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FANTASY FASHION AT THE TOP

Today, Haute Couture is the last bastion of luxury and refined elegance, the exclusive world where each model is a unique creation, a consummate work of art. And for the designer, Haute Couture is the last reserve where he can allow free rein to his imagination, where he can indulge in unusual forms and colours, and where the most costly fabric is only just good enough for him.

Parisian couturiers have made excellent use of these privileges for their summer 1977 collections. Inspired by the example of Yves Saint-Laurent who — for a year now — has gone in wholeheartedly for the "Fancy Fashion", of which he is the undisputed king, his colleagues have also thrown off all restraint. For next summer Haute

Couture fashion will be an eminently luxurious fashion with the emphasis on fantasy. And since festive fashions — those for the afternoon and evening — offer the greatest scope, day fashions by comparison seem to have been somewhat neglected in the latest collections. Many couturiers, like Serge Lepage, who has reopened the famous house of Elsa Schiaparelli, have limited themselves to creating clothes for special occasions.

A few extra-light coats in silk taffeta for protection against the rain, a few light leisure coats in flannel suitable for wear on yachts are about all that Paris has done in the coating sector. Out of a sense of duty, the big couturiers present a few suits, very few but really chic, very masculine in style with single- or double-breasted blazer jackets, worn over pleated skirts or trousers with gathers at the waist. Made of white, cream or navy blue flannel or gabardine, they are shining examples of a classical elegance that will never goes out of fashion.

But this spring and summer the real Haute Couture creations will not be worn in Paris until after 5 o'clock. They include fashions for taking tea in smart hotels, for cocktails and for all those occasions when women of fashion love to look their best. And there are also light and dainty evening dresses for summer garden parties, costly gowns for summer balls — all midsummer nights' dream creations in silk, mousseline, organdie, organza, taffeta, moiré, chiffon and crêpe, lace and embroidery. And Swiss embroidery and fabric manufacturers have contributed greatly to fulfilling these dreams, many of these lovely materials stemming straight from Switzerland.

Paris Haute Couture has been lavish in its use of materials for the new summer models. Everything is full and swirling. Only waists are kept deliberately slim. Ruching, gathers and pleats give a volume to particularly evident in the silhouette, flounced and tiered skirts, as well as double skirts.

Romanticism — a theme with variations: It is a very feminine fashion that cannot hide its leaning towards real romanticism. Even the trouser suits presented by Yves Saint-Laurent are dressy and extremely feminine; they are the modern counterpart to the traditional little black dress. For this leading couturier is reviving trousers in a big way, soft trousers with gathers at the waist, which he combines with his famous dolman jackets. The latter have become narrower, softer, their edges trimmed with dainty passementerie in the same colour. He puts them with vaporous crêpe de Chine or mousseline blouses with ruching and gathers at the neck; never have

Haute Couture Paris

spring-summer
1977

trouser suits looked more feminine than they do today. In Haute Couture, even the little day dresses, whose hems are flirting with the knee again, are in a festive mood. There are soft dresses in crêpe de Chine, crêpe georgette and mousseline, printed with small figured designs, dark shaped stripes or quiet tie patterns! Loose tops billow out over the waist, emphasized by a belt, a scarf or little stitched pleats. These models are often worn with blazers made of the same fabric or with long blousons in a matching fabric.

Midsummer dresses are off the shoulder, with gathered necklines often enriched with a frill. Nor must we forget to mention the high-necked mousseline dresses in subtle paisley prints decorated with delicate ruching at the neck, wrists and hem. And equally attractive are the white West Indian dresses

in frothy mousseline, trimmed with decorative embroidered braids. Ruching, flounces, embroidered braids, silk ribbons... romanticism is back in fashion once again. A billowing skirt in rustling taffeta or moiré, with a long-sleeved ruched blouse and a fringed shawl — set off with jet or a cameo on black velvet ribbon at the throat — present a charming touch of nostalgia not at all out of place since the recent successful exhibitions of German and Russian romantic paintings in Paris and the unparalleled success of "Barry Lyndon".

Ethnic fashions with a refined touch: Romanticism has yet another side to it in Paris, an ethnic one with a Slav accent. There are pseudo peasant costumes with gathered skirts and little decorative aprons, worn with full rustic blouses with rounded necklines, and boleros or stitched bodices. Embroidery adds a festive note and flowers and cherries are braided into long plaits. This season, flowers used for decorating hair have completely ousted hats.

The ethnic trend also recurs in wide-sleeved Tibetan-style satin dresses, and gives new impetus to the gypsy and "Carmen" style models with their tiered skirts and fitted bodices. For these creations the colours are bright: lacquer red, royal blue, fuchsia, violet, yellow and chartreuse green, often put together in unusual combinations. Apart from white and black, the classical colours for the evening are midnight blue, coral and powder pink.

Pleats — as far as the eye can see: Another important theme in Paris Haute Couture is pleats, yet another example of the trend towards fullness and femininity. They are found in every conceivable variation from the simple fully pleated smock or chemise to vaporous ball gowns with their cascades of pleats, their pleated double skirts and their pleated tiered skirts, with swirling sun ray pleats and fine "lampshade" pleats in mousseline, silk jersey, silk crêpe, chiffon and organdie. And what could be more feminine than afternoon dresses with tiered pleated skirts worn with narrow fitted tops decorated with delicate embroideries and lace. Even the jumpsuits with their pleated legs are quite unrecognizable, especially when worn with a dainty lace wrap. Naturally the Paris models for the evening also include tunics. Empire-style dresses with tiny bikini tops over swirling tiered skirts in Gazar are also in fashion. A new trend, on the other hand, drawing its inspiration from Ancient Greece, takes the form of drapes, looped-up skirts, loose pleat effects and asymmetric necklines. White is the main colour in this sector. In its use of gold Paris has this time observed the greatest restraint, reserving it for brides who, as at Yves Saint-Laurent's, look as if they had just stepped out of a painting by Velasquez.