

APPAREL AND ACCESSORIES

Dior plays up British connections in large-scale exhibition

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Dior's new United Kingdom exhibit includes more than 200 haute couture pieces. Image credit: Dior

By SARAH RAMIREZ

French fashion brand Dior is exploring its relationship with British culture by sponsoring an exhibition at London's Victoria and Albert Museum in what is the label's largest retrospective in the United Kingdom.

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Situated in the museum's Sainsbury Gallery, the exhibit will highlight collaborations between Dior and British manufacturers as well as designs created for notable Britons, including Princess Margaret. "Christian Dior: Designer of Dreams" will be on display from Feb. 2 to July 14 and is the museum's biggest fashion exhibit since 2015's "Alexander McQueen: Savage Beauty" ([see story](#)).

"More than exploring the designer and his design process, this exhibit is important because it provides a textbook example of how singular fashion brands evolved during the 20th century," said Thoma Serdari, brand strategist and professor of luxury marketing at New York University and coeditor of "[Luxury: History Culture Consumption](#)," New York.

"The growth of the Dior brand happened concurrently with the expansion of the fashion industry in the mass market," Ms. Serdari said. "It is at that level that the dreamy character of Dior couture captured the popular imagination equating it with fashion that the fairest of ladies should wear."

Ms. Serdari is not affiliated with Dior, but agreed to comment as an industry expert. [Dior](#) was reached for comment.

From the archives

Christian Dior opened its first London boutique in 1952, but the exhibition includes items from the label's inception in 1947.

The exhibit displays more than 500 artifacts from the Dior Archives, including more than 200 haute couture gowns, fashion photography, vintage perfume and even personal possessions from the brand's eponymous designer.

Ren Gruau fashion illustration



Fashion illustrations by Ren Gruau are included in the exhibition. Image credit: Victoria and Albert Museum

Playing up the designer's appreciation of British culture, the Museum of London has loaned the Christian Dior dress Princess Margaret wore for her 21st birthday in 1951. A portrait of Princess Margaret posing in the embroidered gown is also on display during the exhibition.

A special section is devoted to Dior's fascination with England and the country homes and luxurious hotels that inspired Mr. Dior.

Dior often staged fashion shows in stately British homes, including Blenheim Palace in 1954. Some of those ensembles are included in the collection at the Victoria and Albert.

Precision-cut crystal maker Swarovski is another supporter of the exhibition, and its materials are featured in numerous pieces. The relationship between Swarovski and Dior spans decades and is highlighted through a crystal embellished golden gown created for actress Charlize Theron.



Christian Dior Bar suit. Image credit: Victoria and Albert Museum

The museum also features works by the designers who have been at the helm since Mr. Dior's passing. Among the British collaborators also included in the display are Dents, Rayne, Lyle & Scott and Mitchel Maer.

For an educational aspect, the Victoria and Albert is hosting tours and special events to coincide with the exhibition. These opportunities include fashion illustration classes, photography courses and lectures.

Dior displays

The Dior exhibition was revamped for the Victoria and Albert Museum, but was inspired by a prior event at Les Arts Decoratifs in Paris, which celebrated the anniversary of the atelier's founding.

"Christian Dior, Couturier du Rve" was a retrospective of its founder and its couturiers, displaying more than 300 dresses and accompanying photographs.

Works of art were also incorporated into the exhibit from the Louvre Museum, the Orsay Museum and the Orangerie Museum, the Palace of Versailles, the Center Pompidou, the Museum of Decorative Arts and numerous private collections ([see story](#)).

Previously, Dior worked with the Muse International de la Parfumerie in Grasse, France to trace the legacy of its founder through scent.

The exhibit "Christian Dior Esprit de Parfums" was a multisensory look at some of Mr. Dior's most iconic fragrance creations as well as highlights of his life. Produced with support of Christian Dior Perfumes, the exhibit also featured the inseparable link between Dior's fashion and fragrance creations, starting with the simultaneous launch of the New Look and Miss Dior ([see story](#)).

Designer of Dreams opts for a broader look at the label with a British angle.

"The exhibit provides several access points for the audience to enjoy and reflect on the role of fashion and how it has shaped modernity and our lives," Ms. Sedari said.

"One can look at the details, on the micro level, and appreciate the craftsmanship or vision of the creator or, alternatively, one steps into the world of branding that reinforces the founder's dream through codification and signs that keep the brand alive and relevant," she said. "Finally, on the macro level, one can gain a comprehensive view and understand how globalization presents new opportunities and challenges to creative houses that need to expand while also preserving the dream."

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