

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1957)
Heft: 4

Artikel: Letter from Germany
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798438>

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Letter from Germany

RAU S.A., SAINT-GALL

Bestickter Organdy.
Organdi brodé.

Modell von / Modèle de :
Ursula Roleff, Francfort/M.

Photo F.C. Gundlach



Fashion is very much in the news in Germany these days. Experts and theorists are putting their heads together in an attempt to define fashion and to discover the attitude of women with regard to this burning question.

In Dusseldorf a few months ago there was a very heated discussion between top German fashion designers and representatives of the daily press and fashion magazines

on the theme « What is fashion ? » « Is fashion still fashionable » was the topic recently debated in Berlin at a round table conference between several top designers — among them Hubert de Givenchy — shop owners, fashion writers and feminine consumers.

At both discussions it was discovered how difficult it is to find a clear definition of fashion, even among very

competent people in the trade. One section of the experts and the journalists maintained that a line (or a simple detail, or a colour) launched by Parisian couture can be considered to be « the fashion » once the principal manufacturers of other countries have adopted it and the press has given it wide publicity, in short, once this new fashion has been made known to the consumer and made available for purchase in the shops or fashion houses. On the other hand, another group of the experts maintained that a new line can only be considered « the fashion » when the woman in the street has accepted it and it is actually worn by the majority of feminine consumers. During the first of these meetings somebody called attention to the concrete example of the cape, recently launched by Dior and other Parisian couturiers. All the leading German ready-to-wear manufacturers and couturiers adopted it, all the fashion magazines and daily papers publicised it... and yet not a single woman was actually seen wearing one in the street. The fashion writers wanted to know then whether the cape was to be considered « the fashion » because it had been adopted unanimously by the designers and the manufacturers and backed by the press, or whether it was *not* « the fashion » because women were not wearing it ! Some

ROBT. SCHWARZENBACH & Co., THALWIL

Schwarz und königsblau brochierter Satin über schwarzem Duchesse Satin.
Satin broché noir et bleu roy, sur satin duchesse noir.

Modell von / Modèle de :
Charles Ritter, Lübeck-Hamburg

Photo Hermann Niese



ROBT. SCHWARZENBACH & Co., THALWIL

Cocktailkleid aus orangefarbenem Duchesse Satin.
Orangefarbener Jacquardmantel.
Robe de cocktail de satin duchesse orange.
Manteau en tissu jacquard orange.

Modell von / Modèle de :
Charles Ritter, Lübeck-Hamburg

said one thing, some another. It was finally unanimously agreed to adopt the proposal put forward by Mr. Werner Lauer (of the firm of Lauer Böhlendorff, Krefeld), one of the leading German ready-to-wear manufacturers, who said « The designers and the fashion industries do no more than propose a new line, it is women in their capacity as consumers who decide whether it can be considered to be the fashion or not ». Hubert de Givenchy came to the same conclusion in the second discussion, expressing his opinion in the words: « The couturier proposes but woman disposes ».

Which means, when all is said and done, that it is the retail buyer, the woman in the street or « Lieschen Muller », as she is called here in Germany, who actually decides in the field of fashion. It is not surprising therefore that the fashion industries, textile associations and other clothing organisations, as well as fashion magazines and the daily press (and even film producers) bend over backwards in their attempts to woo this unpredictable quantity — the woman in the street — which does not alter the fact how-

ever that no one, unfortunately, is able to discover exactly what she wants, least of all herself, as has been proved by countless consumer surveys !

The main topic of discussion today is the sack dress, and even the most daring of designers tremble at the thought of the reactions of their clients, particularly as the fashion industries, by the sudden death of Christian Dior, have been deprived of the unquestioned authority which gave them their assurance with regard to fashion trends.

The leading wholesale fashion houses of Berlin and Western Germany have nevertheless included in their spring/summer collections a large number of very successful variations of the sack line. (But who on earth could have coined such a hideous word ? It is almost enough to put anyone off before even having seen it !) Thus, for example, Ursula Roleff (Frankfurt-Berlin) presents a series of delightfully simple youthful models in woollen fabrics resembling tricot, as well as of heavy cheviots in bright luminous blues or cherry reds ; they all have very small square necklines, short kimono sleeves and an attractive little gathered effect in the centre of the front, which in no way detracts from the loose look but removes any suggestion of severity it might have. For the summer, the same firm has made vaporous sack dresses for evening wear in dainty lace, tea-rose coloured on yellow satin or beige on pink, with matching trimmings of roses at the neck and in the middle of the skirt. Swiss organdies naturally require freedom to flow and billow, and a definitely romantic cut — both of which they were given. Ursula Roleff's teenage collection, to which she devotes

particular care, is to a large extent made up of Swiss cotton fabrics : screen-printed poplin (Heer, Tahlwil) with designs of fruit so real that one could almost take a bite out of them, a printed satin and a poplin printed with original animal designs (Mettler, St. Gall) and a white piqué with beautiful roses (Nef, Hérisau). German ready-to-wear manufacturers appreciate Swiss fabrics not only for their quality but also because they can obtain them from the manufacturers with exclusive rights for the whole of Germany.

For the big or small couture houses the decision for or against the sack line is simplified by the fact that the couturiers know their clients personally, so that it is easier for them to find the arguments needed to persuade, whereas ready-to-wear manufacturers are always dependent on the talents of persuasion and the goodwill of shop assistants.

As well as the straight and loose line for day wear, Charles Ritter (Lübeck-Hamburg) presents a baroque bouffant silhouette for the evening. Among his favourites let us mention duchesse and brocaded satins (Schwarzenbach, Thalwil) and an interesting new fabric, lastex brocade (J. S. Block Sons, Zurich). Toni Schiesser too has used fine Swiss woollen fabrics a lot this season for her very fashionable outfits which are elegant without being severe ; she uses mainly coarse cheviots and soft velvety mohairs (Guggenheim Einstein & Sons, Zurich) as well as fine woollens for draped afternoon frocks and Swiss pure silk taffeta for rococo style cocktail dresses.

Emily Kraus-Nover

**ROBT. SCHWARZENBACH & Co.,
THALWIL**

Orangefarbener reinseidener Duchesse
Satin.
Satin duchesse orange, pure soie.

*Goldbesticktes Abendkleid von / Robe du
soir brodée or de :*
Charles Ritter, Lübeck-Hambourg

