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Autor: Chessex, R.
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THE SWISS APPAREL INDUSTRY

Table Talk.

— Who really «makes» Fashion? Dressmakers, textile manufacturers, the public? Or is it some mysterious concourse of influences and circumstances? Is Fashion really «made», or does it «make» itself?

— Well, first of all, isn't it rather a waste of time to raise questions to which there is no possible clear and accurate reply?

— Surely, you will admit that there is such a thing as a road-to-nowhere, along which the traveller may yet enjoy interesting vistas! And that alone gives us the right to ask certain questions, even though our only intention in doing so is to specify other details, in quite desultory fashion.

In effect, our intention here is not to discover the exact sources from which the designer draws his inspiration, nor yet the reasons which cause him — or her — to suggest such and such an idea to his clientele. We need know only one thing, namely, that the couturier does do so, and that women do choose that which pleases them from the collections he presents. And, you will say, what then are the criterions of taste? To which we reply: «What matters it? There are clearly two styles of fashion: that of the designer and that adopted by his clients.»

The role of the outfitting industry.

All women are not the clients of exclusive fashion houses. And, nevertheless, there are so many elegant women about in the world today — quite apart from the film stars and pin-up girls who grace social events, the covers of illustrated magazines and fashionable lidos — women who form part of our daily life, well-dressed women clad with chic and quality. They do not frequent the salons of fashion houses and yet they are fashionable, less dashingly so, perhaps, styled more soberly and demurely.

This may lead you to infer that there is yet a third «style» in the world! Certainly there is! The style created by the clothiers and outfitters, by the apparel manufacturers. They are called upon to place large quantities of garments on the market and to meet the requirements of a large and very dispersed clientele, whose tastes are extremely varied. Commercial and industrial necessities therefore require that all exaggeration of style be abandoned, for that would make the models inaccessible to many; exaggeration may be indulged in only by those who serve a small circle of customers having quite definite tastes.

The manufacturer of ready-made apparel translates and adapts the styles in vogue. He eliminates, specifies general trends, lops off all accidental details which sometimes hide the general outline. His role is that of a classical artist: his material is more pure, his models are created with a greater sense of reality and he produces a more universal conception of feminine elegance than does the couturier. The latter works for his clients alone; the manufacturer works for everybody. The latter's task requires taste, imagination too, but especially an acutely critical eye, a profound knowledge of market conditions and a good amount of audacity tempered by prudence. He must be able to recognize with great surety exactly what elements in theoretical styles are likely to please and become practical fashions.

(Please turn
to page 71)

On the opposite page:

Beautiful evening gown of black net with distinctive écrù embroidery and Valenciennes lace.

ALGO S. A., ZURICH





Photo Tenca

Robe du soir : ligne de Paris, crêpe mousse blanc avec broderie paillettes d'or et applications de velours.
White moss crepe evening gown, Parisian styled, with gold sequins and applications of velvet.
Traje de soaré : crespón «mousse» blanco, silueta de París, bordados de lentejuelas oro y aplicaciones de terciopelo.
Weisses Crêpe-mousse Abendkleid : Pariser Linie, Goldpailletten-Stickerei und Velours-Applikationen.

WILLY MEYER S. A., ZURICH.



Photo Tenca

Robe du soir, corsage en faille pure soie à rayures multicolores et jupe en tulle noir.
Evening gown : bodice of multicolour striped, pure silk faille ; skirt of black net.
Traje de soaré con cuerpo de faya de seda pura con rayas multicolores y con falda de tul negro.
Abendkleid mit Oberteil aus Reinseiden-Faille in Multicolorstreifen und Jupe aus schwarzem Tüll.



Photo Tencu

Robe de cocktail de ligne très sobre en crêpe mousse noir avec Valenciennes sur fond rose.
Sober styled cocktail gown of black moss crepe, with Valenciennes lace over pink foundation.
Traje de tarde sobria : crespón «mousse» negro con Valenciennes sobre viso de color rosa.
Sehr gediegenes Cocktail-Kleid aus schwarzem Crêpe-Mousse mit Valenciennes-Spitzen auf rosa Grund.

WILLY MEYER S.A., ZURICH.



Photo Tenea

Robe d'après-midi distinguée en jersey, noir et « Terre de France », brodée en style ancien. Distinctive afternoon model of black and « Terre-de-France » jersey fabric, embroidered in ancient style. Vestido de tarde, distinguido: tejido de malla, negro y « Tierra de Francia », bordados de estilo antiguo. Vornehmes Nachmittagskleid aus Jersey, in schwarz und « Terre de France », mit antiker Stickerei.

MACOLA S. A., ZURICH.



Photo Bertrand

Manteau en belle duvetine laine absinthe, à porter sur un tailleur assorti garni de fourrure.
Coat in fine, opal green wool duvetine, for wear over fur-trimmed tailored suit to match.
Abrigo de lanilla « duvetine », verde ajenjo, para llevar con traje adecuado adornado de peletería.
Mantel aus schöner absinthfarbiger Wollduvetine zum tragen über einem pelzbesetzten Tailleur.

ARTHUR SCHIBLI S. A., GENÈVE.



Photo Meyboom

Manteau redingote en fin velours avec col original en ragondin.
Smart tailored coat of fine velvet with original nutria collar.
Abrigo levita, de fino terciopelo, con cuello original de piel de nutria.
Redingote-Mantel aus feinem Velours mit apartem Nutria-Kragen.



« ALPINIT »

Ensemble très sport en tricot avec pull-over à larges rayures.
Practical knitted sport ensemble with broad striped pullover.
Conjunto deportivo de punto de malla, con pull-over con listas anchas.
Flottes gestricktes Sport-Ensemble mit breitgestreiftem Pullover.

RUEPP & Co., SARMENSTORF.

And now, having made these points clear, we can better answer our original question: «Who makes fashion?» Our reply must be: «Many different factors, but also — and in any case — the manufacturers of ready-made apparel!»

Zurich — centre of the apparel industry.

It is no exaggeration to say that, nowadays, Zurich is the most important clothing market in continental Europe. It is not so very long ago either, that a Swiss town has been cast for such an important role. In the old days, Vienna and Berlin were the major centres of this industry, but even before the war, the change was becoming noticeable. Since then, international events have finally and brutally settled the question of prestige in this respect. Switzerland today has a flourishing ladies' apparel industry. Most of the firms in the branch are to be found in Zurich although there are quite a number elsewhere, in Western Switzerland for instance. These firms started by supplying the home market and, owing to the restricted demand, were unable to adopt mass production methods; as they were then working for a population with a relatively high buying power, accustomed by its other national industries to good quality products and, geographically, situated sufficiently close to Paris to feel the influence of that centre, Swiss apparel manufacturers at once adopted the methods such factors dictated: very elegant styling, careful designs, good quality materials and impeccable workmanship and detail.

The Zurich market gives foreign buyers the opportunity of viewing and comparing numerous collections of dresses, coats, tailormades, sportswear, etc., all with minimum expenditure of time and under the most comfortable conditions possible. During the «Export Weeks» organized in advance of every season by the Swiss Export Syndicate of the Apparel Industries, the best houses in Switzerland present their new models and within a few days, after having thoroughly examined the models on view, the most exacting buyers can make a careful selection.

High-class creations.

High-class ready-made garments all feature the same fundamental characteristics which distinguish Swiss quality wares. Each collection, however, has certain particular aspects which strike an individual note, just as in the activities of each firm, certain trends which form its «style» can be noted. It is of course understood that, although a manufacturer may «specialize» in, say, youthful styles, he will not for all that neglect other types of feminine apparel because, as already stated, trade conditions being what they are in Switzerland, there are no great clothing factories where just a few special models are mass-produced. The Swiss outfitting industry has certainly adopted modern methods and has grown into a real industry; nevertheless, it is animated by a spirit which leads one to consider it rather as a highly developed craft. In a world where standardization has slowly eliminated much of the charm of life, this «craft» is successfully maintaining — like the best and most famous fashion houses — the prestige of good taste and the pleasure of beautiful clothes.

We have here selected eight models of very different types presented by some of the best known Swiss firms. In every one of these concerns, we have noted how much care is taken to place only the best at the service of true elegance. Some prefer richness of trimming, the effect of embroideries, sequins and appliqués; others are particularly attentive to fashionable sobriety of cut and line. One manufacturer may specialize in carefully studied colour harmonies and combinations, while another cultivates novelty in sportswear... Whatever their preference, all these manufacturers are animated by a keen spirit of emulation, stimulated by their growing success on foreign markets where they fully intend to win a place of honour. It is only fair to mention also, that Swiss outfitters have the support of a highly developed domestic weaving industry. Some firms indeed have their own knitting mills where they can produce exactly the type of fabric they desire.

R. Chesseix.