



**DIOR EXPRESSES ITS HAUTE  
COUTURE SPIRIT WITH WATCHES  
THAT MARRY MECHANICS WITH  
MÉTIERS D'ART** *by Laurie Kahle*

In 1947, Christian Dior revolutionized women's fashion with his **New Look**, which was defined by its feminine hourglass silhouette created by a cinched waist and voluminous skirt. After years of wartime sobriety in fashion, Dior ushered in a new era of lavish design, dramatically executed with sensuous materials and attention to detail, a pairing that continues to distinguish the house in fashion and timepieces alike.



# Fashion Plates

PICTURED ABOVE: One-of-a-kind Dior VIII Grand Bal Haute Couture No. 2 in white gold and black ceramic with amethysts, sugillite, mother-of-pearl and pink sapphires



Dior VIII Grand Bal  
Plumes in black ceramic,  
diamonds and feathers



*The visible spinning  
winding rotor evokes the  
swirl of a ball gown with  
every movement of  
the wearer's wrist.*

Unlike many fashion watch brands that emphasize style over substance, Dior was among the pioneers that ambitiously sought to combine the two. Dior's Grand Bal VIII range, introduced in 2011, is the latest, and perhaps most expressive, endeavor to harmonize the creativity of *haute couture* with the technical demands of *haute horlogerie*.

Synergy between advanced engineering and time-honored *métiers d'art* is evident throughout the expanding line of timepieces. For example, the mechanical watches are powered by Dior's Inverse Caliber, which positions the spinning winding rotor on the dial side, where it visibly evokes the swirl of a ball gown with every movement of the wearer's wrist. Developed through a collaboration of Les Ateliers Horlogers Dior, movement manufacturer Soprod and watchmaker Frédéric Jovenot,

the Inverse Caliber provides the house's prolific artistic talents with a blank canvas upon which to create their visions. Developing such inventive original movements is nothing new for Dior, says Laurence Nicolas, president of Dior Timepieces. She references the Dior 8 Fuseaux Horaires caliber, which created a kinetic effect with the rotation of its satellite subdial,

showing the time in eight zones worldwide; a delicate tourbillon built with transparent sapphire crystal elements; and an intriguing mystery watch, created with layers of sapphire crystal discs.

Because the Dior VIII Grand Bal designs vary—each evocative of a decorative discipline used in *haute couture* production, such as lacemaking, embroidery or







Dior VIII Grand Bal Résille in black ceramic and diamonds

pleating—the watchmakers must adapt the movement to each concept. “Our main challenge concerning this caliber was to make possible, in the quite conservative Swiss watchmaking universe, the creative ideas of our Parisian studio,” explains Nicolas. “Every new design obliges us to recalculate the total inertia of the movement.”

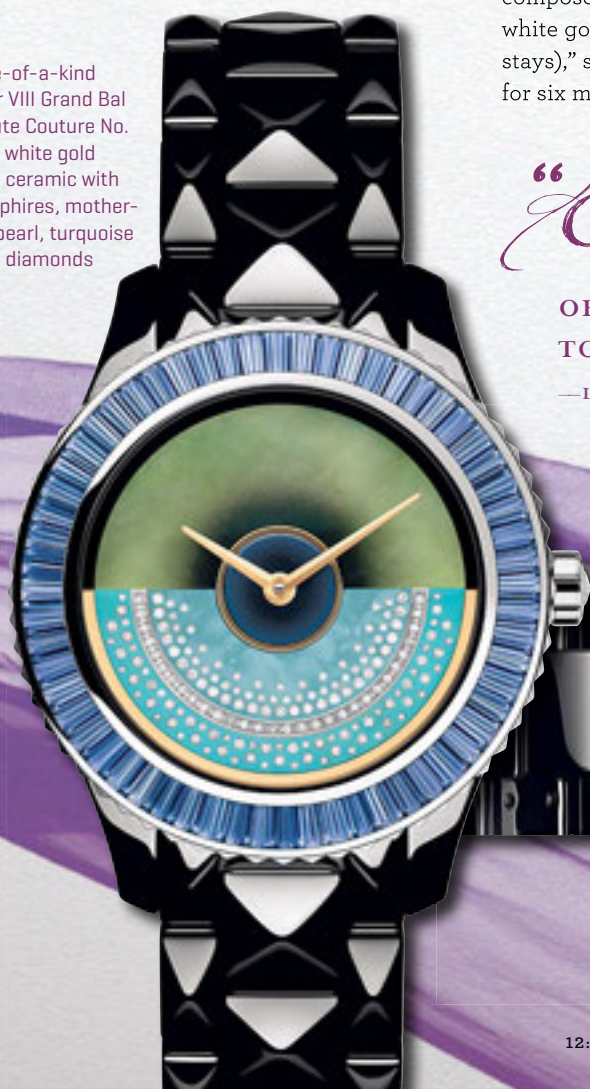
Last year’s introductory range of five pieces has been expanded this year with a

new Résille model, which emulates netting, and a Plumes variation, with feathers on the oscillating weight. This use of feathers posed a particular challenge because the material is so light and airy. “When Les Ateliers Horlogers Dior at La Chaux-de-Fonds in Switzerland received the sketch, they could immediately foresee the difficulties in developing an oscillating weight, not covered with feathers, but composed of feathers placed on invisible white gold stays (somewhat like corset stays),” says Nicolas. “After researching for six months, they found the right bird,

an Italian rooster, from which they could recut the feathers to obtain the most amazing fluffy effect with the right density.”

Also noteworthy is Dior’s use of semi-precious stones, such as turquoise, tiger’s eye and malachite, often combined with sparkling diamonds, rubies, sapphires and other precious gems. While the La D de Dior collections have featured colorful stone dials for years, the new Dior VIII Grand Bal Haute Couture pieces audaciously combine the stones with various *métiers d’art*, including engraving, marquetry, lapidary work and gemsetting.

One-of-a-kind Dior VIII Grand Bal Haute Couture No. 4 in white gold and ceramic with sapphires, mother-of-pearl, turquoise and diamonds



## “Every new design

OBLIGES US TO RECALCULATE THE TOTAL INERTIA OF THE MOVEMENT.”

—LAURENCE NICOLAS



The back of the same piece, featuring a tinted sapphire crystal exhibition window





One-of-a-kind Dior VIII Grand Bal Haute Couture No. 5 in white gold and ceramic with sapphires, jade, malachite, diamonds and emeralds

For example, the first in the series mixes the collection's slick high-tech black ceramic case and bracelet with a luminous Australian opal dial, a bezel set with baguette-cut tsavorite garnets and an oscillating weight made of mother-of-pearl marquetry. The Model No. 5 offers a colorful variation on the theme with a jade dial set with diamonds and emeralds and a rotor fashioned from engraved malachite. "The lapidary work is unusual, because we ask the craftsmen to engrave materials, set stones on other stones, or create a very refined marquetry," explains Nicolas. "All these steps require extreme precision, particularly when they have to cut a very

fragile opal to create the thinnest stone possible to be placed on the dial."

Such time-honored decorative crafts also infuse the Dior Pièce Unique Collection, which added several one-of-a-kind designs this year. Powered by sister brand Zenith's Elite automatic movement, these colorful confections blend sparkling gems, mother-of-pearl marquetry and precious fabrics such as silk organza or pleated tulle, used for the straps.

Still, the Dior VIII Grand Bal collection makes the most comprehensive statement

on the synergy between high fashion and mechanical watchmaking with its bold color combinations, exotic materials, unconventional movement design and decorative handcrafts. According to Nicolas, Christian Dior once said, "The human hand gives the *objet d'art* its unique character." Indeed, at Dior, these time-honored crafts are being applied with contemporary aplomb to enrich Dior watches with characteristic zest—something that Dior famously believed is the secret to beauty. [dior.com](http://dior.com)