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London Letter

STEHLI & Co., ZURICH

Pure silk crepe romain, satin back.
Crêpe romain pure soie, envers satin.

Model by / Modèle de :
Roter Models Ltd., London

Photo John French



In an earlier letter, when reviewing the trend of the British market for the spring of 1957, I mentioned that « Anything Goes » would summarise the position ; to some extent the same is true of the coming autumn and winter. The softer look of Paris, bustless, waistless but barrel-hipped is being only very gently echoed in London, where the emphasis seems to be best described as « the relaxed look ». Even though sales of styles based on the new Paris ideas may be small during the autumn they will certainly

be watched and talked about — and some of the first telling sales will come in due course from the more adventurous younger element.

The genius of Paris must, of course, continue to make itself obvious for some considerable time to come in all the better wholesale couture houses but I am beginning to question the extent of its ultimate influence on the younger set who are increasingly wanting style rather than inspired fashion, gaiety, colourfully expressed in movement,

rather than elegance and poise. Paris may influence the vivacity of New York and the verve of Rome but the younger set are becoming less concerned with the powers behind the scene. This duality of line has been very marked during the past few seasons — for example, evening gowns may now be long or ballerina length, slim or bouffant — and as a compromise « peacock » cut for the new season (longer at the back than at the front); day dresses — which this season are mainly in jerseys — are loose topped and straight skirted or sharply waisted and full skirted with unpressed pleats.

The more immediate reactions to the new Paris trends are most likely to be — shorter sleeves (slightly kimono), new experiments in cut and a new feeling in colours. The new « sack » by Dior will certainly receive a great deal of attention from designers and cutters for the mass markets but I am prepared to wager that the final models will all be sold with belts !

To me, one of the greatest pleasures associated with the writing of these London Letters is viewing some of the imported fabrics available in this country ; I feasted my eyes again only a few days ago when I was shown some of the Mettler (St. Gall) materials which will be used for next spring and summer. Mocambas with their fascinating silky surfaces will be appearing in both plain finishes and with printed floral designs — but the outstanding and altogether remarkable novelty will no doubt be the cotton crêpes and cotton chiffons. Both have a magnificent texture and handle and both are obviously very much in line with the progression of the softer silhouette.

Piqué fluctuates in demand considerably — excepting for blouses — and if one tires of it at times one is still glad to see it return again for skirts, dresses, etc. Its neatness and crispness are always so expressive of summer and its whiteness unequalled for coolness ! Judging by the large range of piqués — narrow and wideribbed — it would seem that a bid might soon be made for another « piqué » season — it is now some considerable time since we have seen piqué separates, suits or summer coats of British make.

It is still a little early for the autumn and winter deliveries of Swiss garments to the major London stores so that the women's departments were very much depleted ; on the other hand, I found quite an impressive range of men's shirts and casual jackets. Most of the shirts were « weekend » or sports type in fine poplin and good colours. Shirts for day and evening wear are also finding a market in the better stores and more selective smaller houses. I am inclined to think that there are far more articles for men — such as shirts and ties — imported into this country than is immediately apparent . . . which just shows how cunning men are. They throw women into a turmoil over fashion and then softly proceed to get for themselves the things they like best.

To close this letter on a humorous note, let me just tell you about a report entitled « Women's Measurements and Sizes » recently published by Her Majesty's Stationery Office. This is the posthumous work of a Council for the British Clothing Industry which was never popular and never regarded with anything but suspicion with the result

Some shoe novelties for the British market, as shown recently to the press in London.

Quelques nouveautés en chaussures pour le marché britannique, présentées récemment à la presse à Londres.



that it died unlamented and even unnoticed. If, my dear readers, you have ever thought or cherished the illusion that English women are usually tall, slim, athletic, flat-chested, possibly a little horsey and that they look best in their traditional tweeds — I feel it is my duty to tell you forthwith that you are entirely wrong, for the investigations of the late unlamented council in question carried out on a cross-section of several thousands of women, showed that Miss or Mrs. Average Britishwoman is dumpy — not tall ; chubby — not slim ; under 5' 3" in height and in the intriguing shape of a pear ! Her other measurements are given as bust — 37", waist — nearly 28", hips — 39", which all goes to show how fascinating figures can be !

Ruth Fonteyn.



Modèles BALLY déposés.

