendering [ready-to-wear](#) (factory-made clothing) reputable."
- He is also known for his use of non-European cultural references and use of ethnic models.



Coco Chanel



- Peasant origins
- First broke into fashion scene with hats
- Chanel was credited with liberating women from the constraints of the "corseted silhouette" and popularizing the acceptance of a sporty, casual chic as the feminine standard in the post-[World War I](#) era. A prolific fashion creator, Chanel's influence extended beyond couture clothing. Her design aesthetic was realized in jewelry, handbags, and fragrance.
- She was the only fashion designer to appear on [Time Magazine's list of the 100 most influential people of the 20th century](#).



Pierre Cardin

- Cardin was known for his [avant-garde](#) style and his [Space Age](#) designs. He prefers [geometric](#) shapes and motifs, often ignoring the female form. He advanced into [unisex](#) fashions, sometimes experimental, and not always practical. He introduced the "bubble dress" in 1954.



Jean Paul Gaultier

- Gaultier never received formal training as a designer.
- Many of Gaultier's following collections have been based on street wear, focusing on popular culture, whereas others, particularly his [Haute Couture](#) collections, are very formal yet at the same time unusual and playful.
- In 1985 he introduced man-skirts, and produced sculptured costumes for [Madonna](#) during the nineties
- Gaultier caused shock by using unconventional models for his exhibitions, like older men and full-figured women, pierced and heavily tattooed models, and by playing with traditional gender roles in the shows. This earned him both criticism and enormous popularity.
- Gaultier designed the wardrobe of many motion pictures
- Gaultier was the creative director of [Hermès](#) from 2003 to 2010





Hermès

- French manufacturer of quality goods established in 1837, today specializing in leather, lifestyle accessories, perfumery, [luxury goods](#), and [ready-to-wear](#).
- Queen Elizabeth II wore a Hermès scarf



Christian Lacroix

- With his background in historical costume and clothing, Lacroix soon made headlines with his opulent, fantasy creations, including the short puffball skirt ("le pouf"), rose prints, and low necklines. He quoted widely from other styles—from fashion history (the corset), from folklore, and from many parts of the world—and he mixed his quotations in a topsy-turvy manner. He favored the hot colors of the Mediterranean region, a hodgepodge of patterns, and experimental fabrics, sometimes handwoven in local workshops.



Some final brands you know...

