

Barbie

THE EXHIBITION



the
DESIGN
MUSEUM



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The Design Museum Touring Programme

The programme was set up in 2002 with the aim of bringing design exhibitions to audiences around the UK and internationally. Since then, the museum has organised more than 185 tours to 150 venues in 38 countries worldwide.

The Design Museum's touring exhibitions range in size from 150 to 1000 square metres and cover all areas of design – architecture, fashion, furniture, graphics, product and more.

About the Design Museum

The Design Museum is the world's leading museum devoted to architecture and design. Its work encompasses all elements of design, including fashion, product and graphic design. Since it opened its doors in 1989, the museum has displayed everything from an AK-47 to high heels designed by Christian Louboutin. It has staged over 100 exhibitions, welcomed over five million visitors and showcased the work of some of the world's most celebrated designers and architects including Paul Smith, Zaha Hadid, Jonathan Ive, Frank Gehry, Eileen Gray, Dieter Rams, Margaret Calvert and Yinka Ilori.

On 24 November 2016, the Design Museum relocated to Kensington, west London. John Pawson converted the interior of a 1960s modernist building to create a new home for the Design Museum, giving it three times more space in which to show a wider range of exhibitions and significantly extend its learning programme.

In May 2018, the Design Museum was awarded the title of European Museum of the Year.

In 2021, the Design Museum launched Future Observatory, a national programme for design research supporting the UK's response to the climate crisis. The three-year programme is coordinated by the Design Museum in partnership with the Arts and Humanities Research Council (AHRC), which is part of UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).

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The Design Museum, London



CURATOR
Danielle Thom is a Senior Curator at the Design Museum

EXHIBITION DESIGN
Sam Jacob Studio

GRAPHIC DESIGN
LMC

VENUES
the Design Museum, London
5 July 2024 — 23 February 2025

Kelvingrove Art Gallery and Museum, Glasgow, Scotland
13 June - 18 October 2026

TOUR AVAILABILITY
seeking expressions of interest from June 2027

SPACE
approx. 500 square metres (adaptable)

CEILING HEIGHT
5.4M, adaptable in consultation with the Design Museum

Exhibition overview

Opened to coincide with the 65th anniversary of the Barbie™ brand in 2024, the exhibition explores the story of Barbie through a design lens, including fashion, architecture, furniture and vehicle design.

Highlights include a rare first edition of the very first doll released by Mattel® in 1959 ('No. 1 Barbie'), the groundbreaking Day to Night Barbie from 1985 and the best-selling Barbie of all time, 1992's Totally Hair Barbie which sold over 10 million across the globe.

The exhibition also highlights the diversity of the Barbie range, with examples of the first Black, Hispanic and Asian dolls to bear the Barbie name, as well as dolls that reflect today's diverse, multicultural society, including the first Barbie with Down syndrome, the first to use a wheelchair, and the first to be designed with a curvy body shape.

We're also showcasing the friends of Barbie, including her first friend, Midge, and the much-loved Christie and Teresa; as well as the younger sister of Barbie, Skipper. There's a section dedicated to Ken, which sees six decades' worth of Ken dolls on show, showing his evolution from his introduction in 1961.

Other objects from this historic brand include Dreamhouses, vehicles and furniture, including the first ever Barbie Dreamhouse™ from 1962. Together these items show how Barbie's homes, vehicles and other products have all helped to design the universe in which she exists and has always reflected the tastes and trends of day, engaging with modern design in an aspirational but accessible way.



What's in the exhibition

Over 250 objects including more than 180 remarkable dolls

Rare first edition Barbie from 1959

The best-selling Totally Hair Barbie

Exclusive, behind-the-scenes insights into Mattel ®'s design processes

The first Black, Hispanic and Asian dolls

Dolls that reflect today's diverse, multicultural society such as the first Barbie with Down syndrome, the first to use a wheelchair, and the first to be designed with a 'curvy' body shape

Barbie's friends including Midge and the much-loved Christie and Teresa as well as Barbie's sister, Skipper

A section dedicated to Ken featuring six decades' worth of Ken dolls

The first ever Barbie Dreamhouse™ released in 1962

A huge variety of playsets, vehicles, houses and other accessories that have helped 'design' the universe in which Barbie exists

A selection of films including archival media and TV commercials



First Edition Barbie

A major highlight of the exhibition is the first object that visitors encounter as they enter the Design Museum's gallery: one of the earliest first edition Barbie dolls.

The doll — known by collectors as the 'No. 1 Barbie' as it was the very first model released by Mattel in 1959 — is now extremely sought after.

Hand-painted and featuring Barbie in a black-and-white bathing suit, the doll on display is an especially rare first edition that features holes in Barbie's feet where it would have been fixed to a stand.

Visitors will see the very first Barbie in close-up alongside archival footage of the first Barbie TV commercial (also from 1959), and this introductory section will offer an insight into the production and marketing of the doll — showing how Barbie 'the doll' soon developed into Barbie 'the brand'.





The Barbie universe

Barbie®: The Exhibition is an expansive journey into the Barbie universe. It shows how it has been shaped since her creation by a huge variety of playsets, vehicles, houses and other accessories which collectively have helped 'design' the universe in which she exists.

A rare example of the first ever Barbie Dreamhouse™ — released in 1962, made from cardboard and sporting the distinctly modernist design of its era — is among the Barbie homes on show.

Visitors will also be able to see examples of Barbie's vehicles, such as her first car (also from 1962) and her first campervan (from 1971), alongside a whole range of other 'locations' — from ski cabins to space stations.

Together these items show how Barbie and her accompanying accessories have always reflected the tastes and trends of the day, and how they have engaged with modern design in an aspirational but accessible way.

Exhibition goers will also be able to see the influence of major designers and architects — from Florence Knoll to Frank Gehry — on the Barbie universe, as well as the significance of various mainstream trends and big retailers.

Opposite
1961 Austin Healy. © Mattel, Inc.

Above
1979 Dream House. © Mattel, Inc.



Barbie and fashion

Fashion is a significant theme running through the show. Across the exhibition, there are dozens of original Barbie outfits which both highlight Barbie's origins as a fashion doll, and her impact on the wider history of modern dress. This includes outfits such as 'Poodle Parade' (1965) — a life-size replica of which was worn by Billie Eilish when she performed at the 2024 Grammy Awards this month — and a 1985 outfit by Oscar de la Renta, the first of many designer collaborations with the brand.

Visitors will be able to trace the changing silhouettes of mainstream fashion over the last 65 years through the exhibition, and they will see the influence of designers — from Claire McCardell and Christian Dior, to Nolan Miller and Zac Posen — on Barbie fashion choices.

The final section of the show will spotlight the enduring role Barbie has as a pop culture icon, looking at her impact on design in all its forms, from fashion to film, as well as the Barbie brand's forays into social advocacy.

Barbie®: The Exhibition is the first time a major UK museum has held a major show dedicated to Barbie. It's been made possible through a partnership with Mattel Inc, allowing the Design Museum to draw on Mattel's Barbie archives in California for a number of key loans, as well as utilising the expertise of Mattel's brand historians and archivists.

- Opposite
1. Barbie Fashionista #27 Sweetheart Stripes. © Mattel, Inc.
 2. 2016 fashionista petit brocade. © Mattel, Inc.
 3. 1985 Day to Night Barbie. © Mattel, Inc.
 4. 1984 Peaches 'N Cream Barbie. © Mattel, Inc.

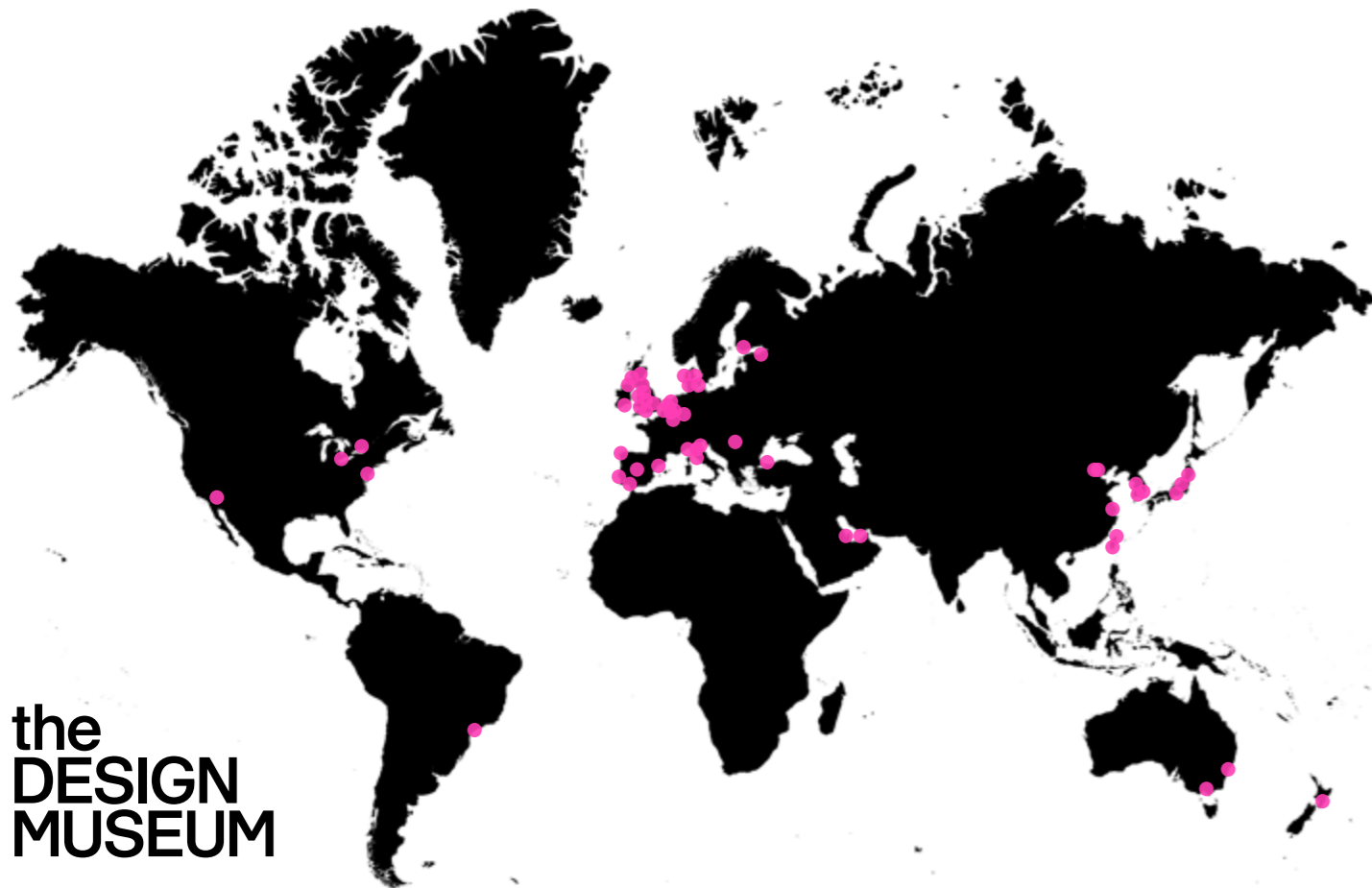
Terms and conditions

Hire fee includes:

- Curation and exhibition concept
- Tour management by Design Museum staff including onsite support for installation and de-installation
- Exhibits, images and films
- Exhibition text and Interpretation plan in English
- Exhibition and graphic design concept, including drawings and artworked files
- Selection of approved assets for press & marketing

Costs payable by the venue:

- Exhibition and graphic design adaptation
- Share of transport and crating costs
- Storage of empty crates
- Nail-to-nail insurance
- All costs relating to exhibition production, 3D and 2D graphic adaptations, AV equipment and lighting
- Installation and de-installation costs
- Marketing and promotion of the exhibition
- Retail merchandise
- Travel, accommodation and expenses for the Design Museum representative to oversee the installation and de-installation
- Travel, accommodation and expenses for the Design Museum curator or director to attend the opening
- Travel, accommodation and expenses for a Mattel courier or doll stylist to attend the installation



Contacts

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