

# Paris Model

# 1946

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**EDWIGE FEUILLERE**, France's Number One actress, is wearing evening clothes again—and all fashionable Paris rejoices. It is a sort of symbol, the blossoming of the lovely Edwige into full-panoplied formality. For she along with most of the women of France, abstained from festivities and the clothes that go with them throughout the war. There was no place for gaiety when the Germans ruled the town.

Now, Paris is smiling again—tentatively, but with gradually increasing confidence. Lights shine again in the streets of the City of Light—not quite so brightly as before, for power must be conserved, but with good spirit. A 20-violin orchestra plays lighthearted gypsy tunes in the glittering night club called The Monseigneur.

The theaters are crowded; shops on the Faubourg St. Honoré miraculously display new stocks of jewelry, hats, gloves and handmade lingerie—and Edwige poses in the white-and-gold beauty of a gown which Marcelle Dormoy designed especially for this Collier's feature.

"It is the first formal gown I have had on since 1939," she said.

Edwige, who commands the prestige of a Katharine Cornell or a Helen Hayes in this country, starred in a stage presentation of *Sodome et Gomorrhe*, by Giraudoux, during the German occupation. The play, which predicts the end of an empire, was applauded enthusiastically by both French and German members of the audience—the French, of course, thinking of the end of the German regime, and the Germans thinking of heaven knows what.

Now Edwige is taking the lead in a movie version of Dostoevski's *The Idiot*. She could, if she would, go to Hollywood. She has had a number of offers. But she prefers to stay in France until the hard days are over. And the days are hard for the movie-makers. They must produce movies in spite of shortages of film, of sets, of cameras. They cannot afford retakes. And they must compete with the highly popular and expensively produced American movies.

Edwige, a graceful, pale, blond beauty, is loved by the people of France. The cabby who drove me to her studio begged me, please, to make it possible for him to get a glimpse of the great one. After he had met her he said, "I can't wait to tell my wife what has happened to me today."

Edwige is intensely interested in American novels, American plays, American actors. She feels that much could be done to better the understanding between nations through the theater.

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"I wish American producers would bring their plays here," Edwige says. "I have met so few American actors. I would like to meet more." A French version of the New York play, *Arsenic and Old Lace*, now is playing to standing-room-only audiences in Paris.

Intellectual Parisians, including Edwige, are thoroughly familiar with modern American writers. She can quote passages from the works of Hemingway, Steinbeck, Caldwell and Faulkner, in the manner of a schoolboy reciting "To be or not to be."

In fashion, as in the theater, Paris is stirring to life again—and here, too, Edwige plays an important role. Throughout the war, she has bought clothes from Designer Dormoy. And now Madame Dormoy is expanding her shop in anticipation of a great fashion boom.

This designer, in the traditional Parisian way, took a job in a fashion house at the age of twelve and went through all the apprentice stages before she established her own house shortly before the war. Her great difficulty now is to get fabric, which can be bought only at black-market prices. Even muslin is so scarce that after it is used for one model, it is ripped apart and used again. So far, only a few American buyers have appeared at the fashion openings, but the *couturiers* are confident that their old customers will be present in full force by summer, and that by then there will be full stocks again.

One American, Fira Benenson of Bonwit Teller, did visit Paris recently, and bought models to copy, a few from each of the leading designers. Madame Dormoy was able to supply several eye-filling creations. The rate of exchange has been so unfavorable that it cost America some \$500 or \$600 to import one model, but with the exchange rate improving as it is, the fashion trade should pick up again.

In the meantime, the wealthy women of France are flocking to buy the precious products of the *haute couture*. For them, Edwige's first postwar evening gown is the signal for a return to prewar elegance. ★★★



Madame Marcelle Dormoy drapes a length of rich silk brocade on a model. This designer is known for free-flowing lines and absence of frou-frou. In the painting at the left, done by the French artist, Marcel Fromenti, Actress Edwige Feuillère poses in a Dormoy creation of white silk jersey. The gown's only accent is a waistline peplum of gold sequins