

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1956)
Heft: 1

Artikel: The whole gamut of the spring collections
Autor: [s.n.]
DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798572>

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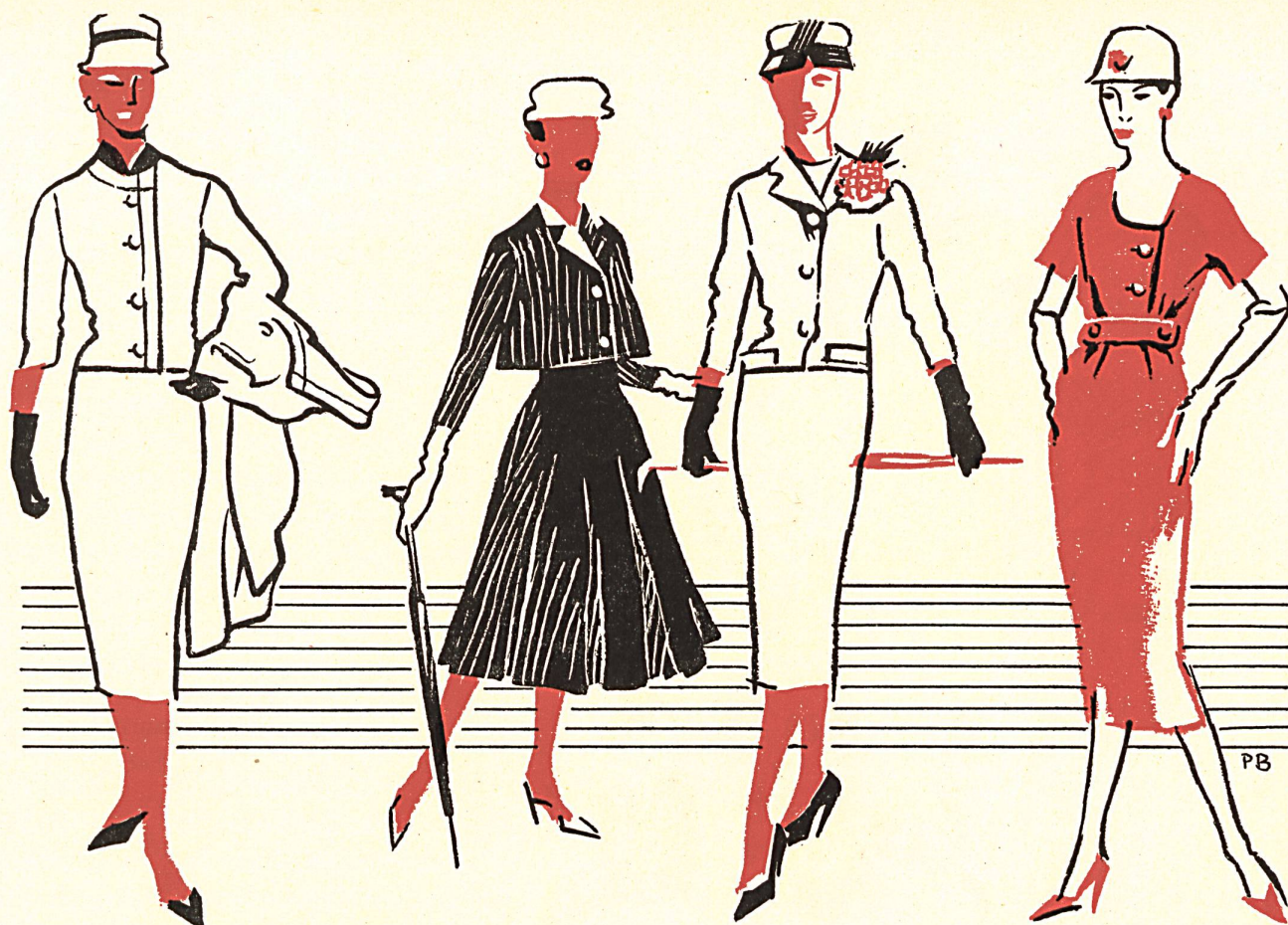
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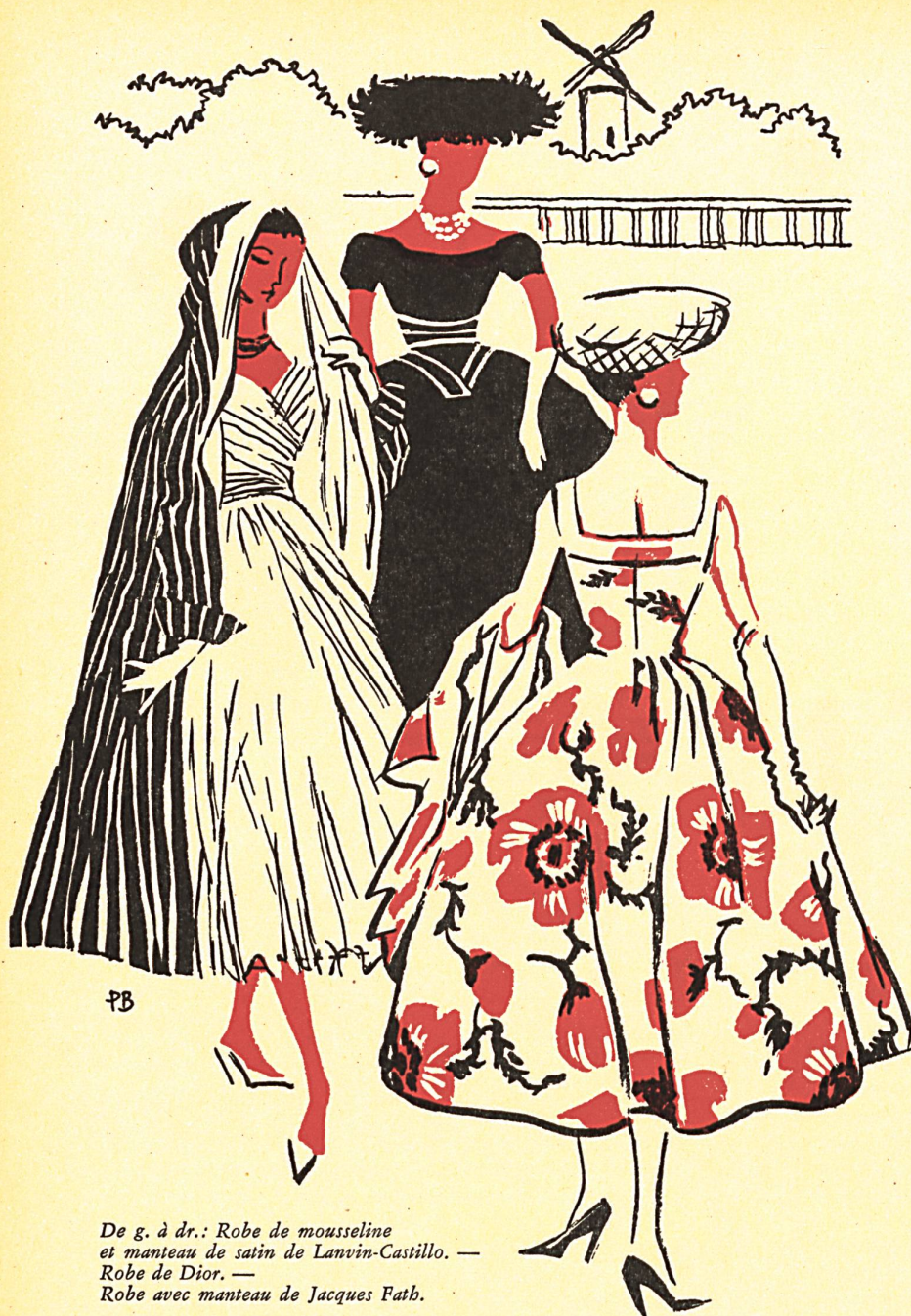


De g. à dr.: Tailleur chartreuse 3 pièces (avec manteau), de Patou. — Robe et canezou en lainage rayé de Lanvin-Castillo. — Tailleur parme (robe et veste) de Balmain. — Robe et veste de Dior.

The Whole Gamut of the Spring Collections

When all is said and done, a woman is a creature of flesh and blood, with a body and curves conveniently placed in all the right places — as Peter Cheyney would say. The couturiers as a whole however seem to have a tendency to forget this fundamental fact. Some of them have, for several years now, been tending to become more and more abstract in their creations. Undoubtedly they are following the rule whereby the arts become less and less figurative, but what is acceptable in a painting or a piece of sculpture is not necessarily so in a dress. A piece of sculpture is an entity, something complete in itself, a painting the setting down on canvas of an ideal or an idea ; whereas a dress is — one would have thought — intended to clothe and adorn a woman's body. However when one sees the mannequins of today strutting by, weighing thirty odd pounds less than they should for their height, their busts skilfully concealed, their backs puckered and wrinkled by their girdles in an aggressive setting of backbone, one realises that the designers are seeking to dehumanize the statue of flesh and blood and change it into a clothes rack for their creations and nothing more.

This is a pity, because one ends up wondering whether these dresses that are marvels of skilful cut are not all a big hoax. But even so they have a certain attraction from the purely technical point of view. They involve remarkable skill and a faultless technique of assembly. But what sighs of relief, what smiles of delight when the evening dresses are shown — and the emaciated bodies underneath are forgotten for the moment !



De g. à dr.: Robe de mousseline
et manteau de satin de Lanvin-Castillo. —
Robe de Dior. —
Robe avec manteau de Jacques Fath.

The line is then soft, rounded, the bodices have the look of baskets of fruit, the dresses flare in a cascade of mouselines and organdies. And the applause breaks loose.

Admittedly, in answer to the remarks that have just been made it will be retorted that one must be of one's time, that fashion is a law unto itself, that it does not have to bother about logic but can choose its setting, that if something is liked that is sufficient to make it beautiful, that however much one may argue about Picasso, he is still the best investment in painting, that French couture has lost nothing of its reputation in the world, and, finally, that it is the most advanced couturiers who are the most successful. The old hands will remind you that Poiret was considered scandalous when he launched his bloomer skirt, and that Chanel's pullovers (the height of sloppiness in the eyes of the conservative) went no one knows how many times round the world to the jingle of pounds, dollars and cruzeiros. The young are always right, by definition — which does not mean however that their elders are wrong. And, as nature balances all things, one very quickly sees that although in couture there are two schools, that of the bold innovators and that of the advocates of embellishments, in actual fact the two conceptions exist

side by side and mingle continually. As I was saying a moment ago, in contrast to the severity of his arrow line, which borders on the abstract, Dior shows, a few minutes later, the most feminine of dresses; the same is true of Givenchy and Balenciaga, those mathematicians of cut. At Balmain's, Fath's or Lanvin's, on the other hand, between two silky languorous models will suddenly appear a little dress, an imitation bolero or a geometrically inspired « canezou ».

* * *

Parisian couture is a whole, a star with its storm centres like the sun, but a whole whose parts are very strongly riveted together. Its evolutions are cyclic, it rediscovers the same ideas, the logical successors of those it has just abandoned.

This year, in order to react against the false return to 1925, waists are higher. The shades of Theresa Cabarrus and Josephine de Beauharnais glide gracefully through the smoke-laden air of the salons. Everywhere, or almost, the style of the Directory, the Empire or Restoration flourishes. But let us make ourselves clear: in spite of everything it is an unmistakably 1956 style. And here is the belt back again, not worn around the waist — that would be too simple — but elsewhere, as an ornament. It is wound round the bust,

entwining it, crossing over, in the form of ribbons, drapes and trailing sashes. Farewell to princess dresses, farewell to long waists.

The tailormade seems to be losing favour, to the advantage of the little practical dress suitable for all occasions, accompanied by a spencer, a « caraco », a camisole, a « canezou » (call it what you will). It is made in soft woollens, pastel « nattés » or Prince of Wales plaids, pick and pick and shantung.

The shirtwaist dress is well suited to the high waists. Draping is found everywhere, giving a languorous air which softens the severity of the line.

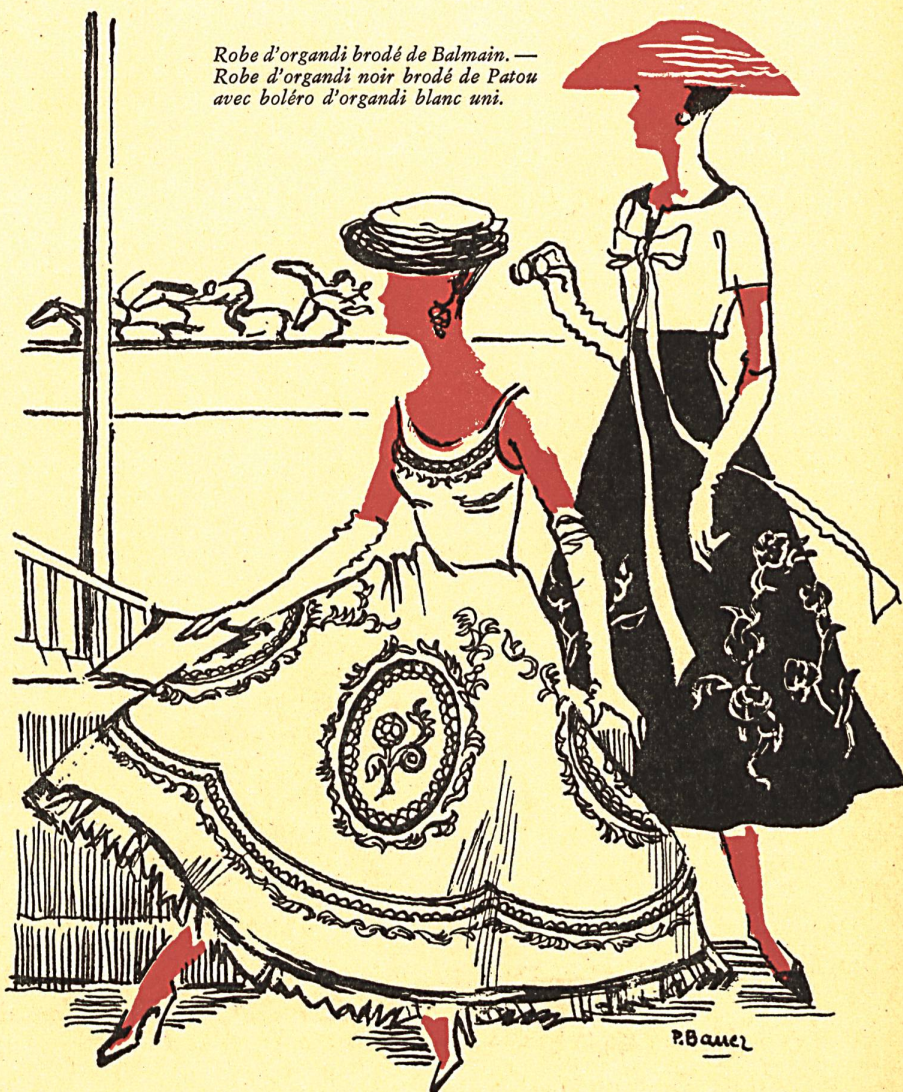
There are a great number of prints. Some use them in almost plain styles, like Geneviève Fath, others prefer them in violent hues, reminiscent of the furnishing fabrics of Poiret in the good old days. The brilliance is reserved for the mousselines, organdies, organzas, laces and guipures, a more sober note being struck by the satins.

Obviously it is easier to draw applause with a charming evening dress than with a smart morning dress. The material, the fullness, the colours all help. For those who crave difficulties as much as our present day couturiers seem to do, the evening dress should really only be a concession. And yet, seldom have we seen so many, so lovely and so iridescent ! Although we judge these matters from a man's point of view, there are certain ensembles that we might almost have dreamed about. White and black dresses by Dior, a « gandourah » of black satin with white stripes by Lanvin, and everywhere, at Fath's, Balmain's, Patou's, Maggy Rouff's and many others, ruinous creations which if collected together and worn by a hundred or so lovely women would recall in all their gaiety and splendour the « fêtes galantes » of days done by.

* * *

Apart from that, if we try to sum up what is new in these 1956 summer fashions, if we restrict ourselves to the dryness of definitions, here are the main points to be remembered :

- much higher waists, with re-appearance of belts and draped effects ;
- curves, but no nipping in at the waist ;
- fewer tailormades (but let us not exaggerate, there are still a great many) and more matching outfits with boleros of all shapes and sizes, separate or attached ;
- skirts, some sheathed, others full, also a tendency to be shorter ;
- light colours for woollens, with a veritable invasion of fabrics of St. Gall ;
- much use of flowers as trimming on dresses (lilies of the valley, roses, daisies) ;
- on the other hand, far fewer edgings and bows in white piqué ;
- reappearance of strapless tops for evening dresses, whereas during the previous two seasons shoulder straps were a must ;
- bulky jewellery, but less showy than before ;
- full coats, rather dashing looking ;
- as for the hats, the men will not care for them at all, but the women will go crazy about them, whether they are shaped like funnels, lampshades or upturned flower pots.



*Robe d'organdi brodé de Balmain. —
Robe d'organdi noir brodé de Patou
avec boléro d'organdi blanc uni.*

P. Bauer



Détails : (de g. à dr.) Nœud avec pan au dos, de Dior. — Jupe montante (taille « directoire ») de Balmain. — Ceinture sous le buste, chapeau charlotte en organdi, de Dior. — Grande collerette en organdi, de Dior. — Robe à pois avec ceinture drapée, de Lanvin-Castillo. — Ruché d'organdi sur tailleur, de Fath. — Jabot d'organdi sur robe de shantung à pois, de Fath.

You will see that the latest fashion, presented on mere shadows of women — 5 ft. 5 in. in their stockinged feet and weighing only 110 lb. — will be rounded out, filled out and feminised. If you have already seen this fashion in the couturier's salon, you will no longer recognise it when you see it in the street, the drawing room or at the theatre. It will have been run in, so to speak, it will once again have found its soft feminine forms. The play of colours and filmy fabrics will have had their effect, it will have been humanised. And then it will be really very lovely.

Gala

