

Letter from Los Angeles

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Letter from Los Angeles

Young, New and Wonderful...

It was an occasion of great moment when the most important people in the American fashion world gathered recently in the new wing of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. The occasion was the presentation of two awards, the highest that are given in the fashion field. And the first of these, the bronze sculptured "Winnie" went to Galanos, a veritable newcomer to the top echelons of designing talent.

This sensationally new name had already been previously honored, by the Neiman-Marcus Award, one of the most coveted awards in America which is annually awarded for distinguished service to the field of fashion.

How did this all happen so suddenly? So quickly? So rightfully?

It all began only 29 years ago when James Galanos was born in Philadelphia. Born of Greek parents, he



White cotton fabric with pink printed roses.

Blue check patterned
cotton voile.



lived in small New Jersey and Pennsylvania towns until he left home at the age of 18 to work at "pushing fabrics around and picking up ins" in the famous salon of Hattie Carnegie. It was here he realized that his strong interests lay, and during his very simple apprenticeship he studied design in art school, learned the technique of draping and cutting, and being talented, sold sketches to various New York dress houses.

Fortune subjected Galanos to a series of ups and downs, smiling on him all the while. He came West at the invitation of an industrialist who invited him to head a venture which never materialized. His backer then sent him to Europe on a three year scholarship. However, Galanos, like so many true artist found little for him in the traditional art schools and worked instead with the great Swiss designer in Paris, Robert Piguet. Here was superb training indeed for the talented novice! In 1951 Galanos returned to California desiring to design for the film industry. Unfortunately at this period

"the slump" threw many another talented designer out of work and there was little room and difficult entree for the newcomer. Galanos' "movie" designing has been confined instead to the personal wardrobe for stage appearances of Lena Horne, Dorothy Lamour and costumes for Rosalind Russell.

On his return to California he turned out his first "collection". There was such immediate recognition of his work by fashion editors and buyers who learned about him very quickly, that he has since concentrated almost exclusively on his wholesale business. This is his third and ever-increasingly successful season. The whispering campaign of approval gradually grew into a national clamor that was climaxed by this year's recent double awards.

Perhaps one of the secrets of Mr. Galanos' success is his method of working. He works with the actual fabrics rather than from sketches. Generally he drapes one half a dress completely then turns it over to an assistant to



« Voiletta » cotton fabric with dainty posies print.

Blue white striped cotton fabric.



White satin striped batiste.



blueprint for the entire model. When it is finished it must face intense scrutiny for acceptance in the collection, because the collection is small, and faultless.

Galanos manages the business as well as design end of his firm. He buys all fabrics, sells to customers, designs, makes sample models and personally inspects all dresses before shipping. Mr. Galanos is a perfectionist!

He does not believe in following trends for the sake of trends but rather he says, "I like to make clothes the way well-dressed women wish to look. I design for women who understand simplicity and cut through detail rather than trimming. I create a line with youth in mind because I know all women want to look youthful. I do not believe in following trends for the sake of trends and therefore I do not generally come out with anything radical." His theory when followed to its conclusion also includes a belief that a successful silhouette, interpreted in many fabrics is the key to each season's collection. His signature is his use of brilliant, beautiful and unusual fabrics such as wool whipcord, worsted wool, silk, brocade, satin broadcloth, chiffon satin and broadcloth. Most of his fabrics are imported and a great number of them are Swiss, since many Swiss fabrics can give him the feeling, colors and uniqueness that he demands. However, he does not feel that any one nation or any one locale has a monopoly on beauty or fashion. Of this he says: "California design? European design? American design? Good fashion emanates from no one place. A well designed dress should be wearable anywhere in the world and be right in that locale at that time. I do not design with California in mind... and I do not believe that fashion should be 'typed'."

HELENE F. MILLER

All models are from
James Galanos,
Beverly Hills.
All fabrics are from
Stoffel & Co., St. Gall