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Master of Couture – Azdine Alaïa
Svea-Härens Konstmuseum
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Fondation Azdine Alaïa
President: Carol Scalet
Curators: Olayana Kusoffsky and Gail Mammé,
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Text: Othmar Scharif
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Svea-Härens
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Azdine Alaïa
Black Couture, Spring/Summer
2003

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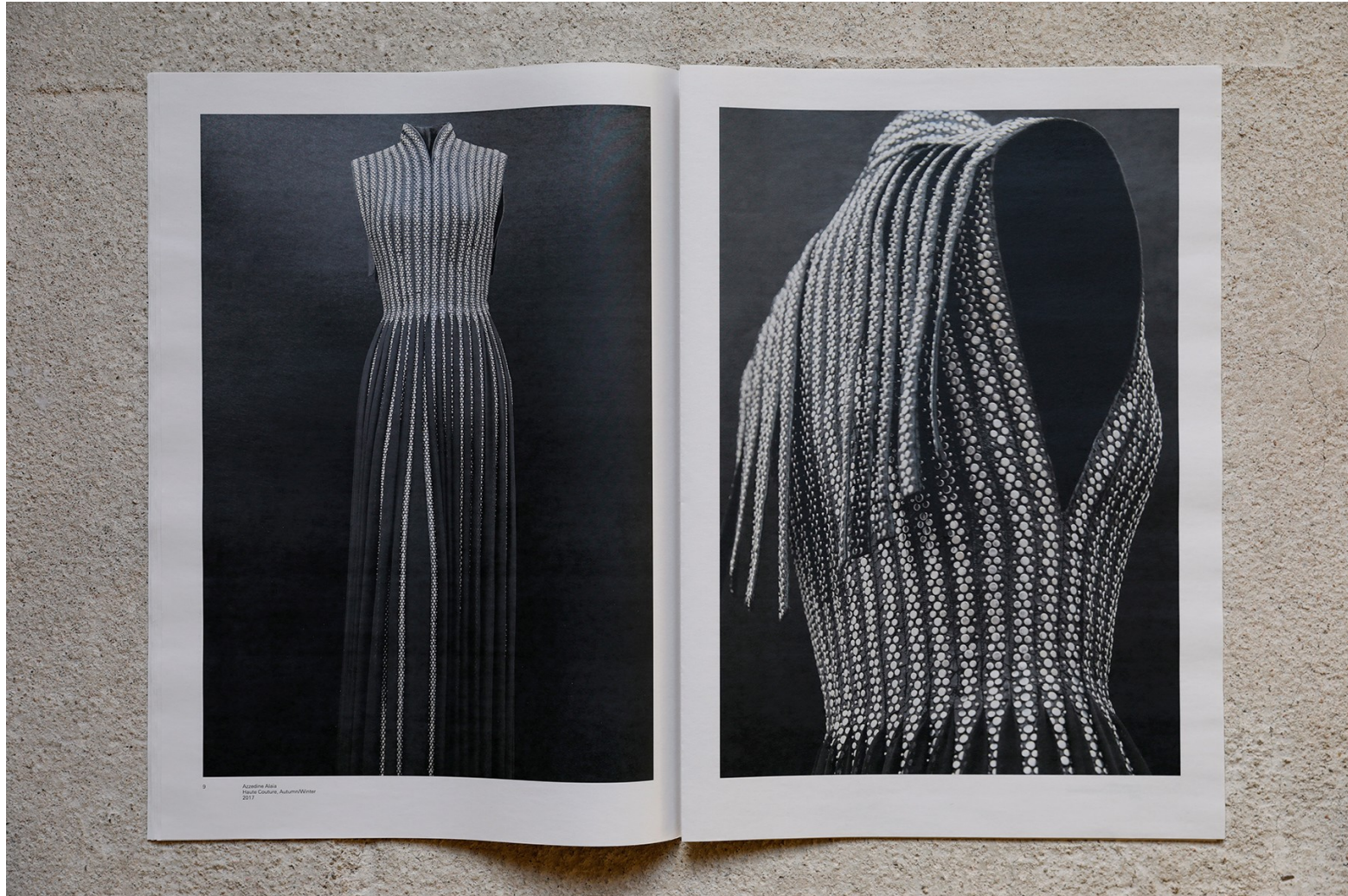
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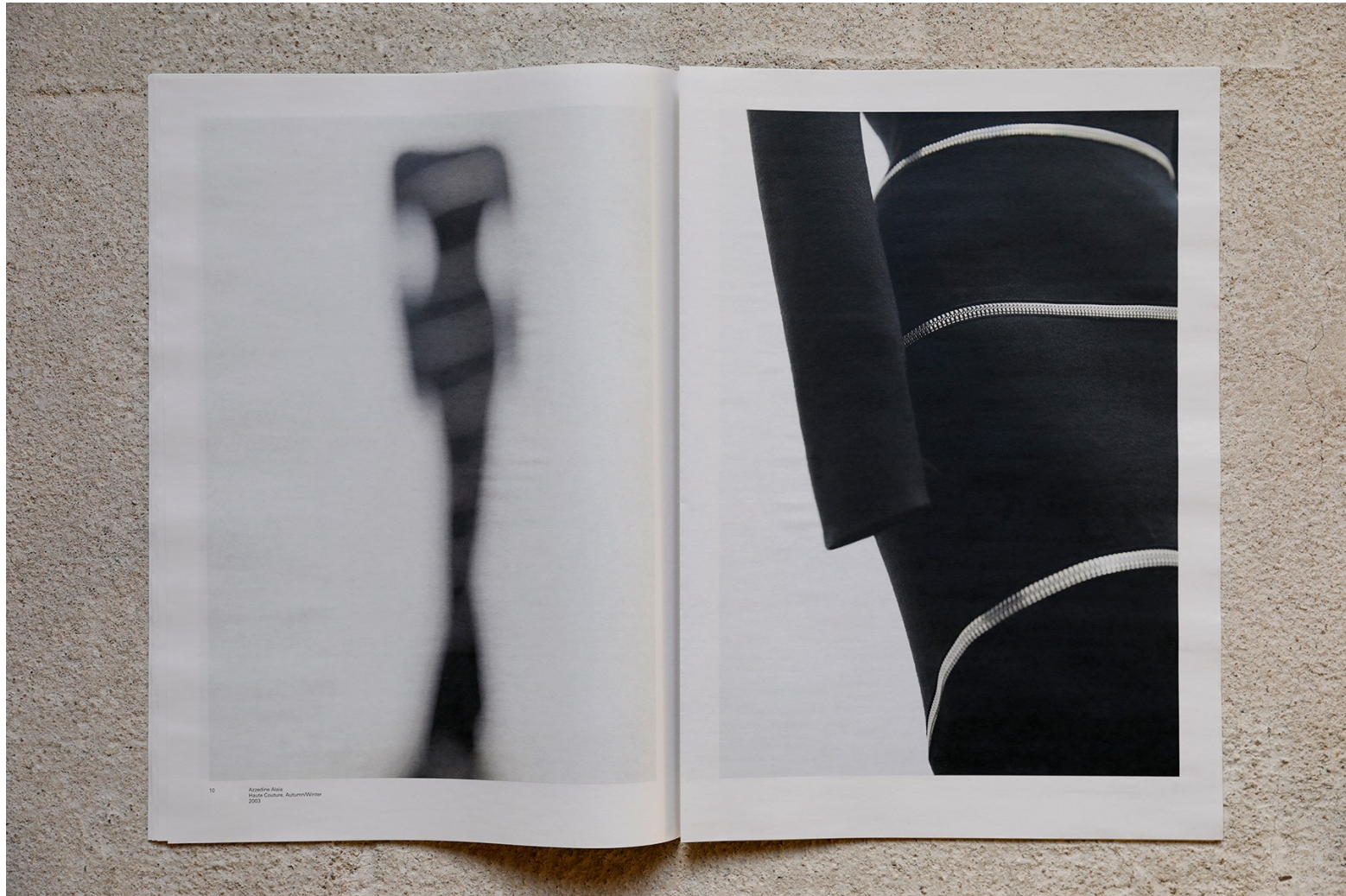
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Master of Couture: Azzedine Alaïa

Azzedine Alaïa (1935-2017) has earned his place in fashion history as one of our time's great masters of haute couture. His artistic talent and his iconic silhouettes, which have won much recognition and praise, still influence fashion designers today.

Alaïa's unconventional approach to the creative process gave him a distinctive and unique style. In his pursuit of apparently seamless cuts and perfect lines, he preferred to work directly on the body, rather than using a form. This was an unusual and time-consuming approach, but it ultimately yielded tailored results. Creativity and ideas were Alaïa's main focus. To allow himself the time he needed for his creations, he abandoned the predetermined seasons of the fashion industry and began to present his collections when he felt his work really needed to be shown. His timing in his artistic process was more important than meeting the tight deadlines of the industry.

Alaïa was born in Tunisia in 1935. At 21, he was already dreaming of making a career in fashion. He moved to Paris after studying sculpture at the École des Beaux-Arts in Tunis. Alaïa's father taught him to sew, and he worked for a local dressmaker in Tunis while he was a student. When he arrived in Paris, the world of fashion was dominated by masters like Christian Dior and Cristóbal Balenciaga. Despite his lack of formal training in fashion, he would eventually rise to the top of the fashion industry, and found a Muslim

In the early stages of his career, Alaïa worked for other fashion houses, but also received orders in his home, which was owned by his uncle, Mohammed El Tahar. The fashion journalist Malka Traiman and the designer Thierry Mugler, for whom Alaïa had already been doing design work, had launched his own fashion house in the early 1980s.

Alaïa presented his first collection in New York in 1982. It was a great success. The American fashion press wrote: "The shapes are 1950s." The exceptional silhouettes and unique, detailed

made of expression. He worked freely, often directly on the body, and used different techniques to emphasize and amplify the body's own shape. Alaïa's innovative approach to construction and intuitive sense of form are rightly considered emblematic of his work. His artistic partners included the photographer Annie Leibovitz, the models Christy Turlington, Cindy Crawford, and Linda Evangelista, and the designers Michele Obama, Lady Gaga, Madonna, and Tina Turner.

Alaïa died in 2017, but his influence is still felt in the fashion world today. His unique selection of couture pieces was shown in the first ever exhibition of his works in the Met Gala. Alaïa was and remains a pioneer of fashion, and a great master of couture.

The Journey of a Legend in Fashion

Several distinct periods can be identified in Azzedine Alaïa's fashion career. The first of these (1964-1981) begins when he moved to what would become his childhood residence and worked at 60 rue de Valenciennes in Paris.

Alaïa worked under the tutelage of Pierre Cardin and Christian Cabat. He also arranged important fashion shows for select groups of guests. During this period, his designs were inspired and characterized by the classic lines of Hollywood in the 1950s and 60s.

The second period (1981-2003) represents the pinnacle of his career. In the 1980s, Alaïa's creations were characterized by a sculptural silhouette with small shoulders. He used distinctive materials and details, like leather and lace. These look-nuggets, produced in small quantities, his simple show during this period. In 1987, Alaïa bought several properties in the center of Paris, on rue de Valenciennes, where he set up both residences and studios. He also held his fashion shows there.

In 2003, Alaïa presented an iconic show of nothing but haute couture pieces. This was his response to the grunge fashion that was popular at the time. This show marked the beginning of the third period of his career (2003-2017), which was characterized by spectacular displays of craftsmanship.

Innovative, Sculptural Design

Alaïa embraced pioneering trends, created fearless expressions, and pioneered craftsmanship over following fashions. His innovative designs shaped the late 20th century. With Egyptian motifs as his inspiration, Alaïa created the first bralette dress in 1986. His garment became an international and iconic trend, even worn by Cher. Alaïa also created several designs for her that she wore in the James Bond film *A View to a Kill* (1985), in which she played the character May Day.

Over the years, only a select few fashion designers have managed to make a name for themselves by organizing their wardrobe in a form of minimalism and innovation. Alaïa's approach in unique in the way it used the body's own shape, accentuating them with generous, sculptural silhouettes.

Alaïa preferred intimate fashion shows, rather than large events. He hosted the collection presentations of his seasonal fashion cycle, and always at country's first. Alaïa chose to make these collections, and began to show his creations when he felt they were ready to be shown. This was a departure from the predetermined seasons of the official fashion calendar. Alaïa's evolutionary time, which questioned the fundamentals of the fashion industry, he gave his creations, and became a role model and pioneer by refusing to conform to the fashion industry's tight production schedules.

Alaïa's single-minded focus on creative work set him apart within the world of fashion. He approached his process much like a sculptor would. He might start on a garment, pause his work, and then return to it many years later. He always showed himself and his process at the time he needed to advance the perfection he sought.

The Inspiration and the Women

In the late 1960s, Alaïa worked for fashion designers like Christian Dior and Guy Laroche. However, his greatest inspirations were the female clients who came to visit him in his atelier. These close encounters with his customers gave him a space in which to develop his craft. His finished clothing directly on the body was completely unique.

The famous clients who visited his studio included the former French cultural icons, like the socialite Simone Zehrfurt, the writer Colette de Winton, and the actress Clémentine and Jacqueline Bisset. Girls' outfits were particularly for the women who liked to wear Alaïa's creations. In the 1980s and 90s, he created ensembles for such global supermodels like Grace Jones and Tina Turner. Alaïa also became a favorite among models. Naomi Campbell was one of the supermodels he discovered early on, and went on to develop a close friendship with.

Alaïa maintained his trademark high standards of excellence in tailoring and business design throughout the course of his long career. This meant that he would often decide to wait a moment longer, to work in a collaboration with his own hands to perfect. Alaïa's greatest source of inspiration were always the women who wore his creations.



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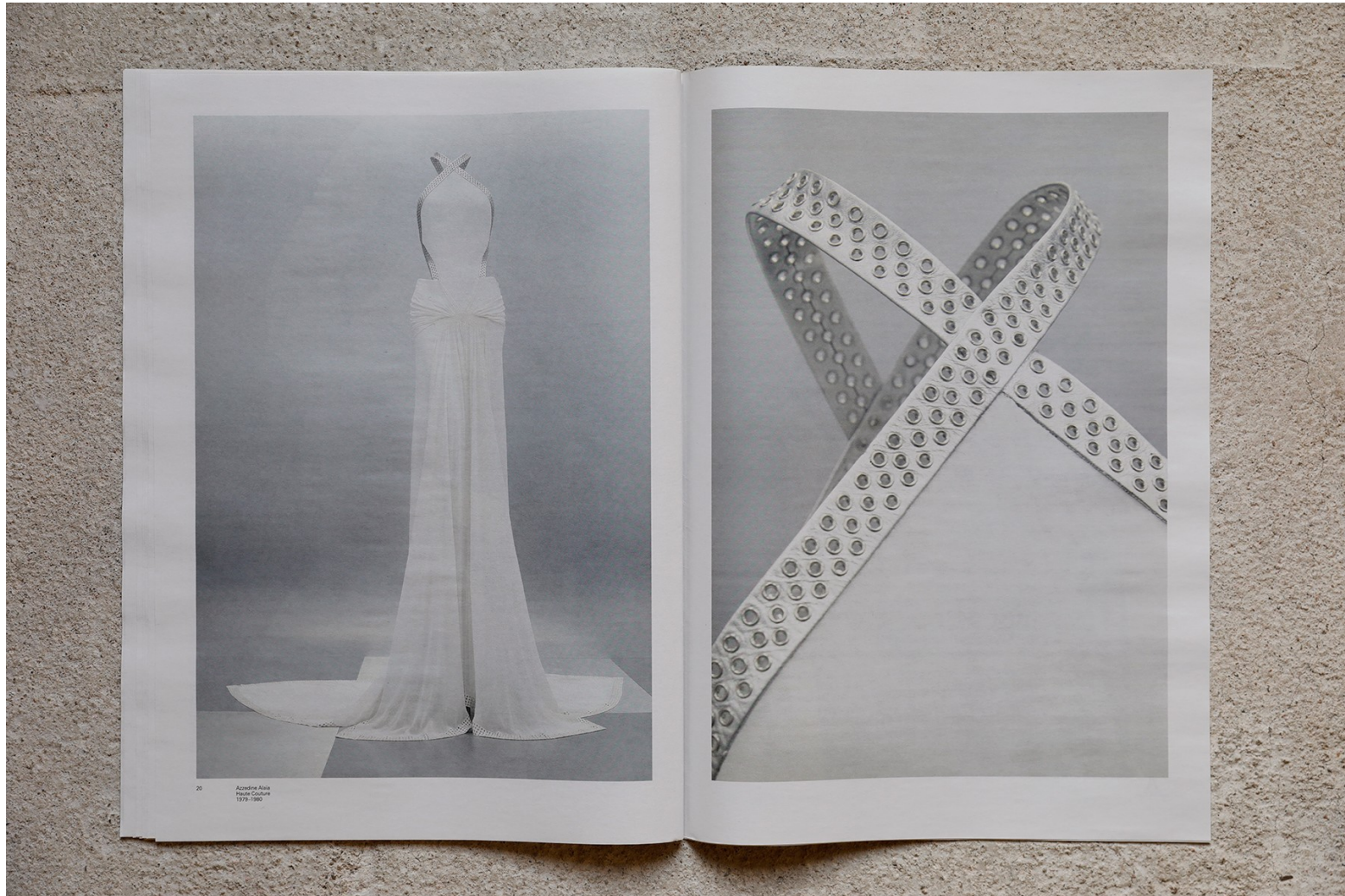
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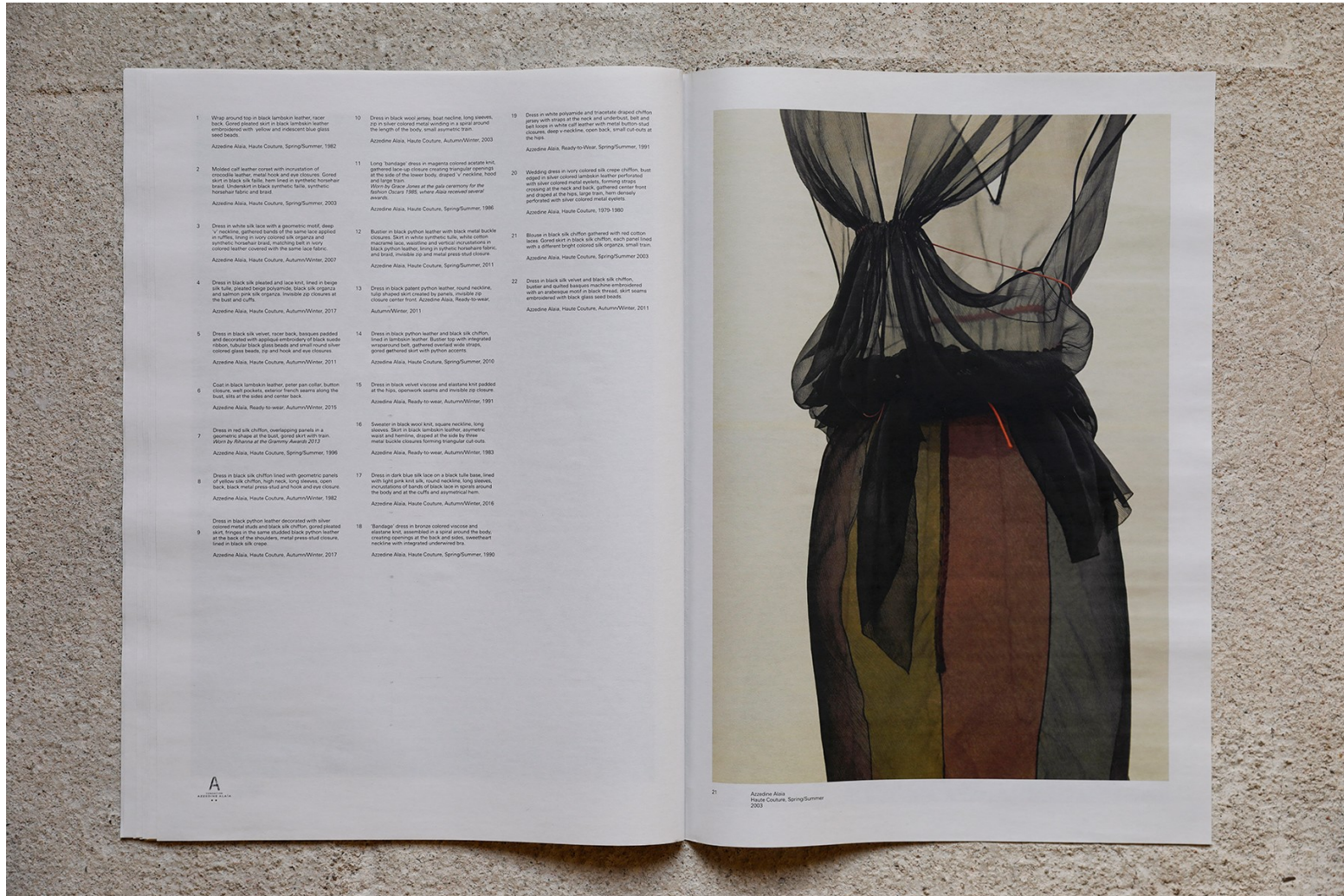
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- 1 Wrap around top in black lambskin leather, racer back. Gored pleated skirt in black lambskin leather embroidered with yellow and iridescent blue glass seed beads.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 1982
- 2 Molded calf leather corset with incrustation of crocodile leather, metal hook and eye closures. Gored skirt in black silk tulle, hem lined in synthetic horsehair braid. Understark in black synthetic tulle, synthetic horsehair fabric and braid.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 2003
- 3 Dress in white silk tulle with geometric motif, deep V-neckline, gathered bands of the same tulle applied in white, lining in ivory colored silk organza and synthetic horsehair braid, matching belt in ivory colored leather covered with the same silk fabric.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 2007
- 4 Dress in black silk pleated and lace knit, lined in beige silk tulle, draped large bows, black silk organza and lambskin silk organza, invisible zip closures at the bust and cuffs.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 2017
- 5 Dress in black silk velvet, racer back, beehive peddled and decorated with appliqué embroidery of black suede ribbon, visible black glass beads and small round clear colored glass beads, zip and hook and eye closures.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 2011
- 6 Coat in black lambskin leather, paper pan collar, button closure, metal buttons, vertical flaps same along the bust, slit at the sides and center back.
Azzedine Alaïa, Ready-to-wear, Autumn/Winter, 2015
- 7 Dress in red silk chiffon, overlapping panels in a geometric shape at the bust, gored skirt with train. Worn by Rihanna at the Grammy Awards, 2012.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 1996
- 8 Dress in black silk chiffon lined with geometric panels of yellow silk chiffon, high neck, long sleeves, open back, black metal press stud and hook and eye closures.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 1982
- 9 Dress in black python leather decorated with silver colored metal studs and black silk chiffon, gored pleated skirt. Fringes in the same studded black python leather at the back of the shoulders, metal press stud closures, slit at the silk silk rib.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 2017
- 10 Dress in black wool jersey, boat neckline, long sleeves, zip in steel colored metal ending in a spiral around the length of the body, small asymmetrical train.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 2003
- 11 Long, handkerchief dress in magenta colored anastatic knit, gathered at the waist creating a draped opening at the end of the lower body, draped V-neckline, hood and long hair.
Worn by Drew Barrymore at the gala ceremony for the Fashion Group 1988, where Alaïa received several awards.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 1986
- 12 Bustier in black python leather with black metal buckle closures, back in white synthetic tulle, white cotton macramé lace, neckline and vertical incrustations in black python leather, lining in synthetic horsehair fabric, and braid, invisible zip and metal press stud closures.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 2011
- 13 Dress in black pattern python leather, round neckline, full draped skirt created in beige, invisible zip closure center front.
Azzedine Alaïa, Ready-to-wear, Autumn/Winter, 2011
- 14 Dress in black python leather and black silk chiffon, lined in lambskin leather. Bustier top with integrated wraparound belt, gathered around waist, straps, gathered skirt with python accents.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 2010
- 15 Dress in black velvet viscose and elastane knit peddled at the bust, asymmetrical slits and invisible zip closure.
Azzedine Alaïa, Ready-to-wear, Autumn/Winter, 1991
- 16 Sweater in black wool knit, square neckline, long sleeves. Skirt in black lambskin leather, asymmetrical waist and hemline, draped at the side by three metal buckle closures forming horizontal cut-outs.
Azzedine Alaïa, Ready-to-wear, Autumn/Winter, 1983
- 17 Dress in dark blue silk tulle on a black tulle base, lined with light pink knit silk, round neckline, long sleeves, incrustation of bands of black knit in bands around the body and at the cuffs and asymmetrical hem.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 2016
- 18 'Bandage' dress in bronze colored viscose and elastane knit, assembled in a spiral around the body, creating openings at the back and sides, sweetheart neckline with integrated closures.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 1990
- 19 Dress in white anastatic and trapezoid draped chiffon, jersey with straps at the back and underbust, belt and full lace in white cut leather with metal button stud closures, deep V-neckline, open back, small cut-outs at the hips.
Azzedine Alaïa, Ready-to-Wear, Spring/Summer, 1991
- 20 Wedding dress in ivory colored silk, mesh chiffon, bust inset in black colored lambskin leather perforated with three colored metal spikes, forming straps, crisscrossing at the back and back, gathered center front and draped at the back, long hair, hair accessory, performed with silver colored metal system.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, 1979-1980
- 21 Blouse in black silk chiffon gathered with red cotton laces. Gored skirt in black silk chiffon, each panel lined with a different length colored silk organza, small train.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 2003
- 22 Dress in black silk velvet and black silk chiffon, bustier and quilted bodice machine embroidered with an elaborate motif in black thread, skirt seams embroidered with black glass seed beads.
Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Autumn/Winter, 2011



21 Azzedine Alaïa, Haute Couture, Spring/Summer, 2003

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