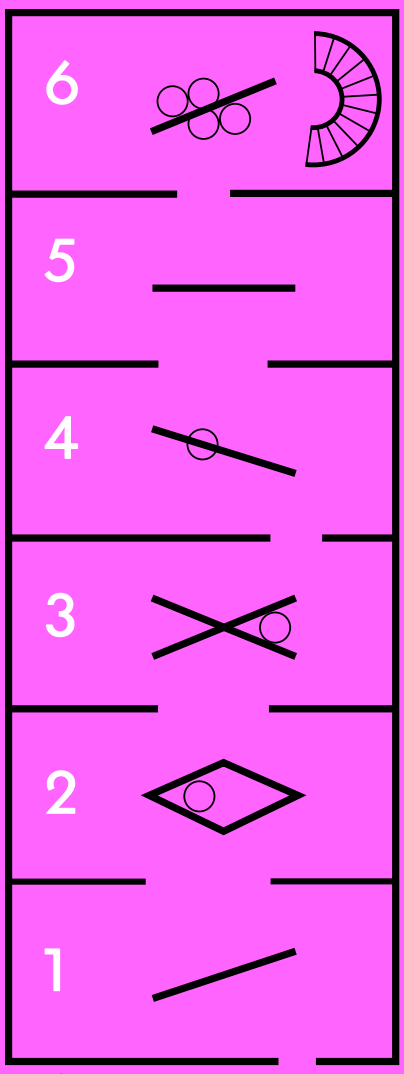
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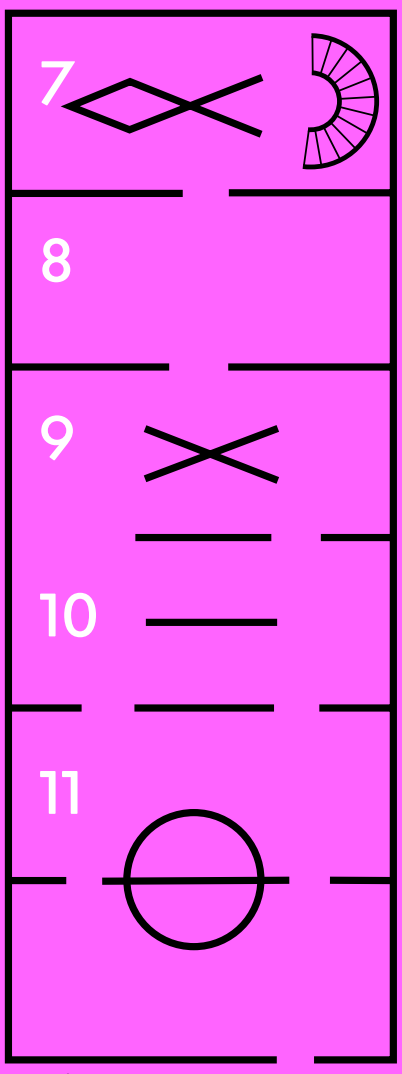
FASHION IS A FEAST

25 JUNE 2025 — 11 JANUARY 2026

MAD
MUSÉE DES ARTS DÉCORATIFS



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For the comfort and accessibility of all, folding seats, wheelchairs, magnetic induction loops, baby carriers, and changing tables are available on level –1 near the cloakrooms.

Recycle me!
If you leave your brochure at the end of the exhibition, it can be recycled or reused.

Welcome to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs and the exhibition ‘Paul Poiret: Fashion is a Feast’.

Enjoy your visit!

According to Christian Dior, “With the coming of Paul Poiret the fashion changed completely.”

Paul Poiret is a novel character, placed by history in a paradoxical situation. Little known to the general public, he was one of the greatest innovators of the early twentieth century and was once crowned ‘King of Fashion’ by the Americans.

As early as 1906, he initiated a societal shift in France by developing a new silhouette free from the constraints of the corset. His dresses played on the fluidity of forms, often adorned with bright colors with oriental inspirations.

Poiret situated fashion within a broader aesthetic approach. “I am an artist, not a couturier,” he declared. He collected the work of modern artists such as Dufy, Derain, and Van Dongen, and also liked to paint. He was the first couturier to create perfumes; he founded a decorative arts school for young girls, and had their best designs produced; he commissioned illustrators to celebrate his dresses; he performed in the theater and even published a cookbook. From couture to gastronomy, he orchestrated an entire art of living with insatiable imagination. At his legendary parties, all the arts were in service of his extravagance: his *Thousand and Second Night* transported the high society of Paris to a fantasized Orient, while the Festes de Bacchus provided a stage for the modern dance of Isadora Duncan.

A whimsical aesthete, Poiret also had flashes of commercial brilliance: he took his models on tour to catwalks as far away as Russia and the United States, where he achieved great success. But his fashion house, founded in 1903, could not survive his expensive fantasies or the crisis of 1929, and in 1932 was forced to close.

Invited by the museum as artistic director, the graphic designer Anette Lenz boldly elevates the creations of Poiret, providing a source of wonder for visitors and inspiration for designers.

The Formative Years

Born in Paris in 1879 to a draper, Paul Poiret witnessed the inauguration of the 1889 World's Fair with amazement. "What a wonderful time!" he exclaimed at the spectacle of the illuminated fountains and Thomas Edison's electrical inventions. From an early age, he displayed a taste for art and theater. His sisters gave him a small wooden mannequin on which he imagined 'fantastical dresses.' Poiret sold fashion designs to the couturier Madame Chéruit, who encouraged his vocation, as well as to Jacques Doucet, who hired him in 1898. A knowledgeable collector and favorite designer of actresses and dancers, Doucet gave him the keys to Parisian life. In 1901, Poiret was recruited by Gaston Worth to design a new, more youthful and simpler collection alongside the sumptuous creations of this venerable house.

The Couturier's Beginnings

In 1903, Poiret founded his couture house in the Opéra district, with money to finance his debut lent by his widowed mother. He was hailed by the press as a true innovator. In 1905, he married Denise Boulet, who became his muse. The 1907 couture collection is a true manifesto of his aesthetic, marked by the pure, straight lines of narrow dresses, the abandonment of the corset, and the adoption of the bra. To promote his signature designs, combining bold pairings of materials and colors, Poiret entrusted Iribe with the task of making them the basis of an original publication. This was the origin of *Les Robes de Paul Poiret racontées par Paul Iribe*, released in 1908. The following year, he opened his new salons on Avenue d'Antin, in an eighteenth-century mansion, whose French-style garden served as an enchanting setting for a fashion runway. This location near the Champs-Élysées, with decor redesigned by Louis Süe, was where he hosted his clients and the high society of Paris.

Artistic Collaborations

An enlightened art lover, Paul Poiret witnessed the emergence of Fauvism. This pictorial movement, which included Raoul Dufy, Maurice de Vlaminck, and André Derain, emphasized the use of pure color. After discovering the woodcuts illustrating Guillaume Apollinaire's *Le Bestiaire ou Cortège d'Orphée*, the couturier asked Dufy to design decorative motifs for his fabrics. Familiar with Vlaminck's research in ceramics, he commissioned buttons from the artist, demonstrating a remarkable foresight in spotting young talent. In 1911, Lepape illustrated his recent creations in an album of stencil plates, *Les Choses de Paul Poiret vues par Georges Lepape*. At the fashion house Erté, José de Zamora and Victor Lhuer assisted Poiret by sketching silhouettes. Avant-garde photographer Germaine Krull, who settled in Paris in 1926, also worked for the great couturier.

Dressing Dancers and Actresses on the streets and on stage

In 1909, Sergei Diaghilev's Ballets Russes conquered Paris. Their aesthetic revolutionized the art world; the dancers Vaslav Nijinsky and Tamara Karsavina were revelations. The following year the Poirets attended the premiere of *Scheherazade*, set in an imaginary Orient with costumes and staging designed by Léon Bakst. Poiret was fascinated by this total work of art and its harmony between music, choreography, and sets. Other forms of dance also attracted Poiret, particularly the free movements of Isadora Duncan and Nyota Inyoka's use of elements from Indian folklore. Natalia Goncharova, associated with the Ballets Russes, designed a costume for the dancer Caryathis, who was invited by Poiret in 1921 to perform at his theater L'Oasis. The actress Andrée Spinelly became the face of the couturier's creations.

Travel: Marketing Tool and Source of Inspiration

To increase the international distribution of his creations, Paul Poiret took his wife and nine models in uniform on a long automobile journey through European capitals in the winter of 1911-1912. Despite the difficulties of border crossings, his itinerary took him from Frankfurt to Berlin, Potsdam, Warsaw, Moscow, Saint Petersburg, Krakow, Bucharest, Budapest, and Vienna. At each stop, he organized fashion shows that were social affairs as well as publicity events. These business trips also provided opportunities to meet artists, visit museums, and purchase textiles and embroidery. In 1913, he was the first French couturier to travel to the United States, where he won fame. His travels across the country received considerable coverage in the American press, which awarded him the coveted title 'King of Fashion.'

Enriching the Mind through Travel

In addition to his business travels, Paul Poiret displayed a penchant for discovering new horizons. He embarked on a Mediterranean cruise in 1910 with artist friends and enthusiastically explored Italy, Morocco, Tunisia, Algeria, and Spain. These trips fueled his quest for authenticity and his understanding of other realities. He considered them research missions intended to 'serve fashion,' to renew its cuts and colors. He observed a range of turbans, harem pants, and embroidery, which he reinterpreted according to his vision: the adaptations designed by Poiret were pure fashion items transformed by the addition of a dreamlike quality.

Organizer of Parties and Shows

The 1910 performance of *Scheherazade* by the Ballets Russes, inspired by the tales from *One Thousand and One Nights*, launched Persian fashion in Paris. Impressed by this success, Paul Poiret organized a party he dubbed the *Thousand and Second Night* on June 24, 1911, in his home. He played the role of the sultan, surrounded by his harem and his mistress, portrayed by Denise Poiret. The event provided an excuse to gather some 300 costumed guests in an magical setting designed fully by him. A force of attraction, he mobilized his artist friends to design the invitation and program and to facilitate novel entertainment. This memorable event brought publicity to the fashion house and fame to Paul Poiret. The following year he organized *Les Festes de Bacchus* at the Pavillon du Butard. In 1919, he installed an open-air theater, L'Oasis, in his garden in Paris.

The Artists' Circle

Paul Poiret called upon artist friends such as André Dunoyer de Segonzac and Jean-Louis Boussingault to help him organize his parties. Passionate about seeking out new talent, he built an art collection that reflected his curiosity. Particularly interested in figurative painting, he acquired canvases by Jacqueline Marval and Hélène Perdriat, whose works, exhibited here, have similar subjects to those he owned.

To cope with the serious financial difficulties he was facing in 1925, he was forced to put his collection up for sale.

Family Portrait

Paul Poiret was the only boy in a family of five children, one of whom died in 1883. His sisters were highly creative: Jeanne Boivin, Germaine Bongard, and the most famous, Nicole Groult. A successful seamstress, she married the decorator André Groult, with whom she had two daughters, Benoîte and Flora. She had a romantic relationship with Marie Laurencin, who painted herself with her.

Married in 1905, Poiret began to portray himself with his wife Denise, whose natural beauty represented his feminine ideal, as he related to Vogue magazine in 1913. Between 1906 and 1916 the couple had five children: Rosine, Martine, Colin, Gaspard, and Perrine. Poiret organized his company into three departments: the Parfums de Rosine, the Atelier Martine, and the Packaging Atelier of Colin. In 1928, the couple separated: Denise reverted to her surname, Boulet, and left her husband, taking her wardrobe with her. Poiret lost his wife, collaborator, model, and muse.

Renovating the Decorative Arts

On his travels to Vienna, Berlin, and Brussels in 1910, Paul Poiret became interested in innovations in interior design and the decorative arts, particularly those of the Wiener Werkstätte. He dreamed of creating "a new fashion of furniture decoration." Back in Paris, he developed an innovative teaching method emphasizing the spontaneity of drawing. In 1911, the Martine School of Decorative Arts, named after one of his daughters, began admitting twelve-year-old students from modest backgrounds. They were supervised by Marguerite Sérusier, artist and wife of the Symbolist painter. Among the students were Agnès Jallat, Martiale Constantini, and Gabrielle Drapier. Raoul Dufy taught textile printing. Some pieces were produced by the Atelier Martine, directed by Guy-Pierre Fauconnet until 1914. The Maison Martine marketed 'fashionable items' such as upholstery fabrics, rugs, screens, furniture, wallpapers, and puppets.

The Couturier Perfumer

Paul Poiret was the first couturier to produce perfumes. In 1911, he launched Les Parfums de Rosine, named after his eldest daughter. He believed that a scent should complement the personality and dress of its wearer, like a sign of great elegance. Assisted by aromatician Maurice Schaller, and later by Henri Alméras, Poiret participated in all phases of production. He placed great importance on the aesthetics of the bottles, stoppers, and packaging he commissioned. Several glass bottles were decorated with flowers and arabesques by students from Martine's school.

The first fragrance, *La Rose de Rosine*, was followed by around thirty more with evocative names, some with oriental aromas, until 1929. For *Arlequinade*, in 1923, an advertising poster was playfully designed by the artist Marie Vassilieff.

A couturier with many passions

"Whatever the nature of the business, whatever the field of activity, I placed my full temperament and sensitivity into everything I did," declared Paul Poiret in his memoirs, published in 1930 under the title *En habillant l'époque*. This was also true of gastronomy: in 1912, Poiret was one of the founders of the Club des Cent ('Club of the Hundred'), which he later left to found the Club des Purs Cent (a wordplay evoking the meaning 'Club of the Thoroughbreds'); in 1928, he published the collection *107 recettes ou curiosités culinaires* (*107 recipes or culinary curiosities*) from top chefs. Having always dreamed of acting in the theater, in 1927 he accepted Colette's offer to experience the stage in a play based on her book, La *Vagabonde*. Like painting, which he had "always loved and practiced," this distraction provided an escape from the financial woes at his fashion house.

The Enchanted Synthesis of the 1925 Barges

At the 1925 International Exhibition of Modern Decorative and Industrial Arts, Paul Poiret sought to stand out by organizing, at his own expense, a presentation of his creative universe on three barges moored on the left bank of the Seine, away from the Grand Palais. Named *Amours*, *Délices*, and *Orgues*, these three vessels displayed the colors of the French flag through their decor, furnishings, and floral displays. Poiret set up a restaurant there and exhibited creations from his fashion house, as well as decorative arts from the Atelier Martine and perfumes from the Parfums de Rosine. He asked his friend Raoul Dufy to create fourteen large scenes that formed the backdrop for the models' fashion shows on the *Orgues* barge. This bold and costly initiative failed to achieve the desired success, for the luxury clientele did not materialize. Poiret never managed to recover from this financial setback.

Cinema, the Art of Modern Times

In the 1920s, Paul Poiret dressed actresses in several French films, including Marcel L'Herbier's *L'Inhumaine* (1924). The credits of this silent film featured prestigious names, including Darius Milhaud for the music and architect Robert Mallet-Stevens and Cubist painter Fernand Léger for the sets. Through its formal boldness it exemplifies a cinematic synthesis of the arts.

Paul Poiret's Stylistic Legacy

In his memoirs *En Habillant l'époque* (known under two titles in English: *King of Fashion* and *My first fifty years*), Paul Poiret contemplated the legacy of his creations: "People have said that I had a great influence on the era and that I had inspired an entire generation." Elsa Schiaparelli, whom he met in 1922, compared him to Leonardo da Vinci, so struck was she by his range of talents. In the 1950s, Christian Dior praised him as a great innovator in fashion. Subsequent generations of couturiers and designers have paid tribute to Poiret, often without naming him, by adopting his themes or drawing on common sources of inspiration. While not exhaustive, the examples of affinities presented here demonstrate the extent of his creative legacy.

Thérèse Bonney (1894-1978), Paul Poiret and model Renée in the salons of his fashion house, 1 rond-point des Champs-Élysées, 1927
Bibliothèque historique de la Ville de Paris, Inv. 4C-EPF-006-00933
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Discover the exhibition in a different way: activities

Individuals

Guided Tour

Adults
Thursdays 6:30 - 8:00 PM
Fridays 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM
Saturdays 11:30 AM - 1:00 PM, 2:00 - 3:30 PM, 4:00 - 5:30 PM

Families – from age 5
Sundays 10:30 - 12AM

Workshop

Ages 4 – 6, 7 – 10 and family
The pattern factory
In 1911, Paul Poiret opened the Martine school to educate underprivileged girls. Flowers, artichokes and radishes were used to create textile and wallpaper designs, which were then published. Following in the footsteps of the little Martines, the children use colour and shape to create a design inspired by the world of the couturier.

Ages 11 – 14
The Worlds of Paul Poiret
As they explore the exhibition, the students will create a multi-faceted fashion scene. Drawings, motifs and colours are combined to create unique and varied backgrounds for a fashion silhouette from the early 20th century.

Wednesdays, 2:30 - 4:30 PM
Tuesday to Friday during school holidays, 10:30 AM - 12:30 PM and/or 2:30 - 4:30 PM

Scan this code to find all the information about the exhibition and to book activities:

Fashion workshop

Ages 11 – 14
Poiret, made to measure
From 1903 onwards, Paul Poiret invented a free and colourful style, often inspired by his many travels. Following in the designer's footsteps, and echoing his legendary parties, teenagers created a printed and embroidered top to shine in society.
Four sessions of 2h30, Tuesday to Friday during school holidays.

Lecture

About the restoration of the Paul Poiret collection (in French only).
By Emmanuelle Garcin.
Thursday 25 September 2024
from 6:30 to 8 PM

Groups

Guided tour and the visit-workshop combination are available for adults as well as youths, according to profile (student groups, recreation centers, higher education, associations, companies), at the day and time of their choice.

20 participants maximum per group; up to 30 for school groups, including chaperones.
Languages: French, English, Spanish, Italian, Danish and Greek.

Programme MAD pro fashion

100% Poiret
For students on vocational courses in Fashion – Couture – Costume.

To book a guided tour:
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You are looking for a time slot for your group tour (with no guided tour):
book a self-guided group ticket at https://billetterie.madparis.fr

Continue your visit to the Musée des Arts Décoratifs collections

Founded in the 19th century, the collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs are a stunning repertoire of forms, styles and techniques designed to nourish and renew French artistic and industrial creation. Paul Poiret himself was inspired by them, probably influenced by the exhibition of Persian miniatures in 1912.
On level 4 of the museum, you will find a selection of works that recall some of the couturier's sources of inspiration.

In 1906-1907, Poiret was inspired by the Empire dresses of the early 19th century. Long, high-waisted and short-sleeved, they were modeled on ancient Greco-Roman tunics.

In the 19th century, Europe developed a passion for the Orient in the context of colonial expansion. This influence was felt in all areas of creation, including fashion and interior design, where both imported works and Western productions inspired by a more or less fanciful Orient were exhibited. In the second half of the 19th century, Islamic art gained recognition and found its way into several collections, including that of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs.

Paul Poiret was inspired by his travels and visits to exhibitions, as well as by theatrical and literary works that reflected a mythical vision of these regions.

Orientalist objects are also on display in rooms 38 and 41.

The deer motif, very present in the Art Deco style, also appears on some of the couturier's creations from the same period. In particular, it appears on one of his linen work jackets, printed after a design by Atelier Martine.



Louis-Léopold Boilly (1761-1845)
L'atelier de Houdon
Circa 1804, oil on canvas
© Les Arts Décoratifs / Jean Tholance
Level 4 — Room 29



Bottle
14th century, Blown, enameled and gilt glass. Blown and enameled foot, restored by Brocard before 1888.
© Les Arts Décoratifs / Jean Tholance
Level 4 — Room 37



Armand-Albert Rateau (1882-1938)
Screen from the dining room of Jeanne Lanvin's private mansion
Circa 1921-1922, lacquered and gilt wood
© Les Arts Décoratifs / Jean Tholance
Level 4 — Room 47

Your ticket gives you access to the entire museum, so make the most of it!

Les Arts Décoratifs is a non-profit association that brings together the Musée des Arts Décoratifs, the Musée Nissim de Camondo and the Camondo School, the Ateliers du Carrousel and the library.

Support les Arts Décoratifs!

Become a Friend of Les Arts Décoratifs or join one of the Circles of Patrons who support and actively participate in the life of the institution.
For further information please contact us at + 33 (0)1 44 55 59 78
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Solo / Duo card

The Solo or Duo pass is valid for one year and gives you unlimited priority access to the temporary exhibitions and permanent collections of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs for one or two people.
For more information, visit madparis.fr.

Exhibition catalogue

Available at the bookstore-boutique.
English adaptation of the French version, published by Thames & Hudson.
256 pages, 270 illustrations,
23 x 32 cm.

Musée des Arts Décoratifs

107 rue de Rivoli – 75001 Paris
Open Tuesday to Sunday from 11 AM to 6:30 PM
Late night Thursday 6 - 9 PM
Tickets on madparis.fr

Bookstore-gift shop

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Le Loulou Restaurant

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Open daily from noon to 2 PM and from 7 PM to 11 PM

#expo_poiret

Curator: Marie-Sophie Carron de la Carrière, *assisted by* Marie-Pierre Ribère *and* Astrid Novembre

Artistic director: Anette Lenz

Graphic and motion design:
Atelier Anette Lenz with Romain Graille, *assisted by* Louis Baroni

Scenography: PAF atelier, Christopher Dessus

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GRoW @ ANNENBERG

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With the additional support of FEBEA

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Discover the collections and exhibitions of the Musée des Arts Décoratifs with our digital guide, available on the free app

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