



CHÂTEAU DE VERSAILLES

Answers to the “Guess the era of the Court ladies’ outfits” game

Versailles fashion continues to be a source of inspiration to the great designers of today. The silhouette that was copied most by the courts of Europe was developed by Louis XIV. As for women’s fashion, this was often dictated by the royal mistresses. The women spared no expense when it came to their grooming.



The portraits above illustrate some of the women’s clothing and accessories that were fashionable at Court. They date from different eras and are shown here in chronological order. Here is more information on the styles of dress and the subjects represented.

- Marie de Bourbon-Montpensier, Duchess of Orleans (1605-1627)



In this portrait, Marie de Bourbon is wearing a **dress in which the main part of the skirt is boned**.

The corset, which is hidden beneath the dress, had iron sides and could be laced up the back or the front; it was stiff enough to force the shoulders back, narrow the waist and push up the bust of the woman wearing it.

It is covered with a “**stomacher**” – a decorative panel of opulent fabric (framed in the portrait).

Marie de Bourbon-Montpensier, Duchess of Orleans (1605-1627), Studio of Charles and Henri de Beaubrun

- Jeanne Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour (1721-1764)



In this portrait, Madame de Pompadour, official mistress of King Louis XV, is wearing an iconic item of early 18th-century style: a **robe à la française**, or sack-back gown.

Comprising a **dress jacket and matching skirt**, the dress also features an elaborately decorated **stomacher**, which could be varied, depending on the occasion. Every day, the dressers would stitch the jacket to the “corps piqué” (a forerunner to the corset), from the shoulders to the waist, in order to hold the dress in place.

Jeanne-Antoinette Poisson, Marquise de Pompadour, by Carl Von Steuben in the style of Maurice-Quentin de La Tour, 1838

- Marie Antoinette, Queen of France (1755-1793)



In this portrait, Marie-Antoinette is in **formal dress**, or Court costume. This comprises a stiff bodice which ends in a point at the waist. Next comes the skirt, which is held up by a wide pannier, or hoops, and the bottom of the dress, which is attached to the waist to create a detachable train.

Marie-Antoinette, Queen of France (1755-1793) by Élisabeth-Louise Vigée-Lebrun, wrongly attributed to Alexandre Roslin, 1779-1788

- Marie-Louise, empress of the French (1791-1847)



Short, puffed sleeves, waist fitted below the bust, flowing dress that skims the lines of the body, elaborate embroidery...

The “Empire” style broke away from the lavish opulence of women’s fashion in the previous century and ushered in a longer, straighter silhouette.

Marie-Louise, empress of the French (1791-1847) by Jean-Baptiste-Paulin Guérin, in the style of François Gérard, 1810-1824

- Louise of Orleans, Queen of the Belgians (1812-1850)



In this portrait, Louise of Orleans is wearing a dress comprising a bodice and skirt that is reminiscent of the “**robe à transformation**” – a type of interchangeable dress – that was very much in fashion at the time.

Society life was very important, and each “key” moment of the day required a different outfit. The women had to be able to get changed quickly, which created the need to limit the number of elements comprising their outfits, or even to make them adaptable.

A skirt could therefore be matched with two or even three bodices – to create an ensemble suitable for day, evening, afternoon, early evening or formal evening wear. Everything was made from the same material as the skirt, but the cuts of the necklines and sleeves were different, as were the decorative elements.

Louise of Orleans, Queen of the Belgians (1812-1850) in the style of Franz-Xaver Winterhalter, 1844-1845

- Eugénie de Montijo, Empress of the French (1826-1920)



Empress Eugénie de Montijo wielded a major influence on fashion at the time, which is mainly known for **the crinoline**.

Made from cotton and horsehair, it made the silhouette look like the petals of a flower. The shape evolved over time, becoming flatter at the front as it continued to expand at the back.

Bare shoulders were also a feature of this time.

Eugénie de Montijo de Guzman, Empress of the French (1826-1920) by Armande Pin, in the style of Franz-Xaver Winterhalter, 1868

To find out more

Learn more about fashion at Versailles and Court life in the YouTube video [“Marie-Antoinette, la reine rebelle”](#) (in French, with subtitles in English) and in the virtual exhibitions produced in partnership with Google Arts & Culture: [“Fashion at Versailles: ‘For Her’”](#) and [“Fashion at Versailles: ‘For Him’”](#). Keep the young ones entertained by [downloading drawings](#) to colour in from the animated film “My life in Versailles”.