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Los Angeles Letter

From logging camps to laces

MAXWELL SHIEFF

From logging camps to laces, from the Canadian wilds to Beverly Hills — these are long leaps but Maxwell Shieff has made the transition easily. As a sensitive man with great good taste, an artist's ability and a worldly eye, he has created, in three short years, nothing short of a sensation with buyers from fine shops across the country. Competition for his collection has already become stiff enough to force him to design a large collection so that certain frocks may be confined to several fine stores in a city. Thus everybody is happy. The Shieff collection is consistently good throughout and buyers find it difficult to eliminate numbers to conform to their buying budgets.

This much sought-after designer, oddly enough, came out of the wild backwoods of western Canada. Here his father pioneered in logging camps and in a fur trading business. This lucrative business was eventually sold to the historically famous Hudson Bay Co. which had established the strong hold of England on the Canadian wilderness. After the sale of this business, the Shieff family settled in Winnipeg, a populous and wealthy community of western Canada. There, in the 1920's, Maxwell's mother opened a dress shop. He recalls helping her in the shop and choosing dresses for various custom-

mers, suiting styles to figures and tastes. He says that he knew then, as a young boy, what each woman should buy. And they bought!

School was a difficult time for young Shieff as he spent most of his school hours sketching hats and shoes and dresses in all his notebooks rather than listening to teachers. Upon graduation from school, he scurried off to art school in New York. He found this disappointing as, upon arriving in New York, he had immediately begun to sell his sketches to New York dress manufacturing firms and there was little else taught in the school that he didn't already know. He spent a short period sketching in the design rooms of Hattie Carnegie and in 1939 he came to Los Angeles to work for Peggy Hunt, Inc. one of the largest dress houses in this city. The war took him back to Canada to await orders. Meanwhile, he took this period of waiting and put it to use... as a customer designer in Winnipeg, his home, and as the head of a commercial art school for returning veterans. In his custom business he catered to the wealthy western trade, visiting nobility and theatrical personages. He considers this perhaps his most important period before returning to the sunny climes of California as designer for another local manufacturer.

Maxwell Shieff,
Beverly Hills

White eyelet embroidery and
white organdy by
Union Ltd., St. Gall

Gray striped synthetic by
Heer & Co. Ltd., Thalwil

Photos Alex de Paola



Maxwell Shieff, Beverly Hills
Striped pure silk taffeta by
Setarti Ltd., Zurich
Photo Alex de Paola



There followed an interlude of such deep unhappiness that Shieff was forced by desperation to take the most progressive step of his life... opening his own wholesale designing firm. His partner and greatest booster in the firm is his capable young wife, the daughter of Canadian pioneers, too. The intrepid spirit of those people who forged into the wilderness is reflected in Mrs. Shieff's ability to make the sudden change-over from the placid life of wife and mother-of-two to business woman, public relations expert and super-saleswoman. As a team these two have combined their separate talents so successfully that in a few short years their firm has already taken its place among the country's « greats ».

Like many another superb designer, Maxwell Shieff is a « triple threat » man being not only a fine designer of women's clothes but a talented pianist of high order and a portrait painter as well. Maxwell has had to give up his painting in the recent years of hustle and bustle but last year he re-acquired his old grand piano and has returned to the earliest of his great pleasures-music. Having once considered the concert stage, he has enough ability to get great enjoyment from his playing and he feels that his other work has improved considerably since returning to the piano. He finds that the hours spent at the piano causes the daily tensions to melt away and leave him with a greater sense of freedom than he has known for many years.

That Maxwell Shieff is a man of definite tastes is clearly reflected in his clothes, his showroom and in his home. In all things he likes clear cool colors, simple lines ; and in his home he prefers the exciting simplicity of contemporary lines and materials... glass, iron, beautifully grained woods. This is quite a departure from most designers we have interviewed who, in their own homes, have a distinct leaning toward the past. Shieff has a clear eye to the future. He feels that many designers lock themselves up in the « ivory tower » of their design rooms and lose touch with the buying public. After a time they fail to know what's going on in the outside world because they begin to live in a world of ideas rather than people. And it is *people* who buy and wear clothes.

So much for theories : now for plans : for this coming season Maxwell Shieff will show what he calls « goldfish » colors. They will be orangey-reds and yellows, luminescent shades, delicate prints in seaworthy tints that display all the subtle lights and shades that so fascinate us when viewing these watery denizens of the living room. In this lovely range of goldfish colors, a large part of the fabrics he will use are Swiss. For Mr. Shieff finds that Swiss fabrics, more than any one group he uses, exemplify the qualities he admires most : simplicity and femininity with the look of luxury. Design-wise he does not believe in any special « look » other than that of quality and he does not believe in any decoration added to a dress other than that of its own good lines. In other words, Shieff designs and Swiss fabrics are a happy marriage of talents that bid fair to go on blissfully for many years to come. Good luck to the happy couple !

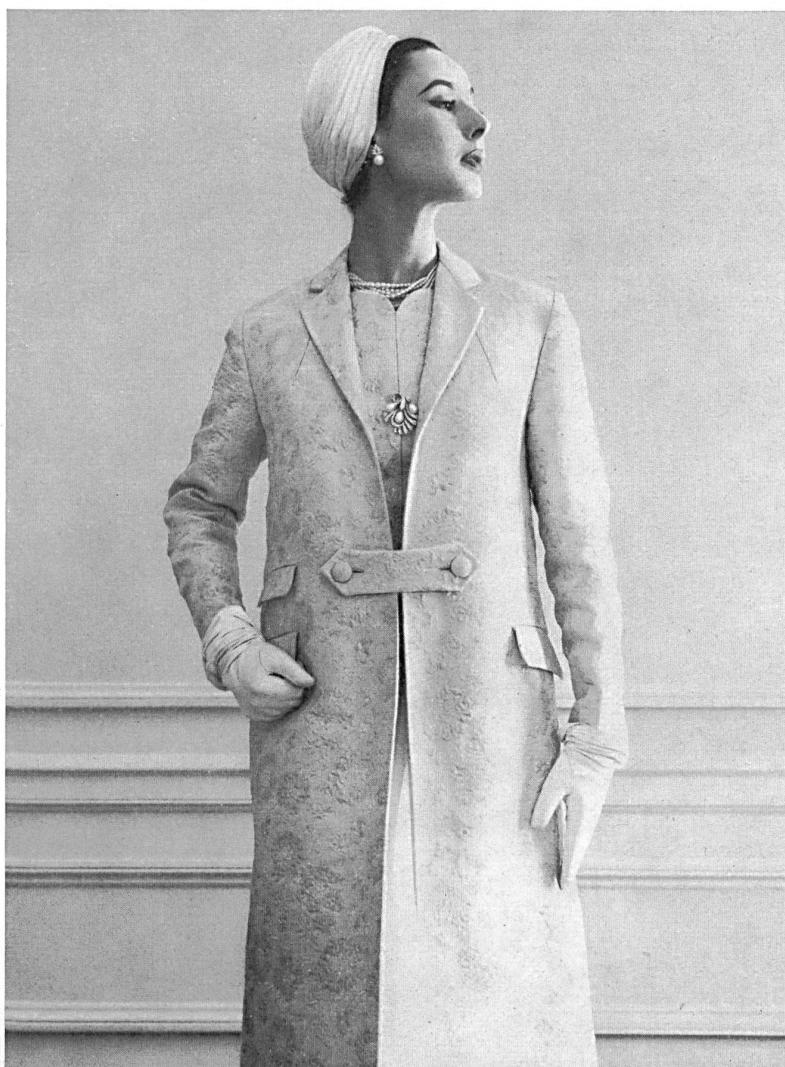
Helene F. Miller



Maxwell Shieff, Beverly Hills
Plain and embroidered organdy by
Union Ltd., St. Gall
Photo Alex de Paola

Galanos, Beverly Hills

« Bangor » fabric by
L. Abraham & Co.,
Silks Ltd., Zurich



Galanos, Beverly Hills

« Bangor » fabric by
L. Abraham & Co.,
Silks Ltd., Zurich

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