

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1965)
Heft: 2

Artikel: New York letter
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798342>

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New York Letter

In former years, fashion writers visiting New York have been invited to chic restaurants so that they might see what the elegant women were wearing.

This spring a designer gave a party for fashion writers and invited a young woman about 22 who is the modern version of «La Vie de Bohème», to whom elegance is something she encounters in the novels of Proust, as remote from her own life as an early Babylonian hieroglyph. She was wearing a long sweater she had knit herself, and she spoke of shopping for clothes in the «Flea

Markets». Here, the fashion writers were told, is the person to whom designers look today for inspiration.

Youth is this girl's outstanding characteristic, the impulse behind all her tastes. And youth is the theme of New York fashion. The swing of the skirt, the soft fabrics that move with the body, the uninhibited colors — all these are part of the atmosphere that puts mature women to dressing like their daughters.

Most designers are trying to persuade the women of America that the knee is attractive, that «the becoming



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length» is a matter of what the eye is accustomed to seeing.

«Fashion is now in a period of unrest», designer Vincent Monte-Sano told a group of fashion writers. «We are getting new ideas of balance. Several years ago we wouldn't have thought of putting such a short skirt with a longer jacket. Now it looks right.»

Skirts are wide. Some skirts are gathered like dirndls, others have panels like aprons. Some have pleats and some wrap around to the side, while a few are flat in front and back with an inverted pleat on each side. The jackets are wide, their shoulders broad and the armholes often so deep as to create dolman sleeves. «These jackets are shaped to the body, but they are not tight», and to prove his point, Mr. Monte-Sano called over a mannequin and lifted her jacket at the shoulders.

The long, unbroken line is a mark of 1965 fashion, sweeping down from a short yoke or down to a lower waistline. In the first case the dress looks like a baby's, in the second case it looks like a little girl's frock. Black ribbed Swiss silk sweeps down from a back yoke in a Monte-Sano coat with a small flat ring collar, worn over a short pink dress shimmering with tiny paillettes. The long line goes from shoulder to hips in a white linen dress by Bill Blass of Maurice Rentner, worn with a linen jacket that is sternly tailored except for the softening effect of white Swiss lace in all its seams.

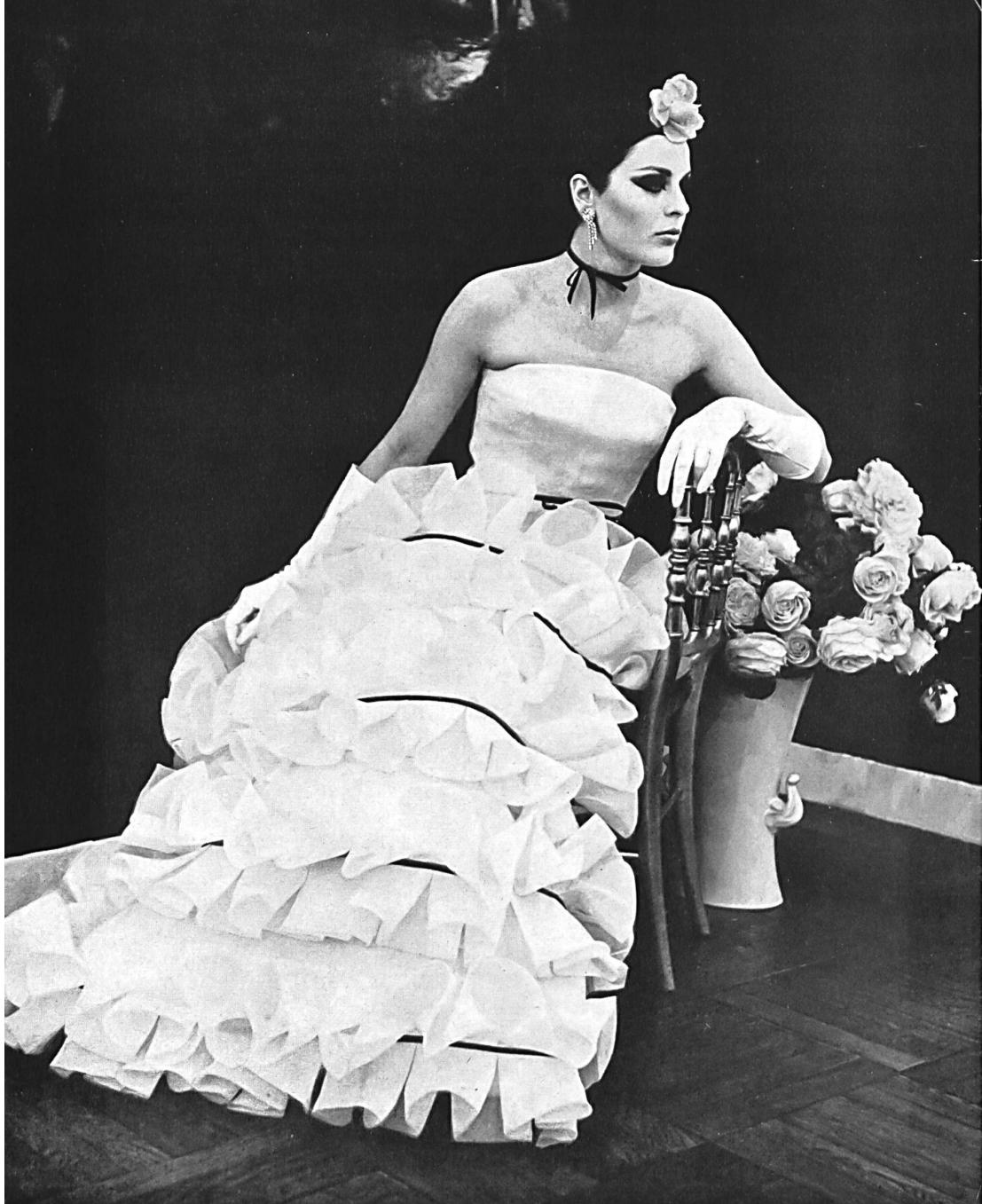
Lace, crocheting, knitting — these are fancies of the young woman who can afford to adopt her grandmother's fashions without worrying that she may look older. Some sophisticated gowns seem to be made of crocheted medallions sewn together. Woven fabrics look as if they were knitted. Soft fabrics like chiffon flutter to accent every motion, for young people are always in motion.

One soft fabric from Switzerland that is especially popular this season is satin organza. Jo Copeland of Pattullo has a skirt that is three flaring tiers of this black organza; the plunging neckline is framed by very wide revers. In another version the same sleeveless bodice is of white satin organza, the skirt black chiffon. Lemon yellow ostrich feathers edge a yellow Swiss satin organza jacket by Jo Copeland, worn over a short matching dress with spaghetti straps over the shoulders. In the cause of providing today's fashionable woman with clothes that flutter as she dances, countless ostriches have sacrificed their plumage.

The most school-girlish of fabrics, white Swiss organdie, makes a romantic gown by John Moore, the designer from Texas who created Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson's yellow satin gown for the inaugural ball. The full skirt beneath the strapless bodice is encircled by rows of wide organdie ruching, each row marked with black velvet ribbon. «The allure of a Southern belle with the threat of a panther,» commented Mr. Moore.



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Satin double face turquoise
Turquoise double faced satin
Modèle: Elisabeth Arden, New York



Organdi blanc de Saint-Gall
Saint-Gall white organdie
Modèle: John Moore

« We can't be bothered » is a favorite phrase of the young who set today's styles, and one matter with which they can't be bothered is the maintenance of their wardrobes. One important designer, Oleg Cassini, expressed the opinion that the world will soon see an end to all clothes that are difficult to keep in condition or to put on, or that are constricting in any way. The move toward nonchalance is apparent already in the number of synthetic fibers that appear in the collections of the leading New York designers. Each season there are more of the fabrics that resist wrinkling and crushing. A costume by Harvey Berin of rayon blend from Switzerland consists of a cap-sleeved dress with long lines and a panel skirt, worn with a double-breasted jacket. Another Swiss fabric, a waffle-weave mixture of silk and synthetics in two shades of beige that Jo Copeland calls « the tones of old Chinese ivory », appears in a costume with jacket reaching the lowered waistline.

The big, bold effects that enchant young people have made prints as dramatic as a poster. A single daffodil may cover a floor-length skirt. The avant-garde artists who create optical illusions would be fascinated by some of the black-and-white prints, with patterns that break off and begin again, as if they were being seen through water.

Among the skirts that fail to cover the knees above which they whirl, there are evening skirts of a new length that some designers call prophetic. These stop just below the calf, always cut straight or wrapped to give a glimpse of the calf. The advocates of this length say it is practical for the theatre, where a long skirt can be awkward. But its future depends entirely on the whims of our young ladies. Observers who say America is ruled by youth will not be disputed in the realm of fashion.

Rhea Tally Stewart.