

# Mantua Court Gowns

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Known as a mantua, the gown consists of a bodice with a train at the back. A very wide petticoat of matching silk completes the ensemble along with a triangle of silk known as a stomacher, in the centre front.



Although considered stylish day wear in the early 18th century, the mantua had become very old-fashioned by the 1750s and was worn only for court dress. Wide hoops were beginning to go out of style, but kept their extreme width at court. To make up for its conservative cut, court dress was always made from the most fashionable as well as expensive fabrics and trimmings. This gown was made from an ivory silk brocaded pattern of stylised flowers and leaves. The motifs are accentuated by colours of the precious metal thread. Such a design is typical of French silk weavers and the fabric was probably imported as this gown was one worn in the English courts. English weavers copied French designs very closely.



*Court Mantua Kensington Palace 1750-1760 From ArtFund*







*Ivory Silk Brocaded Gown*





*French Dress (Robe à la Française), ca. 1765.*

Pale blue silk satin with hammered silver floral brocade and silver bobbin lace trim. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, New York, Purchase, Irene Lewisohn Bequest, 2001 (2001.472a, b).

– From The Met Museum- This court gown is said to have come from descendants of one of Queen Marie Antoinette's Austrian ladies-in-waiting. As with most gowns of this type, there is a hidden economy in its construction. The petticoat, or underskirt, appears to be constructed of the rich brocade seen on the bodice and overskirt. However, a wide yoke of blue chintz is inserted to the upper sides and back of the petticoat and restricts the costly brocade to the areas where it is visible.

Costume historians have seen the lavish plenitude of handwoven silks consumed in the design of such gowns to be an explicit pronouncement of wealth and status. In addition, the nature of the gown's construction, its tightly fitted and corseted bodice, and the wide expanse of its skirt dictated the privileged woman's movements and imposed a number of challenges. The management of an eighteenth-century gown in as simple an act as sitting down "could highlight a person's physical grace," according to the historian Mimi Hellman, but it could also "expose the imperfections of the ungainly body." From this perspective, the gown was not only a pronouncement of elite

membership; it was also an instrument that tested a woman's worthiness for society through the graceful choreography and negotiation of her dressed body.



*Robe a l'anglaise retrousee, 1780*

From the Pitti Palace Gallery of Costume via [La conseguenze della moda](#)

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Waistcoat, 1720's From the [MFA Boston](#)



*Yves Saint Laurent Fall Winter 1983–84 Yellow Silk Faille* Photo Credit [Met Museum](#)











*Robe a la francaise, 1760-70*

From the [Bunka Gakuen Costume Museum](#)





**French Dress (Robe à la Française), ca. 1775** . Pink ribbed silk with white linear silk vine motif and multicolored silk floral brocade with passementerie and scalloped fly fringe trim. Isabel Shults Fund, 2005 (2005.61a, b). Photo Credit [Met Museum](#)

From The Met Museum- This gown first came to the Museum's attention when it was lent for the exhibition "[Dangerous Liaisons](#) : Fashion and Furniture in the Eighteenth Century." Set among The Costume Institute's most lavish court gowns in a vignette representing a ladies' "withdrawing room," this dress stood out because of its exceptional brilliance and the freshness of its color. Found in a perfect state with no alterations, it is a masterpiece of the French textile maker's art. As with other gowns of this form, the elaborately brocaded fabric has been woven with an accompanying passementerie trim. The trim not only matches the colors of the fabric but also repeats, in abstracted form, the little sprigged floral bouquets that appear as the textile's primary motif.

For all its conformity to the decorous sartorial requirements of the time, the button-closing front of the bodice is a development of the last half of the eighteenth century. Previously, the overgown did not close over the corset. The part of corset that was left exposed was concealed by an inverted triangle of fabric called the "stomacher". Pinned

in, it conveyed the impression of an overdress with matching underbodice and petticoat. This gown, like the blue gown, has the innovation of a *compiegne*, or vestlike stomacher, which is sewn onto the overdress and either pinned or, as in the case of these two gowns, buttoned closed at center front. Typically, the covered boxwood buttons repeat a detail taken from the design of the gown's textile.

### **Fashion in the 1750–1795- [Wikipedia](#)**

18th Century fashion usually gets pegged as being full of pink, light blue, ruffles, skirts wide enough to get caught in doorways, lots of escaping bosoms, and tall wigs coated with flowers, ships, bows, and lace. All of this is very true, but just like today, fashions changed immensely from 1700-1799, riding multiple trend waves like all those miniature boats on giant wigs. The world was in a great upheaval: kings gave way to parliaments, colonies gave way to nations, frivolity gave way to reason, and then it all reversed again. Every nation gained power, then seemed to lose it. Fashions fluctuated just as wildly as the times, but the haze of forgetfulness and generalization has condensed most of these fluctuations into the brief world of Madame de Pompadour (1721-1764) and Marie Antoinette (1755-1793). But even these ladies didn't remain stuck in one fashion trend their whole lives. Over the course of their lifetimes, the world and fashion changed drastically



Robe a la francaise ca. 1760 From [Les Arts Decoratifs](#)





*Robe à l'anglaise ca. 1760*

From the [Bunka Gakuen Costume Museum](#)









*Robe a la francaise ca. 1770 From the [Bunka Gakuen Costume Museum](#)*



*Green Robe 1755-60*





*Caraco and quilted petticoat, 1770-90* From the Mode Museum via [Wikimedia Commons](#)



*Robe a la francaise, 1770-80 From the Mode Museum via [Wikimedia Commons](#)*





*Robe a la francaise ca. 1760's*