

Letter from Germany

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Objektyp: **Article**

Zeitschrift: **Swiss textiles [English edition]**

Band (Jahr): - **(1953)**

Heft 2

PDF erstellt am: **17.09.2024**

Persistenter Link: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-799234>

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Letter from Germany

For ten long years there were no fashions in Germany. When the first fabrics and wearable dresses and coats made their appearance in 1949, women took up the New Look with open arms. After having worn, for what seemed an eternity, clothes that had been turned inside out and altered beyond recognition, "models" cut out of curtains

or dyed table-cloths, they were enthusiastic over the possibility of at last being able to dress themselves again in a feminine, fashionable and smart manner.

But it was still a long time before the quality of the textiles offered corresponded, to any degree, with the prices. However, even though slowly at first, the German



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textile firms gradually recovered, high quality goods started being imported again and the clothing industries established contact once more with international fashions.

Swiss textiles reappeared on the German market, in the form of "sestrières" with a velvety finish, vaporous blou-

ses of embroidery, hand-rolled batiste handkerchiefs and soft underwear in cotton tricot. Then came the poplins, the pure silk fabrics, the soft woollen pullovers and cardigans. They were welcomed with enthusiasm and gratitude, for, after the war years, women valued quality above



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all else. The small label "Made in Switzerland" soon became a guarantee of quality. Today there is not a single shop selling textile articles—whether hosiery, lingerie or fabrics—that could or would want to give up the sale of Swiss products.

Before the war the fashion centre of Germany was Berlin. The war destroyed this centre; most of the firms were scattered to the four winds. Fashion houses and ready-to-

wear clothing manufacturers started up again wherever they could. Large textile firms sprang up at Krefeld, Hamburg, Dusseldorf, Frankfurt on the Main, Munich and even in many small towns; the firms that had not left Berlin also opened up branches in western Germany. Meanwhile the situation has improved and Berlin, once more the centre of the clothing industry, again sets the fashions for the whole of western Germany. The great



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fashion shows however take place in Dusseldorf. This town is considered the most fashionable in the whole of the Federal Republic. In addition, it is the social centre of the rich Rhine-Ruhr district. Hamburg comes second from the point of view of fashions, with a style that is traditionally more conservative and reserved. Munich has a tendency to add a touch of folklore to its fashions. Frankfort on the Main is a busy commercial town of con-

siderable economic importance but without elegance, at least from outside appearances. Nevertheless it contains a certain number of first-rate fashion houses as well as an Institute of Fashion which plays an important role from the practical point of view.

In order to form a true opinion of the position of fashions in Germany, it must not be forgotten that in addition to the ready-to-wear clothing industry (which has made



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great technical and artistic progress since the war) the tailoring to measure of the fashion houses and the small couturière still plays an important role. Clothes that are ready to wear and made to measure naturally follow the trends indicated by Paris, but there nevertheless remains enough scope for individual artistic imagination and for the practical considerations of common sense which must adapt the ideas of international fashions to the far less exacting requirements of the German market.

The superb creations of high fashion and the famous fashion houses are only bought by a very rich but scattered public. In most cases they can only be seen at private gatherings or in the centres of fashionable and international life. One needs a practised eye to be able to pick out a really smart outfit in the normal setting of the streets. The necessary background is lacking: cool tree-lined boulevards, smart, inviting cafés, opera houses, big mansions and luxurious night clubs are better suited to set off the creations of fashion designers than noisy, dusty streets with innumerable scaffoldings, overcrowded trams and second-rate restaurants in which meals are hastily swallowed by crowds always pressed for time.

For the average German woman, the dresses of the fashion houses and the smart shops remain in the realm of dreams. More within her reach is the little dress from the big department store or the one made up by the little dressmaker round the corner. On an average monthly salary of from 200 to 250 marks, even the cheapest of the better ready-to-wear models are inaccessible.

German women therefore pay particular attention to quality. In the larger towns, women make up a third of all persons gainfully employed and one married woman in five goes out to work. A woman therefore has very little time to devote to her clothes. The first qualities she looks for in fabrics are that they should be uncrushable, easy to wash, require the least possible ironing or, better still, none at all, and that they should keep their shape. And it is precisely Swiss textile products that are fulfilling these conditions to an ever increasing extent.

Emily KRAUS-NOVER.

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