PARIS FASHIONS, LIBERATION STYLE

BY GERTRUDE BAILEY

LIBERATION didn't come any too soon for the Paris *Haute Couture.*

Lucien Lelong, official head of the French dressmakers, persisted by sheer persuasion and "endless negotiations" during the German occupation to convince the high command that the industry be allowed to continue in Paris. This was in spite of threats to move it and all the French workers to Berlin.

He revealed, at his own first liberation collection in October, that the Germans threatened shortly before D Day to clamp down on the entire industry.

Not all of the Paris houses were as quick as Lelong to establish a sudden note of restraint, appropriate for a country again at war, in their October fall openings. For four years they had concentrated on extravagant, flamboyant creations, in deliberate defiance of the Germans. Everything about the silhouette had been inflated. Yardage, while limited to 100 tons a year for 90 houses employing 12,000 workers, was flaunted. The *couture* preferred to keep up appearances by cutting down on the number of models instead of spreading the material thin. They lavished fabric into parachute sleeves, elaborately draped bodices, skirts that bunched fullness at the front, and outsize hats that were overtrimmed.

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All of this was part of the impression that left no doubt in the American doughboy's mind he was entering a city of style!

The hangover of this defiance was still evident in most of the first liberated showings, recently completed. Some of the *couture* were frankly embarrassed by it. Particularly when war correspondents —pressed into covering fashion openings for overseas publications—told them about clothes rationing in England and fabric restrictions in America.

At least two designers, Lelong and Capt. Edward Molyneux (who got to Paris from London just a few days before his own opening) were quick to declare a new mode of simplicity, slimness, and restraint. While the *couture* strained their eyes with embroideries, without benefit of electricity or heat in their workrooms, seeking to maintain the Paris tradition for fine handwork, Lelong and Molyneux put their heads together and quickly made some tentative plans for realignment that looks to the American market for direction.

Back in London Molyneux announced that he and Lelong hoped to visit America soon to discuss fashion needs and fabric sources, provided, of course, the trip can get government approval. Their chief need, he reported, was fine wool.

While appreciating the sincere effort of the Paris *couture* to re-establish itself

he tended to understate the significance of the first October showings with "most of the houses are now showing a few winter models but hope to assemble somewhat larger collections of spring models in November." He expects these showings to reveal important changes.

Two days later Capt. Molyneux told the London press that the Paris *couture* will prepare their first buyer collections of spring and summer models for the end of January, and expressed the hope that by January both American and British buyers will be able to attend. He is working to pool French and English resources in order that England and France can have simultaneous openings for the benefit of visiting buyers. To this end Molyneux and Lelong discussed two possibilities. One, getting some of the British woolens to Paris for the designers there to work with. Two, getting some of the French workers to England to help prepare the English collections, since London's *couture* has suffered from a labor shortage.

Molyneux also hinted that if clothing restrictions were still in force elsewhere by January the French couture would undoubtedly create models to conform to them.

In a transition as sudden as turning from deliberately ornate and exaggerated style, made during the German occupation, to modifying and simplyfying

fashion, in keeping with France's new role in the war, there were bound to be conflicting reports, out-and-out contradictions, and not a few amusing paradoxes.

At some of the showings the audiences was more spectacularly dressed than the models!

Maggy Rouff, who opened the 10-day October showing, insisted that her collection was "comparatively restrained." But to a few Wacs, army nurses, and two men correspondents, the styles seemed plenty gay.

"It seems terrible to see huge velvet skirts and sequins when the world is at war," one Wac commented.

In the midst of the openings the government formed a Purge Commission for fashion, France's fourth largest industry. It seems the wives, sisters, and sweethearts of black marketers or war profiteers who had money to burn had displaced the original best-dressed list. Now no sales could be made until the committee of the *couture* had O.K.'d them.

Marcel Rochas, whose creations were among the most theatrical, justified them on the basis that they were created for stage and screen stars as a symbol of things to come. His clientele was of the theatre. Marlene Dietrich ordered a yellow moire and black velvet evening gown while she was there. The Rochas program, seeking to explain the incongruity of fabulous clothes when a few

hundred miles away women needed bare essentials, said, "Tomorrow means hope and peace recovered. For its future task the spirit and hand of Paris must not lose its skill. Our immediate task is also to satisfy through the cinema and theater the soldier's dream."

Madame Jeanne Lanvin, the Grand Old Lady of the Paris *couture*, interpreted the number of little black evening dresses in her collection, as the "end of the occupation bluff." "It is no longer necessary for the French to bluff Germans by wearing bright colors," she pointed out.

Conversely, one American correspondent reported that for four years Paris had worn almost nothing but black, saw the return of autumn colors with occasional flashes of red in street clothes, the sign that the period of mourning was over.

Madame Lanvin made one of those spontaneous gestures that always keeps history students interested in fashion. The plastron on one of her little black afternoon dresses was in the shape of a big red heart, quilted satin, the point reaching to the waistline. She named it quickly "The Heart of Paris."

Correspondents, not all with fashion-trained eyes, since they had followed the invasion into Paris for other reasons, appeared more confused then the *couture* about trends. One found significance in the appearance of green as a color,

and noted the reason it had been absent for four years was because it was the color of the German uniform, which no Frenchwoman would wear until France was free. Another was frankly bored by the restraint and simplicity of Molyneux's collection, and shocked by the extravagance of the Lanvin clothes. All of them recognized that the French collections were obviously not fabric-saving creations, had little that America could copy in wartime, even if models could be exported.

Leading stylists here, searching the cables for trends, and in no position to make anything out of full sleeves and full skirts as long as there are WPB restrictions, are pretty sure the Parisian feeling will take more definite style shape in the forthcoming spring collections. They recognize that the underlying reasoning behind French and American styles has always been different: the French creating for the few, the American manufacturing for the many. But the majority of them want to know when France will be ready to show to American buyers, when they can get over there, and when models can again be exported.

Export is still just a gleam in the eyes of Paris, which explains why the first fall collections were directed to the Rue de la Paix, and why we can expect more significant fashion news in later spring collections. One correspondent summed

up impressions of the lavish displays as "a gorgeous gown draped on a crosseyed mannikin." One eye, he said, was cocked on American women, on whom depends to a large degree the international success of the *couture*. The other was, straining, nearsightedly, down the Rue de la Paix. That is where, with inflation, a 10-cent cotton handkerchief now costs 60 cents, and a black broadtail fur coat about $13,000!

The greatest accomplishment of the French *couture*, according to all reports, is that despite the lack of coal, gas and electricity, every collection adheres to the tradition of impeccable workmanship. While there were only two evening gowns in the Paquin showing, for example, one of them, a light tobacco-brown tulle, had exquisite basque embroidery of iridescent sequins. The other, a romantic black velvet, embroidered its bodice with pearls.

There was plenty of passementerie on the pockets and collars of Rochas' afternoon suits. A debutante gown of white tulle at Lanvin's had finest ruchings of tricolor. Schiaparelli's collection, shown without benefit of the designer, was traditionally rich in jet, embroidery, and passementerie braiding in Renaissance colors.

At Patou's, where simplicity was allegedly the keynote, there was extremely elaborate passementerie and handwork on the majority of the models. His pro-

gram described the collection as "Created in a period of anxiety, achieved in an atmosphere of freedom and enthusiasm, presented in the restrained mood of this serious moment." The serious mood was stressed in somber colors—grays in coats and suits, blacks in dresses.

The most renowned of the Paris *couture* found more significance in the fact that there were showings to fill ten days than in the details of the silhouette. It was France going back to work Roger Worth, third generation of the House of Worth, described it, "This is a collective effort to defend French art in one of this most important branches—the art of dress. The couturiers of Paris are paving the way for a resumption of French business life."

Like many of the designers, Worth introduced *Canadiennes*, belted jackets inspired by those worn by Canadian trappers. These appeared in velvet and corduroy for afternoon costumes as well as in heavier wools for daytime.

Most of the fine wools and silks that appeared in the liberated collections, the *couture* admitted, had been zealously saved from prewar stocks for just such an occasion.

On the practical side virtually every collection included some version of the hooded raincoat for bicyclers. And there was a prophetic note in the number of warm, if opulent, hostess gowns.

Two things point to a new slimness in

the Parisienne style world. The *couture* is in the mood to follow the lead of Lelong, who uses less yardage, because they know that the good working order of the *couture* generally is due to his efforts to keep it alive. And the Frenchwoman, after four years of restrictions coupled with the active life, has a slim figure to enhance. French girls, in particular, are more beautiful than ever, according to photographs that have reached here.

Lelong's liberation silhouette glorifies slimness, emphasizing wasp waists, softly rounded hips, subtle shoulder width with fabric folds rather than artificial padding. He likes little touches of lace or lingerie on simplest black dresses of wool or velvet. And he has set the pace for an essentially dignified elegance, a restraint that has nothing in common with the former mode of defiance except to maintain the Paris reputation as a creative style center and insure the livelihood of thousands of workers.

The leader of the French *couture* has given the signal, and others have indicated their willingness to follow. In reestablishing itself in the world's eyes the French *couture* is determined in the next months to create styles that will combine sobriety with new ideas.

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