

Christian Dior



THE FAIRYTALE WORLD OF CHRISTIAN DIOR

Words: Josie Goodbody

The French fashion titan that is Dior, is turning the great British institution that is Harrods, into a spectacular *mise-en-scène* of its world. *The Fabulous World of Dior* is a magnificent celebration of the 70-year bond between the two establishments.

In 1926, aged 21, Christian Dior spent a year in Britain to learn English, he promptly became an ardent Anglophile and subsequently embellished his new love affair with the English into his couture.

In 1950, not long after the establishment of his eponymous fashion house, Monsieur Dior held a secret presentation of his Spring/Summer Collection at the French Embassy in Knightsbridge; several distinguished guests attended, including Princesses Elizabeth and Margaret. Only three years later, the Christian Dior corner opened in Harrods and Monsieur Dior chose the prestigious store to present his 1954 Spring collection. Up until his death in 1957, Monsieur Dior named many of his designs after well-known British icons: for example, the Dior ‘Dickens’ coats in 1949. Even long after his death his Anglomania penetrated the hallowed haute couture brand when, in 1996, John Galliano became Creative Director of women’s fashion and milliner Stephen Jones, head of Dior hat creations and later, another British designer, Kim Jones, became head of Dior Homme.

In 2019, only a stone’s throw from Harrods, the *Victoria & Albert Museum* held a ravishing retrospective of the *maison* which included 200 items from the archives.

Dior and Britain is a love affair that I can perfectly understand. As part of my French degree, I spent a year in Paris and three months of that working in the Dior press office at 30 Avenue Montaigne. During those months I discovered a dreamy and whimsical paradise like nothing I had ever experienced before. The press office ‘wardrobe’ was a world in itself, samples of the latest prêt à porter collections waiting to be sent around the world for magazine photoshoots, displaying Galliano’s fantasy fashion: asymmetrical dresses and skirts emblazoned with over-the-top prints; provocative denim; lace-up logo boots; saddle bags and saddle skirts; furs, leathers and silks. I discovered the Lady Dior – a handbag beloved by the late Diana, Princess of Wales. I tried on Victoire de Castellane’s early collections of Dior Joaillerie, learning that jewels weren’t just two strands of pearls and a sapphire engagement ring (some my mother’s) – they could be as wonderful as anything seen on the catwalk – oh yes, and I attended my first, haute couture show.

When I finally left to go home to the English countryside, my brilliant boss gave me a bottle of J’Adore (which perfectly summed up my Parisian sabbatical!) and as I so ‘adored’ the golden choker and bracelet worn by Carmen Kass in the first few campaigns, I was gifted those too. It was the summer of the new millennium, and I had fallen in love.

This is not the first time Dior has had a prominent position in Harrods. In 2013, there was a pop-up store, a tearoom, and an exhibition about the historic brand. Pietro Beccari, CEO of Christian Dior commented on the store’s legendary end-of-year events, “We have never led a collaboration of this scale with a department store”.

Arriving in Knightsbridge, Harrods’ famous façade is impossible to miss, emblazoned with a monumental installation of the compass rose – in homage to Monsieur Dior himself, who so treasured the symbol. Other Dior emblems include the Dior gold star, the Bar jacket and the Medallion.

Each of Harrods’ 44 famous windows is dressed for a journey through the world of Dior, from fashion to fragrance, to fine jewellery as though made from gingerbreads, candied fruit and caramels. 30 Avenue Montaigne, opened in 1946 by Monsieur Dior as the home of the House of Dior and recently redesigned by legendary designer Peter Marino, is there for all to see – resplendently recreated in gingerbread. A Baby Dior window has a giant polar bear teddy pushing a wagon, another has miniature models of the famous New Look dresses in re-imagined dressing rooms. More models of dresses are seen in a spectacular display which includes handbags and shoes. There is also a gingerbread house with each window presenting an iconic bottle of fragrance.

Inside there is an outstanding exhibition tracing the history of the brand; an installation showing how the famous Lady Dior handbag is crafted; the Dior Spectacular Beauty Pop-up on the ground floor includes the Dior Advent Calendar; from December 15th on the second floor there will be a personalisation pop-up with the embroidery and engraving of gifts. There are also exclusive collections created for the event – a new design of the Dior Book Tote, Lady Dior Bag, and garments. And once you have exhausted yourself, the Dior Café will refresh and replenish you. ☺

The Fabulous World of Dior at Harrods
10th November 2022 - 3rd January 2023

