

# A study of Cristobal Balenciaga's works

– Focused on style line and silhouette –

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## **I. Purpose**

This study aims to analyze the works of Cristobal Balenciaga around the silhouette and style line. To this end, the characteristics of designs of Cristal Balenciaga were identified through his works from the end of 1930s to the end of 1960s when he deployed the earnest activities as the designer in Paris.

## **II. Design World of Cristobal Balenciaga**

As one of distinguished couturiers with the craftsmanship and creative mind, Cristobal Balenciaga(1895–1972) was born in Spain. We can't talk about the history of Haute Couture without mentioning him as the maestro of fashion who was active in Paris. He treated fashion as art. " A couturier must be an architect for cut, a builder for form, a painter for color, a musician for harmony, and a philosopher for style". His fashion style pursued the elegant femininity. It is characterized by the oval silhouette that was designed to be ample for the body without being fitted to the body and by the architectural sense that was observed in the forms. He started from the body and sublimated the structures to the art as if he made the sculpture. He has presented the luxurious and elegant dresses and formal suits for 30 years and was recognized as the 'master of configuration' and 'advocate of silhouette. Through his career, he created the proper designs that were professionally cut out.

Moreover, he obtained the chic harmony and dramatic effects by studying the color, cutting and decoration. He was admitted with his asymmetric and exuberant styles. Balenciaga who was faithful to the image of exclusive Haute Couture refused the new look and then the Pret-a-porter.

## **III. Design Analysis of Cristobal Balenciaga's Works**

Since Balenciaga studied the men's clothing, his design has no useless details and shows the strict, decent and classic forms.

With the frequent application of black and black and white contrast, his design was appraised to be dramatic.

The relation between his design and the human body was architectural as evidenced by

the gentle curve that didn't directly touch the body. There were a number of evening dresses without any definite forms.

Balenciaga decided to make the frame on a specific part on the human body. It was the creation of factor that generated the sexual stimulation. He made the daring cutting that exposed the neck and left the space for splendid necklace. Moreover, the 3/4 length of sleeve, one of his design features, made the wrist of women and motion of their hands as the new points.

His works can be classified by year as described below.

#### 1.1930s (Fitting Silhouette)

The representative work in this period is the architectural dress fitting to the body line. Those dresses were balanced with the geniality, simplicity and beauty of moderation. The upper part was fitted to the body line and the waist line was tightened. The skirt formed the slim line by being cut in the bias direction or made in several strips. The bottom edge of skirt created the flaring silhouette.

#### 2. 1940s (Hourglass silhouette)

As experimenting the suit forming the curve toward the hip without the waist line on the very slim skirt and the party dress with the wide skirt, Balenciaga presented the suit flowing under the hip line in the smooth curve without the waist line and belt in the F/W Collection in 1951. With this presentation, he became renowned as the best creator among the couturiers.

#### 3. 1950s (Freedom of Waist: Sack silhouette)

He created the evening dress with the uneven hem line that was cut to sweeping the floor and short front line to expose the legs under the knees and the chemise sack dress that was considered as forming the highest simplicity and new silhouette in a tunic shape that was not completely fitted to the body differently from the new look of Dior. In the late 1950s, he set the trend of flapping clothes and capes without the waist line.

#### 4. 1960s (Oval silhouette)

In this period, Balenciaga created the simple dresses in design such as the sleeveless sheath dress and the sleeves of 3/4 length emphasizing the wrists of women and the motion of their hands. In particular, the evening wear held the voluminous expression like the lampshade or tired wedding cake and emphasized the side silhouette. With the comfort and opulence for the body by the outer design setting the distance from the neckline and structural seam lines on the sleeves and body, he became the epoch-making designer.

### **IV. Silhouette and Style Line Analysis of Cristobal Balenciaga's Works**

#### 1. Pursuance of Elegant Femininity

Balenciaga expressed the elegant femininity by the dome silhouette and bell silhouette emphasizing the waists of women and mixture of mermaid silhouette vitalizing the best

curvaceousness of women's body and the style line surrounding the body in a smooth curve and scalloping.

#### 2. Pursuance of Architectural Sense created like sculpture

The sculptural works that sublimated the design to the art by interpreting the relation between the body and fabric in the architectural aspects expressed the structural sense by adding the vertical and horizontal style line to the Pyramid silhouette, Tiered silhouette and Trapeze silhouette shown in the shapes of architecture.

#### 3. Pursuance of Comfort and Opulence for Body

The style line generating the sense of straightness on the body part and sleeves was added to Oval silhouette, Barrel silhouette and Tent silhouette that were not tightly fitted but had the ample measure to the body. Such a mixture expressed the comfort that could help the body smoothly and comfortably moved.

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