

Coronet

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Willys of Hollywood has the enviable job of making stellar bad legs look good, good legs look better, and better legs perfect



by DORA ALBERT

HE SOLD STOCKINGS—office to office—to stenographers during the depression. He accepted bit parts in gangster movies in order to gain access to the movie great—to sell stockings. He is Willy De Mond, known as Willys of Hollywood, whose cheapest stockings for stenos now cost two and a half dollars and whose highest price hosiery for movie glamour girls brings up to 25 hundred dollars a pair, ordered six pairs at a time. That's a gross of 15 thousand dollars, and De Mond did it by decking out Alice Faye's legs in the picture *In Old Chicago*, in opera hose studded with semi-precious jewels (cornelians and jade) and expensive appliques and inserts.

Ninety per cent of the stockings worn on and off the screen by Hollywood's famous queens are designed today by—you guessed it—Willys of Hollywood—who does a brisk 400 thousand dollar a year business as Hollywood's leg man.

For 21 years Willy De Mond, a tall, fair-haired man with receding hair, has been making bad legs look good, good legs look better,

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and better legs perfect. With a business of that kind, De Mond naturally is privvy to trade secrets, fashion trends and the idiosyncrasies of the stars. But he will confide, for example, that Marlene Dietrich hates girdles and garter belts and that she used to roll her stockings until short skirts made that embarrassing. Then De Mond told her to use adhesive tape on the welt of her stocking. She did, and so did a lot of other women.

One of the screen's most shining eyefuls has piano legs, but she nonetheless has a reputation for possessing curves in just the right places. It was Willy who advised her always to wear clocks on her hose to break up the width of the ankle. Another glamour gal, known to millions as a five-alarm siren, takes the curse off *her* piano legs by wearing only dark stockings and avoiding all light and nude shades. Some stars have legs that are too thin. Willy's solution calls for stockings worn with leg pads of rubber—a lovely deception. Sometimes he is even called upon to design hose for people with club feet, knock knees, and a whole catalogue of physiological handicaps, including deformations resulting from infantile paralysis.

For women with no serious defects who are tall and slim he recommends mesh stockings with horizontal lines. For short women he designs hose with low heels—it gives the illusion of height. When designing, he makes up five dozen of each style, since the actress usually buys any stockings that aren't

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purchased by the studios for screen scenes. It is his job to be six months ahead of the fashion world. When called by a studio he checks the costumes, molds his stocking designs to fit the costume. Many of his styles have resulted in national fads. Back in the days of Ann Pennington he designed black-heeled hose to suit the mood of her Black Bottom dance in George White's *Scandals*. Women all over the country went for the idea. Other fads traceable to De Mond designs include sandal-fit stockings, opera hose, laced heel and toe stockings, and the use of jewelled clocks.

An offer of employment as a chain store buyer in 1929 brought him to California. Thereafter that business collapsed and went into receivership. It was then that he began selling office to office. Naturally, he thought of the movie studios as an ideal outlet for his wares, but found that he wasn't welcome without credentials. A chance meeting with several Broadway acquaintances now in Hollywood enabled him to obtain work as an extra. The recommendation of Marjorie Rambeau, who told the director of *The Secret Six* that Willy had had lots of stage expe-



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rience—without mentioning what kind of experience—brought him a bit part as the gangster bodyguard of Wallace Beery. He clicked and played gangster roles for M-G-M for a whole year.

Upon investigating the hosiery situation in the studios' wardrobe departments, he discovered that each studio kept on hand at all times about 200 to 300 dozen pairs of stockings, for it was almost impossible for them to get what they needed on short notice, what with color-matchings and season changes. He approached the studios and proposed: "Order your stockings from me and you won't have to keep 200 dozen pairs on hand, thus tying up thousands of dollars in hose that you don't need. I'll keep the inventory—and a large one—and guarantee to give you 24 hour service." It sounded good and the big studios agreed. Since then De Mond has been designing, creating and supplying the stockings for all big Hollywood productions.

By 1938 he was so well established that Paramount produced a short about his career—*From Cocoon to the Stockings the Stars Wear*.

Willy and the studios manage to get enough silk, and even enough nylon, to cover up the legs of filmdom's beautiful. As might be predicted, he's been offered everything up to crown jewels to supply private parties with nylon hose, but it's no go. All nylons are earmarked for studio use.

Before the war, Willy conceived an enterprising idea called Service on the Run. Whenever some Hollywood beauty found herself in a night club with a run in her stocking, all she had to do was telephone De Mond, who immediately would dispatch a messenger with a perfect pair of duplicate stockings, matched as to color, design, size and everything else.

So successful was the service that Western Union seriously considered a tie-up with De Mond, whereby they would furnish "service on the run" in large cities all over the country. But with the outbreak of

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war, and manpower and gasoline shortages, the plan fell through.

The stocking king of Hollywood is married and has three children. His wife could be his best walking ad if she wished. But she rarely wears stockings by Willys of Hollywood. In fact, she prefers slacks with bobby socks.

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