

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1965)
Heft: 4

Inhaltsverzeichnis

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TEXTILES SUISSES N° 4 - 1965

(SWISS TEXTILES)

The Swiss textile and clothing review with a world-wide circulation

Special publication of the

Swiss Office for the Development of Trade, Zurich and Lausanne
published with the co-operation of the concerned professional organizations

EDITOR AND PUBLISHER: SWISS OFFICE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE
RUE DE BELLEFONTAINE 18, LAUSANNE

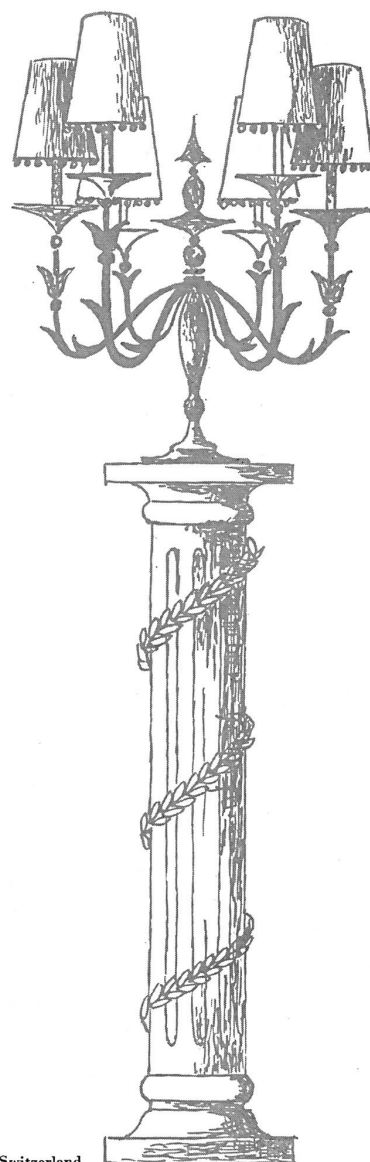
Managing director: ALBERT MASNATA - Chief editor: CHARLES BLASER

« Textiles Suisses » is issued four times a year.

Annual subscription — Abroad: Swiss Fr. 30.—. Price per copy: Swiss Fr. 10.—

CONTENTS

	Pages
Publications of the Swiss Office for the Development of Trade	38
PARIS	
The 1965/1966 Autumn and Winter Collections	39
Creations Autumm-Winter 1965/1966	43
(All Paris creations shown in this periodical are copyright and their reproduction is prohibited.)	
Cotton — Leisure 1966	74
Monsieur	75
Manufacturers' own contributions	80
Stehli Silk Mills Ltd., Zurich — Five-fourths of a century old	89
Collaboration at the Technical Level (Viscose)	92
Brilliant and inspired (Bally)	94
Swiss Ready-to-Wear	95
47th Swiss Export Week, Zurich	102
News	134
Terylene — EFTA	136
Swiss Made with Swiss Materials	137
Letters from:	
New York	146
London	148
Italy	154
Here, there and everywhere	155
Index of Advertisers	163
Where to subscribe to « Textiles Suisses »?	164-165
What we can do for you	166



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SWISS OFFICE FOR THE DEVELOPMENT OF TRADE, LAUSANNE

Rue de Bellefontaine 18, Telephone (021) 22 33 33



Printed in Switzerland on paper from the Biberist Paper Mills



Paris

Yves St Laurent

Catherine Ranett





Grey skies, cold and rain provided an appropriate setting for this year's showings of the 1965/1966 Paris winter collections. Unlike other years with the temperature well up in the 80's and mannequins wilting in the heat, under the glare of the projectors and the unseasonable warmth of mink coats, this year the atmosphere was decidedly wintry, in fact just perfect for the showings.

A year quite unlike any other then, in more ways than one. Usually the Paris showings are the signal for an onslaught of rival propaganda and slogans between the couturiers. In order to get people to talk about their showings, the purpose of which is to sell their creations, they invent new formulas, launch new lines, using all the time the most extravagant epithets.

Now, in July 1965, the press ever on the lookout for a sensational scoop trooped en masse to the one couturier who presented nothing but whose influence hovered over all the collections, just as Christian Dior's did at the time of the New Look. Courrèges, in addition to unparalleled skill in the so-called geometric line, has the keenest sense of publicity. He did not hold a showing, but all the collections, without exception, show the influence of his ideas in varying degrees and rang the changes on motifs with squares, triangles or diamonds, as if Euclid, twenty-two centuries after his death, had suddenly become the master-mind inspiring fashion.

Is this good or bad? There is no doubt about it — it is an excellent thing, for the very definition of couture is to live with one's time. And now that youth reigns supreme, now that girls of 16 dominate the fashion scene, ousting the women in their thirties, with a backdrop of clubs, Saint-Tropez, the Sirtaki, Ferraris on land and Rivas on sea, to the musical accompaniment of electric guitars; now that a first night at the Lido is reserved for women in evening trousers, that hairdressers juggle with hairstyles like Françoise Hardy's or Sylvie Vartan's, that the sales figures of record manufacturers vie very favourably with those of heavy industry, we need something new. And we have certainly got it this season.

If women adopt the new fashion — and there is no reason why they should not — we shall see them this coming winter in dresses designed by what I would call couturier-architects. I'll explain. What I mean by dress architecture is a creation that eschews the traditional points of support offered by the female body, in order to transpose them, conceal them or even surpass them, by skilful cutting or decoration. There is no need to be scandalized. You have but to remember the unwieldy crinoline, the enormous rounded posteriors produced by extra padding, or the huge leg-of-mutton sleeves of the turn of the century, and Poiret's divided skirts. The difference from the present trend is that all these fashions exaggerated, for the sake of effect, the natural curves and prominences of a woman's body, while today's fashion, except that it takes delight in revealing the legs, gets as far from the feminine frame as possible. This winter we shall be admiring a crop of adorable little Martians with low waists, a very straight silhouette, hair worn in a fringe in front, the general appearance of little girls who have grown too fast, knees well in evidence below the hems of skirts, buttoned tunics and, for the very cold or merely chilly weather, or even just for the fun of it, gaiter-pants, wollen stockings or soft boots.

I wouldn't swear that this is all particularly aesthetic, but it is certainly very amusing. Now would I swear that women who have passed the age of the juke-box will always find these models to their taste, but everyone knows now that no self-respecting woman ever passes the age of the juke-box, and photographs are there to show that mothers now dress exactly like their daughters. And then, as always in Paris couture, which in a century has mastered its trade to perfection, in addition to the eccentric dresses, going beyond the bounds of possibility, there are always, and for all types of women, a host of eternally graceful, becoming and sumptuous models. During the showings, even if those in the know show their interest in the novelties, it is nevertheless the loveliest, most classical, most beautifully cut, embroidered and re-embroidered dresses that call forth the loudest and longest applause.

This being so, it is obvious from most collections that, for the day, shoulders will be wider and straighter, and skirts definitely shorter. For the evening, the loosely flowing dress has been put on one side in favour of the body-hugging siren dress, beplumed or befeathered at the hem.

The couturiers who seem to have had the most fun working with the astronaut style or ultra-short skirt are (I quote at random) Pomarède, Jacques Heim's designer, Ted Lapidus, Yorn, Ungaro (formerly with Courrèges), Roberto Capucci, Jacques Launay, Estérel, Michel Goma (at Patou's), Louis Féraud, and Pierre Cardin. Those who struck me as the most restrained, while nevertheless being very much « with it », are Dior, Lanvin, Balmain, Laroche (the prince of the promising décolleté), Ricci, Carven, Griffe, Grès, Madeleine de Rauch, Maggy Rouff, and naturally a host of others.

Is there a conclusion to be drawn from these showings? Actually, I think I have covered all the main points. But it could be added that Parisian couture makes one think of a classical author who, in addition to his strictly orthodox works in the most rigorously pure style, goes in for flights of fancy and great exuberance of expression. Just as Picasso can give birth to his monsters on canvas precisely because he possesses the skill and genius of the great masters of the past, and just as Salvador Dali amuses us with his eccentricities made possible by his sound mastery of technique, so couture is able to take all the liberties it chooses because in addition to the cake smothered with icing and candied fruit, it alone is capable of creating the good and wholesome everyday bread. Let us therefore enjoy our charming space-women of 1965, especially as they make all women look younger. Long live the new fashion...

GALA

