

Christian Dior: history and analysis



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

I chose the topic of Christian Dior and John Galliano because fashion has always interested me. Dior is one of the most well known luxury fashion brands in the world. I was really interested to see what effect the influence of a new designer had on the fashion house. I was interested to see how the designs had changed from the Christian Dior era of 1947-1957 to the present day, this will be addressed in the second and third chapters of this dissertation.

I feel that this is a good topic for a dissertation because I have not been able to find an example of this study before. This means that I will compile information into a new study.

The first chapter will address the history of Christian Dior, where he came from, how he started life as a designer, how he managed to get a backer for his fashion house and how well his house was managed up until his death.

The second chapter will address the 'New Look' and the branding and marketing of that era. It will focus on the reaction of the new look, how it was branded and who it was marketed to. Also this chapter will look at the typical client of Dior at the time of his success.

The third chapter will address the history of John Galliano and his time at Dior, from when he was first appointed head designer to the present day. It will look at his background, his design history and how he has changed the way Dior is perceived.

The fourth chapter will look at how Galliano has changed the branding and marketing of the Dior house. It will focus on how Dior has remained one of

the world's top fashion houses, who Dior is marketed to and how it is branded. All of this will show how Galliano has changed Dior.

I have decided to organise my dissertation into two halves. The first two chapters will discuss the house of Dior when Christian Dior was alive. The third and fourth chapters will analyse the house of Dior with John Galliano as head designer.

My aims and objectives for this dissertation are as follows;

To compare how designs have changed from the 'New Look' to the present day

How Galliano has affected the house of Dior

How the branding and marketing of the fashion house has changed from when Dior was alive to the present day

All of these points will be kept in mind when writing the dissertation, to make sure that the research used is relevant to the topic.

Chapter 1: A History of Dior

Christian Dior was born on 31st January 1905 in the Normandy town Granville. At the age of five, Dior and his family moved to Paris (Design Museum n. d). To please his father he enrolled in the world renowned school, Ecole des Sciences Politiques, in hope that he would go on to have a career in politics. However he wanted to pursue a career in art or design (Design Museum n. d). In 1927, after his obligatory military service Dior decided to

open an art gallery and with the help of his father he succeeded in doing so (Stegemeyer 1980: 22).

In 1935, after a one year stay in the south of France to recover from illness, he returned to Paris and tried to find a job but to no avail (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). He started to create design sketches in his spare time and eventually he managed to find employment with 'Le Figaro' working on fashion illustrations (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). He was able to sell some of his designs to fashion houses. The most popular designs turned out to be his hat designs, although his dream was to sell dress designs (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). He perfected his designs and was able to sell some of them to renowned designer Robert Piguet (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). Piguet was impressed with his work and commissioned Dior to make a number of his dresses for one of his upcoming shows (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). He was later hired as a designer. However, his job was to be put on hold when he was called back to the military when the Second World War began (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). Robert Piguet asked Dior to come back and work for him after the fall of Paris (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). Dior declined the offer and stayed in the south of France until the end of 1941. This turned out to be a bad decision because when he returned to Paris there was already a new designer in his place (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). Once he learnt of this he found employment with the larger fashion house of Lucien Lelong (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). He was still with the Lelong house when Paris was liberated in 1944 (Stegemeyer 1980: 22).

Christian Dior was introduced to a financier called Marcel Boussac in 1945 (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). Boussac was a very powerful man who owned a

number of textile mills, newspapers and racing stables (Design Museum n. d.). Boussac also owned the couture house, Philippe et Gaston, which was failing (Design Museum n. d). He was looking for someone to take control of the fashion house and thought that Dior would be the right person to do this (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). However, Dior had other ideas; he wanted to start his own fashion house and decided that Boussac was the right person to help him achieve this goal (Stegemeyer 1980: 22). Once Boussac had heard of Dior's ambitions he decided to back him and Dior left Lelong in 1946 (Stegemeyer 1980: 22).

It made sense for Dior to work with Boussac, whose nickname was the ' King of Cotton', because the ideas that Dior had been discussing meant that he needed access to a large amount of fabric. The new fashion house was opened with a budget of 60 million Francs (Design Museum n. d). A civil servant called, Jacques Rouët was given the job of administrator of the fashion house (Design Museum n. d).

Christian Dior presented his first collection, ' Corolla', in 1947 (Cawthorne 1996: 109). The collection was a much more successful than anyone had thought. It was a revolutionary collection that will be discussed further on in this dissertation. At the time that the collection was presented there were a number of strikes occurring in the French newspaper and magazine industry (Cawthorne 1996: 109). This lack of opportunity for publicity made it more difficult for Dior to become recognised as a top designer.

Another problem that Dior encountered was that the majority of American buyers and journalists had already returned to the United States after seeing

the designers that they wanted to see (Cawthorne 1996: 109). One American editor remained, Carmel Snow of Harper's Bazaar and went to see Dior's fashion show. She declared that 'Corolla' was revolutionary with a 'New Look'. She is known to have said to Dior "It's quite a revolution, dear Christian. Your dresses have such a new look." (Cawthorne 1996: 109) A worker from Life magazine overheard what Snow had said and published work about the 'New Look'. This name stuck and has been known as this since then.

After the success of Dior's first collection Jacques Rouët started to look into other ways of making money. He found that other fashion houses, such as Chanel, had branched out into other areas of fashion, for example, perfume and hosiery (Design Museum n. d). He realised that in order to become more successful and world renowned, Dior needed to make products that could be sold around the world. He opened a shop on New York's Fifth Avenue, which was a fur subsidiary and a ready to wear boutique (Design Museum). He also launched Dior's first perfume, 'Miss Dior', with the American market in mind (Design Museum n. d).

When Dior saw what Rouët was doing, it brought his commercial aptitude to light (Design Museum n. d). This was evident when an American company wanted to buy the rights to manufacture Dior's stockings. They offered Rouët \$10 000, but Dior did not want this (Design Museum n. d). He said that he would rather have a percentage of the sales of the stockings and in turn he would waive the fee for the rights (Design Museum n. d).

The Dior couture house was probably the best run house in Paris at that time; the only other competitors were Pierre Balmain and Cristobál Balenciaga (Design Museum n. d). The reason that Dior's house was so well run was due to the people that worked for him (Design Museum n. d). There were five very important people who worked for Dior, the person who ran his studio, Raymonde Zehnacker, his chief stylist and hat designer, Mitza Bricard and the person who was in charge of the workrooms, Marguerite Carré (Design Museum n. d). These people along with Jacques Rouët and Suzanne Luling enabled the Dior brand to be run efficiently (Design Museum n. d). This shows that the people behind the scenes are just as important as the designer (Design Museum n. d). Without them the Dior brand would have struggled to get the acclaim that it has today.

Twice a year Dior would put on a haute-couture show, one in January and one in August, and every time he showed his new collection over 2, 500 people would turn up to see what the new designs looked like (Design Museum n. d). His biggest clients were from North America, where a select number of shops bought the rights to certain designs for the clothes, which were then made by their own seamstresses (Design Museum n. d). There was a large amount of clothing stores that wanted to be able to sell Dior's clothes but as they were 'discount' stores they would not be able to sell them to their clientele as the price was so high (Design Museum n. d). So Dior said to them that if they attended his fashion shows and bought a range of his clothes and outfits they could copy them and sell them at cheaper prices (Design Museum n. d). This was the start of the 'knock-off' range of his designs (Design Museum n. d).

The reason that he was so popular in North America was due to Harper's Bazaar editor, Carmel Snow. If she had not attended his first fashion show and written about him then it would have taken him a lot longer to reach the American and Canadian market (Cawthorne 1996: 109).

The house of Dior was very important to France and particularly Paris at that time; in some respects it put France to the foreground of fashion once again.

Chapter 2: The 'New Look'; Branding and Marketing

On the 12th of February 1947 Dior presented his first collection from his fashion house to French society. It was called 'Corolla', after a coil of leaves and petals on a flower. It has always been Dior's aim to make women feminine and more flower like, and his first collection epitomised this (Cawthorne 1996: 109).

At the time, just three years after Paris was liberated, women were still wearing unflattering, practical and sometimes even masculine clothing. This was to save money and fabric during this hard time when most of Europe was still using rationing.

At the time of production the 'New Look' was a completely radical clothing range. It was made to make women look and feel more feminine and curvy. Christian Dior wanted women to look like women and give them back their natural shape (Cawthorne 1996: 111).

The 'New Look' was an exaggeration on the number eight, with accentuated hips, small, narrow waist and an underlined bust. A typical skirt in this line required on average 25 yards of fabric and around 200 hours of labour to

complete (Cawthorne 1996: 111). At a time when France was nearly bankrupt it was seen as outrageous that Dior would use such large amounts of material. The Americans in particular thought that it was unpatriotic to use large amounts of material for dresses when it could be used for other things (Cawthorne 1996: 110). There were, however, people who liked the fact that Dior was being extravagant as it showed the French people that the war was really over and that people could start living again (Cawthorne 1996: 110). His clothes were everything that women wanted. Men thought that women should start dressing more feminine, they were fed up with seeing them wearing men's clothing or military uniforms. They thought that Dior's designs were ideal for making women look like women (Cawthorne 1996).

Appendix one is evidence of the exaggerated number eight. This is a picture of the 'Bar Suit' from the 'Corolla' range.

The fact that Dior's range of clothes were so feminine made them stand out from the rest of the clothes that were on offer at the time, the added curves made women feel special and more womanly. Along with this feeling the Dior house took the opportunity to express the feeling of happiness and freedom after the war; people were able to start living again. This became a crucial part of the Christian Dior brand.

The way that Dior designed his clothes took a lot of hidden expertise (Cawthorne 1996: 111). To get the very womanly, curvy figure that he wanted to give women there were hidden pieces of material within the dresses (Cawthorne 1996: 111). Some people criticised Dior. They claimed that he was giving a false interpretation of women, that without the added

padding in the dresses they would not look like they should; women did not generally have the figure that these dresses created (Cawthorne 1996: 111). To create the look, Dior designed the dresses to have a corset made from whale bones. The reason for the boning in the corset was that it needed to be moulded to the customers shape (Cawthorne 1996: 111). It was also necessary to wear padding for the hips and a padded bra when wearing these clothes (Cawthorne 1996: 111). It would take two or three fittings for the outfit to be completed but when it was done, it would fit like a glove (Cawthorne 1996: 111)

It could have turned out to be a big problem in that women might not want to buy clothes where you have to wear a lot of extra padding, but as it turned out the need for feminine clothing was so great that people bought them, no matter what they had to endure to achieve this (Cawthorne 1996: 111).

At this time you could not buy a ready to wear Dior piece, you had to have it made for you, similar to Haute Couture today.

There were a lot of protests about the New Look; one of the biggest protests in France was in Paris where the protesters were shouting '40 000 francs for a dress and our children have no milk' (Cawthorne 1996: 115). This attitude was adopted in other parts of the world. In Britain, designers were asked to ignore the style; this was due to the amount of clothes that could be made from the extra fabric that would have been used (Cawthorne 1996: 115). If British designers had adopted the New Look then there would have been close to a million items of clothing not made (Cawthorne 1996: 115). The

government nearly created a new law on the length of skirts to make sure that they would not be long, like the style of Dior where some of the skirts would reach the ankles (Cawthorne 1996: 115).

The reaction was so strong that when Dior went to America people shouted at him, ‘down with the New Look’ and ‘burn Christian Dior’ (Cawthorne 1996: 117). He was not surprised and stuck to his feelings that women should be able to dress femininely if they wanted. He even said that he loved to see his dresses being copied so that women who did not have a lot of money could have a dress that had been designed by Dior (Cawthorne 1996: 117).

Despite all the protests and complaints the New Look was an incredible success. It accounted for 75 percent of fashion exports from France in 1947, which was a big achievement considering the conditions of the world at the time (Cawthorne 1996).

As soon as the ‘New Look’ was presented to society it was automatically branded as luxury. The main reasons for this were the price, clientele and the amount of work that went into producing the clothes. As time went on the Christian Dior house decided to branch out into other brands. There was the Christian Dior Femme line, a hosiery line, a fur subsidiary and a perfume line (Design Museum n. d). Dior’s range of products were out of the price range of the working class public. You had to be either rich or a member of aristocracy to be able to afford products from any Dior range.

The only affordable products would have been a bottle of perfume or a pair of stockings or tights. However these would have been difficult to afford

during the times of rationing. During the forties and fifties not many shops outside Paris stocked Dior's products which made it difficult for people to easily buy Dior's merchandise. If you lived outside of Paris travel would have been long and arduous so you would have had to go with the mentality that you were going to buy something, not just to browse.

When the advertising for this brand began it was quite difficult for Dior to rely on the articles in newspapers and magazines, due to the strikes (Cawthorne 1996: 109). He also had to wait for the word of mouth in America; the editor of Harper's Bazaar could only do so much.

At the time of the 'New Look' the perception of women was that they did not work and that their job was to stay at home, raise the children and make sure that the house was run properly. However the women in the aristocracy did not have to worry about these things, they did not have to clean their houses or cook, as they would normally have had a maid and a cook to do these things for them. This is why Dior and his team aimed and marketed the clothes from the 'New Look' at these women. They could wear them without having to worry about the practicalities of them, they would not have to worry about getting them marked when they were cleaning or cooking.

In 1947 the protests in Paris and other countries were reported on the news, bringing the name of Dior and his designs to the attention of people whom it would have taken a lot longer to reach through advertising alone. In some ways the people who were protesting may have been better if they had not protested because then the rest of the world would probably not have heard as much about the designs or about Dior himself.

Letting people produce his designs at cheaper prices or making ‘ knock-offs’ showed that this was Dior’s way of reaching the rest of the public (Design Museum n. d). He liked and sometimes encouraged people to make cheaper versions of his clothes; this was a way of making him happy, just like he wanted the people that were wearing them to be happy about their choice and their shape (Design Museum n. d).

The haute couture side of Dior was important for the label. It brought in a lot of revenue as the dresses and other clothes that were made in that line were very expensive and took a lot of time to create. Once again you would not be able to buy these clothes if you did not have a lot of money as they were expensive, even by higher society’s standards.

It was important for Dior to be able to prove that the times were changing and that clothes needed to change with them. He accomplished this with his range of clothes from the ‘ New Look’. The branding and marketing were quite simplistic in those days. However they always managed to put across the point that they wanted to prove.

Chapter 3: John Galliano and His Influence on Christian Dior

John Galliano was born in Gibraltar in 1960. His real name is Juan Carlos Antonio Galliano Guillen and he moved to London when he was six (Design Museum n. d). After leaving school he attended the prestigious art school in London, Central Saint Martins (Design Museum n. d).

His first collection was inspired by a play, for which he was a dresser and when Joan Burstein, the owner of fashion boutique Browns saw this she stocked his collection, which quickly sold out (Design Museum n. d).

Even though he had attracted publicity and hype, when he tried to start his own business two backers pulled out (Design Museum n. d). Due to this in the 1990's he moved to Paris, where he met American Vogue Editor-in-Chief, Anna Wintour, who used her influence to introduce him to a sound financial backer, and she also found him a venue for his first show (Design Museum n. d). He managed to assemble 17 outfits, all of which were in black because bolts of black fabric were all that he could afford, and he secured the services of top international models, such as, Kate Moss and Naomi Campbell, who modelled his designs as a favour to him rather than being paid (Design Museum n. d). His show was a success and it proved to the fashion world that he was a great and very influential designer.

Galliano was grateful to Anna Wintour for the opportunities that she created and she was influential in launching his designs in America.

After the success of his latest fashion show, Chairman of the conglomerate LVMH (Moët Hennessy -Louis Vuitton) Bernard Arnault, had noticed the brilliance of Galliano and in 1995 very daringly decided to appoint Galliano as head designer for Givenchy (Design Museum n. d). However a year later Alexander McQueen took his place. This gave Galliano the opportunity to move onto the bigger fashion house of Dior. Dior was an internationally renowned company (Design Museum n. d).

In 1996 when John Galliano was appointed the head designer of the Christian Dior fashion house the designs took on a new direction.

Galliano is quoted as saying “ I wanted to turn couture on its head” (Galliano n. d). This is evident throughout his collections.

Appendix two is an example of this. The dress in this picture is the dress that he was talking about when he said that he wanted to change couture (Dior n. d.).

When Galliano first started working for Dior after Giancarlo Ferre the previous designer, left, it was almost as if the fashion house was starting to stagnate. It was mainly concentrating on the women’s clothing range and there was not much emphasis put on the advertising of perfumes and other products. It needed to be brought into modern times.

Arnault had made the right decision in hiring Galliano for this role because he was a younger designer. He was fifteen years younger than Ferre and six years younger than Dior when he presented his first collection. This brought lots of positive aspects to Dior. Having a younger designer enabled him to know what the target group desired. However he had to be careful not to alienate the traditional clientele. Instead of having the designs that they were used to they would have found that he was a designer who had very different ideas from that of his predecessor. This gave the brand of Dior the wakeup call that it needed so that once again Dior became a leading fashion house.

Galliano is famous for his radical and sometimes “over the top creations” and designs, and this was what was needed at the time. When he arrived at the fashion house he breathed new life and inspiration into the company. It appears that he takes inspiration from a lot of his surroundings and especially from the surrealist works of the artists Salvador Dali and Jean Cocteau (Frankel 2001: 172). This is an important fact. Instead of being very conservative he has brought an aspect of surrealism to the designs.

The clothing no longer has the curvy aspects to the designs, although in later designs there are a few influences from the ‘New Look’ with very small waists and long skirts. There are a lot of colours that are used in the new designs. They are a lot more vivid than before and they stand out from the rest of the designers in the fashion industry. Galliano’s first dress he designed for Dior is a perfect example of this. It is a bright pink dress cut on the bias and therefore very close to the body. This just shows how different Galliano is in comparison with Dior’s early work (Dior n. d). The amount of detailing that goes into a Galliano couture piece is very intricate; Dior employees are very skilled and talented. They hand stitch, hand bead or embroider a large number of the dresses (Dior n. d). Some might say that he has created a new ‘New Look’ (Dior n. d). It shows how much more energy there is in the fashion house now.

The fashion shows are a very important part of any designer’s collections. Galliano’s always appear to have a theme running through them and are normally quite theatrical. For example in his Autumn/Winter haute couture collection for 2010 there is a definite equestrian theme and the fashion show is made more dramatic by the music that is being played, at the beginning

there are sounds of horses' hooves (Dior n. d). This is typical of the Galliano influence on the shows (Dior n. d). Once again it emphasises how much Galliano has brought to Dior. The fashion house of Dior had never had shows like it before.

There are many positive views to this; free publicity is the main benefit. When people start talking about the shows it intrigues others to find out more about the new Dior collection. However Galliano has been careful to find a fine balance between the theatrics, drawing the attention away from what the show is all about – the new designs. It has come to be expected of a Galliano for Dior fashion show, the eccentric shows match the eccentric designs and designer.

In Galliano's Spring/Summer collection in 1999 the main theme running through the clothes and fashion shows was surrealism (Frankel 2001: 172). He is quoted as saying "as Dali and Cocteau understood it, with wit but always romantic" (Frankel 2001: 172). The clothes definitely have a romantic style to them, but there is also an element of fun in the clothes and in the way photos from the collection have been taken. Although this one collection has been centred around surrealism there always seems to be an aspect of it in all the work he has created.

The ready-to-wear clothing line has been emphasised a lot since Galliano has been head designer. It is an important change for Dior, most customers are unwilling to wait to buy their clothes anymore and will not spend the time to have the clothes fitted and made for them. They want to buy the clothes and take them home with them. Galliano has picked up on this and made the

collection a very big part of the house of Dior. These clothes may not be as exclusive as the clothes in the haute couture lines but the Galliano influence is very easy for people to see.

Since he started at Dior he has been creating designs that have, on occasion, shocked the fashion industry. When there is a new collection at his flagship store in Paris the queues of people waiting to view it normally stretch down the Avenue Montaigne (Design Museum n. d.). He has an ambition to go down in history as one of the best designers in the world, and it seems he will succeed in his mission.

Chapter 4: Branding and Marketing in the Present Day

Even after Galliano joined Christian Dior, it was still perceived as a luxury brand. The products however are much more diverse than before. Although Dior's products are still classed as luxury there are now more items that can be afforded by a wider range of people. These lines include; sunglasses, watches, perfume and purses. The Dior products are likely to be more expensive than the equivalent high street items. However, the fact that they have Dior's brand on them appeals to more people. When you buy a product with a brand name on the general thought is that you are purchasing products perceived to be of a much higher quality than the general high street ranges. The fact that they are not normally found in all high street chains and are produced to a higher quality makes people think that the product they are buying is worth spending the extra money on.

When Galliano was appointed head designer it was evident to him that the whole brand needed to be brought up to date. Until then the Christian Dior

fashion house had always been known as Christian Dior. When it was rebranded it became known as just Dior (Okonkwo 2007: 109). This was done to make the brand as a whole more modern and to keep up with the new direction that Galliano was taking the brand. However the company name remains unchanged, it is still known as Christian Dior Couture (Okonkwo 2007: 109).

With a new brand name the range of products needed to be modernised. The house of Dior did not want to be associated with old fashioned designs and products. There was a need for the Dior brand to reach a larger number of the public.

For example the Dior perfumes are available in most beauty stores and are around the same price as other luxury branded fragrances. The beauty range is a very popular segment in the new brand but it can still be sold at a premium price against other makeup ranges. However if people believe in the quality of the product they will be prepared to pay higher prices. It is very important for a luxury brand such as Dior, to be able to produce a range of products that do not ignore other market segments. Producing the beauty line along with watches and eyewear enable them to reach a wider spectrum of customers.

The beauty products are an extremely important line because they enable everyone to have the chance to buy a designer product and therefore Dior is capturing a larger share of the market. This is reflected in the fact that LVMH's perfume and beauty products sell to a larger share of the market because this year in their first quarter they have increased their sales by

12%. “ In perfume, where LVMH sells Christian Dior and Guerlain fragrances, sales were up 12%” (The Guardian 2010)

LVMH have put a lot of time and resources into re-launching the Dior fragrance range which has led to an improvement in sales. This proves how much Dior relies on the sales of their mass market products, as shown in figure 1.

“ In Perfumes & Cosmetics, organic revenue growth stood at 12% in the first quarter of 2010. Christian Dior benefited from the strong dynamic of its perfumes with, in particular, the growth of Fahrenheit and of Miss Dior Chérie. A new skincare product, Capture Totale One Essential, had an immense success, while the new mascara, DiorShow Extase is having a very promising start. Guerlain successfully rolled out its new Idylle perfume and Givenchy saw strong growth thanks to the progress of its Play line. Benefit and Make Up For Ever continued their international development.

Taking into account the uncertainty of the strength of the economic recovery, LVMH will continue to concentrate all of its efforts on the development of its formidable brands while maintaining strict cost management and selective investments. The Group will rely on the strength of its brands, the responsiveness of its organization, the diversification of its businesses and the good geographical balance of its revenue to increase, once again in 2010, its leadership of the global luxury industry.”

These two tables are evidence of the increased growth of the perfume and cosmetics of Dior. It has contributed to a 12% increase in sales, even throughout the economic crisis.

In the present day most luxury brands have five common lines of their products (Okonkwo 2007: 130). They are fashion, perfume and cosmetics, watches and jewellery, eyewear and other. The fashion line includes haute couture, ready-to-wear and leather goods. The first four lines are very standard for all luxury brands, Dior included (Okonkwo 2007: 130). The ‘other’ section is the only section to have been added in the past few years. The products under this section include stationery, gift items, products to decorate your house and hair accessories (Okonkwo 2007: 130). Not all luxury brands have the ‘other’ section under their brand name. Dior does not produce all of these products in their ‘other’ section.

The one main change that the majority of luxury brands have gone through is the introduction of online retailing (Okonkwo 2007: 211). This was not necessarily Galliano who decided to do this, it was more due to the changing times, but it was necessary to show that Dior is an easily accessible brand and that people from all over the world could buy a product from the Dior.com website.

According to Uche Okonk