

# PARIS COLLECTIONS SEEN BY A CONNOISSEUR

By BARON DE MEYER

Illustrated by Etienne Drián



Baron de Meyer and the greatest comedienne of France went the rounds of the collections of the "grandes maisons." Baron de Meyer has written, in the article below, his impression of the opening collections of some of the most important of these houses.

**A**FTER an all too short but sunny vacation I felt well rested and ready for work—photographic—and I thought of Paris, empty, all to myself, and of leisure to concentrate on work and give you of my very best.

However, here I am, literally struggling to defend myself against my many friends, especially against those from the States, on shopping bent.

"Hallo! Are you back in town? Let's go and see the Callot collection," or "Do come with me; I don't dare go into Cheruit's alone. I can not afford anything, but am dying for you to show me what is worn." Another asks "for just an hour," which means three or four.

The only variation to the theme is the name of the house, for each of the ladies has, of course, her predilections.

Some even suggest a "general round," a personally conducted tour—Callot, Worth, Poiret, or Chanel; anything and everything as long as I share their peregrinations. The openings having, as you know, only recently taken place, the feminine mind is thrilled by thoughts of novelty.

However, I am firm and steadily refuse—with grace. Of course "collections" must be seen by me. The round of all the big *maisons de couture* must be made. I must know what is worn and what I shall decide to present to the readers of *Harper's Bazar*, but this all shall be done alone.

How can I concentrate on such important matters with charming companions diverting my attention?

**H**OWEVER, man is frail—I have always said so—for with all this persistently firm attitude of saying "No" and "No" again, I have succumbed!

And why? Because of subtle flattery and innate vanity. But, if I fall there certainly are extenuating circumstances, for a great artist, the greatest *comédienne* of France, whose taste is accepted here as nothing short of perfect, claimed my advice. How could I be expected to refuse her?

This brilliant artist leaves for America next month on a first visit. She doesn't know the country, nor the public, nor what styles would please them most. I realized that to accompany her was by no means a waste of time, but in a sense my duty to the American public at large. So we sallied forth, and started very seriously the grand tour of frivolities.



**M**Y charming friend wanted to see *all*; she would go everywhere, buy everything. She needs from twenty-five to fifty dresses. Last season's frocks are old, perfectly hideous, and oh, so *démodé*! That's what she says. Of course we all know better. We started with Callot.

As you know, one has to sit through the very large "collection" and write down names, or numbers, of gowns one fancies—"Sylvanie," "Scheherazade," "Soleil d'Orient," and other lovely appellations—before the *vendeuse* takes the slightest notice of an order.

If you venture to make a remark, the stately and impressive lady reproves one very gently: "The collection has not completely passed, we shall discuss this later."

One's patience gets sorely tried, and one is so bewildered by having seen so much that often one feels too exhausted to wish for anything, and give an order.

Not so my friend, for after two hours of patient waiting she was rewarded by having the saleslady lead the way to one of the twenty-four artistic and very lovely dressing-rooms, to which were brought all the "Sylvanies," "Scheherezades" and "Soleils d'Orient" her list contained. She fits them all, she wants them, and, I believe, orders most of them.

My own impression of Callot, summing up what I had seen, was not just one garment or another, but brocades, rich in color and design, shot with gold or silver, often both; velvets in deep or vivid shades; laces in metal thread, heavy with beads; embroideries, Persian, Hindoo and Chinese; sinuous oriental drapings, hoops, and slender lines. So much for generalization, for in detail they remained "Callot forever."

We were pretty well worn out by having seen so much, so we had to put off going to Lanvin's and Chéruit's. We went the next day.

At Lanvin's the same custom of watching patiently, with no permissible interruption, prevails. However, as it has often been said of Jeanne Lanvin, and with perfect justification, she has more individuality in her art than almost any other dressmaker in Paris. One is never bored.

Her models generally represent a distinctive period, this season the *moyen âge*. Some say this collection is almost too pictorial. Anyway she has certainly sounded a new note, and a picturesque one at that. "Picturesque" seems very un-Parisian as a term, from the modern Parisienne's point of view, whose ideal these days is "unpictorial chic."

**B**E this as it may, one is compelled to admiration for the Lanvin brain, so full of invention and new ideas.

Nearly all of her gowns have high collars and sleeves, typical of the Italian Renaissance. These models have long, full skirts and fitted bodices, true to the period. Purple and deep violets are some of the favorite tones. They somehow seem new shades, so little have they been worn these last few seasons. Curious looking hats go with this type of gown. They are real helmets, mostly made of velvet, and cover the head entirely. They have a high standing, comb-like piece from ear to ear, forming a half moon over the head. In some cases, this halo is made of fur, or has a tulle veil draped over it.



Such hats are, without doubt, the only really new hats in Paris at present, for I've been to Rebou, Marie Louise, and Marthe Collot's and have seen most of last summer's models in straw,



(Left) The silvery shimmering greens that Paris wears this season are particularly lovely in the evening. Worth used green velvet for this wrap, embroidered it with gold and silver, and placed a sable collar across its velvet shoulders.



(Right) The short jacket worn with a plain embroidered crêpe skirt is one of the things Paris does particularly gracefully. Worth has embroidered this jacket of white cloth with black silk flowers; there is a jeweled belt and trimming of sealskin.



Les deux modèles déposés



and lace still on the stands. At Maria Guy's crinoline shapes were paraded for the foreign buyers.

By the way, Marthe Collot—not Callot—is a name I want you to remember. It is a new house, and I shall certainly have interesting things to say of it as time goes on. Her taste and the atmosphere to be found in her establishment are what is called in Paris *dans la mode*. It needs a long stage in very French surroundings for a stranger to know what is meant by this expression.

I go to many of the most famous dressmaking houses, see sartorial novelties without number; exquisite textures, inventions, style, in fact, the fashions for which Paris is so justly celebrated and yet, so much of this tremendous effort seems uninteresting, fundamentally antiquated, and out of date—*démodé*. This applies to some of the world-renowned houses one hears so much about, houses that every year turn out millions of franc's worth of business.

Somehow, in spite of having all the business they can handle, they have in a certain degree ceased to preserve the true Parisian spirit. They work for exportation, and to coin money.

**T**HE same inartistic point of view applies to hats. Some of the most important modistes have crowds of women in their shops buying their models at which, were I a French *Elegante*, I would never dream of looking. Such creations seem designed for the proverbial French mother-in-law, "*la belle mère de province*," as the saleslady in a famous house wittily remarked. They are profusely decorated with aigrettes and paradise plumes, and easily run up to two and three thousand francs a hat.

Other houses, smaller ones, I will admit, are often much more up to date. They turn out carefully prepared and fitted shapes, mostly black with hardly any trimming, but with a thousand franc lace veil draped over all, and quite ready to receive one of those fashionable double pins from Cartier made of onyx and diamonds in an artistic setting, and which may be worth just anything.

However, we have wandered—wandered to hats and pins from Cartier—when my sole object was to tell about the visits we paid, my fair friend and I, in quest of fashion and novelty in dress.

Our next call was at Chéruit's where wonderful surprises were in store for us. The house of Chéruit, or rather Madame Boulanger, ranks amongst the foremost creative artists in Paris. In her own way, she stands alone. Every time I view one of her collections, I have the same feeling, always the same impression of seeing one of the most individual manifestations of *L'art dans le Couture*.

One can not say her clothes are oriental, or *de style*, for they are only modern, individual and typically Parisian in type. They have a great deal of personal originality and are, in some cases, almost fantastic in their novelty.

Madame Boulanger's personality pervades them all, be it in shape, in texture, or detail. They are a font of new ideas, a source of inspiration everlasting. We both enthused over a coat-gown, very sinuous and softly clinging, made in a soft shade of fuchsia velvet, lined with black, and scalloped at the edges. A band of skunk, producing a high collar, and another band around the hips, gave one the impression of a coat and skirt.



**A** VERY new material is lacquered black charmeuse. I saw it used with fringes of ermine tails. With this gown went a short cape of ermine and a hat to match. A day gown of brown charmeuse seemed heavily embroidered in threads of gold and iridescent shells. It had, besides, most fantastic dragons made of cloth of gold, cunningly worked in high relief, producing a modern imitation of some Chinese garment.

Unusual inventions of detail have presided at the creation of a series of novel evening gowns. The lines may be simple, but the choice of color and material—pure sophistication. Bright blue brocade combined with rose and violet cerise and black shimmering with bits of mother-of-pearl; dyed straws, worked into intricate designs and shapes; long trains of very thin gauze, edged by flounces, or these same peculiar flounces used on some slim gown, producing an effect of strange, exotic flowers.

Madame Boulanger has even been successful in inventing a new fur—not "shaved" astrakhan,



(Below) Some of Chanel's most important gowns are simply glorified chemise frocks; they have been given an indescribably rich atmosphere by a delicate frost-work of embroidery, highly jeweled and exquisitely fine. This white crêpe romaine gown, simple and straight-hanging, is heavily incrustated with diamonds and onyx.

CHANEL USES  
EXQUISITELY FINE  
EMBROIDERY



which I have seen in a great number of the houses—no, it is a coat of civet, regal and magnificent, which has the white part of the fur dyed orange. This is certainly the newest thing in furs I have, so far, been privileged to see.

I ALWAYS enjoy going to Patou's, the next house we went to on leaving Chéruit's.

An atmosphere of prosperity and welcome greets one, as one enters, in fact, the name of Jean Patou seems synonymous with success. This bright young man's vitality, coupled with a rare sense of business that is almost American, has made this comparatively new firm quite famous in a very short space of time.

Last year, three large salons seemed to me overcrowded by customers. This year he has been obliged to take the house adjoining, and two or three new salons have been added to the suite, yet seating space again seems lacking! There has been, I am told, an unheard of increase in business, which seems to grow from day to day.

His models are combined on ultra—(Continued on page 43)

modern lines with a practical and wearable object in view. This, nowadays, is a very considerable asset and does not exclude good looks. In some houses one's eye is fascinated by models in wonderful color schemes and of great originality, which, however, one takes good care not to order. At Patou's, everything seems to sell.

The gowns are very slim and youthful in appearance, which is, of course, the prevailing fashion of the day—"slimness at any cost!"

Many gowns in crêpe de Chine are merely wrapped around the figure, some of them held together by a jeweled ornament on the side. According to the neck-line, they can easily be adapted to either day or evening wear. For evening gowns, one shoulder is entirely uncovered, the drapery passing under the arm, the other side having the drapery fastened high up on the shoulder. A very artistic model is made of violet and black crêpe de Chine, embroidered in an all-over pattern of *crème*, deep rose, and cerise. The design is Hindu in atmosphere, and on nearer inspection, birds and flowers are discovered. The style is evidently inspired by an Indian *Sari*.

Doucet, this year, has quite surpassed himself; Monsieur de la Pena, who for years has been connected with this house, here reigns supreme.

He has a world-wide reputation for taste and elegance. His specialty always has been elegance—Parisian elegance, and he has lived up to the solidly established traditions magnificently.

My artist friend, who has never once deserted me on this quest for fashion and novelty, was very enthusiastic over a suit, if such a glorious thing can still be called a suit, made of black velvet bordered by a band of some gray fur, quite one foot deep and standing out, giving the coat an almost hooped effect. Through sheer ignorance, alas, I am in many instances unable to give the name of furs. For obvious reasons, these pelts had better remain unnamed. So discreetly I refrain from asking.

A coat of black marocain, has floating panels in the back and is heavily trimmed by a legitimately named fur, called *singe perle*. Here again the shaved asthakan trimmed with *putois blond* appears in coat form. A black velvet evening gown is looped and draped in front, has a low swinging cape, and is worn by (Concluded on page 132) a tall young woman with her blonde and fluffy hair piled high and ever higher, very Greek in style.

A sapphire velvet gown has in front a fan-shaped black lace over-skirt which rises on each side and forms the sleeves. A reversible coat, like *anaquascutum*, was made of finest *crème* leather, lined in some warm and woolly brown material.



The collar and a long band down the front were made of tiger skin.

My friend suddenly wanted to know what sort of clothes she would need for private occasions. What would she wear if asked to a big luncheon, a dinner, or a play, on one of her off nights—if one dressed much for restaurant or theatre in America?

As we had not as yet been to Chanel's, we directed the chauffeur to take us to the rue Cambon to see the new collection.

Here, nothing we saw was at all doubtful in taste. Everything was desirable, wearable, and lovely, and always remaining true to the inimitable *cachet* of this house. They started their show with sports clothes, also suitable for steamer wear. Woolen sweaters of Russian design, fantastically barbaric in tone and texture, made to be worn with simple homespun coats and skirts. We also saw long coats made of these same colored "woolies," edged by wide bands of fur, which impressed us as absolutely new. There is a department for very chic little sport hats, suitable to be worn with such garments, on the premises.

Chanel's sports outfits are quite unique. No other dressmaker goes in for just this style of thing, so essential nowadays in any modern woman's wardrobe.

Simple cloth gowns, to be worn with jackets short or long, have the bodice part of the gown made of crêpe de Chine. Black and beige, or brown and gray, street wear are Mademoiselle Chanel favorite shades.

For the afternoon, many models wear simply glorified chemises made of Georgette crêpe: one black one, for instance, is entirely covered by steel-embroideries. Another, of an unusual brocade, seems woven in subdued metal threads in tones of gold, steel and beige. This gown is trimmed with beaver and a cape "en suite." Most gowns in the house have coats or capes to match the individual costume, as somehow, nowadays, one really is not truly elegant, and even what is more important, not well dressed without indulging in such extravagances.

Evening gowns are mostly white, chemise shaped, and embroidered all over, or rather have stones incrusting in the texture, a new and costly fashion. One is worth in pearls, one in small diamonds and newest ones in diamonds and onyx. The latter combination is very lovely.

There are some long narrow capes, one of Venetian red crêpe marocain embroidered with oriental gold embroidery and lined throughout with sable squirrel. Another one is pure white crêpe, with all-over design of white silk embroidered and trimmed with Russian sable. A cape of pale beige velvet is edged with a flounces of chinchilla half-way up the garment. This is the newest combination of gray and beige, this latter tone sets off the gray fur magnificently.



There are many other houses just as important as those I have described, which we still intend to go to, but time is passing, so these must be left for another letter. The mail is calling any way, as it is, I have already taken up too much your space and time.



*(LEFT) Beige, Chanel uses again and again for her sports and afternoon costumes; she finds it an effective background for her colored embroideries. Then, too, for evening she chooses pale beige velvet and adds deep flounces of gray chinchilla, to blend from the warm beige to cool gray tones, a very lovely combination.*

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