

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1951)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Boutiques...
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798811>

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BOUTIQUES...

by J. Gaumont-Lanvin





It is not the fact that couturiers have boutiques that surprises us, but that for the most part they have waited so long. Indeed, to anyone who knows them, to anyone who knows to what extent their spirit likes to go off in search of detail, the atmosphere they need, the delight they take in having a hand in all that is either closely or remotely connected with their art, to anyone who understands all this, it is obvious that the boutique is the natural means of expression of Haute Couture.

A couturier cannot live for his dresses alone. He must go out and observe, visit the theatre, the cinema, the Ballet, go to concerts, see exhibitions of paintings or objects of art, take part in the life of Paris in all its forms, keep in touch with interior decorators, antique dealers and lapidaries, and pay frequent visits to the Flea Market — he must seize, as it passes by, the idea which he will turn into the new Fashion, to an accompaniment of brilliant images and a riot of accessories. From then on, the inventors of novelties besiege his door; he is offered the strangest objects. Of all this jumble, the couturier makes his choice. There is nothing more logical than that he should be led to create the setting in which his choice will be expressed, where the hundred and one odds and ends that he loves will be displayed. And this is the boutique.

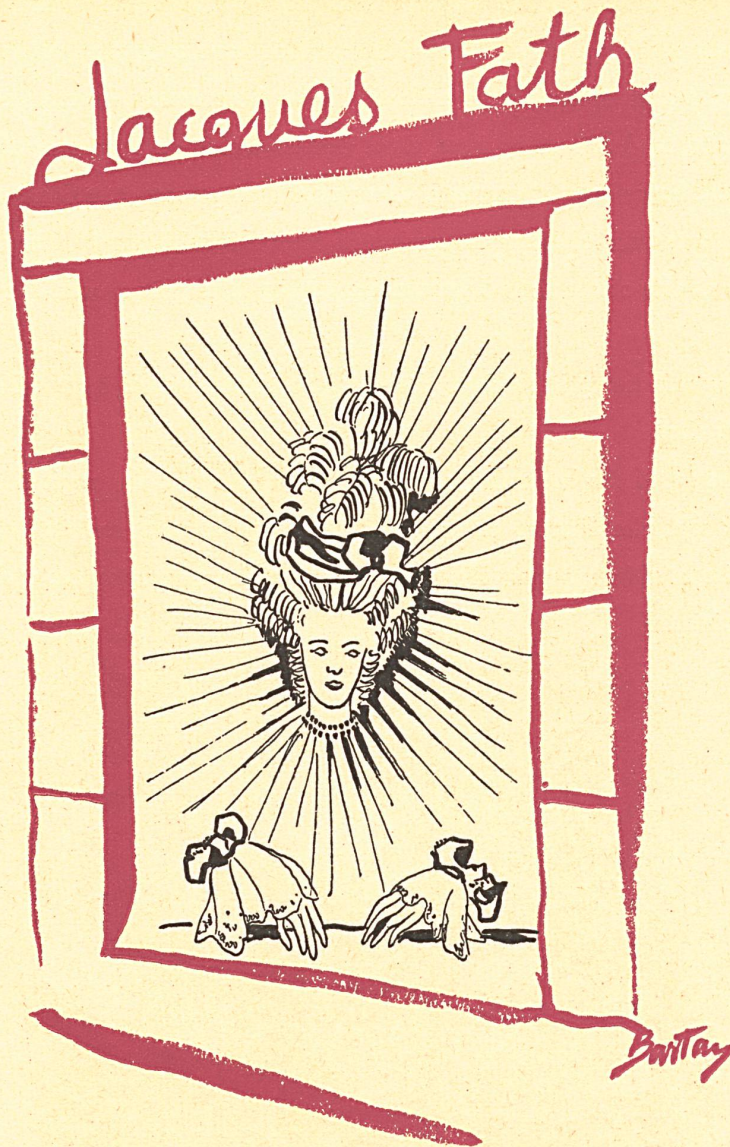
The boutique is, moreover, the pleasant, elegant and overheated place where he tries to sell more, for

the work of creation is ruinous. These dresses that are sold for four hundred thousand French francs, and which (when they are sold) give only a trifling profit, these dresses which have been worked on for days on end — to put right a fold, to change a skirt, to renew the embroidery — these dresses heavily decorated with gold which will tarnish to-morrow and be destroyed by dust, these dresses which no longer bring wealth but reasons for care, these dresses that are henceforth as exacting, as voracious as private mansions, these dresses that demand servants — these dresses are the ultimate expression of international luxury. They are an anachronism and yet they must remain as one of the links in the chain joining us to past epochs, like a symbol of eternal creation.

But to be able to go in for the ruinous sport of dress designing, couturiers must have other strings to their bow. The boutique is one of them.

A great spendthrift, a «playboy» of the beginning of the century, understood the tragic dilemma of the dressmaking situation. *Paul Poiret* was the first to create the perfume of couture and its setting, as did *Jeanne Lanvin* shortly after him. Both, although very different in character and background, understood that the couturier had to extend his activity.





Since the end of the last war, events have compelled couturiers to reflect, and to protect themselves. And after the perfumes, the lingerie, the handbags, scarves and accessories, we saw the appearance of the little ready-made dresses which are sold in the boutique but which nevertheless keep the reflected glamour and the predominant lines of the great collection.

However as soon as a boutique was opened, the desire was felt to make it original. The decorators were called in, an attempt was made to overcome this antithesis of the « boutique d'art » coupled with a shop where things are sold. And very often it was a success, so subtle is the taste of couturiers. And each boutique reflected, like a dress, the personality of the head of the House. In the five sketches accompanying these notes, it is easy to recognise the proud and luxurious simplicity of *Balenciaga*, the drapes, the friezes and preciousity of Napoleon III in the abode of *Jean Dessès*, the eager concern for quiet decoration and line, so dear to *Christian Dior*, the charming fantasy of *Jacques Fath* and finally the lovable tradition of *Maggy Rouff*.

Are boutiques merely a passing phase? Shall we see them fade away as soon as they are born? We do not think so. On the contrary, we believe that they are only in the first trial stage that hardly gives us a glimpse of what they will be like in the future.

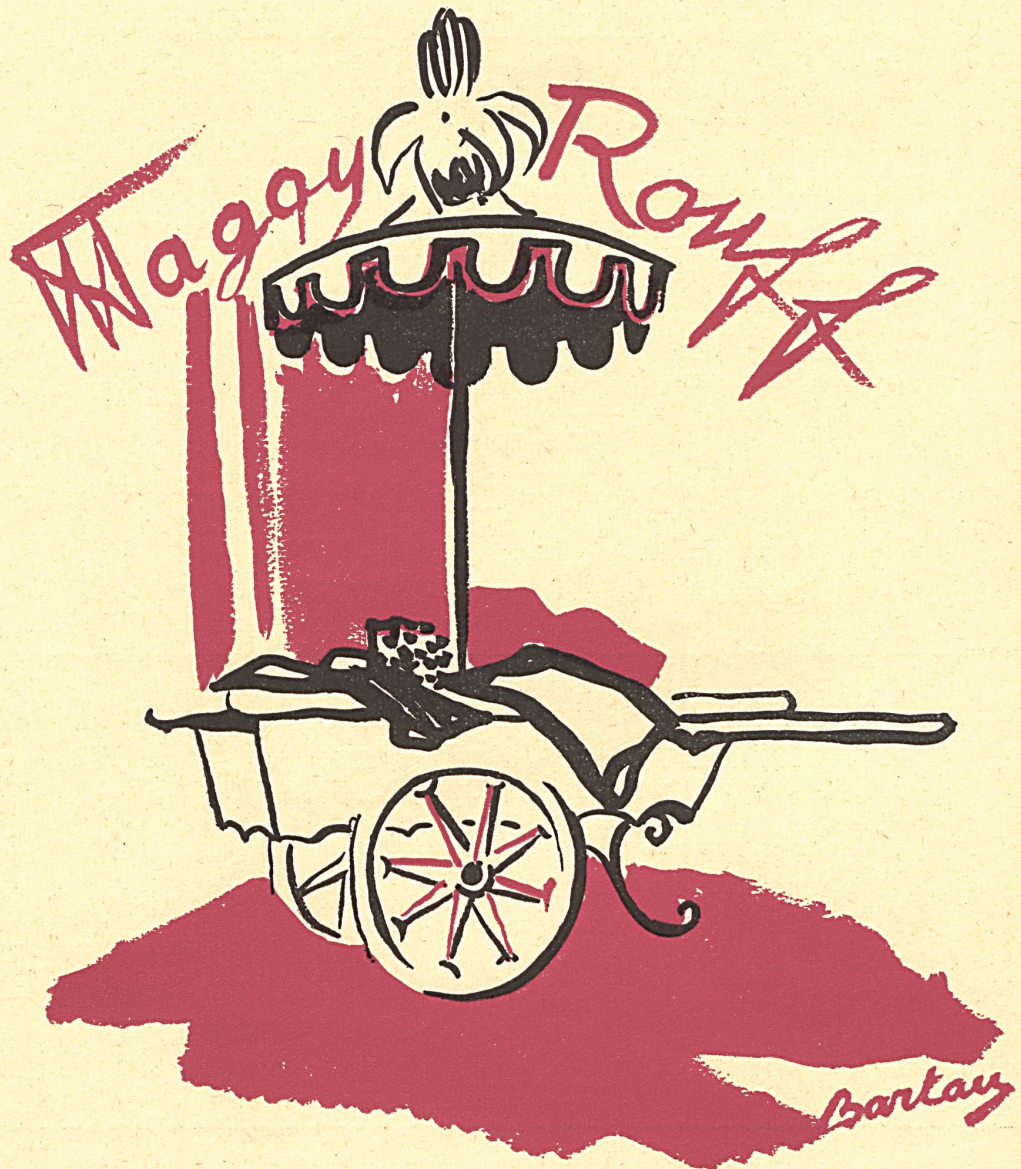
If couture is to survive it must, instead of awaiting events, launch out, copy itself, develop its points of contact with a wider clientele. And the boutique is one of the easiest means for it to use. Because the couturier knows that his boutique will always keep its elegance.

Up there, in the studio, he will continue to create the loveliest dresses in the world, but also those that he will sell by the thousand, everywhere, but which will be launched by his boutique.

These are not just empty, gratuitous assertions, but an argument that is logical and that the future will confirm...

But must we weigh down these light and iridescent bubbles — the couturiers' boutiques — with these weighty considerations? Is it not better to let oneself be led away by the charm of a visit to them and the intoxication of the perfume of Paris with which they are saturated?

Charming reader, let yourself be tempted. Go off for a visit round the boutiques, and even if you make no purchases, you will carry away with you the memory of these delightful luxurious surroundings : that alone will make your journey well worth while.



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