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The universal language of fashion

Fashion, like music, is an expression of the love of beauty which is accessible to everyone and understandable in all countries and in all climates. This year particularly, the creations of Paris, New York, London, California and Italy have a unity of line, form and fabric that tends to relate them and gives fashion a very marked international flavour. New York, owing to its geographical position and its importance in the world, and because of the intense trade which connects it with the rest of the world, has always had a certain international character which is becoming more and more marked with the growth of the air lines and the increase in the number of transatlantic liners.

Ideas, pictures and models pass rapidly from one continent to the other and there is a continual exchange going on which stimulates not only the ready-to-wear manufacturers of New York or the milliners of Paris but also the great couturiers themselves. Thus elegance is spread instantaneously even to those parts of the world which are furthest from the great centres: a model by Dior or by Fath, created in Paris, will adorn a charming American woman on her ranch in Arizona or Texas and this swimsuit, made in California, will appear on a beach in Scandinavia or Chile.

Like ideas and designs, fabrics also go round the world. Fabrics and the thousand and one accessories indispensable to feminine attire — silks, straw hats, scarves, fine handkerchiefs, shoes, embroidery and trinkets of all kinds — travel like migratory birds, moving according to the rhythm of the seasons from one latitude to the next, from temperate climes to the tropics, from countries with snowy peaks to palm-fringed beaches, from overpopulated towns to farms in vast deserted plains.

There are many problems here for the manufacturers of textiles to solve, not only in order to adapt their export fabrics to the most varied climates but to deliver them at the right moment for spring or summer at the antipodes, or to meet the different requirements of American women in Buenos Aires or those in Boston or San Francisco.

Thanks to the rapid transmission of fashion trends from one continent to another, the last of these problems becomes less complicated every year: indeed, the international character of fashion unifies to a certain extent the desires and needs of women all over the world. And in New York women dress — more or less — as they do in Paris, Rome, Santiago in Chile or Melbourne. The same fabrics are worn, cut according to the ideas of the same Parisian couturiers; the only change is that of the difference in season from one hemisphere to the other. This difference is really only a matter of a few weeks, and then again it only makes itself felt where the heaviest woollen garments are concerned. The « little » dress and the suit of course are worn all the year round, and it is just the same for evening and cocktail dresses which know no season, no age, no definite hour, but are to some extent the *passé-partout* of women's clothes.

In this age of international trade in which we live, the fine cotton fabrics of Saint-Gall, whose fame dates back many years, have acquired a vitality and an « actuality » without equal. Having become uncrushable, unshrinkable and easy to look after, thanks to improvements in finishing, they are admirably suited to the most extreme climates as well as for air and sea travel. Cotton has for several seasons now been enjoying a world-wide success, and the forecasts are still all in its favour

as regards the future. The new cotton fabrics are so varied, so fresh and light, so different from one another that they can quite easily be used to make a whole wardrobe for the four seasons. Saint-Gall has revived some old ideas and found in its old books of samples, fabrics which delighted the woman of fashion of 1860 or 1900. By cleverly adapting them to the requirements of modern life, Swiss manufacturers have made them into fabrics which are worn at all hours of the day, in town or country.

The collections of the couturiers and big ready-to-wear manufacturers of New York have all made use of these Swiss fabrics whose quality is beyond compare. However Switzerland does not only send organdies and embroideries to America but an infinite variety of fabrics, such as batistes, voiles, piqués and fancy shirtings, which are admirably suitable for dresses and light suits for town country, for day and evening wear.

June, the month of weddings, sees the appearance of a whole host of models of wedding dresses and bridesmaid's gowns made of fabrics imported from Switzerland. June is also the month of graduation ceremonies and the first summer balls for which young girls wear the freshest, coolest kind of clothes, dresses in white or pastel shades, prints and embroideries from Saint-Gall. For these important occasions, Switzerland exports a large selection of its finest cotton fabrics. The silks of Zurich, whose quality is also first-rate, likewise contribute considerably to the manufacture of the best models of the New York collections.

It should be noted when admiring these fabrics from Switzerland that they are no longer exceptional, or fragile, or delicate to the point of being intended only for dresses for great occasions. A remarkable strength and resistance is combined with their apparent fragility. The finest fabrics of Switzerland, the daintiest embroideries of Saint-Gall possess lasting qualities which enable them to be used for everyday wear. The blouses, collars and embroidered aprons which have to be washed each time after use will not wear out but keep the appearance and finish of new fabrics even after many washings. This explains why American fashions have seized upon the dainty cotton fabrics of Saint-Gall to make them into sturdy little summer dresses that can be worn all day, that can be washed in the evening and put on again the next morning, as fresh as they were the day before.

This is one of the charming new features of the fabrics of Saint-Gall — their suitability for the most ordinary purposes and for everyday wear. Few fabrics are so well suited to the scorching climate of the United States in summer, few fabrics stand up so well, and without losing their freshness, to the humid heat of the Atlantic belt. This is one of the reasons for the lasting success of fine cotton fabrics with American women.

In order to adapt themselves to this trend which is becoming increasingly marked, Swiss manufacturers have sought to create fabrics and embroideries with simpler and lighter designs for practical, unpretentious dresses. Among the collections of fabrics from Saint-Gall one can see then, alongside creations of great elegance for gala evening gowns, a whole host of delightful fabrics particularly suited to the making of these little cotton dresses which every girl and every young woman likes to have an interchangeable set of, for the summer holidays, travelling and for life in the country.

Thérèse de Chambrier.



SWISS FABRIC GROUP, NEW YORK

Pat Premo of California

Dress of «Hetex» sheer cotton fabric from Switzerland