

Balenciaga and Spain

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Cristóbal Balenciaga made significant and lasting cultural and artistic contributions to fashion during his career as a couture fashion designer. He was known for his sculptural and architectural manipulation and control of fabric and using unique pattern shapes for fitting garments. Primary research is important to gain insight into the principal characteristics used by a designer. It is important to demonstrate Balenciaga's crucial contribution to the history of fashion and design.

My goal was to design an original garment influenced by the work of Cristóbal Balenciaga and by an element of Spanish culture, a design influence he used often himself. Primary source research included examining design and construction techniques of Balenciaga garments in the collections of the Philadelphia Art Museum and the FIT Museum. Further, I visited the Balenciaga Museum in Getaria, Spain to view Balenciaga's work and speak with the Curator, and reviewed books about Balenciaga and his techniques. Historic research exploring couture techniques provided the basis for the construction techniques used in this ensemble.

A peacock-tail style, sleeveless tunic and Spanish matador-influenced knee length pants complete the ensemble. Draping was used as the design technique. Black silk gazaar was underlined with silk taffeta to achieve a tunic silhouette that stands away from the body. High hip length in front, cascading to floor length train in back, the tunic is bias at the center back and has insets in the hem to achieve the length and shape envisioned. Hand embroidery with silk ribbon complements the tunic neckline and train, and pant sideseams. The fitted pants have a waist facing, slot seamed sideseams with fushia silk



gazaar showing through, fushia covered buttons and button placket at the knee. Both garments are lined with rayon.

Couture techniques utilized in this design include Balenciaga's technique of extending the outer shoulder seam, then folding this under, forming a pleat for a more attractive armhole, bias neckline facings, bias silk organza as interfacing along all outer edges, and underlining the entire tunic. A waist stay balances the tunic to prevent the weight of the train causing the front to rise.



This design was conceived during research in preparation for teaching a Couture Techniques course at Paris American Academy in Paris France. An opportunity I received after winning the professional design award for the Paris American Academy sponsored "Balenciaga in Hawaii" Design Award in 2012.