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Letter from London



London

The big event this New Year has been London's Fashion Week (just ended), in which the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers showed their export collections of summer clothes. For the foreign buyers and the journalists who pack these shows there was much entertainment, apart from concentrated viewing: for example, a gala party at Covent Garden, where the auditorium itself was a glittering scene, thronged with women in really lovely dresses, an infrequent sight in these post-war days.

The collections themselves revealed no startling new line. Instead, the flamboyant femininity of two years ago has been still further modified and whittled down into a slim, graceful and easy silhouette. Skirts incline to be very slightly shorter than

last year, and narrower, too — pleats are used so subtly that at first you scarcely notice them. Fulness starts low down, if at all, and as a rule, is drawn to the back or sides. The classic suit is rather in eclipse at the moment and dresses are in the ascendant. Sometimes, they have matching jackets, which make them look like suits; or short boleros — there are a lot of these — and stoles, too. This fashion for stoles is equally beloved for daytime and evening wear: many evening dresses have them, often of chiffon or tulle. But there is also a return to shawl necklines in the evening, or to high, stand-up collars; the off-the-shoulder décolleté is no longer *de rigueur*. The heyday of the «tent» coat is over; the princess line is much newer. There are some black silk coats for summer «best» and heavy, stiff silk is used a great deal for cocktail clothes — tie-silks, grosgrains, satins, taffetas. Except in little cotton frocks, colours are muted — grey and pewter, beige and biscuit, and, as usual, a lot of navy blue. *Fin de journée* dresses of satin and taffeta now tend to be in silvery and coppery colours rather than black.

Fine fabrics and their exploitation have, indeed, provided one of the most interesting aspects of the spring showings. Since the recent severe restrictions on imports, English dress-makers have had to manage without most of the fine silk, tulle and muslin which came from abroad. But a much-coveted quota of these things still arrives and English designers know how to make the best use of the small quantity of rich Zurich silks, delicate lace and romantic muslins which reach their work-rooms every season.

Angèle Delanghe is a designer with a very feminine, gentle approach to fashion: her line is soft, so are the materials she uses; and she adores crisp lingerie touches, ethereal evening dresses and Swiss lace. She uses the latter to add a frosty touch

of white to a cool navy-blue alpaca suit; while, for another dark suit, she designed a summery white organdie blouse.

The tie-silks for which Zurich is renowned are having an enormous success here this spring. You see them everywhere. There are used for chic afternoon suits, for rather grand cocktail suits and for dinner dresses.

Norman Hartnell, who designs for the Queen those romantic crinoline gowns in which she looks so well, uses a great deal of tulle for his evening dresses. One beautiful model in palest grey was embroidered with thick clusters of sequined roses; another, a froth of silvery grey embroidered with flowers; and there was a delicious dress of lime green and white tulle with a shawl collar sprinkled with gold sequins.

Cottons are going to be more chic than ever this summer. Some of the couture designers even use it for ball gowns. Hardy Amies uses cotton for the shirts that he teams with his suits, for washable day dresses and for an amusing little jacket to wear over a rayon dinner dress. And he is faithful to the fabrics of St. Gall. He chose a filmy Swiss cotton organdie for a delicious evening dress which he tops with a jacket of leaf-green rayon; and a silky evening frock is embellished with Swiss lace.

Another designer who always does something exciting with Swiss muslins is Michael Sherard. Now, he shows a distinctive evening frock of white Swiss organdie, decorated with a flight of London sparrows, hand-painted by an English artist. The single shoulder-strap of this lingerie-topped dress is *entre-deux* embroidery, threaded with brown ribbon, and the waist is spanned with a ruffle of the same insertion. Other Swiss-fabricated models in this collection are a black lace cocktail dress adorned with ostrich feathers and a loose, hip-length evening jacket of daisy-patterned guipure.

It is not only in the salons of the haute couture that Englishwomen look for the delicious fabrics of St. Gall. Those who have to do their shopping in the great stores or the small dress-shops also look for the filmy organdies and voiles and the crisp *broderie anglaise* which is the perfect summer fabric — and a few are lucky in their search!

Indeed, whether or not clothes rationing is abolished and Purchase Tax reduced, there is no doubt that we shall most of us manage to buy at least one fresh summery dress of cotton, tulle or muslin. What we must now hope for, is warm sunshine in which to wear them.

Ann Duveen



Dinner dress with soft black skirt and camisole top of Swiss *Broderie anglaise*, by Spectator Sports, London.