

Zeitschrift: Swiss textiles [English edition]
Herausgeber: Swiss office for the development of trade
Band: - (1959)
Heft: 2

Artikel: A return to simplicity... : but with what a virtuosity!
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DOI: <https://doi.org/10.5169/seals-798529>

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Download PDF: 17.03.2025

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For an old Parisian, who lives as much on his memories as on his day to day impressions, the new fashion always comes as something of a shock. The first collection of the season, however accustomed to this sort of thing, however blasé he may be, is as exciting as the dress rehearsal of a play by a famous author. He hopes against hope not to be disappointed. And when the first model is announced, his heart — why not admit it — starts to beat twice as fast as usual. Naturally I am speaking of those who have been contaminated from their early youth by the virus of fashion, a virus it is impossible ever to throw off.

Then too, the world of dresses and hats is a world as complex, as tense and emotional as that of the theatre or cinema. The top few become sacrosanct; they master their art better each day, but hot at their heels comes the eager troupe of the rising generation who have only one aim in life: to win fame, and whose daring and bold innovations stimulate those who have reached the top and oblige them continually to outdo themselves in order to remain in the lead.

If one were to work out the average age of Givenchy, Saint-Laurent, Guy Laroche, Pierre Cardin and the others among the top twenty, one would be amazed at the lowness of the figure and would readily understand why Paris fashions remain so youthful.

In this respect, this season is a real festival.

*A Return to Simplicity...
but with what Virtuosity!*



Left: CHANEL
Centre: CHRISTIAN DIOR
Right: PIERRE CARDIN

Rita Bressy.



Left: JEAN DESSÈS
Centre: NINA RICCI
Right: MAGGY ROUFF

It seems as though, after last season's experiments — which were admittedly amusing but often looked like disguises for a fancy dress party — after the sack dresses, the imitation Empire gowns and the short skirts, designers suddenly remembered that women demanded something more than marvels of skilful cutting, no matter how clever, that with the return of spring they wanted, like the apple tree with its young pink blossom, like the lilac with its heady flowers, to be rejuvenated, clad in freshness, enveloped with soft hues.

At the end of January, still in the depths of winter, we saw spring's magic wand touch women's dresses. We witnessed the blossoming of lovely, simple form-hugging tailormades with short jackets, whose collars and lapels are like the corollas of flowers; close-fitting boleros modeled on the battle dress but with a soft flare. On these collars, lapels and sleeves we saw puffs of immaculate organdy.

We saw jackets opening to give glimpses of flowered blouses, middy blouses back in fashion, conjuring up visions of high adventure.

Shirtwaist dresses too are back in full force. Admittedly they never really went out of fashion, and will always be found in every collection because they are attractive and because women love them, but this time it was a mass return. There are a hundred and one ways of ringing the changes with the shirtwaist dress, with its collar, its pleats, and this time designers have given free reign to their imaginations. As I write, I recall a Christian Dior dress whose collar was a lovely gathered bertha, a vision I shall never forget.

Like the tailormades, the dresses are almost always brightened with touches of ethereal whiteness or flower motifs.

How about the length, you ask? Neither too long, nor too short; dresses that embellish without being exaggerated.

Navy blue and white are to the fore, naturally, but also many soft and bright colours, pinks, yellows, springlike greens.

With regard to fabrics, many houndstooth and other checks; woollens as soft as silks and silks that literally fly away.

A great play is made with belts, in new and original shapes, with ends that emerge unexpectedly, which dip, reappear, tie and flare out into beautiful bows.

Coats seem made all in one piece; they are usually straight like the skirts of Asiatic garments, with wide collars, sometimes cut straight across to enhance the fineness of the neck.

The evening dresses are in keeping with the Paris tradition which requires that the women we dine, dance or go to the theatre with should be like exotic bouquets, and one can just imagine how enthusiastically and with what precision Marcel Proust would have described the blossoming of these young girls in bloom.

Mousselines, laces, tulle, are the corps de ballet of the spring.

All at once I feel rather inadequate for I suddenly realise that I have told you nothing of the technical side of the latest collections. Perhaps it is because, at this season, technique is hidden. It is there though, it is the framework, the backdrop on which the dazzling arabesques have been embroidered.



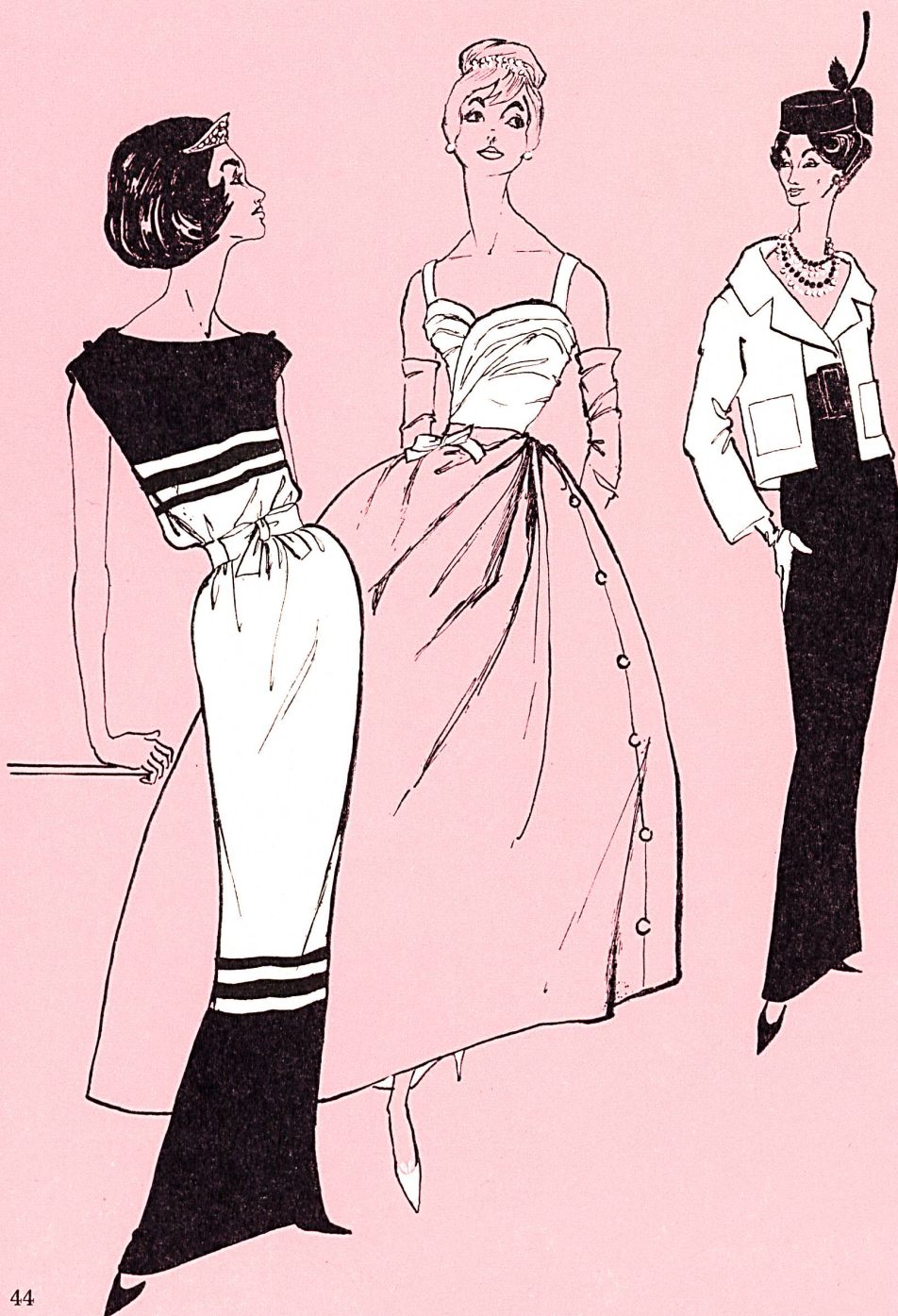
Left: GUY LAROCHE
Centre: PIERRE CARDIN
Right: JACQUES HEIM

Perhaps I might suggest that much of the credit for the present fashion should go to Chanel, that her partiality for simplicity has prevailed on others, that thanks to her we have returned to the soft dress, so ideally suited to modern life. But in this revived simplicity how much virtuosity there is, on the part of all, of all those — all twenty or more of them — who have a right to the headlines of the world press !

You think that I am exaggerating ? You are wrong and I shall prove it to you. When I was in the United States last September, I saw in New York as well as in Chicago and San Francisco, in Los Angeles, Dallas, New Orleans and Miami, all the windows of the big dress stores displaying copies of Paris models.

And it will be the same again this season. We shall see these charming spring creations blossom forth in all their brightness and gaiety. They are lovely promises of beauty come to console us a little mid the cold efficiency of this Atomic era.

Gala



Left : JEAN PATOU
Centre : PIERRE BALMAIN
Right : MADELEINE DE RAUCH