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Paris Sets Jaunty, Expensive Cap to Regain World Style Leadership

For the first time in five years, the Paris winter collections were seen by American fashion experts and writers last week. From NEWSWEEK's Paris bureau comes the following detailed account of the showings of houses which in the past have led the world of fashion:



A Jacques Costet gown in pink, cream, and pale blue

The winter collections are the best exposition of Paris's determination to keep its traditional place in the fashion world. The clothes offered give no hint of the difficulties encountered in making them. And the difficulties were many.

A fortnight ago fabric costs soared, reflecting a new textile-industry wage scale that is as much as 85 per cent above the standard hourly rates of 1936. In addition, the couturiers themselves are paying roughly three times the hourly rate of 1939.

The couturiers were also beset by a textile shortage. Wartime restrictions had limited textile makers to only 2/100 of 1 per cent of peacetime civilian consumption. Postwar production was held up by a coal shortage and the uncertainties of wage and price control.

To combat price and textile difficulties, the designers for the first time in memory accepted the principle of selling "muslins"—basic patterns, not yet made up in materials. Even these sold at the unheard-of price of 15,000 francs (\$300). And prices for finished models were even more fantastic. Yet the designers certainly offered their best.



The Winter Collection

Long Waist, Hidden Knee:

A look at all the collections shows that black is the outstanding color for afternoon and dinner. Drapings, wrappings, and swathings that girdle the hips are the outstanding line. The favored fabrics are velvet, velveteen, corduroy (used horizontally, as are other striped materials), monotone tweeds, Kashas (a twill-weave fabric of wool mixed with Cashmere), and some Scotch plaids. Fur is used sparingly, most often for warmth in linings. Mole worked in opposing bands horizontally is smart and new, especially in three-quarter Canadiennes (heavy, hooded sports coats, often of blanketing or plaid).

Waists are longer and slimmer, and skirts cover the knees. Front or back fullness is evident everywhere, with a soft bodice and small waist giving full value to the bust (and suggesting undernourishment). The Gibson-girl or rounded shoulder is back in style. Hats, worn far back on the head, are small—about a third the size of the former Parisian models.

Neckline interest is divided. Some are high, some slit to the waist, while others are draped in square *décolletés*. Yokes, cowls, and berthas are omnipresent. After years of material shortage, the accent is definitely on the feminine, with all of its flounces. Some of the highlights of the collections:

- Worth, oldest Parisian *couture* house, launches a jacket-length basque and re-emphasizes jumper dresses.

- Patou features coats with rounded shoulders, snug waists, and sleeves often closely buttoned at the wrist and occasionally widened halfway between shoulder and elbow. In his dresses, jerseys of all types are used, side-draped or side-pleated. He also introduces a new barrel skirt in heavy materials like satin-striped moiré.

- Paquin agrees to the new, slender silhouette line in some of his models, though he continues restrained fullness in others. He makes a Persian lamb coat with a back skirt and girdle of duvetyn—an eye-tricking stunt which slenderizes the waist. Tailored, short lamé dinner suits look like a winner.

- Molyneux is still in London, but a collection was presented in his name. Both he and Paquin launch really smart rain-wear. The outstanding Molyneux model is a beige redingote, with a plaid-lined *capuchon* (peaked hood).

- Maggy Rouff's evening gowns have tremendous circular skirts, luscious fabrics, and huge bustles, seeming to be more in the line of "desire dresses" instead of wearable fashions.

- Jeanne Lanvin is happiest with her hostess gowns, including one topped with a furlined bolero.

- Madame Schiaparelli, who returned to Paris after four years in the United States, presents the most sensational model. It features a divided skirt which shows a knee-length pantaloon on one leg only. The costume is completed by a high, postilion hat with a starched-taffeta plaid scarf which leaves only the

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nose and eyes exposed.

Significance ~~~~~

In all houses, one fact was outstanding—prices were exorbitant. Daytime dresses ran as high as 20,000 or 30,000 francs (\$400 to \$600); some evening models went to 50,000 (\$1,000), contrasted with last spring's starting price of 8,000 francs (\$160).

This wasn't all. For French buyers there was an added 40 per cent luxury tax. For foreign buyers there was an imposition of 5,000 francs (\$100) on each piece bought—and 5,000 francs on a coat and 5,000 more on a dress brought the cost of an ensemble to as much as 60,000 francs (\$1,200).

As a result, American buyers don't know what to make of these showings. Before the war buyers figured the cost of any model delivered to New York would be just double the amount paid the Paris designer. Today's prices, export restrictions, transport costs, and delays make buying so unpredictably expensive that the United States trade is unwilling to indulge in it.