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London Letter



REICHENBACH & CO., SAINT-GALL

Piqué de coton nid d'abeilles brodé.
Embroidered waffle cotton piqué.
Model Fantasie Foundations Ltd.,
London.
Photo: Alan Boyd, London.

The Swiss Export Week in Zurich has, this autumn, received more attention from the better informed British press than is usual. This is no doubt due partially to the widened appreciation of Swiss skill in textiles, fashion and knitwear and partially to the eased opportunities in the importation of Swiss merchandise. In spite of their high prices compelled by high import duties and purchase tax these products continue to expand their sales because of their consistent quality and individual character. In

addition it seems that Swiss manufacturers are developing the all-important ability to absorb new ideas from outside, to experiment with them and so produce their own interpretation.

During the past three full years (1955-1957) the gap in the balance of clothing-trade figures between Switzerland and Great Britain has considerably narrowed. The surplus which has so far always been in the favour of Great Britain narrowed from 11,600,000 Sw. Frs. (U. S. A.

\$ 2.75 million) in 1953 to 7,900,000 in 1957 (U. S. A. \$ 1.84 million) ; furthermore, the total of almost 10,000,000 Sw. Frs. (\$ 2.33 million) reached by Swiss clothing exports to Britain in 1957 was very nearly five times as high as in 1952. These figures do not, of course, take into account the exports effected to the British Dominions and Colonies. Now that the Swiss textile industry has attracted trade from all over the world it seems almost unbelievable

that way back in 1924 Britain could have purchased about 67 % of Swiss knitwear exports and that before the war of 1939 the major Swiss manufacturers should have found their most valuable markets in London !

Some of you who read the last London Letter may remember my observation on the new high-line from Paris and the rapidity with which some manufacturers would react ; this has in fact happened and the new line is



STEHLI & CO., ZURICH

Crêpe marocain pure soie.
Pure silk marocain.
Model Roter Models Ltd., London.
Photo David Olins, London.

everywhere much in evidence. It has brought a verve, sales girls in shops who are so often indifferent or bad assistants are finding pleasure in selling a style they like and many of the wearers, fully conscious of the effect of the line on them, are almost sub-consciously developing a new poise — perhaps just a little «ingenue» but definitely charming and feminine. Those manufacturers and retailers who immediately understood the significance of the Paris Shows last August and who promptly set to work on the high-line have certainly gained their rewards. The new silhouette has, of course, swept through coats and suits, dresses, cocktail and evening gowns and particularly interesting have been the various adaptations contrived by manufacturers to suit the older figure, in fact by almost every means to emphasise the top except a belt! Obviously the Line will be prominent throughout the spring and summer ranges but as far as the «teen-age» market is concerned it will still be small waists and full skirts and underskirts. Of course, for the young who have not yet developed a fashion sense it is easier to think in terms of prettiness rather than elegance — maybe there's a romantic and picturesque association, however sub-conscious, between the small waists and full skirts of to-day with the crinolines of the mid-nineteenth century!

The spring and summer Collections are showing many variations of line but the most successful in the general mass market will be the gently moulded «chemise» with a subtly suggested waistline and the popular and practical shirt-waist dress with a curved belt high in the front and waist fitting at the back.

Cottons with new textured surfaces, prints widely spaced on white grounds and fabric mixtures (cotton with nylon, or rayon, or Terylene) will be providing the main cloth interest. Whatever the fabrics the indications are that we shall have a very colourful spring and summer ranging from bright to soft shades.

Looking a little less ahead but to Christmas and the New Year, which at the time of writing are but some six weeks ahead, I thought it would be interesting to visit some of the London stores and note, as an ordinary customer, what was visibly Swiss-made and suitable for the gift season. The most obvious and readily available were handkerchiefs — many of these bore the name Kreier, while others were merely marked «Made in Switzerland». Dickins & Jones in Regent Street had a very fine selection in lawn and printed handkerchiefs, while the most entertaining design was at Marshall & Snelgrove, who featured a menu motif leaving the centre blank, in which Christmas fare or one's favourite dishes could be inscribed with an ordinary ball-pen. If someone were to offer me a gift of Swiss knitwear at the moment, I would certainly have «l'embarras du choix». In outerwear there are, of course, some inimitable ranges like Egeka in suits and dresses in most of the major stores, but a new name to me — Anderes — appeared at Selfridges. Two models by this house which I found interesting were a suit with a loose boxy jacket with a Peter Pan collar and straight skirt and a button-thru' dress in a knobby knit — no belt in front but with a dropped bloused back and loose half-belt. Maybe we shall see more by this house in the seasons to come.

Ruth Fonteyn



FORSTER WILLI & CO., SAINT-GALL

Broderie sur pure soie. Embroidered pure silk.
Model Roter Models Ltd., London.
Photos John French, London.

L. ABRAHAM & CO. SILKS LTD., ZURICH

Satin glace brodé. Embroidered Ice Satin.

