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Fashion Finds a la francais

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Fashion Finds a la français

“Could you buy a Paris wardrobe?” asks Janice Wiegman

A FORTNIGHT in Paris! How thrilling! You have two weeks in which to buy a wardrobe and become befuddled with French terms. You arrive, wondering and respectful, a few clothes in your trunk, and in your purse (as you think) the key to the perfect Paris wardrobe. You imagine that collecting Paris costumes will be just one long spree. However, the first day is enough to convince you of your mistake.

Shopping intelligent and fruitfully in Paris is more like earning a degree. You are greeted in the salon by a man who acknowledges your presence with English—spotted with French terms. “A manteau for la jeune fille?” Perhaps you are a bit bewildered, but nevertheless intrigued. You are shown models which are très jolie, very pretty; ones which have bustles, tournure; robes de style, long full skirted gowns with tight bodices; toilette du soir, evening dresses, and many other ensembles à la mode, in fashion.

You cast longing glances at the many gowns, picking a select few to be made by the couturière, ladies’ dressmaker, who fits the garment from the model you chose. Perhaps he will suggest a few changes in the lines of the costume—décolleté, cut low in the neck, or maybe even complete pastiche, transformation. You have the feeling that it will be soigné, correct in detail, when finished.

Anything the couturière refers to as démodé or passé is in our language “old fashioned.” If he mentions frappé—don’t let your mouth prepare itself for a cooling refreshment, he is only referring to anything “closely pressed.” Another “mouth waterer” for sound is the term for the color of coffee with cream, café au lait. Other interesting color phrases are claire de lune, light of the moon—a lavender gray, composé, several colors, crevette, shrimp pink, noire, black, and rouge, red.

As you leave the atelier, workroom, of the couturière, you are tired and dejected from the deliberation over samples and discussions of the tiny details, but you may rest assured that you will soon be the owner of a bien jolie, good looking and soigné, well-groomed, gown, which is marked by its own style and fashion “parisienne,” from Paris.

Pronunciations

manteau, maw (n) -tose
la jeune fille, zhenn -fyl
très jolie, tray zho-lee
tournure, tourn-yure
couturière, coo-tyair
décolleté, day-cull-tay
pastiche, pass-tyesh
soigné, swan-yay
démédate, day-mo-day
passé, pa (as in art) -say

frappé, fra -pay
café au lait, kaffay-o-lay
claire de lune, clair-d-lune
composé, kaw-(m) -pozay
crevette, cre-vay
noire, nwar
rouge, roozh
atelier, a-tel-yay
bien jolie, bya (n) zho-lee
Parisienne, pa-rez-yenn

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