

The serious side...

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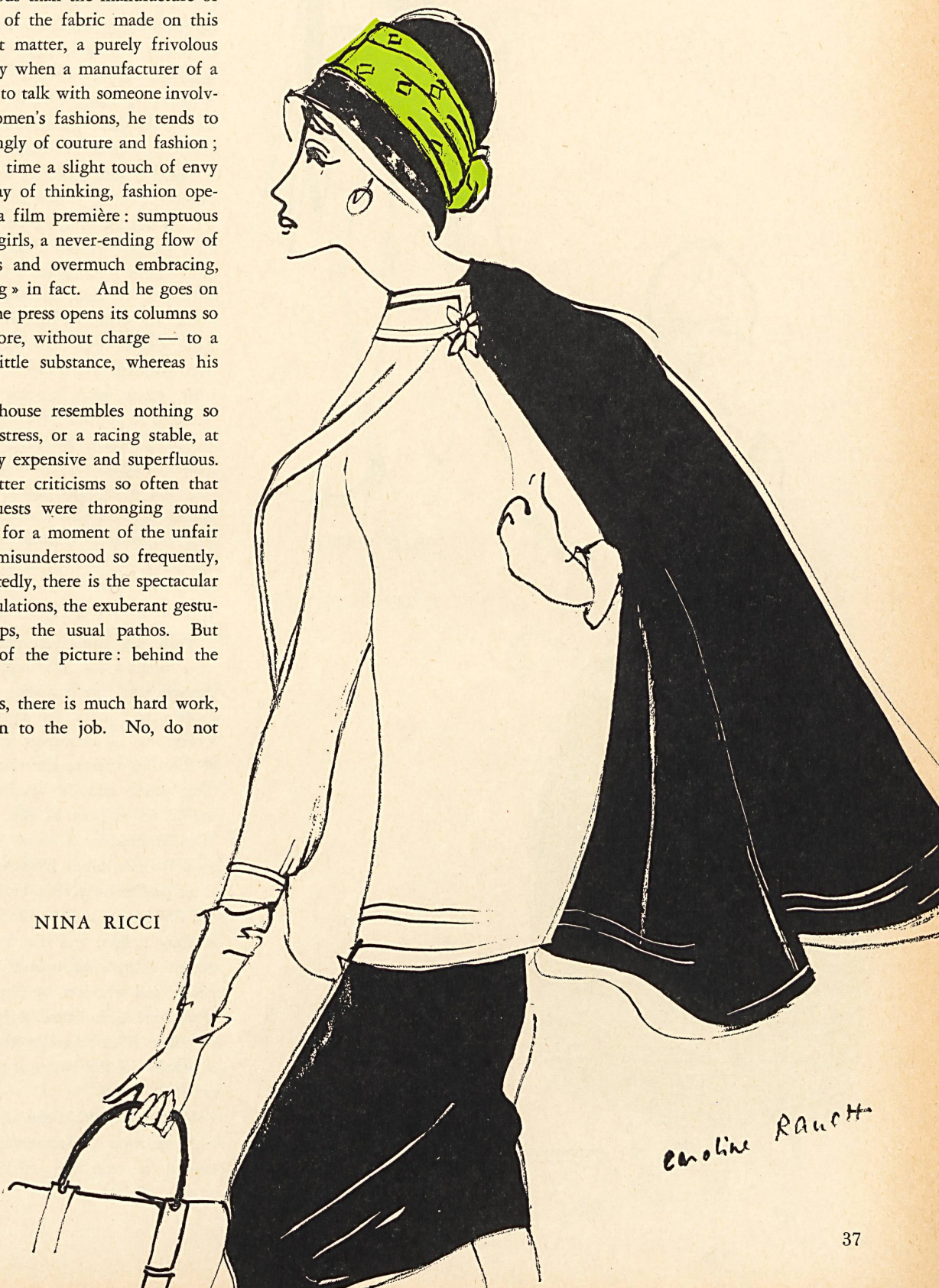
The serious side...

Certain professions are by definition serious. Others have a reputation for frivolity. For example, what could be more serious than the manufacture of a loom, whereas the use of the fabric made on this loom is quite a different matter, a purely frivolous occupation. Consequently when a manufacturer of a certain standing happens to talk with someone involved in the creation of women's fashions, he tends to speak rather condescendingly of couture and fashion; with perhaps at the same time a slight touch of envy and jealousy. To his way of thinking, fashion openings are all rather like a film première: sumptuous setting, hordes of pretty girls, a never-ending flow of hyperbolic compliments and overmuch embracing, « much ado about nothing » in fact. And he goes on to deplore the fact that the press opens its columns so wide — and, what is more, without charge — to a profession that has so little substance, whereas his own products...

To others, a couture house resembles nothing so much as a pampered mistress, or a racing stable, at any rate something highly expensive and superfluous. We have heard these bitter criticisms so often that the other day as the guests were thronging round Marc Bohan we thought for a moment of the unfair lot of couture which is misunderstood so frequently, and by so many. Admittedly, there is the spectacular side, the effusive congratulations, the exuberant gestures, the flowery write-ups, the usual pathos. But there is the other side of the picture: behind the scenes...

And, behind the scenes, there is much hard work, high hopes, and devotion to the job. No, do not

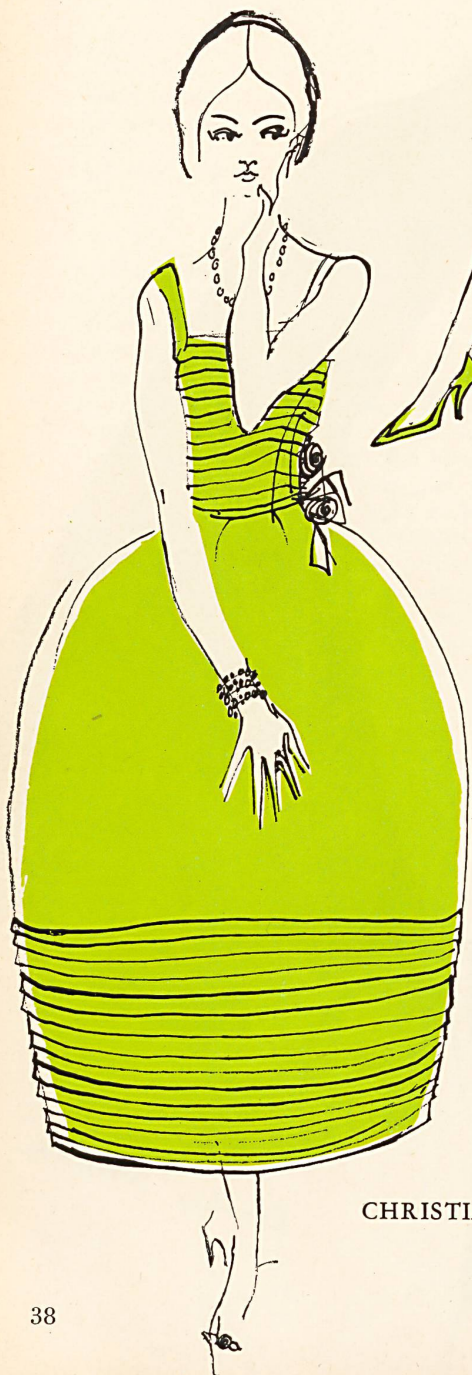
NINA RICCI



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worry, we have no intention of trotting out once more the time-worn cliché and trying to wring your heart with the sad little tale of the poor midinette who will never wear a dress like the one she is sewing, but simply and in a few words of telling you about everything and everyone connected with couture — the couturiers themselves, the textile craftsmen, the embroiderers, the accessory experts, the designers and the seamstresses, all the men and women who, whether with their pencils, their needles, their looms, their presses or their machines contribute in one way or another to the work of creation. Let it be clearly understood, we have no intention of trying to belittle the importance of the mass-production of spaghetti, whose turnover is certainly much higher than that of couture, in saying that such an industry, for all its great practical utility, requires less talent and less spirit of devotion.

Then, if one scratches away the top surface of a fashion opening, if one strips down the profession to what is noblest in it, the burst of creation, the striving after beauty; if one deliberately forgets the rather ostentatious showmanship involved, the dresses that will never be worn but which are needed to define a trend, for publicity purposes; if one thinks of all these people who have been occupied for months over sketches and samples, who have been working their utmost, planning and dreaming, until the final outburst of applause, the faint echoes of which are so anxiously awaited behind the scenes, then you will be bound to agree with us that Fashion is not all frivolity and that it is quite as useful for the well-being of mankind to be able to show a pretty figure off to advantage as to sell a highly efficient household appliance.

* * *

These few lines were necessary to help us get rid of a complex — the complex of someone who lived through the gay twenties, the grand galas at the Carlton in Cannes, the drinks served on the lowered windscreen of a roadster in front of the Bar Basque at Biarritz, of someone who saw the Dolly Sisters in their prime and the stately mannequins descending the giant stairway of the Grand Palais during the 1925 Exhibition in Paris; of one who has driven in Paul Poiret's tartan Hispano-Suiza, taken part in the Oasis parties he gave in his fabulous home, who knew the Charleston and the Black-Bottom when they were at their height, and the foot long cigarette holders, the thigh-high waists and the knee-length strings of pearls, and who has the impression of living through it all over again, some thirty years later. Hence the complex. Has he really seen it all before? Is it just a parody of the twenties to amuse the young couturiers?

To tell the truth, the answer is both yes and no.

Those who for some time now have been kind enough to read our articles in this periodical will

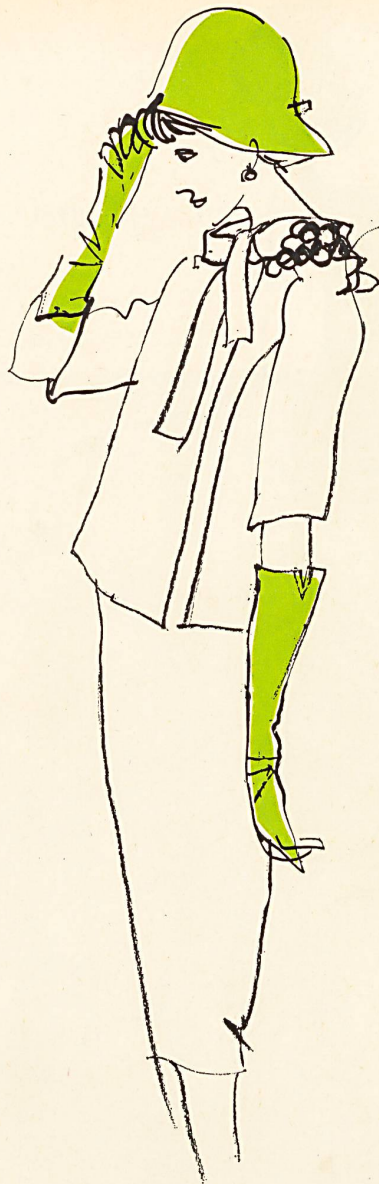
think that we are forever harping on the same old string, repeating our theory of saturation in couture, which maintains that there is a certain logic in creation, that it is a curve which leads quite naturally to a transition as soon as a fashion has reached its peak, its saturation point. It is perfectly natural that after a period of moulding women's bodies, the embrace should be relaxed, that after long skirts there should be a return to short ones. This is not a parody or facile imitation. Where it might be said to approach one, is wherever sentimentality enters into the picture. This is something well known to antique dealers, who periodically resuscitate a period, with all its attendant accessories. Just as in antiques, there are crazes in couture, and the couturiers are too sensitive to try to hold aloof from them. A moment ago we were telling you about the preliminary work of the textile designer, the embroiderer, the braid maker, the spinner and the weaver, but there are also the finishing touches given by the aura of Paris, where anyone lucky enough to be endowed with the necessary artistic radar captures the tenuous elements and converts them into what is known as the fashion of the day.

Now today's fashions are strongly reminiscent of the gay twenties: a certain nostalgia, sleight of hand, calculated folly—they all abound. Hence a few exaggerations, not unpleasant, but very necessary.

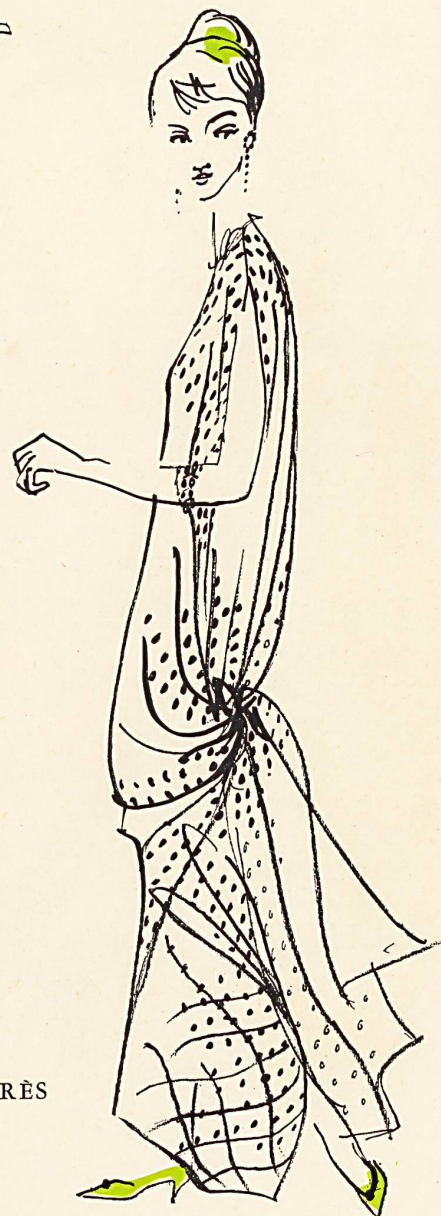
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We were interested in comparing the women's magazines of thirty years ago with those of today. There are certain resemblances, but basically everything has changed. Even the changeless, dogged Chanel, who has been said to have stuck to her style through thick and then, come hell or high water, does not create the same dress in 1961 as she did in 1930. Even when she uses the same soft crêpes, the same knitted materials, there is a difference...

Among all couturiers, what compares most with the models of the gay twenties is the length of the skirts, the waistless look, the bloused effects, but the cut is essentially different. The young designers are of the post-war generation, they have followed the lead of Christian Dior; they have concentrated on renewing the cut of their creations. Do you remember the upheaval caused, long before the war, by Madeleine Vionnet when she revolutionised the cut of dresses? From 1947 on, Dior played the same role. And the whole school of young designers followed suit except, if you like, Pierre Balmain and Balenciaga, who are very special cases, a law unto themselves, the first more concerned with achieving prettiness, the second with dressing a select few according to his particular taste; but all the others, or almost all, have continued to be mainly « architects ». Hence the deceptively simple dresses which appear so unspectacular to the uninitiated, whereas in reality they are a real *tour de force*.



PIERRE CARDIN



GRÈS



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JACQUES GRIFFE

There are four this season to whom the magazines give more prominence than the rest, because however unfair it may seem the spotlight must focus on the most characteristic. They are Marc Bohan (Dior), Crahay (Nina Ricci), Pierre Cardin and Guy Laroche. This does not mean to say that Lanvin-Castillo, Jean Patou, Jacques Heim, Griffe, Jean Dessès, Michel Goma, Maggy Rouff, Madeleine de Rauch, Grès, Carven... to mention but these, are any less deserving of praise. It simply means that the first four are stamped unmistakably with the seal of January, 1961. Having said this, we defy the conscientious fashion writer to define the new fashion other than in general terms, with vague comments on the softness, the lightness, the spring-like look of the models. The best idea would be to publish a catalogue with coloured photographs of the two or three hundred dresses and coats presented this season. It would show short jackets and long jackets, overcoats and capes, suits with and without collars, classical pleated dresses and asymmetrical dresses, belts (held by ribbons and bows at all altitudes and longitudes), straight coats and flaring coats, sleeves joined at the shoulder or in the middle of the biceps, skirts with little pleats or big box pleats, skirts narrow or wide, or even cloche shaped. Everything, absolutely everything.

All fabrics, all colours, all embroideries, every possible effect with pearls and spangles for the evening (there was even the spangled dress of the late 20's).

* * *

To tell the truth, everyone having decided on the spirit of the gay twenties for inspiration, it is as though the couturiers had composed variations on this theme to suit their own individual tastes, with the wish, above all, to create something youthful and gay. Today's fashion is one for the very young, one which will also delight the not so young by enabling them to join in the spring rejuvenescence.

It is a gay, amusing fashion by its very diversity. It obeys no edicts, no decrees, except those of being, looking and remaining young.

Wherever you go, Fair Reader, whoever is your favourite couturier, you will find the dress of your dreams, since the framework of creation is all-embracing and all trends are included. Provided you are not looking for a belted or bodyhugging garment, or wish to choose a long skirt, you will be able to find your dream dress, pure and unadorned. It will be left to you to load it down (don't be afraid to exaggerate) with a pendant necklace in coloured stones, and to walk perched on slender, not too high heels, to place on your head a little cloche hat or a sun helmet, unless of course you prefer a scalloped straw — and the trick is done!

A word of advice however. Take care, as you slide into your little two-seater convertible, of your wayward little short skirt...

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