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California emphasizes elegance

The California collections for Spring, 1952 have just had their preview to a large group of fashion editors from New York, San Francisco, and thirty large cities north, south and in-between these points. This is the first time these editors have ever come en masse to see the whole market.

In the vast variety shown, there was only one « look » discernible and it was growing and extreme elegance, presented at better prices than ever before.

Of course, each designer planned his collection for a certain type or types of clientele. Howard Greer frankly stated that he has designed for the woman who doesn't get up until noon. He adds, about silhouette: « We still believe that the woman who spends years beating her hips down chooses not to throw away that svelte look under a bulging hipline. There are, however, full and billowing skirts for those with left-over Dior waistlines. » When discussing length, Greer says: « The length depends upon the shape of a woman's leg, her age and what her husband lets her get away with... »

Don Loper, a long famous costumier, decorator, dancer and couturier, presents the most elegant of the collections, combining Fall and Spring. This is a potpourri of remarkably lavish fabrics, laces and embroideries designed to enhance every figure from the Greek goddess to the woman with problems. At this period in his career, Loper is probably the most exciting designer on the West Coast. In an exclusive section of Beverly Hills, he has opened a small, baroque boutique, housing under one roof his custom, made-to-order collection, his ready-to-wear collection reasonably priced, his jewelry, gifts, silver, objets d'art and even the chair you sit upon... priced and ready to be sold, too.

In direct contrast to these two flamboyant designers is Irene, who designs with great simplicity, with the look of great quality, with an appreciation of women who are great ladies. This season she has absorbed the feeling of the first empire with its dignity, color and adherence to classic Greek forms. She has used tiny gold embroidered bees, a new « Empire Blue », slender jeweled straps on misty materials, long Grecian scarves. This collection has the largest number of full-length, billowing ball gowns, while other

collections definitely favor the short evening dress almost everywhere.

One of the newest firms on the California wholesale-but-upper-range horizon is Bruce Stuart, a firm headed by Howard Greer's junior partner. The line is similar to Greer's using the latter's tricks to give the female form every advantage of sophisticated display and using the wonderfully saleable « convertible »: the bare-topped cocktail dress that carries a woman from daytime into nighttime with its small bolero, cover-up jacket whisked off at dark to an exciting decolletage.

Two « foreign » influences have made themselves strongly felt this year merely because they are so pretty and wearable by so many figures. In spite of the slim, sophisticated lines of the best houses, the full skirt holds sway, complete with petticoats and paraphernalia, all of which is very un-Californian; for this is the home of the stream-lined design for the fast and sport-loving life. Another influence which finds continuing favor in houses which create for the more worldly woman is the flying panel, a variation on the cinema designer's trick of creating movement and excitement for its wearers. Angovar, a designer, much in the manner of Irene with added spice of comment-causing fabric, uses flying panels for her wealthy, exacting trade since it is at once one of the most concealing and flattering tricks the mature woman can employ.

Gradually the number and quality of Swiss fabric users increases and multiplies in this market. The small group of style leaders who began several seasons ago are still passionately loyal such as Athena, Edith Small, Adele (suits), Adrian, Irene, Greer, Eric Bass (gowns, suits), Pat Premo, Addie Masters, Marjorie Michael, Marjorie Montgomery (sports-wear).

As it becomes more and more evident that Swiss fabrics are ideal for the all-year-round seasonless kind of wardrobe that California creates, the cooperative efforts of designers and mills becomes an increasingly important factor in the originality of design that California promotes, a factor for which designers here, so many thousands of miles from their resources, are more than grateful.

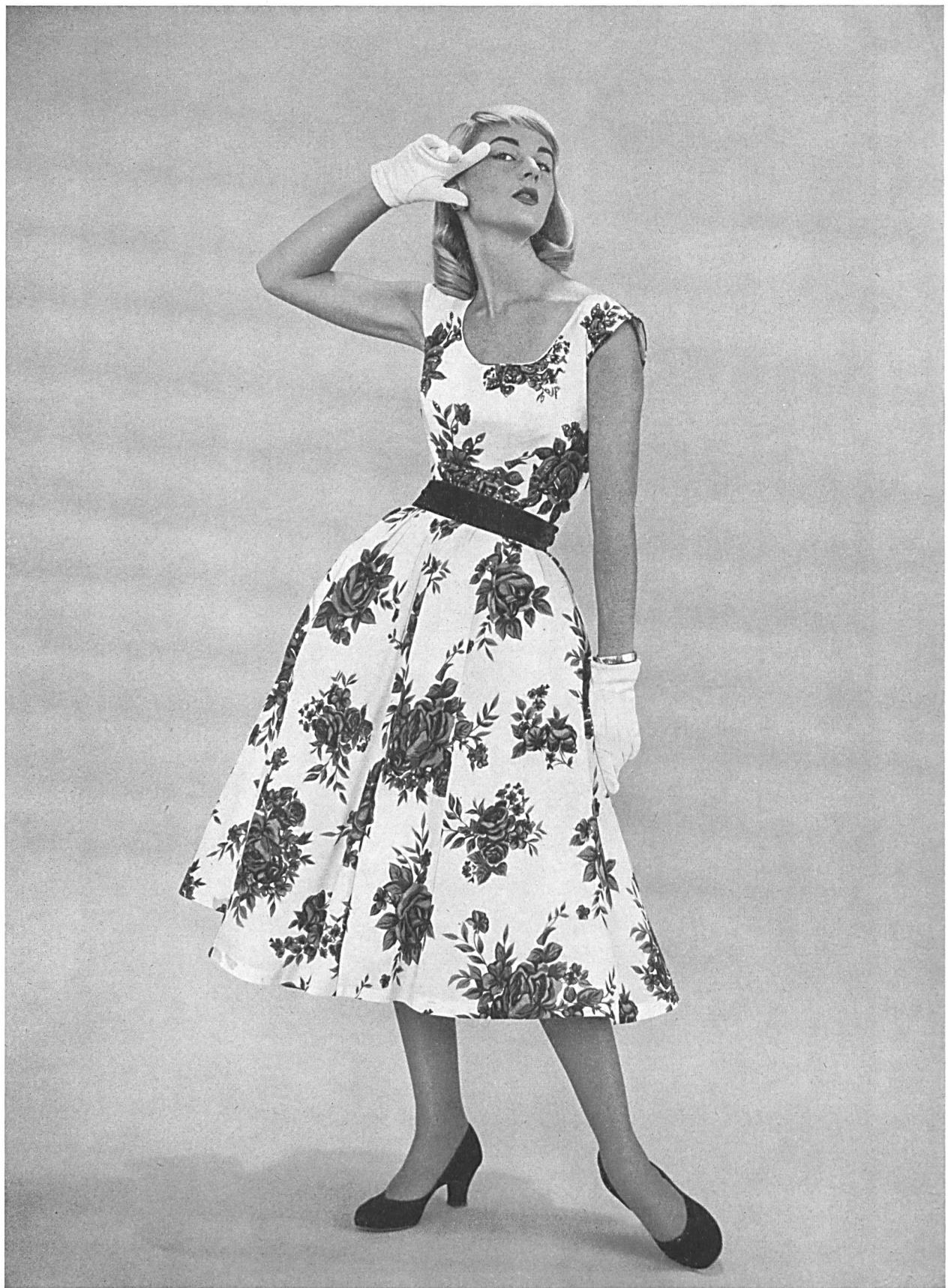
Hélène F. Miller.



Photo Engstead

ANGOVAR

Silk evening gown with white embroidered piqué banding trim from
Forster Willi & Co., St. Gall.



ADDIE MASTERS

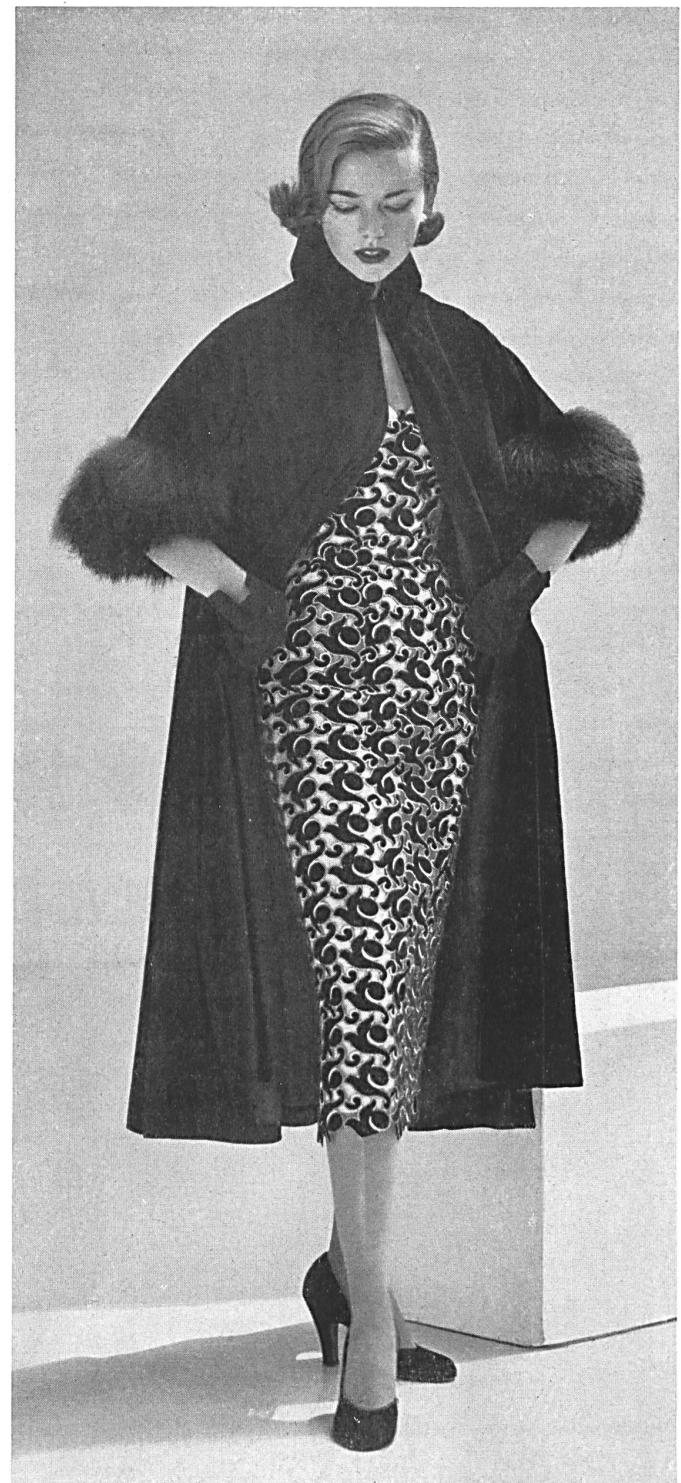
Bell-skirted dress sprinkled with sequins. Wool challis with glowing rose-print on white from *Stoffel & Co., St. Gall.*

Photo Fashion Arts

DON LOPER

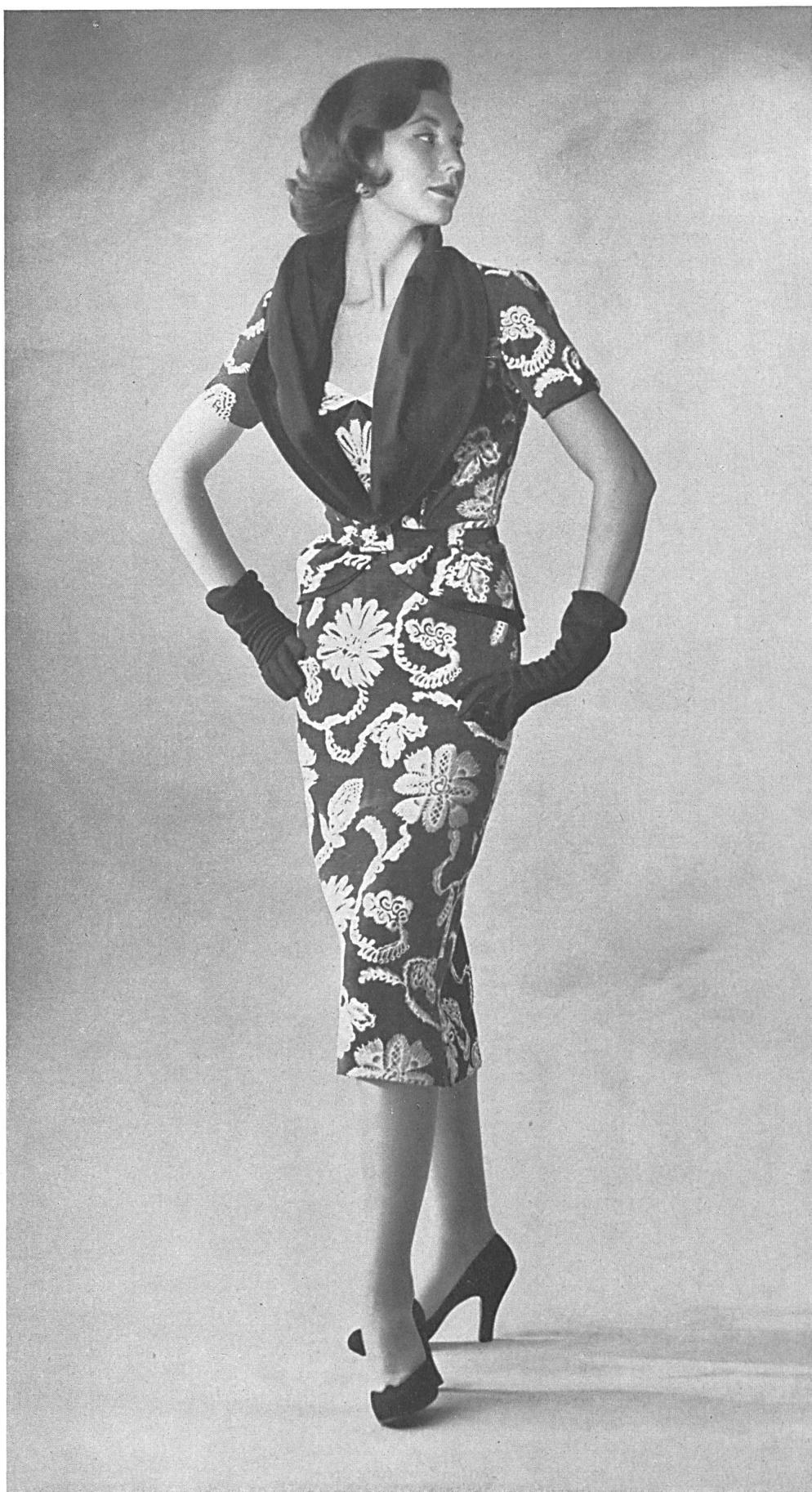
Body line dress of black
velvet lace from
Forster Willi & Co., St. Gall
overlaid on gold lamé sheath.

Photo John Engstead



Button down front dress
with full skirt of cotton
damask taffeta from
Stoffel & Co., St. Gall.

Photo John Engstead



HOWARD GREER

Suit of imported Swiss shantung damask in black and white; wrong side of material is used.