

What Well Dressed Women Will Wear

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Revival of Ancient Venetian Clothes Stimulate Designers

Over in Paris there are two Italian houses which have been doing a rushing business with Americans. One is Babani. The other is Fortuny.

After American tourists had gone about to the well-known dressmaking houses who launch new ideas and fabrics, they cheerfully spent their money at one or the other of these Venetian shops. At such plays as "Ta Bouche," where one could hear the most tuneful melodies in Paris and gaze at smartly dressed women, one could spot these Italian gowns throughout the audience. Americans wore the majority of them.

The reason the American women waxed enthusiastic about such clothes was the ease with which they could slip into them without the exhaustion of fittings, the loss of time through appointments. The garments were on the shelves, they were adjusted to the figure, and usually followed the buyer to the hotel within the hour. Life is very simple when one can buy colorful and stimulating clothes at a minimum expenditure of time.

The Italian houses offered still another bait. They undersold the well-known dressmaking houses. This was due to a natural industrial condition; the garments were made in bulk in Italy in different sizes and, because of their apparent shapelessness, they could be easily adjusted to any normal figure.

Over here, Americans acknowledge these gowns on each other wherever social life is whirling. The trick of recognition has gone so far that it promotes a kind of good fellowship. One woman passes another in the theatre, looks at her ruby colored crushed velvet gown embroidered in a pattern of silver Renaissance lace with sleeves that come to the hand, and a neck line that reaches to the collar bone, and says in a half whisper, "Babani's." And the two women smile at each other.

A man thought this was a new game, something like "Beaver." He looked about for beards.

"Did you say 'Beaver,'" he asked of a woman in the theatre. "Where is he?"

"He? What?" was her puzzled answer. "I said 'Babani' for the woman near me wears one."

"But, is it a new game for women like 'Beaver,'" he asked. Then she explained. And he was disgusted. "Oh, clothes," he said, and let the subject drop.

Back to the Court of Doges

Because an American woman could walk into a shop out of the rush and turmoil of Paris traffic and buy a gown she could wear that night, which cost her 1,100 francs, she took quick advantage of the chance. The fact that it was ruby or gray, yellow or brown velvet, half covered with the open floriated pattern of Fourteenth Century Venice, gave her the right to believe it would attract attention. And it did.

If she could buy a wrap for 1,200 francs made of crushed velvet, warm and protective, with a deep Italian cape about the shoulders heavily embroidered, she snatched at it. In truth, it was difficult to get Americans out of these two shops. They found garments that were higher and lower in price than this, but with the franc running above 13 to a dollar, they felt as though they were getting clothes almost for nothing.

Women who did not want frocks and wraps bought blouses, kimono, even pajamas. Not that anyone in Fourteenth Century

Italy wore pajamas, but Venice borrowed a leaf from the Persian book and prepared exotic trousers with long tunics of velvet and brocade that would catch the eye of others than an actress who was playing in one of the half million bedroom farces that constitute America's chief form of theatrical amusement.

Italian Influence Is Widespread

It was not given to every woman to go over to Paris this year and be able to buy these ready-to-wear Italian clothes, but their influence is spreading through the talk of tourists who brought them home.

They are being copied and women find they are easy to build. True crushed velvet of Venice is not easy to buy in this country and it gives a certain antique look to the frock that women like, but the heavy satin of other Italian garments, and thin fine velvet, are used with good result. The Italian ruffled velvet looks like a fabric that has been washed and left to dry without ironing. It has its practical side, for it does not show creasing and crushing. The smooth velvets do.

These particular colors are not always easy to get in this country, but women who are searching for fabrics should remember that a deep wine red, a soft yellow beige, a warm light gray and faded copper are shades that give such garments the look of old Italy.

There is not much variety in the decoration. It is either embroidered in several colors in a small floriated pattern with cross lines of embroidery or tarnished metal thread, or it is the open pattern of Venetian lace, one that is well-known. Most women are familiar with it through table linen, large collars and wide cuffs.

The lace is always in gold or silver; never of white thread. Deep borders of it are used on the skirt or around the oblong Italian décolletage. Rarely is the lace used on both bodice and skirt, for it is mediaeval in weight and appearance of splendor. Too much of it spoils the effect.

The cut of the gown is straight, like a chemise, and the girdle is a string of the fabric wound once or twice around the upper part of hips. The sleeves are long, tied at the wrist, wrinkled up to the elbows and of excessive width at the top. They are not set in at the shoulders; they are cut as part of the gown. The garment slips over the head.

The Venetian wraps have delighted American women, for they serve many purposes, from the bathroom to the opera. They are usually square with wide sleeves and a deep decoration of metallic lace around the neck and down front. The lining is often the yellow of gold, the inside fabric is satin the outside fabric is velvet. Some of these wraps have embroidery instead of metal lace, but they are not so effective.

None of them have fur. None of the Venetian clothes are found with fur. They call for pearls, for strings of jade or coral, or the bright blue crystals that have the coloring of Italian lakes. These blue necklaces came into first fashion in Paris along with the Venetian revival. They are a bit less common than the green Chinese beads. Women found that they can wear any of these bead necklaces with the Italian gown better than with the modern American frocks.

Venetian Tunics Rival the Chinese

When one has to pay in America fifty dollars more or less for a good-looking overblouse with striking decoration, it is not to be wondered at that the Americans

quickly picked up in Paris the Venetian blouses of heavy crepe de chine or satin, daringly and delightfully decorated, at less than twenty dollars. They are swagging about quite proudly in these garments in their own home towns. They look rich and expensive and one only whispers the real price to an intimate friend. Then one says it is francs.

They are not caught in at the hips like the average overblouse. They flare considerably at each side, they are rather short, and the decoration is often bright Italian blue and gold. The sleeves slope upward from waistline to elbow, grow tight and wrinkled at the wrist, where they are fastened with a bright band of blue and gold embroidery that reaches up the sleeve to elbow. There is a deep opening in front which is fastened up with small loops and buttons edged and decorated with bright blue and gold.

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