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Fur - a Costume Climax

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BUYING a fur coat is usually a red-letter occasion. Because of the thrilling prospects a fur buying expedition implies, an otherwise sensible woman often goes sailing off on a frivolous tangent.

The type of fur you wear must suit your personality. Also the kind of fur one buys must be chosen in regard to the wear it is to receive and the amount of money you wish to invest. When the coat is yours, it must be treated properly if it is to last its expected lifetime.

Let's pretend to buy a fur coat for you. We first ask: Do you want to wear the coat about the campus every day? Taking it on and off between classes and jumping up and down cheering for the team at the football game is going to be hard on it. Badger, beaver, bear, marten, mink, otter, raccoon, seal and skunk are among those considered "good wearing furs." They will give service for several winters and not show too much wear.

Of course, if you wanted something elegant for evening wear, you might consider chinchilla, fox, lamb or kidskin. But if you can spend rainy day savings and no more, you are not going to be tricked into buying a lower quality of an expensive fur. First quality and expert workmanship of a less expensive fur is what you'll want.

We go to the most reliable furrier we know and the clerk starts bringing furs to us. You fall in love with the first one you slip into. It's so soft and flattering up around your face. But you must examine the coat, not your facial appearance. The fur in a well matched coat is lustrous and uniform throughout the garment.

In long-haired furs, the guard hairs should be well distributed, because they protect the underfur and because they are the first to wear or break off. Some furs are tip-dyed to improve the color or to stimulate a better grade. Furriers call this blending. By comparing the guard hair and the underfur, we can see if the color is the same throughout. If the blending is done inexpertly, the fur may fade unevenly.

Top spotted fur such as leopard-dyed coney may be observed in the same fashion as blended furs. Some raccoons may be heavily dyed or painted in stripes or patterns. Heavily painted fur feels sticky rather than smooth and clean.

You see a lovely sable wrap on a model nearby. Just for fun examine it for singed or split ends in the guard hairs. Martens, foxes, minks—all long haired furs are apt to be inferior in this respect. Sometimes this may be natural, or it may be caused by poor dressing of the fur. It may even be a sign of an old fur.

The clerk has brought you a coat of the durable fur we've been seeking. It seems perfectly matched and well blended. But we must inspect it more closely. What about the workmanship? The facings at the front except with bulky furs such as raccoon or bear should be folded over, not extra pieces sewed at the turn. The facing must be at least 1 1/2 to 2 inches wide. Extra fine quality of fur should be in the cuffs, pockets, back of the neck and around the bottom, because these edges are going to receive especially hard wear.

What about the buttons, loops and needle work? To wear well, the lining should be made of a closely woven fabric. It is going to be subject to the same friction and wear as the fur. The interlining must be examined. Heavy interlining does give added warmth and firmness to coats with thin leathers, such as kidskin, caracul or baby lamb, but this is not the important point to be considered in most fur coats. The main purpose of the interlining is to reduce the wear from friction on both the leather and the lining. A light or medium weight flannel, quilted cotton, woolen fabric or suede are serviceable providing they are closely woven.

Even the leather side of the coat must be examined, if at all possible. A good skin has soft and supple leather. It is firm and strong but never harsh or brittle. No matter what the fur, the pelts should be pieced together uniformly. The leather may have a "staying" fabric stitched to it. This is usually a piece of material stitched to the skin to reinforce the seams and increase the fur's resistance to strain. However, you must be sure that the "staying" is not to hold defective skins together.

The money invested, if nothing else, demands that a fur coat receive the utmost care. You can't be dramatic and drop a fur wrap on the nearest chair and expect it to look nice for long. Resolve at the beginning to hang your coat on side hangers that won't strain the leather around the shoulder seams, to place it in the coolest closet in your home so that the oils of the leather won't be driven out by heat and to give it plenty of room—no clothes should be jammed against the coat to mat or break the fur.

Acquire the habit of shaking your coat when you take it off and put it on. This keeps the fur fluffy. When it is wet you should dry it in a cool room.

Eleanor White delves into fur facts to find valuable tips for spring buying.