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The pot-pourri of fashion

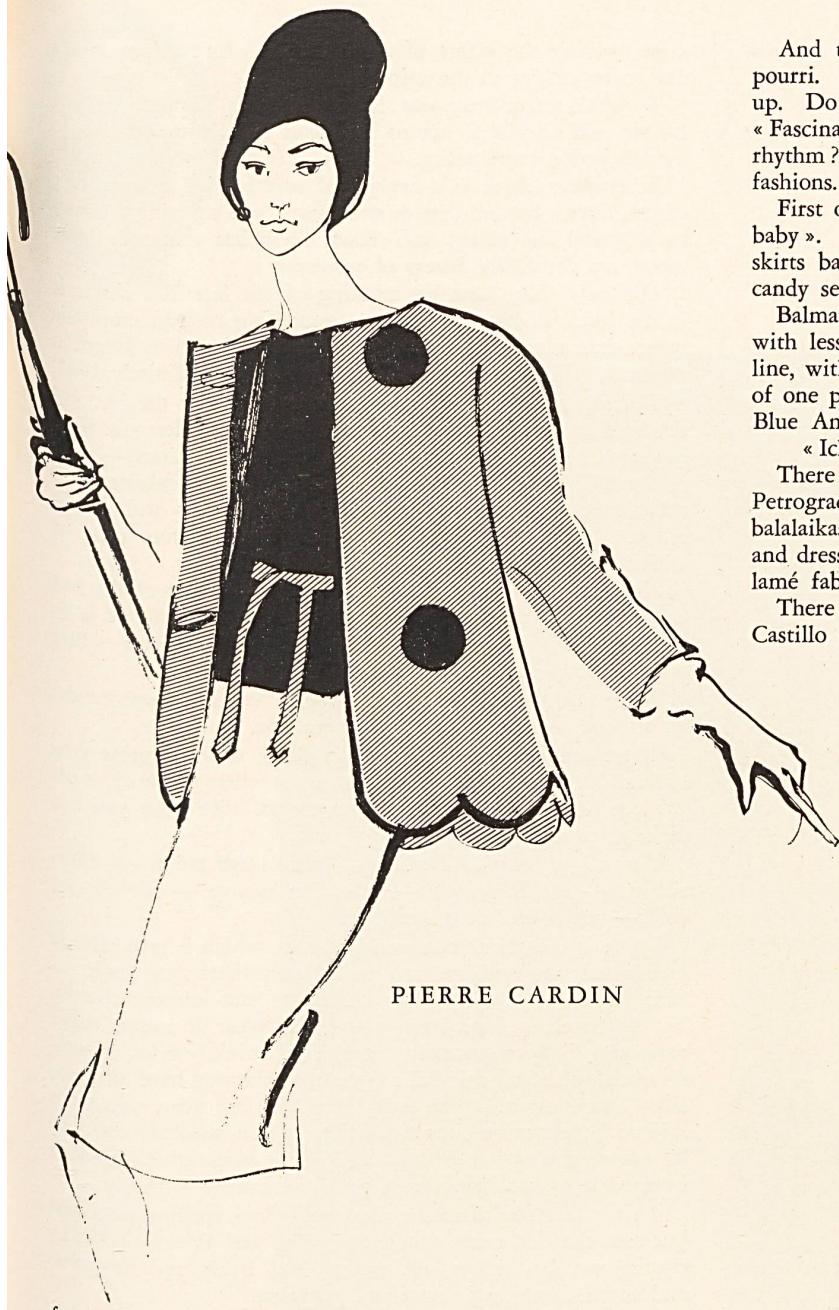
Most years it takes all the ingenuity and skill of the Parisian couturiers to create the right atmosphere for their showings of the winter fashions. Everything would seem to conspire against them. First of all these openings take place at a time of year when journalists would much rather be at the beach or in the mountains. At the end of July, the sun usually turns the overcrowded salons into veritable hot-houses, where

the mannequins wilting inwardly under the heat and the weight of woollens and furs, parade up and down in a halo of burning dust. At a time when women's thoughts are turned to light, gay décolleté dresses, they and their male colleagues are expected to attend a showing of some two hundred dark, sober-styled models.

Actually this year Parisian Haute Couture seemed to have concluded a pact with the rain and the cold, and the winter models were almost timely. Was it yet another attempt to break with tradition that they were so different, so full of







PIERRE CARDIN

And this is just what this season's fashion is — a pot-pourri. With that tricky touch all old tunes have when jazzed up. Do you remember the waltzes of the good old days, like «Fascination», which are now played to the cha-cha-cha rhythm? This is the impression left on me by this winter's fashions.

First of all there is the 1925 touch — «Yes Sir, that's my baby». Dior plays it with his long, soft bodices, his short skirts ballooning out in slices, like those orange and lemon candy sections which when put together form a whole fruit.

Balmain's Fair Lady progresses on a rather calmer note, with less charleston to it but even so she has the elongated line, with the waist hardly marked at all. I am thinking too of one particular body-hugging coat that even Marlene of the Blue Angel would not have disdained.

«Ich bin von Kopf bis Fuss auf Liebe eingestellt...»

There are the haunting melodies of glamorous nights in Petrograd, played by Nina Ricci, «Life was gay, while the balalaikas played...». She shows nothing but swirling coats and dresses edged with precious furs, mink, chinchilla or sable, lamé fabrics and brocaded fabrics with giant flowers.

There is the classic style of the 30's, represented by Lanvin Castillo with his coats, dresses and skirts drawn tight at the

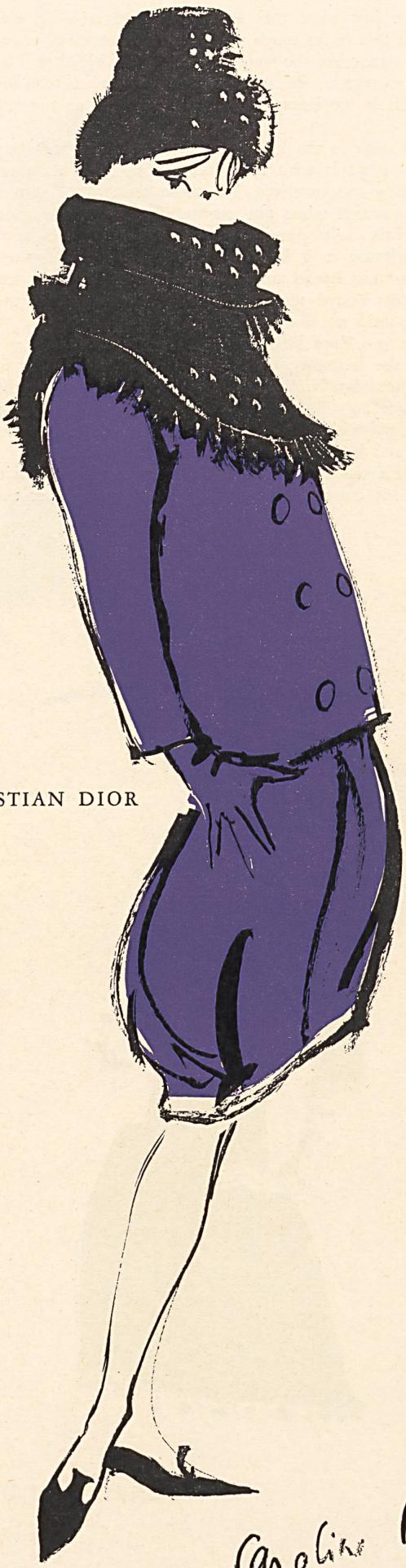
fantasy? There was no longer the unity, no longer the broad general trend that we are wont to expect, but one surprise after another.

Do you remember the lucky-dip stalls at the old-time fairs, with a host of heterogeneous objects buried in the sawdust; one fished blindly without knowing what one's luck would bring. That is what couture is like this season. A sort of lucky dip on a grand scale producing a short skirt or a mid-length skirt, mink edged with knitwear, a completely asymmetric dress, a zouave coat, a bodice falling almost to the knees, another as brief as a ship-board romance, a suit covered with buttons, another without any at all.

There seemed to be no general agreement among the designers. Every one of them, each quite on his own, played the magician and before the somewhat astonished eyes of the spectators produced his own completely personal ideas. To me there is one word that admirably sums up this fashion, except that it has unfortunate connotations, a derogatory sound — the word «pot-pourri». Why is it so often taken in the wrong sense however, when the dictionary defines it very clearly thus: «a mixture of dried petals of different flowers mixed with spices, kept in a jar for its perfume» — nothing unpleasant about this — or in the more modern sense: «a musical medley», a medley being «a heterogeneous mixture».



CHRISTIAN DIOR



CHRISTIAN DIOR

knees, giving the effect of a raindrop. « Isn't this a lovely day to be caught in the rain? »

To what music may one liken the Paris flapper style of Lanvin and Cardin, if not to the songs of Mistinguette? « Je me fais petite, toute petite... »

Everywhere there is a revival of soft fabrics, mousselines, crêpes, laces. Beaded dresses and sheaths are enjoying a comeback. And the shiny, stiff black dress has returned. But where are the Dolly Sisters of yesteryear?

The only thing that has nothing of the late 20's about it is the hat. A hat has become something to add emphasis rather than merely to adorn. It is hard, designed to lengthen the head, with no nonsense about it; it is very definitely 1961.

The sugar-loaf shape, perched more or less at the back of the head, seems to be the favourite. Its austere clean-cut lines go very well with the luxurious hypocrisy of creations — such as those of Dior — which combine the heaviest fabrics, even mink, with the seeming simplicity of knitwear and ribbed edges. It could be introduced under the signature tune of « Mam'zelle Nitouche ».

There is the « brave Musketeer » style with its cloaks and capes. As I say, there is a little of everything and it is as amusing and charming as Alain Gerbault's famous « Pot-pourri » sung so delightfully by Yvonne Printemps.

There are belted waists and loose waists, unaccentuated waists and waists emphasised by scallops.

There are classical collars (very few), officers' great coat collars (a great many), rolled knitted collars (a few), suits without collars and suits with fur collars. See what you can make of it all!

There is a festival of skirts — with large pleats — tulip-shaped — raindrop style — imitation zouave — slit on one side — made of lace or scalloped.

There is the glamorous world of furs, which I have already mentioned; everywhere you turn, everywhere you look — fur: fur on hats, fur collars, fur made into knotted scarves, fur at hemlines, fur linings — and what a range, what variety! Badger, monkey, lynx, fox, mink, ocelot, skunk, astrakan, sable and chinchilla (where by the way have all these silky little animals come from, which a few years ago were said to have almost disappeared, but which suddenly seem to be enjoying a new lease of life). Even suits, which used to be models of sobriety, are at present trimmed with fur.

This winter too there are the lovely deep, springy woollens, but also the dry, crisp woollens, tweeds and Prince of Wales checks, woollen crêpes, and satins, and lamés and brocades, and mousselines, and laces, and guipures.

All that is very fine, I can see you saying, Fair Reader, but what is the fashion? What shall I wear? Will my skirts be long or ultra-short? My waist pinched in, or loose? My winter suit with collar or without? and so on...

If I may be permitted to give a word of advice, in your place one lesson I would have learned from the showings of the great couturiers is their emphasis on simplicity.

A little winter dress, short of course, in a black woollen fabric, set off with one or two big buttons, but without a collar; on the left shoulder, above a bodice where the bust is only faintly suggested instead of provocatively stressed, I would tie a little bow of fur or a small bouquet of flowers; the sleeves would be three-quarter length, the skirt straight and to be completely in fashion, slightly tapered at the hem. Over it all I would wear a loose simple coat in an attractive colour, with fur collar and trimmings. My hat would be a very youthful cloche, or else a pointed bonnet made of the same fur as the coat trimmings. I would walk, in your place that is, with my bust modestly drawn in, my stomach slightly protruding and knees a little bent, I would be discretely made-up, with the emphasis on a pale complexion.

If you follow this advice, you need have no qualms — you will be the very height of the 1960/61 winter fashion.

GALA