

Evolution of Haute Couture

Evolution of Haute Couture – Study Notes

1. Definition & Core Characteristics

Aspect	Description
Haute Couture	High-fashion, custom-made clothing created by officially recognized fashion houses.
Key Requirements (French law, Chambre Syndicale de la Haute Couture)	- At least 15 full-time staff members in the atelier (design, pattern-making, sewing, finishing). - Present a bi-annual collection (spring-summer & autumn-winter) of minimum 50 looks (35 daywear, 15 eveningwear). - Operate a Paris workshop where garments are hand-sewn. - One-of-a-kind pieces, made to the client's measurements.
Distinctive Traits	- Use of the finest fabrics, exotic materials, and elaborate hand-embroidery. - High price point; often considered works of art rather than mere clothing.

2. Historical Timeline

Period	Milestones	Influential Figures & Houses	Socio-Cultural Impact
Mid-19th c. – Birth (1850-1870)	- Emergence of the <i>fashion designer</i> as a brand. - First public fashion shows (Charles Frederick Worth).	Charles Frederick Worth (London ? Paris) – “father of haute couture.”	Shifted fashion from anonymous dressmakers to celebrated creators; set Paris as the style capital.

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Period	Milestones	Influential Figures & Houses	Socio?Cultural Impact
Belle Époque (1880?1914)	- Formalization of the <i>atelier</i> system. - Introduction of the “<i>dress making house</i>” model (multiple ateliers under one house).	House of Worth, House of Poiret, Maison de Lanvin (Jeanne Lanvin).	Couture became a symbol of aristocratic status; Paris salons became social events.
Interwar Years (1918?1939)	- Rise of <i>artistic collaborations</i> (Surrealism, Art Deco). - Expansion of ready-to-wear (<i>prêt-à-porter</i>) alongside couture.	Coco Chanel, Jean Patou, Paul Poiret (revival of exoticism).	Women’s liberation (shorter silhouettes, jersey fabrics) blended luxury with practicality.
Post-WWII Golden Age (1945?1960)	- Re-establishment of the <i>Paris Fashion Week</i> (1946). - Couture as a vehicle for national prestige (French government support).	Christian Dior – New Look (1947). Cristóbal Balenciaga, Hubert de Givenchy.	The <i>New Look</i> re-asserted femininity, boosted the French textile industry, and attracted global clientele.
1960s?1970s – Democratization & Competition	- Emergence of <i>ready-to-wear</i> houses (Yves Saint Laurent, Pierre Cardin). - Decline in the number of official couture houses.	Yves Saint Laurent, Pierre Cardin, André Courrèges.	Couture became more exclusive; mass-media fashion shows broadened public access to trends.
1980s?1990s – Revival & Globalization	- Revival of opulence (power dressing, extravagant embellishments). - Expansion of <i>fashion weeks</i> worldwide.	Gianni Versace, Karl Lagerfeld (Chanel), John Galliano (Dior).	Haute couture re-positioned as a luxury brand experience