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New York Letter

BACK TO THE CITY

Labor Day, at the beginning of September, marks the official end of the holidays and of summer throughout the whole of North America. From one day to the next, straw hats and bright cotton dresses disappear even if the weather is still warm and fine. And their places are suddenly taken by little head-hugging felt hats in warm bright colors like those of an Indian summer, by coat dresses in dark cotton, silk and fine wool or synthetic fabrics mixed with angora. Tailormades are to be seen everywhere, impeccable and neat even if they are in cotton tweed, orlon jersey or nylon and silk instead of classical pure wools. Suits this autumn are characterised by the variety of their lines, which may be straight or fitted, moulded or full. The same can be said of coats, which lend themselves to all the whims and fancies dictated by the couturiers of Paris with regard to length, width and the variety of fabrics used.

There are a great number of autumn and winter suits of the soft or dressmaker type as opposed to the classic two-piece outfits of the tailormade type. All allow freedom of movement, are comfortable and at the same time smart in appearance. One of the features of the 1953/54 season is the great variety in cut, a general fashion effect which is sporting but at the same time elegant and with nothing casual about it, even in the world of teen-agers who have gone back to a well cared-for and even sophisticated look, contrary to the studied sloppiness of previous seasons.

Fashion as a whole then in America is sporty and youthful in appearance. Moreover, the variety and beauty of the fabrics contribute to the rich look which is so striking this autumn and which gives American fashions an opulence making them more akin to the creations of haute couture than those one would expect from the standardised ready-to-wear collections for the general public. Thanks to the vast choice of fine fabrics at present available in America, ready-to-wear clothing manufacturers can vary their effects without appreciably modifying the cut of their models. This results in not only an immense choice of outfits and suits for the winter, but also an impression of elegance and refinement that one would not expect to find in average ready-to-wear clothing.

If there is all this variety in the ready-to-wear clothing that is within the reach of women who work in offices or shops, how many new ideas and ingenious creations must the better ready-to-wear collections and fashion houses offer to the more well-to-do women of fashion. Paris, Rome and Florence, Vienna and Spain have made their contributions to the launching of the best models. But in

SWISS FABRIC GROUP

« Nelo-Fantasia », pure cotton fabric from *J. G. Nef & Co., Herisau.*

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VAL DESCO

« Nelo-Realosa », color-woven cotton fabric from *J. G. Nef & Co., Herisau.*

this profusion of novelties the part played by fabrics is of prime importance. Various fabrics and fibres are put together in transformation outfits that can be worn all the year round. Original and harmonious effects are obtained by using different textures and colours on the same model, by putting together materials that are rough and smooth, dull and shiny, fine and thick, plain and striped or checked. For example, a little short coat, a topper in shaded bouclé tweed in a shade of purple, has a texture like that of broadtail fur. The skirt of this suit is in plain flannel of the same colour, and the blouse in plain wool jersey of a paler shade. Thus three different fabrics have been carefully chosen and matched to create an outfit that is classical in form but with a very new effect owing to the combining of different fibres and textures.

The same is true of dinner and ball dresses. Ball gowns are often made of two or even three different fabrics which are not even alike. The very rich effect thus achieved recalls the periods of Louis XIV or Louis XV and that of the royal courts of the eighteenth century in England. As in the past, brocaded silks are used alongside plain failles and trimmed with furs and lace. Fine batiste embroideries are wedded to sumptuous velvets, tulles and lamés. Although these mixtures of rich fabrics recall bygone centuries, the coming winter's fashions nevertheless possess the young and vital look demanded by American customers.

A striking feature of the winter's fashions is the use of fur on dresses, blouses, jackets and coats, in the form of trimmings or collars, both light and dark, small and large. Jerseys too are of great importance for daytime wear and in fashions for the evening too. First come the jerseys of wool or synthetic fibres mixed with wool and silk, then the silk, rayon or nylon jerseys which are used for making sculptured dresses that hang with a particularly Roman grace. Closely related to these is the knitwear, which also plays an important role in fashions. Coarse knitwear imitating hand-knitting for coats, finer but still hand-knitted types for dresses and suits that are popular in California and in the country for the winter.

The comfortable elegance of the different outfits for town wear, traveling and sport is matched by the sumptuous elegance of the fabrics for dinner or dance dresses. One would have to go back to the palmy days before the first World War to find again such a variety of silk fabrics, brocades, velvets, lamés and fancy silks as well as the new fabrics of all kinds, from cotton to orlon and nylon fibres.

The weavers of France, Switzerland, England and other countries exporting from Europe and Asia add to the creations of the American looms a wealth of cotton fabrics, embroideries, laces, fine woolens and silks. This contribution to quality rather than quantity is far from being negligible, and it is because of it that American ready-to-wear manufacturers are able to offer their customers an infinite variety of models so different one from the other that every woman, when buying a pretty dress in a good shop, may have the illusion of possessing a model specially created for her, or at least exclusive enough for her to be sure not to come across another like it worn by one of her friends.

Competition has its disadvantages, for it makes the struggle more arduous for the weavers and wholesalers, and the shops selling fabrics. But in America it has the advantage of allowing a large public to find a big selection of different models and fabrics in spite of the mass-production methods called for by such a huge country. It is the competition between American and foreign fabric manufacturers, between American wholesalers and importers, that gives the American textile market, particularly in New York, its extraordinary vitality, its inexhaustible variety and its remarkable choi e of materials that are renewed every season to supply American clothing manufacturers and fashion houses. In this continual struggle to succeed through novelty, Switzerland continually offers New York a remarkable contribution of high quality fabrics, whether they be silks or fine cottons, embroideries, organdies or novelties for summer and winter. Moreover, Switzerland creates numerous fashion accessories such as ribbons, fancy straws, shoes and articles such as handkerchiefs, blouses, knitted underwear, knitwear for town and sports, and others too, whose reputation is well established and has been handed down from generation to generation for certain articles such as the embroideries and organdies of St. Gall, the silks of Zurich, the straws of Wohlen, the ribbons of Basle, etc. Thus in the ever-changing and perpetually progressive world of New York, quality stands like an indestructible rock and remains appreciated at all times and through all changes of weather and fashion.

Thérèse de Chambrier.

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COUNTESS ORO
Material by *Fisba Fabrics Inc., New York.*
Manufacturers: *Christian Fischbacher Co., St-Gall.*
Photographed in Jay Thorpe Bridal salon.