

Spotlight on John Cavanagh

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Spotlight on

Just as good music has its place and followers in this day and age of "pop", so has couture in fashion. In fact, besides "pop" and "fun" fashions, good, well-made clothes have never been "out". Creative couture still forms the backbone of fashion.

However, as times change and mechanization replaces human labour more and more, it become increasingly difficult to find the right people for couture workrooms. It is also a question of money. Even those who can afford to pay couture prices will nowadays rather buy one couture model plus several boutique outfits, for fashion changes too quickly. Then it is also a question of time; increased travel often at short notice or with a sudden invitation to an important event makes it impossible to order from a couture collection, instead a model off the peg has to be selected, which can be quickly altered if necessary.

Mr. Cavanagh happily recognised the necessity to adapt himself to this situation and modernised his approach. He drastically cut his overheads, expanding his "Couture Boutique", which he had opened in 1959. He is now able to offer couture clothes to his customers, all models made to order, but at highly competitive prices. For instance, "I used to have 4 house mannequins and show every day at 3.00 in the afternoon. Now I have only one mannequin who also doubles up as sales assistant".

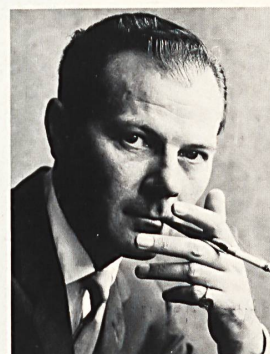
Seven years ago Mr. Cavanagh added the ready-to-wear shop next door to the boutique at 26 Curzon Street, London, W.1. where models can be bought off the peg but altered to customers' requirements. Here prices range from £25-£90 against those in the Couture Boutique at 27 Curzon Street which range between £75-£200. Nowadays, approximately two-fifths of the garments sold are couture as compared with three-fifths from the ready-to-wear shop. Four collections a year are produced, in February and August for the Couture Boutique, and in April and October for the ready-to-wear collections.

Irish-born John Cavanagh left St. Paul's School in 1932 and started his career "picking up pins" for the house of Molyneux in London and Paris. After spending the war years in the army, being demobilized as captain, he returned to Paris to work with Pierre Balmain until 1951. In 1952 he opened his couture salon in London and on presentation of his first collection was invited to become a member of the "Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers". In 1953 he showed his collection with great success in Paris, in the USA and in Canada. During the International Trade Fair in



Short dinner dress. The shirt style top is in Abraham's black rayon jersey, the black skirt features multicoloured wool embroidery by Jakob Schlöpfer & Co. Ltd., St. Gall.

JOHN CAVANAGH



Munich in 1954 he was awarded a Gold Medal in the International Couture Section for outstanding workmanship.

Having, over a number of years, made clothes for Princess Marina, the Duchess of Kent and Princess Alexandra, Mr. Cavanagh was honoured to make the wedding gowns for both the present Duchess of Kent and Princess Alexandra. Since 1968 he has made all the clothes for Lady Soames, wife of the British Ambassador in Paris. Mr. Cavanagh also designed some clothes for Princess Anne's tour of Australia and New Zealand in 1970.

Wearability, colour and simplicity of line are the main characteristics of Mr. John Cavanagh's designs. His clothes are well-made and refreshingly lacking in "gimmick" styling. "I do not buy fabrics by nationality, I choose what is beautiful and I always like colour", he declares. "I always use Swiss fabrics because they are so beautiful". John Cavanagh himself is the best advertisement for his clothes. Dapper, elegant, well dressed, polite, no silly gimmicks in his appearance, just smoking tipped cigarettes from a cigarette holder, his blue eyes not missing any detail and always ready to assist during a customer's fitting with his sincere advice.

For the Winter collection 1972/73 Mr. Cavanagh has again chosen Swiss fabrics. The collection includes suits and coats in fine tweeds, dress and jacket ensembles in printed Swiss wool and jersey, short dinner and evening dresses, waisted with lots of pleats, no widened shoulders—"I do not like them", states Mr. Cavanagh. He is for the fluid lines following the figure. The day dresses just cover the knee cap and jackets are short as well as hip length, depending on the skirt, for Mr. Cavanagh keeps to proportion, the golden rule for designing clothes.

Greta Sitek