French and Fashionable

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Toni Miley reports—

FRENCH and FASHIONABLE

by Anne Beem
Technical Journalism Junior

Toni Miley, after spending 14 months in France, saw her exaggerated ideas of French creations take a nosedive when she discovered the average French woman’s taste in clothes. Paris — home of the world-famous fashion designers — has even felt a modified influence of the Davy Crockett coonskin cap! A typical example was the old French woman who used the familiar cap with its tail hanging down the back to dress up her raccoon coat.

Sees Jacques Fath Showing

Though most of France exemplified the high cost of clothing and consequent inability to buy, Toni saw the much-dreamed-of Paris in the fashion shops of Jacques Fath, Christian Dior, Jacques Heim and Craven. Toni requested tickets to these fashion showings and was put on the waiting list. Only because of last minute cancellations was she able to get in.

Black velvet sheaths with matching velvet shoes, brocaded satins and filmy pastel chiffons were modeled in plush salons. The tapestried walls and fine-grain woods were usually an off-white color with touches of gold so that the room wouldn’t detract from the models and the clothes.

“All Creations Aren’t Extreme”

“Jacques Fath,” Toni related, “impressed me with the fact that all exclusive French creations aren’t extreme and severe.” Many of the suits, cocktail dresses and formals that were modeled at his showing could have been worn in midwestern United States.

Toni exclaimed, “Imagine, wearing a $500 fur inside a non-reversible coat!” Fur was used in coat linings, in hats and on the collar and cuffs of conventional suits.

Showings in French and English

The style show, very unlike our American style shows, was held in a room accommodating about 100 people. The viewers chatted in hushed tones as the slender and dramatic models walked quickly across the room, pivoted and walked out. “Because so many Americans visited these showings, the narrative was spoken both in French and English,” added Toni.

Shoe styles in Paris are very similar to ours. The greatest difference is the slender heel. The base of the heel is very narrow, tapering off to a pencil-like thinness.

Regardless of where Toni went, French women were seen in suits. The practical suit was worn for dressy occasions, semi-dressy events and even for shopping. But when Toni wore a hat with her suit, women turned to stare and one young girl stopped her in the hotel lobby to ask, “Why are you wearing a hat? Young girls just don’t wear hats in Paris!”

The older women were very easily typified by their dress. As a result of the war, the war widows are always seen in black. “You just can’t miss noticing these women, and there are so many,” noted Toni.

Toni Buys Parisian Design

Hats in Paris are lending that definite Russian influence to the costume. High and heavy appearing, the hats are usually made of fur. Toni weakened and diminished her economic condition considerably when she bought a hat in Paris.

Because clothes were so expensive, Toni bought very little in France. She would buy material and copy a dress from memory that she had seen at a showing. The only items that she bought from fashion houses were their own brands of perfume and cosmetics.

Models at International Fair

During the early part of the summer Toni modeled for the International Trade Fair, an annual event where all nations of the world gathered to display their products. “I’ve always been interested in modeling,” said Toni, “so when I saw this job advertised by the American Embassy, I wrote, little expecting to get the position.”

She and 10 other girls modeled all day long for three weeks in the American pavilion at the fair. All the modeling was conducted to show the other nations how styles were shown in America. Toni’s only comment about her modeling experience was, “Three weeks was too short a time to model in Paris!”

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