Christian Dior Biography

Christian Dior

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Biography

Christian Dior (1905-1957) was a fashion designer who changed the look of women's clothing and gave the post-World War II French fashion industry a new feminine look.

Christian Dior, son of a wealthy Norman manufacturer of chemicals and fertilizer, wanted to be an architect, but his family insisted he enter the diplomatic service. He prepared for a diplomatic career at the Ecole des Sciences Politiques but abandoned diplomacy in 1928 and became an art dealer. Illness forced him to give up that business in 1934, and when he returned to Paris a year later, it was as a fashion illustrator--first of hats, later of dresses.

"The New Look"

In 1946, when World War II cloth rationing was lifted, Dior opened his own salon. In the spring of 1947 the success of his first collection, called the "New Look," propelled him to the top of the French fashion industry. His idealized, ultrafeminine silhouette featured tiny waists; long, full skirts; padded busts; and rounded shoulders. Everything was made exquisitely of the best materials available. The New Look changed the shape of women's clothing and lifted the French fashion industry out of the doldrums. For this feat a grateful French government awarded him the Legion of Honor.

Subsequent Designs

His successive collections (including the "H-Line" in 1954 and the "A-Line" in 1955) continued to be popular, and throughout the 1950s the fashion world looked to Paris and Dior for inspiration and style. He expanded his company into eight firms and sixteen associate firms in twenty-four countries, reportedly grossing some $20 million a year. His Dior label went on jewelry, scarves, men's ties, furs, stockings, gloves, and ready-to-wear clothing.

After his death the House of Dior continued under other designers, including his protégé Yves St. Laurent until 1960, then Marc Bohan.