

The Beautiful World of Hubert de Givenchy Is On the Auction Block

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Christie's is auctioning the astonishing antique and art collection of the renowned French couturier.

By Bart Boehlert

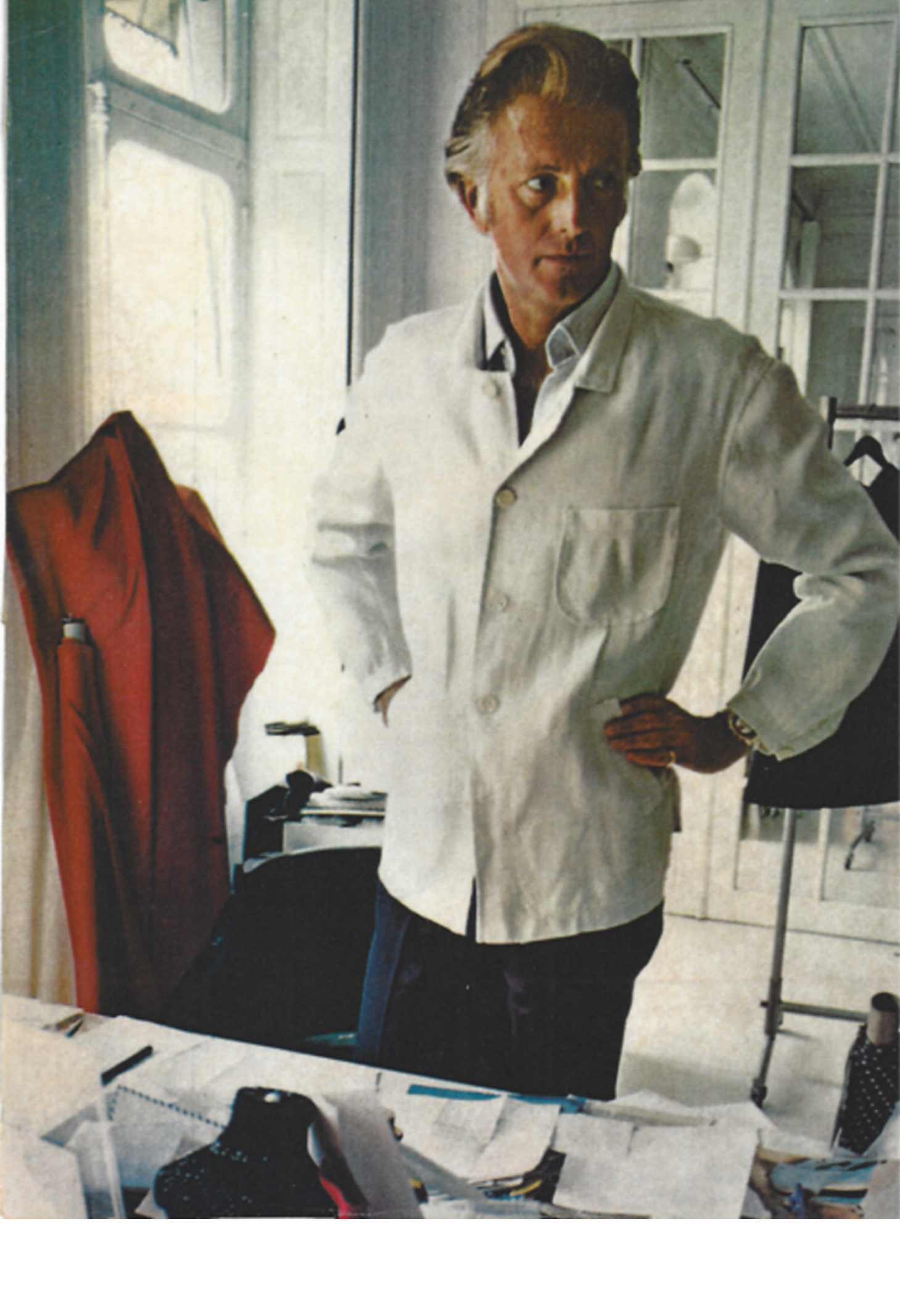
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Hôtel d'Orreux, the Paris home of Hubert de Givenchy.

The French fashion designer Monsieur Hubert de Givenchy is synonymous with an elevated elegance, still celebrated for his exquisite taste and sophistication in fashion. Applying the same rigor to his homes and interiors, the famed couturier amassed a world-class collection of French and European furniture and works of art from Old Masters to modern pieces.

Givenchy, called “one of the last of the true gentleman artists of our day,” passed away at the age of 91 in 2018, and this month Christie's in Paris will present the Givenchy collection at auction with more than 1,200 lots of furniture, decorative objects, and art offered in an online auction June 8–23 and a live auction June 14–17.



Hubert de Givenchy in his atelier at Avenue George V, 1972 [Wikimedia Commons]

Hubert de Givenchy was born a Count in Beauvais, France, to an aristocratic French family. He moved to Paris at age 17 to study at the École des Beaux Arts and began a career in fashion, working for Jacques Fath and Elsa Schiaparelli. The designer then opened his own fashion house in 1952, at the age of 25. Though he never worked for Cristóbal Balenciaga, Givenchy was befriended and mentored by the great Spanish couturier whose spare sculptural creations and mantra of “edit, edit, edit” influenced the young designer.

Another close friend who inspired Givenchy was Audrey Hepburn, who became his lovely muse. The story goes that when the fashion designer was told that Miss Hepburn was coming to his atelier, he was expecting Katharine. Instead, he found finefeatured, gamine Audrey. The two became great friends, and Givenchy outfitted Audrey Hepburn in many of her movies including *Funny Face*, *Sabrina*, and *Charade*. Certainly Hepburn as Holly Golightly in *Breakfast at Tiffany's*—dressed in a long, black, Givenchy sheath dress; pearls; long, black gloves; and big sunglasses—is one of the most iconic costumes in movie history.



Audrey Hepburn dressed by Givenchy in Breakfast at Tiffany's, 1961 [Public domain]

The designer's fashion philosophy of “noble simplicity” that gracefully followed the lines of the body appealed to other sophisticated clients like Jacqueline Kennedy Onassis, Grace Kelly, and Bunny Mellon, the art collector and horticulturist. Givenchy, who was known as “le Grand Hubert” due to his imposing 6'6" height, sold his label to LVMH in 1988 where it has since been helmed by various designers including John Galiano, Alexander McQueen, Clare Waight Keller, and currently Matthew Williams.

Givenchy applied his theme of noble simplicity to his handsome homes, which he shared with his life partner Philippe Venet, who died in 2021.

“I try to achieve harmony between architecture, decoration, and color,” observed Givenchy.

At his Paris home, the Hôtel d'Orreux, as well as his country house, the Chateau du Jonchet in the Loire Valley, Givenchy created rooms that were both beautiful and comfortable.



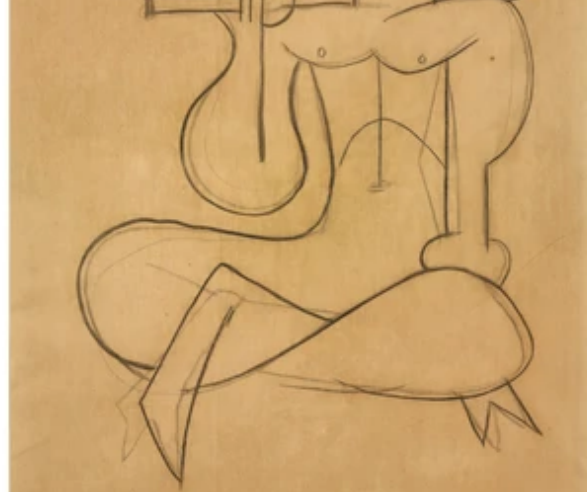
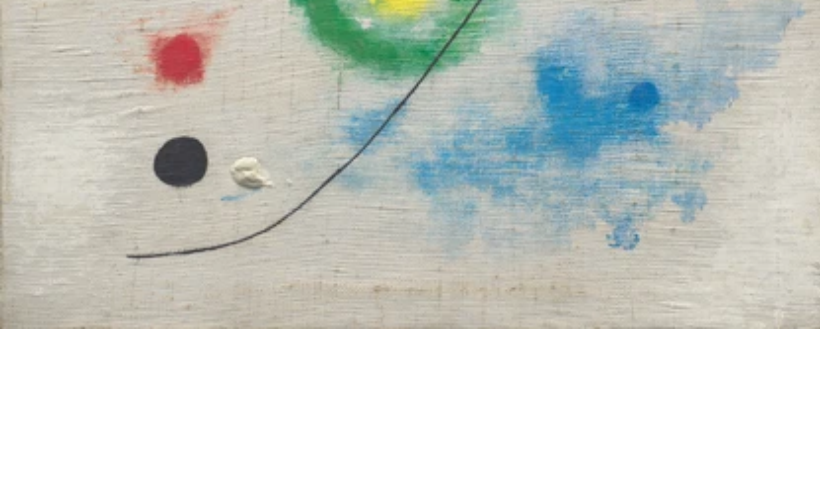
Hôtel d'Orreux exterior and interior

The Paris home, a *hôtel particulier* which is a grand free-standing townhouse, was built in 1732 in the High Regency style, and named a French national monument in 1926. Behind its carved limestone facade, Givenchy graciously arranged velvet-covered furniture with 18th-century objects, Regency armoires, and an Alberto Giacometti bronze sculpture. The country house in the Loire Valley is a Renaissance manor built in the 16th century, surrounded by a moat. There, he mixed seating covered with casual white cotton slipcovers and printed cottons with sculptural bronze Diego Giacometti furniture and a Joan Miró painting in the stairwell.



Chateau du Jonchet interior and exterior

The contents of the two homes are now up for auction at Christie's, which is offering almost 200 paintings including works by Pablo Picasso and Max Ernst—plus over 100 sculptures and more than 440 examples of seat furniture including armchairs, sofas, and *fauteuils* made by the greatest makers and designers from the 18th to the 20th century. That era of Givenchy elegance may be over, but collectors can rejoice in the prospect of owning a bit of the extraordinary provenance that bears the designer's signature style and taste.



Clockwise from top left: Joan Miró, Painting VI; Pair of Louis XVI chairs; Pablo Picasso, Fau à la Lance; Diego Giacometti bronze table