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Los Angeles Letter

By the Beautiful Sea...

from Cannes to Capetown, from Seattle to Sydney

90 pounds of well-controlled dynamite, a gamin look, a curly cropped head and a dramatically husky voice... these are the sugar and spice that make up Margit Fellegi, designer for the internationally famous bathing suit firm, Cole of California. Although she designs bathing suits and has problems vitally different from those of the dress designer, Miss Fellegi's career has followed closely the pattern of several distinguished dress designers who have preceded her on these pages, for her real schooling came from the stage and the theatre.

Even before her teens, Miss Fellegi began her career as a dancer. At the same time, encouraged by her artist father, she entered the Chicago Academy of Fine Arts and studied design.

Success on stage came fast, travelling all over the country began and the need for constantly new and fresh costumes arose... fast, very fast. Everything about Margit Fellegi is fast, and sure and certain. Thus were her stage designs born, first for herself, then for friends, then for entire shows and then for her own full-fledged thriving business. Then typical of today's fairy-tales, she was whisked off to Hollywood to do costumes and sets for the first technicolor films.

She found that all that glitters is not necessarily glamour and the long studio conferences became a bore... too slow, too indeterminate, too out of character with the speedy Miss Fellegi. She quit the movies to open her own custom salon for a large and exclusive clientele.

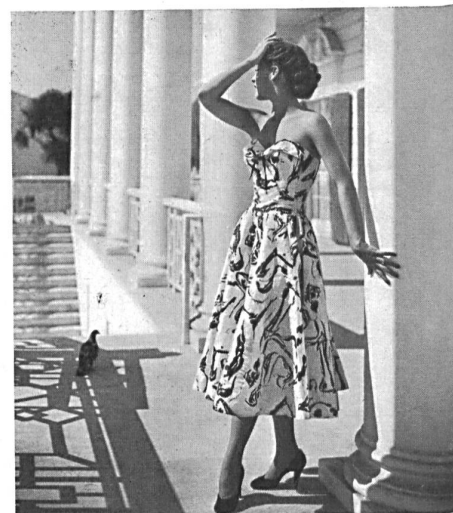
This, too, like her other enterprises was a flourishing

business. One night, however, she was introduced by an actress friend to Fred Cole who captivated her with his offer to open new vistas in designing, to meet new challenges and explore new ways of doing bigger and better things. The result has been a 19-year old association with Cole of California and a whirl of year-after-year innovations in the sportswear field.

Margit Fellegi's designs quickly branched outward from bathing suits to sports costumes, to correlated accessories and even to evening gowns. However, her first love and greatest challenge is with bathing suits. She explained very carefully to this writer that although it is obvious that a bathing suit would necessarily get much harder wear than a dress, it is not so obvious how carefully a suit must be 'engineered'. Aside from her use of fascinating fabrics, Miss Fellegi must be cognizant of their wearing qualities, their sun and water fastness, their tendency to pull in one direction or another, the way in which they must be sewn to defy destruction and utmost strain and how they will beautify and flatter their wearers.

She works and plans her fabrics for 2 or 3 years ahead, studies new yarns, tests wrapping for the latex used in the shirring to make non-stretch fabrics stretchable. She works in the swimming pool at her disposal with what she calls her 'bodies'... the carefully selected models with whom she works. Her working arrangements are, in themselves unique. She selects models... usually two... who have imperfect figures. They must be what she calls 'unselfed'... in other words, unself-conscious, impersonal,





completely cooperative without injecting their own personalities into the situation. She then perfects bathing suits on these 'bodies', tests them under actual swimming conditions, then tugs, pulls and does all the small violences to a bathing suit that would normally cause it to fall appart. Hers don't.

Having been a dancer, Miss Fellegi has a feeling of how a body should move so that her suits are always completely comfortable. For Esther Williams, the Hollywood film luminary who is seen most often either getting in or out of a swimming pool, Margit Fellegi designed the 'Esther Williams' suit, a tank suit that is flattering, easy to swim in and not too uncovered. Here is one bathing suit designer who feels that the bathing suit that reveals too much embarrasses men and is not often flattering to a woman.

Out of the 175 suits she designs each season, Miss Fellegi sets aside a certain exclusive grouping to be made up in Swiss fabrics. For the past three years she has used exciting novelties by Stoffel & Co... embossed and glazed and glistening types which cause movement and excite-

ment to catch the eye. As Miss Fellegi points out, most designers have a large area to cover. The bathing suit designer has a very small area to work on, therefore she must be ingenious. Thus most women look for big, bold color or a variety of eyepopping effects on bathing suits. Toward a smaller group of women with a desire for quality Miss Fellegi directs her collection of suits in Swiss prints fashioned in an exciting manner. You can see them in her 'Strip-tease by the Seashore'... the form-fitting bathing suit with its matching, removable skirt. Last year a fitted bolero was added to this ensemble so that it might go from patio to beach to public eating place with no loss of decorum and a plus value in appearance as well as packability.

Besides being a famous designer and innovator, Miss Fellegi also has time for other activities. The most important of these is being the devoted wife of a famous Hungarian writer, Aladar Laszlo, and mother of four children. Certainly this is a full and exciting enough life for anyone!

Hélène-F. Miller



All models are designed by
Margit Fellegi for

Cole of California.

All fabrics are from
Stoffel & Co., Saint-Gall

Photos Victor H. Tampone,
Los Angeles