



Dior brown boucle wool jacket, ca. 1956. Ryerson FRC2013.99.007. Photograph by Jazmin Welch.

# A CLOSE LOOK AT A 1950s WOOL JACKET

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The garment I have selected for my project is a wool jacket by Christian Dior for Holt Renfrew from the Ryerson Fashion Research Collection (FRC2013.99.007). The jacket is dated in the collection catalogue as originating from the late 1950s to early 1960s, most likely 1958-1963. Based on the styles of the time, it is highly probable that there was once a matching dress or skirt that accompanied the jacket.

At a quick glance, the jacket does not appear to be particularly complicated in construction. However, upon closer inspection, there are many subtle and complex details to be noticed. For example, the front and back of the jacket are cut on the bias, which results in a soft chevron effect. The sleeves are cut as part of the body of the jacket with a seam that follows the shoulder line. There is a diamond-shaped gusset under each underarm. In couture tradition, there are bound buttonholes on the front of the jacket and three metal weights concealed in the lining towards the hem of the jacket to help it hang properly.

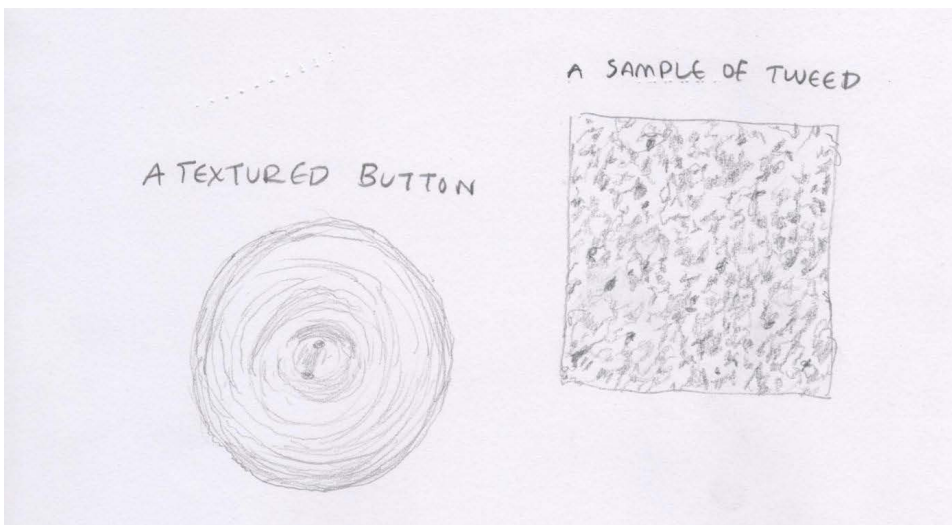


Ryerson University  
Fashion Research Collection

The jacket is very angular in shape, with sharp straight edges along the hem, collar, pockets and sleeves. The collar of the jacket is flat and wide. There are three large textured round buttons at the front that hold the jacket closed. These buttons are very large at 2 inches (10 cm) across and appear to be made of plastic. Two 5-inch wide tailored pockets sit on either side of the centre front, towards the bottom of the jacket. The pockets are lined but would have limited functionality since they are very shallow in depth. The selvedge is not visible in the garment, because the jacket is fully lined with facings at the neckline and centre front. The gusset under the arm appears in both the shell and the lining of the jacket. There are no reinforcements to the jacket, in terms of boning, padding, or wire reinforcements. This garment was made with a combination of machine and hand stitching. The care taken with construction is apparent, and this affirms the quality and cost associated with a Dior garment.

While the fit of the jacket is quite boxy, the jacket sits snugly across the shoulders and is cropped in length. The sleeves are 3/4 length. A woman wearing this jacket would not be drowning in fabric.

Dior brown boucle wool  
jacket, ca. 1956. Ryerson  
FRC2013.99.007. Label.  
Photograph by Jazmin  
Welch.



Top: Dior brown boucle wool jacket, ca. 1956. Ryerson FRC2013.99.007. Sketch of collar. Drawing by Millie Yates, 2015.

Bottom: Dior brown boucle wool jacket, ca. 1956. Ryerson FRC2013.99.007. Sketch of button and fabric. Drawing by Millie Yates, 2015.

The fabric of the jacket gives it the appearance that it would be very warm. A wool tweed has been matched with a silk satin lining. The outer shell of tweed has a number of colours in its pattern, with brown and a greyish green being the most prominent as well as some flecks of white. The silk satin lining is reddish brown.

The garment has a label at the neckline that reads: "Christian Dior Original in Canada Exclusive with Holt Renfrew and Co. Limited." It was in 1951 that Christian Dior and Holt Renfrew made an agreement for exclusive Canadian reproduction rights. The tag does not indicate the season or exact year that the jacket was made. There are no care labels, nametags or size labels within the garment. There is no information on the owner as the jacket was donated anonymously.



Although the garment is over fifty years old, it is in remarkable shape. There is some wear at the cuffs and collar with some light discolouration. There are some small stains on the insides of the jacket on the silk lining. The silk has lightly split in a couple of areas on the inside of the jacket, especially near the hem and at the armholes. There have been no alterations.

When I first encountered this jacket in the FRC, I felt a number of sensory reactions. Visually, it is consistent within the period, particularly with its large buttons and cropped length. To the touch, this jacket feels a little nubby and a little scratchy. The fabric feels like it is of a fairly heavy weight. The inside of the jacket is silken and cool to the touch. One could imagine that the wearer of this jacket might made a soft, low, scratchy sound as she moved. It does not have a particularly strong smell, but there is a subtle worn wool smell to the jacket on its underarms and collar.

Dior brown boucle wool jacket, ca. 1956. Ryerson FRC2013.99.007. Sketch of jacket front. Drawing by Millie Yates, 2015.

## BACK VIEW OF DIOR JACKET



Dior brown boucle wool jacket, ca. 1956. Ryerson FRC2013.99.007. Sketch of jacket back. Drawing by Millie Yates, 2015.

This particular garment attracted me for a number of reasons. First of all, it is a truly beautiful piece. It is warm, yet sits lightly on the body, and though boxy it would not overwhelm the frame. The design of the jacket is both clever and subtle: a perfect marriage between couture quality and everyday versatility. I believe that this jacket would fit me well, though it could be a little short in the sleeves. If this jacket was mine, I would wear it through every fall season. It is a classic jacket: something proper to wear in a professional setting or for formal occasions. Though a serious piece of clothing, in its cropped length, big buttons and 3/4 length sleeves the jacket is far from austere and boring.

There are several other Dior pieces in the Ryerson Fashion Research Collection, and there are many Dior garments from the 1950s in the collections of museums around the world. Christian Dior is one of the most celebrated designers of the twentieth century and so much has been written about his work. It is truly remarkable just how much Dior changed the fashion industry during the time of the New Look in the 1950s, and though this jacket was created towards the end of that decade, there are hints of the ultra-feminine style in the bias cut of the jacket and its narrow, sloping shoulders.

This post was edited by Dr. Ingrid Mida.