

Under the magician's wand... : ...the ever-changing face of fashion

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UNDER THE MAGICIAN'S WAND...

...The ever-changing face of fashion

There is no need to be especially observant or well-versed in haute couture to see that the fashion has changed once again this season. Obviously, everything led us to expect such a change. For the last two years there has been a definite aura of 1925 in the air, a mixture of gentle mockery with a touch of nostalgia for the carefree existence of the gay twenties. The Charleston has been revived, Victor Margueritte's « La Garçonne » (the Flapper) is being filmed, the furniture of the period (Salon des Arts Décoratifs) is beginning to be sought after. 1925 is having the same sort of revival as 1900 had a few years ago.

Now couturiers seem to be endowed with a kind of sixth sense. It is sufficient that they get wind of a new trend for them to seize upon it, adapt it and at the same time carry it one step further. This season, they are all reviving the sheath, the soft look, shorter skirts and rounder backs.

It is in no way a wholesale adoption of the fashion of 1925 (to believe that Parisian couturiers could be content to repeat themselves



De droite à gauche : MICHEL TELLIN, veste-blouson à taille basse en tweed beige uni sur robe droite. — CHANEL, tailleur lamé. — Robe et chapeau de 1925. — *Figurine de gauche :* CHRISTIAN DIOR, fourreau blanc court, entièrement recouvert de franges de perles.

every few years or so would be to underestimate their integrity) but an interpretation. And a very free one at that. Anyone old enough to remember the period of cloche hats, bobbed hair, skirts above the knee, waists half way down the hips and exaggeratedly long cigarette holders, sees no resemblance between the silhouettes of the mannequins of today and of those of 1925. If you can lay hands on an old copy of «Vogue» or «Harper's Bazaar» for that year, take a look at the photographs. Compare them with those of Arzac or Pottier. You will see at once what I mean — the women are quite different.

And in the couturier's salon the difference is even more marked. Thirty years ago mannequins were more generously covered, not — how shall I put it — in the more conspicuous parts of their anatomy, but all over. They were more natural perhaps, the feminine lingerie and corset industry not yet enjoying the importance it has assumed today. Corsets had been abandoned and the body was no longer confined, giving a new freedom and suppleness of movement. Today the effect of suppleness is just a snare and a delusion, the result of cleverly padded brassières and complicated corsetry. In other words, even though couture has stopped for the moment constructing its dresses over a framework, even though it allows, or at least seems to allow fabrics to drape and flow as they please, it does so today on a feminine body that is controlled and moulded as it dictates.

The model girl of today has a tendency to be an artificial exaggeratedly make-up creature, mincing along with an unnatural gait. There is as much difference between the walk of a Dior or a Givenchy model and that of a society woman entering a private drawing room as between the bearing of the latter and that of a Portuguese peasant with her bare feet planted firmly on the ground.

That is why the so-called modern version of a 1925 dress is in fact a wholly 1957 creation.

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What is more, few couturiers are in a position to make the comparison. Which among today's top couturiers remember 1925? Dior — but he had nothing to do with couture at the time and never even dreamt that he would be taking it up one day. Patou was alive, but it was Jean Patou who was doing the designing. The same goes for



De gauche à droite: CHRISTIAN DIOR, toque à franges de laine noire, veste de lainage noir, très gonflée, sur robe noire. — GUY LAROCHE, robe-chemise en flanelle grise.

Lanvin. There is only Chanel — and she has remained true to the spirit of 1925. And Balenciaga too perhaps. But the younger generation — and by that I mean all those who have made a name for themselves since the war — Balmain, Dessès, Griffe, Givenchy, Castillo, Pierre Cardin, Guy Laroche and many others whose names I forget, make dresses that are strictly contemporary.

Amusing dresses — difficult to wear and even more difficult to copy, since all the chic is in the cut and the fit. Let there be no mistake about it: these little unbelted suits which look unbelievably simple and almost thrown together are really custom-built jobs. It is easy enough to call the new fashion the « sack line », conjuring up visions of sacks of potatoes or cement. But it has more to it than that. It is all a kind of trickery. Trickery in the dresses that look so extraordinarily like two-piece outfits and yet are not. Trickery in the cardigan-style tailormades, worn under a top-coat. Trickery in the woollen scarves lined with fur and worn like boleros. Trickery in the sheath dresses worn with another skirt on top, split at the front and sides. Trickery in the dresses in several instalments (one model in polka dotted taffeta enables one to ring the changes — for cocktails, dancing, dining at home or dining out — by the simple addition of a skirt, bolero or cape). Trickery in the hostess gowns in brightly coloured shaggy woollens. It almost seems as if the couturiers were amusing themselves immensely at our expense, for everywhere there is artifice and trickery.

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Although on the whole black is dominant, there is also a profusion of bright colours. Brilliant reds, pinks and blues are found everywhere. One magazine published figures showing the colours used by the top five couturiers, from which it appears that of 489 models, 175 were black, 55 blue, 45 grey, 36 red, 20 pink, etc. And don't forget these are winter models!

De haut en bas : BALMAIN, 1) fourreau de velours noir, grand décolleté dans le dos ; 2) manteau de lainage à manches formant pèlerine, renard aux poignets. — LANVIN-CASTILLO, 1) robe de lainage blanc avec corselet, boutons ciselés noirs ; 2) gros manteau pied de poule géant en lainage poilu.

With regard to fabrics, it is only natural that crêpe, which reigned supreme in 1925, should be making a comeback, because it is ideal for those soft, hazy outlines. Frequent use is made too of heavy shaggy fabrics and knotted fabrics. As is only to be expected in this season of reminiscences, the sumptuous lamés, brocades, figured fabrics and matelassés add their note of brilliance and splendour. There is also trickery among the fabrics: some mix tweed with jersey, others tweed and mousseline, or brocade and jersey. Still others mix colours with such subtlety that one step further would put one's teeth on edge; Balmain, for example, plays with blues and greens with rare skill, reminding one of the Chinese proverb which says that there is only a hair's breadth between ecstasy and pain.

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Everywhere, for the evening, use is made of vaporous fabrics such as mousselines, voiles, guipures and laces.

The flowers decorating décolletés are gigantic like the buttons (which by the way are purely non-functional).

In fact, this fashion bears witness to a completely characteristic love of illusion. The other evening, after forty minutes of reminiscences and confidences by Jean Cocteau on French TV, one had the impression that this great writer not only possessed a rare talent but could at the same time call upon all the gifts of a great illusionist.

One has the same impression on seeing the 1957-58 winter fashions. I enjoyed myself hugely when I first saw them — I hope you will too.

Gala

Figurine à droite: MADELEINE DE RAUCH, faux deux-pièces (robe) en lainage noir, dos droit; bonnet de castor. — Chapeaux, de gauche à droite: CHRISTIAN DIOR, casque de plumes d'autruche blanches. LANVIN-CASTILLO, 1) «perruque» de tulle gris; 2) béret cône gris en mélusine. — CHRISTIAN DIOR, forme noire avec nœud horizontal sur le devant.

