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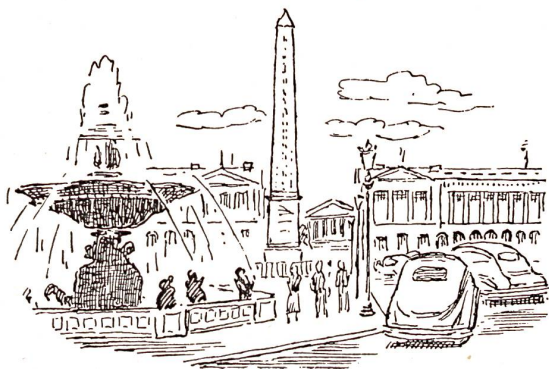
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PARIS

The 1953/54 Winter Collections

In 1947, a couturier by the name of Christian Dior, who had recently opened his own fashion house, met in one day with the most striking success by suddenly breaking with the drab and utility fashion of the day and launching what was called the New Look. After the presentation, shy and blushing, he tried to escape the manifestations of enthusiasm which seemed to leave him a little breathless.

Six years later (six centuries at least in the world of fashion where the years are like geological eras), Christian Dior has once again caused an uproar, this time by shortening skirts. For the fashion press — for all editors in fact — it came as an even more welcome scoop than the Loch Ness monster. In England, Norman Hartnell, the court designer, declared himself against short skirts; so did Italian couture.

And that is how matters stand at the moment.

It was, however, only to be expected. For several years now couture collections have been showing signs of finding difficulty in producing something new and original. It has already been mentioned in this periodical, on the occasion of both the spring and previous winter collections, that it was impossible to discover any general trends. This state of affairs was a great boon to ready-to-wear clothing manufacturers who, almost everywhere, have been experiencing an unprecedented boom for some time now. It was only natural that haute couture should seek to put one over on its rivals — we say rivals because the close link between “made to measure” and “ready-to-wear”, which moreover is so desirable, has never in fact been able to be forged up till now, in Europe at any rate. Ready-to-wear manufacturers, who must plan their collections at least six months ahead of the couturiers, cannot risk making a mistake: it is out of the question for them to alter models already in the course of production or distributed among the different stockists.

So Christian Dior has raised skirts to some 16 in. from the ground. This is a fact, a disturbing fact perhaps, but one that will leave room for compromise. In the last analysis, it is the public that will decide on the length to be adopted. Everything seems to indicate that skirts will be shorter, without being exaggeratedly so, and that all that will be necessary in order not to be out of the fashion will be to raise the hems a little.

But, apart from this internal revolution, there is moreover evidence, almost everywhere, of a great desire to produce something new. Let us take Dior first of all. He has put his creations within the reach of women who are not particularly tall. The era of mannequins 5 ft. 8 in.

tall without heels appears to be over. He has also — hence the indignant protests of the experts — fulminated against the armour enveloping women’s bodies and making them hard and impersonal to the touch: it was thought that he had in mind our grandmothers’ corsets



CHRISTIAN DIOR

JACQUES FATH



BALENCIAGA

or the girdles of our wives. In actual fact, Dior was setting fire to what he had previously adored by rising up against the stiffening of which he had formerly made such lavish use in his creations. For the rest, he remains classic and his collection is one of a master that knows how to work with all the colours on his palette. He has made a particular point of giving a harmonious curve to the shoulders — the *cupola* silhouette. The idea was in the air, since we notice at the same time that Jacques Fath calls his line “romanesque”, and Griffe gives it the name of “Gothic”. Let us add that his suits and coats are narrow and collarless, that the skirts of the dresses are, on the whole, *bell* shaped, that his waists are narrow and rounded, without belts, and that Mauviette and Victoire, his two star mannequins, represent the triumph of the small plump woman.

While Dior is the champion of the short skirt, Pierre Balmain still champions the longer skirt. (But do not worry, skirts will soon settle down to a standard length!) His collection is very varied: there is something, one might say, for every taste (every good one, that is!). He advocates the *champagne glass* line. Whereas many of his colleagues do away completely with the belt, he keeps it and even makes it into a kind of corselet. One feels that Pierre Balmain is trying to make all women appear at

their best, and the title of his collection, “*Jolie Madame de Paris*”, bears this out well.

Jacques Fath, while shortening skirts (13½ to 14½ in. from the ground) goes in wholeheartedly for a wildly youthful sex appeal. All his models have rounded shoulders, reminiscent of a romanesque arch, over bodices made to emphasise the bust; suits have little basques which are rounded too, buttons are classical. On the other hand, there are many narrow bands of fur trimming to be seen at the neck and cuffs. Moreover this sudden reappearance of fur trimmings at all the couturiers is a sign of the fashion of the day. His evening gowns with their trails of flowing mousseline are sumptuous.

Like all his colleagues, Fath uses fabrics with new colours, the whole gamut of the golds in particular, including the fashionable shade *cognac*, and greys in a score of twenty different tones.

Balenciaga, as always, goes his own way. His models are pure Balenciaga and are so difficult to define that fashion writers often hesitate and content themselves, in artful circumlocution, with expressing above all their admiration. Alone perhaps of his kind, the invisible couturier of Avenue George V has his staunchly faithful clientele, as the bullfighter his aficionados. And even those who are not among his clients are compelled, when discussing his style, to recognise his amazing talent.

The predominant note in Jean Dessès’ collection seems to be the guitar line. There are no belts at the waist. As opposed to Fath, who has done away with revers at the necks of his tailormades and two-piece outfits, he favours small pointed stitched revers. His basques are normal, and almost all the interest is centered on the hips and the twenty and one ways in which the skirts are cut and put together. The length? About 14½ in. from the ground. Many redingotes, some of them in *trompe-l’œil* woollens. Like Balmain, Jean Dessès caters to all women rather than to any one particular type.

In order not to overload this brief account of the collections, we must leave much unsaid: and yet, even when we have added that Givenchy’s creations have appeared this time to be free from the intentional fantasy of last year in order to adopt a more classical look, even in the flood of fabrics in which the Chinese inspiration predominates;

that the new couturier of the year is Marc Bohan, whose showing was received with great acclamations by the press;

that Maggy Rouff has gained her usual success with her well-made dresses, in which the beltless princess line predominates, where skirts are 13½ in. from the ground;

that Carven, with her Nafa line, Castillo with his lady-bird, Nina Ricci with her basket, Paquin with his new designer who replaces Lov Clavierie, Patou with Julio Lafitte, Schiaparelli with her caressing line, Manguin with her supple and slenderising line, Serge Kogan who escapes from his exclusively tailormade inspiration to tackle various kinds of dresses, have all met with success;

when it has been added, as a final word — we must render unto Caesar . . . — that most of the fashion houses mentioned above have used textile creations from Zurich and St. Gall and have used them to great effect, we shall still have given but a pale reflection of the collections. But the photographs appearing in the pages of “Textiles Suisses” will complete and illuminate these notes . . .

J. Gaumont-Lanvin.