

“L'OASIS *was the* BRILLIANT GALA SPOT *for* PARIS FÊTES

Was Turned into “L'Oasis”, a Place of Magic Fêtes That Might Well Inspire Gardens and Ballrooms in Other Lands



Madame Poiret is quite prepared to meet the camera's eye, wearing one of her most enchanting costumes

IN pre-war Paris there were certain dreary hot weeks which occurred after the fourteenth of July, when any one who was any one felt mortified to be found in the city. But if chance willed it that they were discovered there, hastily they would explain that their appearance in Paris was a twenty-four-hour affair, a bridge from one summery delight to another. Then came the great catastrophe to upset all social customs, so that until “Big Bertha” and the air-raids drove them out, devoted men and women remained through the heat of August at their posts in hospitals, canteens, and all the other good works into which Parisian society threw itself with the same vigorous energy formerly lavished upon frivolity.

IN POIRET'S GARDEN

In the beginning of this first summer after the war, we wondered if the old twenty-four hour comedy would be played again. The scene was apparently set for it when a new factor suddenly appeared, a changing, fascinating, scintillating factor which caught the fickle attention of Paris and held it riveted week after week right through the dog-days. And this brilliant kaleidoscope, which has almost succeeded in breaking the pre-war tradition of absence, is the *Jardin de Danse* of Paul Poiret, a well-named “Oasis” of elegance and originality in the dulness of a city summer. From the beginning of its Friday gala nights, the pretense of being in town for twenty-four hours only was dropped by the men and women who would have broken almost any engagement to be present at this series of delightfully informal fêtes in one of the most charming settings of the world, Paul Poiret's garden. And really, it was quite as exciting as assisting at the performance of a miracle; for something very like a miracle took place every Friday evening when the sedate old-world garden, open to all the clients of the *maison de couture* until the hour of six, was transformed into a harvest field, or a circus, or the seaport of a trop-

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ical island, all in the space of three brief hours. Promptly at nine, the garden gates opened on a scene of enchantment subtly designed to appeal to all the senses, cunningly lit, scented with strange perfumes to evoke vividly, as nothing but a perfume can, the suggestion which the setting was meant to convey.

The arts of a veritable magician were needed to change a grey and green Paris garden, stamped with the convention of the eighteenth century, and an assembly of guests in modern evening dress to a band of Pierrots serenading Colombine in the mysterious silver gardens of the moon. And every Friday, Poiret practiced his modern magic until it was no wonder that “Tout Paris” recklessly proclaimed their presence in town by coming week after week, dressed as carefully as if the socially dead summer had been the very height of the season.

THE PICTURESQUE COSTUMES

Perhaps the most delightful feature of the fêtes was the fact that the guests themselves were a component part of them. We have all looked at theatrical spectacles, until we are weary of them, we have watched wildernesses of paid revellers disporting themselves in vain for our amusement. At the “Oasis,” we suddenly found ourselves the entertainers instead of the entertained, and the novelty was as exciting as a heady tropic wine. “Dressing-up” is a pastime with an eternal appeal to the child which lives in each one of us, and Poiret is psychologist enough to know it. He set the scene with all the picturesque resources at his command, and then he proceeded to make the festival unique by turning every spectator into an actor with a prominent part to play and a costume which alternately flattered and amused him. Deftly his manikins proceeded to transform every guest into a participant of the scheme of the evening, and clever enough were the expedients adopted.



Eveningwear, 1920 (image added)

The Friday galas began, as such things should, quite mildly, and finished in a crescendo of gaiety which culminated in “*La Vénérerie*,” a mad riot of the hunting-field which was the last before the implacable weather man, who cares nothing for amusement, turned on the chilly rains of early autumn and outdoor pleasures were suspended until another sunny season. This first fête was called “*La Redoute Orange*,” and the guests were requested to come in orange, black, or silver, and found themselves, upon arrival, bedizened with tulle sashes, crowned with silver coronets, and otherwise disguised. Orange lights twinkling among the deep green of the trees, and silver beams playing from hidden search-lights upon the dancers were just a promise of the witchery to come.

The second fête, alluringly called “*Clair de Lune*,” promised something more intangibly lovely and kept its word. A garden lit in blue and silver met the gaze

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"Jump through this," said he. And she did—head first, too, which just goes to show that Frenchwomen, at least, are still obedient

of the guests who had been bidden to come in blue or white. From the historic trees, which were old when a king held court in Paris, hung silver threads of rain caught among the branches and turned to frost by a magic wand. The warm night breeze swayed them to and fro with the rhythm of the waltz, for those who danced at "L'Oasis" left all thoughts of "jazz" behind them. A stringed orchestra blended the sweetness of its violins and 'cellos with the sounds of the city, coming faintly in over the high grey walls to remind us that this fairyland had been created within the town's prosaic confines. Romance stirred in every heart, and the men accepted gallantly the cap and ruche of the Pierrot offered by the pretty Colombine-clad manikins, and wore them with an air.

HARVEST HOME CHEZ POIRET

When they returned on the following Friday, the place had magically taken on the life and colour of a harvest field. Reds, yellows, and brave blues flamed everywhere; in the centre of the garden, a huge wheat-sheaf reared itself aloft, wreathed with blue corn-flowers and crowned with poppies. Strong yellow beams, rivalling the sun itself, bathed the garden in floods of light which shone on great heaps of the picturesque produce of the grange and the farm. Sunbonnets, rakes, wide-brimmed hats, and deep-pocketed aprons transformed the guests into a band of harvesters singing and dancing the last load of wheat to its winter home. Jolly and happy and strong, the fête was a golden contrast to the delicate harmonies of blue and silver which had preceded it, and curiosity was whetted to the utmost.

The next Friday came at last, and with it we left behind us the dull materialism of the temperate zone to spend an evening of warmth, colour, and perfume in the tropics. At the entrance gate, two negresses, their heads bound in brilliant coloured bandanas, were burning tar in great braziers, tar that conjured us at once by the magic of its unforgettable odour to the port of some forgotten island lost upon the bosom of the South Seas. Passing the gates, we entered a bower of heavy petalled flowers, weighted with their own intense sweetness and hanging in garlands from the branches of strangely transformed trees. Birds of glowing plumage were perched among them and rivalled the flowers in their diversity and brilliancy of colour. Grass skirts and necklaces of blossoms transformed the guests into a company of island lotus-eaters, and negroes in white clothes passed silently about with trays of such succulent sweetmeats as we have read about and envied in the Arabian nights. "*L'Equateur*" was such a success that it seemed that nothing could equal it; but

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In the dim, flower-scented setting of "L'Equateur," one drifted to the tune of a waltz—far, far from thoughts of the "jazz"

the next gala night was a greater triumph.

THE JOLLITY OF A CIRCUS

Who hasn't wanted, at some period of his life, to join the circus? "*Paillasse*" gave us this opportunity, for on this occasion the centre of the garden had become a vast ring in which Poirot, in impeccable ring-master's garb, flourished and mightily cracked a long whip. Wide ribbons knotted from the trees to the centre of the space gave the impression of a tent, and the manikins ingratiatingly invited the women to become circus-riders and slipped fluffy paper skirts over their heads. The men were induced to be clowns and donned absurd paper noses and immense paper caps. Thus disguised they joyously broke paper hoops over the heads of the fair *équestriennes*.

"The best" was the verdict on the circus evening, but the following Friday brought the last and crowning festival, "*La Vénérerie*," with all the pomp and stateliness of the historic French hunt, one of the most dignified traditional ceremonies in the world. Madame the Duchess d'Uzès had lent her "fanfare" for the occasion, and the calls were sounded on the picturesque *cors de chasse* by the *piqueurs* in their historic dress. Red and green were the colours of the night, and the men who possessed hunting pink wore it bravely, while riding-hats, crops, and spurs were favours for the women. In the centre of the garden, with a great beam of light playing upon it, hung a magnificent roebuck, fruit of the chase, and before the evening was over, choice venison steaks had been cut for special guests. Very special indeed was the assembly. There was the Chinese Embassy across from the Japanese—both forgetting Shantung in the pleasures of the chase; the Princess Murat, Mrs. Addison, and the Countess de San Martino, who had organized a brilliant dinner at the Ritz and taken their guests on to "L'Oasis," the Princess de Fclignac, Lady Michelman, Monsieur et Madame Serge André, Madame Maigret, the Count de Jumilhac, Madame Gebboid; and these are but a few of the well-known people who filled the tables and the dancing platform. If all these people, disdaining the "twenty-four hour in Paris" excuse, frankly al-

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lowed themselves to be seen during August and early September, dressed in the newest version of the mode according to the great couturiers and enjoying themselves in a fashion which the summer resorts would be hard pressed to rival, perhaps—who knows?—Paris might become a summer resort herself. Stranger things have happened.



Photographs from (c) Delphi, Paris

In this sedate old-world garden, a series of wonderful things occurred; gala fêtes, were they, arranged by Poirot to speed the nights of a Paris summer



Part of the spell of these bewitching nights was that every guest became part of the scene and everyone forgot how to be dull

Smart Paris recklessly proclaimed its presence in town by appearing week after week to dance in enchanted settings, designed to appeal to all the senses