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New York Letter



FORSTER WILLI & Co., SAINT-GALL

Appliquéd embroideries.
Applications de broderie.

Model by / Modèle de :
Philip Hulitar, New York.

FORSTER WILLI & Co., SAINT-GALL

Embroidered satin striped silk organdie.
Organdi de soie à rayures satin, brodé.

Model by / Modèle de :
Carrie Munn, New York.

FORSTER WILLI & Co., SAINT-GALL

Embroidered black velvet.
Broderie sur velours noir.

Model by / Modèle de :
Elisabeth Arden, New York.

In New York the showings of the season's collections of haute couture and the better ready-to-wear houses have started once again. The models made by New York fashion houses are always impeccably cut and show how successfully the ideas originating in Paris or Rome can be adapted to suit American tastes !

Each of the houses makes its contribution to the new fashions, but let us visit for a moment the salons of a comparatively new American concern — with European

connections stemming from one of Switzerland's most famous textile centres — whose models combine beauty of fabric with a flair for form and balance.

The salon of Claire Schaffel Couture is situated on Madison Avenue, in the « Smart Fifties », which abound in exclusive boutiques and some of the most famous fashion houses in New York.

The setting is quiet but distinctive. The black ceiling, the buff colored carpets and light beige walls are a fitting background for the lovely lines and colours of the dresses shown there. In its sophisticated simplicity, it is a typical New York setting, in other words very cosmopolitan. While the smiling mannequins whirl past in their new barrel and balloon skirts, the fashion reporters, invited for the first showing, remain inscrutable. Most of these distinguished members of the press are of the greyhound type, lean and streamlined. Their bored, rather blasé gaze never for a moment betrays what they are really thinking. Their slender and efficient hands never deign to applaud even the most lovely bridal gowns and bridesmaids' dresses or sumptuous evening dresses ; their disdainful eyes never so much as glance in the direction of the Neuchâtel clock imported from Switzerland, which is the only ornament on the main wall. It is quite a surprise to see this Louis XV clock, with its classical decoration of gold and black, so far from its traditional home in Switzerland. It adds an exotic note to this stereotyped Manhattan setting. Another exotic touch is the language of two men in the audience whose diplomatic air is explained by the fact that they have come from the Swiss Consulate General to see these New York creations made with fabrics imported from Switzerland. And their language is the Swiss-German dialect which is spoken in the Swiss cantons that produce the silks, embroideries and ribbons to be found in almost all couture collections in New York.

Claire Schaffel, an accepted part of the Manhattan scene for ten years or so now, has not forgotten her Swiss origin. Born in Basle, centre of the silk ribbon industry, she has a soft spot for these lovely accessories of feminine fashions. « I am still very ribbon conscious », she said, adding that one of her first creations was a very successful ball gown made entirely of ribbons. And, through her mother, Miss Schaffel keeps in close contact with embroidery and fine fabric circles in St. Gall. It is not surprising therefore that the creative imagination of this young woman has been strongly influenced by the loveliness of these ribbons and the charm of the embroideries. She slipped naturally into couture as a career and serious study has strengthened her love and knowledge of fabrics so that to her the designing of a dress is like the creation of a work of art. Claire Schaffel handles light fabrics, such as embroidered organdies and laces, or the most sumptuous silks and embroidered velvets with equal ease.

Her 1958 collection is eclectic in the variety of the American and imported fabrics she uses with such originality — block-printed woollens, velvets, re-embroidered laces, silk ottomans, crêpes, soft jerseys, peaux de soie, doupions, tulles veiled with lace or worn layer upon layer and decorated with applied embroidered flowers. Afternoon and cocktail dresses predominate. This year colours and materials are matched rather than contrasted. She places great stress on the harmony between the fabric and the style of each model. This results in the general impression of balance to be found throughout this original collection. When an unusual trimming is used to add a touch of brilliance, it will always be in perfect good taste and used with moderation.

Collections of imported fabrics are sometimes as fascinating to see as the collections of dresses themselves. American firms importing embroideries and fabrics from Switzerland each have an exclusive range of original creations. The embroidered organdies and laces call to mind curtains floating gently in the breeze of an open

**L. ABRAHAM & Co.
SILKS Ltd., ZURICH**

« Frivole » printed
muslin / Mousseline
imprimée.

Evening gown by / Robe
du soir de :

Count Sarmi for
Elisabeth Arden,
New York.



L. ABRAHAM & Co. SILKS Ltd., ZURICH

« Taftalia » printed fabric / imprimé.

Cocktail dress by / Robe de cocktail de
Count Sarmi for Elisabeth Arden, New York.



window on a sunny spring day. It is a refreshing sight to see these collections of embroidered and printed fabrics, which have remained young and gay since the Victorian era, through all the crises and world wars of this turbulent half century.

Among the many collections of embroideries of the New York firms belonging to the Swiss Fabric Group, Forster Willi's is outstanding for the extraordinary exclusivity of his designs and the fineness of workmanship of all his embroideries, whether flat or in relief. Before being admitted by Mr. Sormani, who watches over these textile treasures, the visitor must show his credentials. The presentation salon is bare of all enticing displays of alluring fabrics. The setting might easily be that of a

word « breath-taking », if the force of this expressive word had not been weakened through overuse.

These precious embroideries which can be likened to real jewels, are obviously intended for American couture and better ready-to-wear fashion houses. In handling these soft silky fabrics, touching the delicate relief of the embroidered flowers whose stitches are as close of those of the first Appenzell hand embroideries, one realises that the embroidery loom, as long as it remains the instrument of craftsmen as skilled and proud of their art as these Swiss craftsmen are, can still produce beauty and perfection in embroidery, in a period of vulgarity and imitation such as ours. In fact, it would be quite impossible to attempt to imitate these embroideries by



L. ABRAHAM & Co. SILKS Ltd., ZURICH

« Taftalia » printed fabric / imprimé.

*Afternoon dress by / Robe d'après-midi de
Count Sarmi for Elisabeth Arden, New York.*

L. ABRAHAM & Co. SILKS Ltd., ZURICH

« Basra » embroidered fabric / brodé.

*Evening dress by / Robe du soir de
Count Sarmi for Elisabeth Arden, New York.*



diamond merchant, the fire and sparkle of whose precious gems lies hidden in drawers lining the walls. When Mr. Sormani gently unrolls down the long table a unique specimen from his incomparable collection of silk and cotton organdies, embroidered with artistic designs in subtle shades reminiscent of the splendours of submarine vegetation and precious stones, the resemblance to a diamond merchant is complete. One word alone would suffice to express the thrill of seeing one of these lovely creations, the results of so much work and care — the

mass-production methods. They would lose their whole character if they were to be reproduced in standard qualities. But it appears there are pirates who would stop at nothing, and it is easy to understand why these treasures are kept so carefully for their exclusive destinations, the top fashion houses, which will use them for the gala dresses of American couture, both in New York and California.

Th. de Chambrier.