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New York letter

Every spring and autumn sees a whole host of American fashion and textile experts leaving New York on their seasonal trip to Europe to find out the latest fashion trends in Paris and Rome, and to see for themselves the fabrics created in the big textile centres of Switzerland, Austria and Great Britain. The reason behind this exodus is the search for new ideas, even though American designers are not lacking in imagination themselves and have given ample proof of their talent in the youthful sports models in which they excel.

Just as migrating birds suddenly fly off towards new feeding grounds at a certain sign from nature, so American buyers, fashion designers and manufacturers of fabrics and ready-to-wear clothing take off each season towards the fertile fields of Europe, attracted there by the ceaseless surge of creative ideas that well up from the inexhaustible springs of Paris, Vienna and Rome, and the textile centres scattered all over Switzerland and other countries.

What benefits do these buyers and experts expect to derive from their tour of Europe, as they make the rounds of dozens of national and international trade fairs, and visit numerous factories and countless shops and boutiques to which they are drawn by the hope of discovering the original design or idea that will spell success for their firm back in America, which will build a huge manufacturing program round it involving the production and sale of tens of thousands of yards of material?

Will these myriads of hurrying visitors succeed in finding what they were looking for? Will their hunt for novelties have been worthwhile after all? In many cases, yes! In just as many others, no! The number of these American prospectors pouring into Europe is increasing every year and it is precisely for this reason that full benefit is no longer derived from these trips. Two American competitors may very likely both pounce on the same discovery and build their hopes on it, each killing the surprise effect of the other.

Then again, although the models and fabrics exhibited by European manufacturers at the big international fairs constitute a representative cross-section of their best creations, these exhibitions being public, everyone is at liberty to take advantage of the most interesting ideas for his own use. Consequently the shrewder textile firms refrain from exhibiting the whole range of their products but reserve a choice selection exclusively for their own regular French or American clients. The manufacturers of the fine cottons and embroideries of St. Gall, the silks of Zurich, as well as knitwear and other well-known Swiss specialities, will naturally exhibit at international or local fairs the very best of their creations from the point of view of quality, but the cream of the designs and new inventions will remain top secret and only be revealed to the top designers and ready-to-wear manufacturers, sometimes two years before being released to the public.

Furthermore, Swiss textile industries are reluctant to see their specialities copied and mass-produced, and in order to keep their prestige and aura of exclusiveness prefer smaller orders, not subject to the streamlined requirements of American buyers with regard to deliveries, which are not always compatible with the Swiss system of production.

Abandoning the sometimes frantic chase after novelties and the expenditure of stupendous sums on these European tours, a wise New York buyer will in many cases be able to avoid most of these difficulties by carrying out his search coolly and calmly from the comfort of his own office. Equipped only with the traditional knowhow and his telephone, he will be able to find, right here in New York, a whole mine of excellent ideas not tapped as yet. He will be able to find, preserved from popularisation by the secrecy surrounding them and by the recentness of their creation, a host of sumptuous fabrics, embroideries of incredible fineness and cottons worked and finished with the greatest skill, all lying there waiting to be discovered only a few blocks away from the main New York fashion houses. All that you prospectors, buyers and fashion experts need do is go to Broadway and examine the wonderful collections that Swissair brings rapidly from Switzerland to agents in the United States.

In this way you will be able to experience all the joys of discovery without any expense or fatigue. In the office of an ordinary commercial building, you will find an agent representing textiles made in Switzerland. Whether it is embroideries, fabrics, knitwear or other specialities that you are looking for, this agent, once you manage to win his confidence, will probably, after showing you his standard collection, pull open some hidden drawer out of which will tumble the very idea, the exclusive fabric, the novelty you would have thought possible to find only in Europe after much searching.

Thus before emplaning for famous and far-distant destinations, just think, all you buyers, of the countless possibilities that exist for discovering, right here in New York, a stone's throw away from your office perhaps, everything that is new and ingenious in fashion.

There is nothing surprising in this either. After all, for whom is the quintessence of Swiss production intended? For whom but French Haute Couture, the designers of the fashion capitals of the world, the better American ready-to-wear manufacturers and the leading fashion houses in towns all over the United States, for which New York remains the chief distribution center?

It is only natural therefore that one should have here, among New York agents for Swiss textiles, the best chance of discovering what he often goes so far to find, the original model, the unusual design, the latest thing in fancy weaving, knitting or finish.

Thérèse de Chambrier