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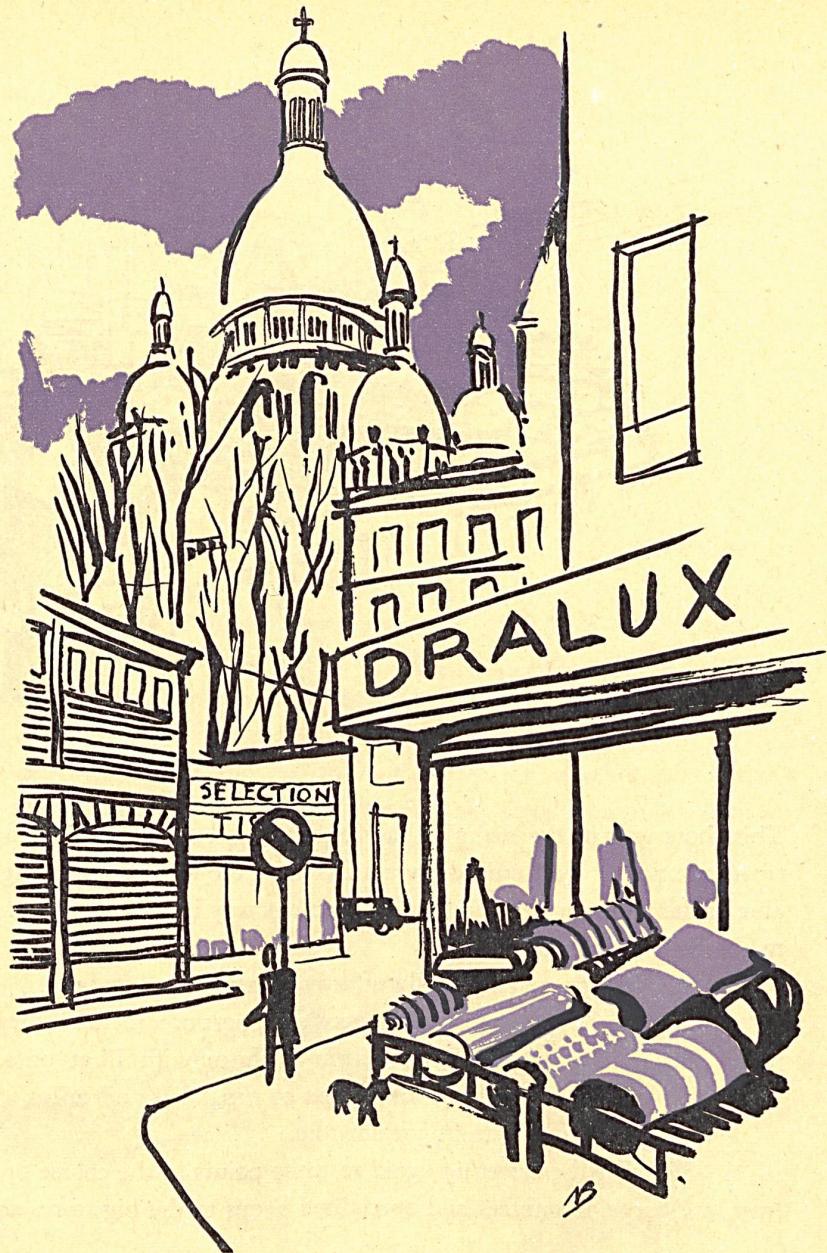
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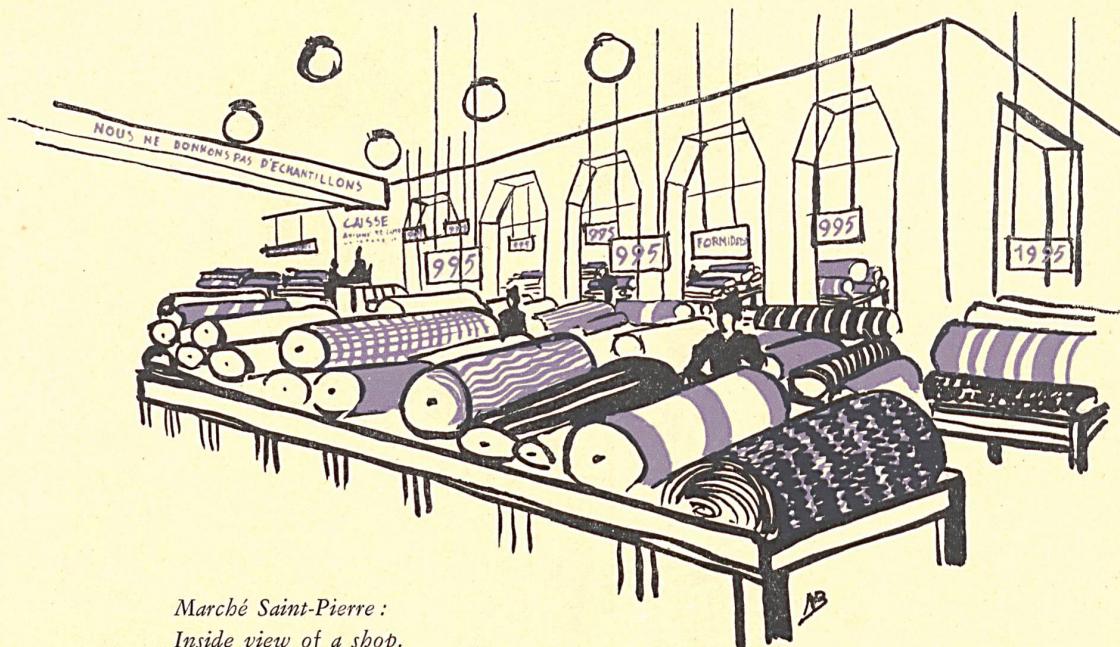
*The
Delight
of the
Fair Sex*



Au Marché Saint-Pierre.

To the layman, there would seem to be no problem in the presentation of textiles. After all, the materials are beautiful, supple and « eloquent ». All that would seem necessary to obtain the desired effect would be to display the fabric. But in actual fact, it is much more complicated than it seems. First of all, to be displayed to advantage, any kind of textile requires a large exhibition surface. What is the couturier's instinctive gesture on taking down a bolt of material from the shelves ? He unwinds it. What does the customer in a shop do ? Exactly the same thing, if there is enough room on the counter. Therefore in order for a single fabric to be properly appreciated in the window of a shop, it should be laid out over a large area. But the problem becomes more complicated for the textile merchant when it comes to arranging his fabrics for display. And I am not speaking here of the questions of harmony in materials (woollens, silks, cottons) and colours, but of the need to show a wide range of his products not only in his windows but also on his counters.

As everything related to textiles is of interest to readers of this periodical, we went the rounds of the shops and boutiques of Paris in order to see how the problem has been solved.



*Marché Saint-Pierre :
Inside view of a shop.*

This short visit to the realm of fabrics confirmed the idea we had already of the complexity of these questions. Not only did we understand the difficulties facing the window dresser but were able at the same time to admire the ingenious way in which he overcomes them. Our visit led us to the following conclusions :

1. Fabrics are only really effective when shown in bulk.
2. Except on counters, they need a support or a theme if they are to be shown to advantage.
3. It is a mistake to mix heavy fabrics with light ones. Fine winter woollens, for example, do not go well next to organdies and tulles.
4. Colours play an important role.

We shall be referring again to these points in the course of our article, which will take us from the bargain counters and specialised shops to the big stores and luxury boutiques.

* * *

Our first stop will be the Sacré Cœur district. Getting there is no easy matter as anyone unfamiliar with these streets invariably takes a wrong turning into a one-way street which comes to a dead end at the foot of a flight of steps. Driving up the Rue Clignancourt and Rue André-del-Sarte, we reach Square St. Pierre, which is as well known for fabrics as the Flea Market for antiques. Clignancourt was at one time a hamlet forming part of the commune of Montmartre. Today, it is merely an ugly, busy street climbing towards our ultimate goal. But this ugliness is soon forgotten at the sight of the Sacré Cœur with its white domes tinged with pink standing out against the blue grey sky. Paris is certainly a unique town to transform an absurdly byzantine basilica, a veritable wedding cake topped with whipped cream, into an endearing silhouette with its soft pastel shades.

Why the street vendors of fabrics decided to choose this part of Paris will always remain a mystery. First there was one, then there were ten. Just as the Boulevard Haussmann, between the Chaussée d'Antin and the immediate vicinity of the Gare St. Lazare, has specialised and become the street of big stores, the Square St. Pierre has become known for fabrics, the place where one may hope to come across the rare bargain, to find the elusive remnant. At one time the stalls were lined up along the pavement with boxes full of fabrics that women loved to plunge their hands

into. Now they have turned into big five-storied shops, stacked high with bolt upon bolt of multicoloured fabrics. It is a triumph of salesmanship. The customer must be made to feel that she has unearthed a real bargain. And all the women fall for it. Besides, even the big stores like the Galeries Lafayette, which are always on the lookout for new ways of tempting the customer, have taken up this idea and offer their customers row upon row of baskets piled high with scarves, lingerie and knick-knacks. What joy to dig right down into this lucky dip and pull out what all the others have missed — the very thing one was looking for ! This is the attraction, the secret behind the astonishing success of the Marché St. Pierre. Here, no attempt is made at subtle displays ; any shown of taste would only be wasted. All that is required is mountains of fabrics, piles of remnants. No tricks, but sheer weight of numbers.

Naturally there are one or two dissenters who make a timid attempt at raising the tone of the neighbourhood with methods more suitable to the Grands Boulevards. The most common consists in dressing miniature dummies placed on the counters. Not surprisingly, the result is very poor, for lack of proportion. A fabric is designed on the human scale. Its thickness, its texture, its patterns are made to be worn by a woman. On a dummy less than two feet high, the proportion is lost, particularly when the fabrics are heavy woollens, silks or printed cottons. These small-size dummies have moreover a fixed, frozen look, something Lilliputian about them which divorces them from reality.

It seems here that the best policy is to be free and easy ; this makes it possible to sell anything and everything, from the most fashionable silk to the incongruous length of material that has been left on the merchant's hands for several years. The idea is a good one since it appeals



Chez Corot — Champs-Elysées.

to a woman's curiosity and her typically feminine instincts. It requires no costly installations, no expenses for a window dresser and no lighting bills. It adds nothing new to the presentation of textiles, but it has the supreme virtue of working.

* * *

Leaving the Butte Montmartre we make our way towards the Boulevard Haussmann, parking our car some distance away as it would be impossible to find a parking place nearer our destination. Besides, a walk through the narrow streets, where the pavements are in a perpetual state of repair and the cars follow one another bumper to bumper, is quite an adventure.

Here we are at last, between the Galeries and the Printemps, in front of Bouchara, a well-known fabric shop. Its neighbourhood makes it adopt the techniques of the big stores, without resorting to the use of a theme in its window displays. The window is full of supports over which the fabrics are draped, life-size dummies, miniature dummies, luxurious counters, all the paraphernalia of a big store. Bouchara's customers are obviously as varied as those of its powerful neighbours, ranging from the working girl to the rich middle-class housewife.

* * *

After our visit to the Boulevard Haussmann we make our way to the Champs Elysées, where we may be lucky enough to find a parking space on the pavement, provided we do not leave the car for more than an hour. On our arrival, an old man with a little bag tears off a brightly coloured ticket, valid for 60 minutes, which he proceeds to stick on our tyre. Now we are free to go over and see Max — not far from the Lido Arcade. Actually there is nothing very special to say about this shop with its wide bay windows revealing the counters and shelves stacked high with multicoloured fabrics. At Corot's however, on the other side of the street, the setting is rather special. There is a section for printed fabrics, a section for woollens, for Haute Couture, furnishings and interior decoration ; the inside of the shop is a succession of varied displays. The rare pieces made from engravings by Dufy or Lurçat are framed. Life-size dummies are subtly draped (the material is not cut, only cleverly arranged over the dummy). Here the customers are usually rather more well-to-do, and we find the fabrics we had thought reserved for Haute Couture, obviously expensive but just as obviously of excellent quality. Owing to the layout of the premises, there are no shopwindows on the avenue, so the decoration is reserved for the different floors. The sales are boosted by a powerful advertising campaign. This is a subject to which we shall be returning in a later article, but we can state here and now that in order to compete successfully with its rivals a fabric shop has to advertise extensively in the press. Undoubtedly there are exceptions. Two of the biggest shops in the Quartier St. Pierre, for example, have opposing policies ; the bargain counter specialist gives out no communiqués, whereas its rival « Reine » publishes monumental ones — like Bouchara, Max and especially Corot, which takes advantages of the beginning of a new season to publicize the fact that it stocks the fabrics recently launched by Couture.

* * *

From this first visit to Paris we would draw the provisional conclusion that fabric shops all have the same difficulties with regard to presentation. The methods used are few. The limited size of the shop-windows is the major reason for this apparent lack of imagination.

In order to see more artistic and more interesting window displays (with the exception of Corot, which is really quite exceptional), one has to go to the big stores, exhibitions or certain boutiques. This will be the object of our next visit.

Gala.