

House Style: Five Centuries of Fashion at Chatsworth, 25 March 2017 – 22 October 2017, Chatsworth, Bakewell, Derbyshire, DE45 1PP,
www.chatsworth.org

This landmark exhibition displays historic and contemporary fashion as worn by the Cavendish family who have called Chatsworth House their home. This Elizabethan country pile in Derbyshire's Peak District sits alongside the River Derwent between lush dales and bleak moors.

The first fashion exhibition by Chatsworth took six years to research/curate and compile the accompanying book (Rizzoli). 'Five Centuries' dates from Elizabeth 'Bess' of Hardwick (who built Chatsworth from 1552) through 18th century's 'It' girl Georgiana, Duchess of Devonshire to 20th and 21st centuries - Stella Tennant, model, muse, grand-daughter of the 11th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire - Andrew and Deborah Cavendish ('Debo' lists Oscar de la Renta and Hubert de Givenchy as friends) to the current 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire. Personalities are shown by their choice of attire - great couture, ironic sense of humour and love of popular culture.

'House Style' started serendipitously when Laura Cavendish, Countess of Burlington (daughter-in-law of the 12th Duke and Duchess of Devonshire) asked on a regular Chatsworth visit for a christening robe for son James. The in-house textile department revealed stacks of archive boxes containing sartorial gems – from Balenciaga/Dior to Westwood/Margiela. Having spent her professional life in fashion Laura Cavendish knew she had stumbled across something truly worthwhile.

The story unfolds with a transatlantic phone call – drawing on past connections Laura Cavendish contacted Hamish Bowles, International Editor-at-Large for American Vogue to assist in preparing a vision. Patrick Kinmonth and Antonio Manfreda were brought in for creative direction/design within Chatsworth's staterooms and chapel. Gucci in place as principal sponsor, along with C.W. Sellors, Investec, Sothebys and Wedgwood - the exhibition was born.

No historic costume parade, a 1999 Alexander McQueen black cotton 'cobweb lace' mini-dress greets in the Painted Hall while 'Timeline' vitrines lay out an eye for wit and detail - 1970s Converse trainers, a belt buckle, first shoe and nose ring. The Library appropriately stages Hussein Chalayan's Tyvek ('envelope paper') dress, Stephen Jones's fascinator created from a Robert Burns poetry book and Christopher Kane's dress cut to resemble open pages. The Great Dining Room arrests formal eveningwear at a grand table (with conversation soundtrack) - Dior seated with Westwood with Burberry. The Chapel is a Baroque 17th century setting for 'The Circle of Life' - clothing for christenings, weddings and mourning. Monochrome exhibits from pristine white christening gowns and wedding dresses to dramatic black mourning outfits. Stella Tennant's 1999 diaphanous Helmut Lang wedding ensemble had been mislaid for 18+ years but was found beneath her mother's more robust, wedding dress. Hard to distinguish from layers of tissue, the ethereal combination of tulle loosely veiled in chiffon had lain undisturbed. On display here it provides an understated,

elegant look. Photographs and hand-written letters allow glimpses into lives led. Garments converse with paintings where visuals echo, hats creatively pair with porcelain so forms announce and fine tableware frames accessories.

The clothes belong here at Chatsworth – seen in their relevant context as living culture, beautifully celebrating the best of British eccentricity.

Sarah E. Braddock Clarke