

THE NEW BALENCIAGA MUSEUM

Cristóbal Balenciaga Museoa, Aldamar Parkea 6, 20808 Getaria-Gipuzkoa, Spain

[www.cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com](http://www.cristobalbalenciagamuseoa.com)

### **Cristóbal Balenciaga returns to Getaria**

A journey lined with many problems and issues, one of which is still being argued in court, culminated finally in the inauguration of the Balenciaga Museum of Getaria by the Queen of Spain on 7 June this year. The gala opening was thanks to the tenacity, vision and steadfastness of the Spanish Ministry of Culture, the Basque Government, the Diputación of Guipúzcoa, the Getaria Town Hall and many generous donors. The project would never have been possible without the generosity of Hubert de Givenchy, Sonsoles Díaz de Rivera and all those who kindly donated Balenciaga dresses. With 1200 pieces in all, the display at Getaria represents the most significant Balenciaga collection in the world and addresses the question as to why something as ephemeral as fashion can endure over time.

Cristóbal Balenciaga achieved pure forms after long and arduous work and never ceased in his constant search for perfection. Exhibitions such as this can help us to understand that beyond a mere suit there can also be art, dedication, genius and depth. In the same way that the great painters in history offer us a visual narrative of the reality of their time and their moods, haute couture - and in particular Balenciaga - created dresses which represent and reflect an era that once was and is no more. In the post-war years up to the 1960s there was a clear and unique concept of feminine elegance, a time when fashion was intended to flatter women, concealing and disguising when necessary, never exposing them.

The Balenciaga Museum collection is comprehensive, and covers six different areas designed to illustrate all phases of Balenciaga's art. *Beginnings* opens the collection and displays his early designs as a young couturier in San Sebastian. Here, the visitor can clearly see his search for perfection that hallmarked his entire career until retirement. The rest of Balenciaga's creations are tastefully displayed across *Day*, *Evening*, *Night*, *Bride* and *Essence* where the visitor can relish the creativity of a great couturier making dresses for different occasions. In the section called *Day*, we can see how he invented seams and cuts or, surprisingly, avoided them to create elegant, simple dresses. Cocktail and evening hours provided him with an opportunity to showcase rich and voluminous fabrics. Balenciaga's wedding gowns synthesized two concepts: the simplicity of using a white textile to create volume and the artistry of pattern-making. The last room, *Essence*, is the space where iconic Balenciaga designs are showcased and these form a collection to study for their particular construction and handcrafting. The tour takes the visitor on a journey of discovery, learning and enjoyment of the creativity and innovation that is the Balenciaga art form. As the designer who reached the upper echelons of high fashion in the early 1950s and 1960s he still today remains a source of inspiration for designers across the world.

To commemorate the opening, the museum has published an elegant and artistically designed catalogue with high-quality images of each piece, taken by Manuel Outumuro (b. 1949) coupled with words on the life and work of Balenciaga in Spain and Paris. The compilation allows the reader to discover the finer details and origins of each Balenciaga piece on display.

The Balenciaga Museum of Getaria is a 'must see' for all who have even a passing interest in fashion and for those who do not. It clearly tells us a story about effort, perseverance and the tenacity of one man. Balenciaga consistently worked to

improve his handcrafting and in doing so reached the very top of his profession. He was born in Getaria in 1895 and died in 1972, and although Hubert de Givenchy, his pupil and friend, said 'he would think it is too much', the museum has brought Balenciaga home to Getaria forever.

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