

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1952)
Heft: 4

Artikel: New York letter
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-799055>

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New York Letter

The coming winter promises the greatest variety in all things connected with fashion. Variety in line, colour and fabric, variety in the cut of dresses, coats and suits. In spite of the size of their production programme, American ready-to-wear manufacturers succeed in being as varied, as different and capricious in their collections as can be desired. American fashions are far from being standardised by their mighty industrial equipment and it is in this that they reveal their extraordinary youth and vitality.

Ideas and models come pouring in from Paris to New York. London, Italy, Spain, Vienna, Mexico and India also in turn exert their influence, contribute their more or less pronounced specialities, according to the trends of the moment. Fabrics arrive from France, Scotland and Switzerland. The whole world deposits some of its most characteristic products in the vast workshop that New York represents for the whole of the fashions of the United States.

In spite of all these varied contributions, in spite of the ever growing influence of Paris creations on American collections, New York manages to maintain a great degree of independence in the general appearance of its models for next winter and spring. The Parisian couturiers themselves have realised that their dresses have to be given a special touch to please the American woman and they create models especially for America, destined for mass copying, for simplified adaptation and interpretation in American or imported fabrics, which are less exclusive than the fabrics used by Parisian haute couture.

Paris fashions, once they have crossed the Atlantic, are no longer reserved for the wealthy few. They tend to become simpler, less luxurious, less individual perhaps, but more sporting. They have to adapt themselves to a middle class which is uniformly well dressed from one end of the United States to the other, but with practical and simple tastes. Only the very important ball gowns or those intended for exceptional occasions, in the theatre or on the screen, can afford a large degree of fantasy. But to become accessible to American women in general, haute couture models quieten down to suit the American way of life: the smart woman in New York works in an office or in her shop, she does her own housework without domestic help; and although she has all the conveniences offered by the latest electrical appliances, the running of a home is a form of sport which excludes any complications in the way of clothes and fabrics that are expensive to look after or too fragile to be washed or ironed.

American ready-to-wear manufacturers this winter are giving their original productions as well as their adaptations from Paris models a particularly smart note, in spite of their comparative simplicity. Whether expensive or medium in price, or even cheap, the dresses that one sees are carefully made, perfectly cut and in an extraordinary variety of lines, colours and fabrics. Winter 1952-53 is going to be one of fine fabrics, and it will be followed in the spring by a splendid flowering of materials as pretty as they are practical.

A large part of the progress that has been achieved in the weaving, finishing and dyeing of natural or man-made textile fibres can be attributed perhaps to this simplified

way of life of the American woman of today. This improvement reduces the upkeep of clothing and lingerie to a minimum. It makes it possible to travel with very little luggage, since the finest lingerie, blouses and dresses can all be washed without need of ironing, and the fabrics of suits and coats do not crease with wear.

Not only do the new textile fibres such as nylon, orlon, dacron and acrilan combine well with silk, wool or cotton, not only is the value of the latter increased by the precious qualities conferred on them by the artificial fibres, but there is also another factor added to the extraordinary progress which we are witnessing in the field of textiles: as a result of competition, the subtle art of weaving has woken from its long sleep to rediscover in the collections of patterns of our grandmothers' day a whole host of charming ideas which, rejuvenated and adapted to our modern tastes, produce fabrics with effects as youthful as they are unexpected.

The reps, the ottomans, the terry cloths, the gingham, the plain or figured voiles, the organdies of all kinds, the brocaded silks, the woven or merely printed lamés, the glazed and embossed cottons give a new interpretation to the fragile or sumptuous fabrics that adorned the beauties of Queen Victoria's day. Deprived of their archaic stiffness and their fragility, the fabrics of former days have come back to us like treasures emerging from the depths of some secret chest, and — as if by a miracle — science has made them accessible to all American women, to the young secretaries and salesgirls as well as to the executives and the women in high finance, or on the stage or screen.

Although the simplicity of the models of Parisian haute couture is a necessity imposed by the very vastness of American fine clothing production, it has not resulted in either monotony or uniformity in present-day fashions. A wonderful stream of fabrics of all kinds is continually arriving in the workshops of New York clothing manufacturers on Seventh Avenue from the weaving mills of New England, the dyers of New Jersey, the great textile centres of the Southern States, or France, Great Britain, Switzerland and Belgium.

Among the fabrics offering the greatest variety at the moment we must mention and admire those that are now used to make cotton dresses that can be worn the whole year round. Switzerland, having specialised for many generations in the weaving of fine cottons, contributes to the latest new fashions a large selection of fabrics and embroideries from St. Gall, modernised and as individual as possible, to satisfy the most exacting tastes. The same is true of the silks of Zurich, the technical quality of which is enhanced still further by an infinitely varied production, that is to say a subtle choice of textures, colours, mixtures and finishes.

Embroideries from St. Gall, silk ribbons from Basle, cellophane braid from Wohlen, horse-hair lace — also reminiscent of the last century — all these extremely feminine accessories combine with the fabrics to create youthful and fresh outfits, and dance dresses each one more attractive than the next.

Th. de Chambrier.