

THE Paris Collections are an old-fashioned variety show. Molyneux's hoop-flared day skirts walk beside Lanvin's modern peg-topped hobble skirts; Balenciaga's wide Velasquez paniers dance past Paquin's tightly wrapped mummy skirts; Schiaparelli's full Turkish harem ankle-length evening vie with her own slim 1880 bustle-backed skirts; Molyneux's plastered-to-the-figure bodices for day, contrast with Chanel's softly shirred ones. Suzy says "tuck your back hair in a snood bag"; Talbot says "wrap your chin in a mesh bandage veil"; Schiaparelli says "hold your hat on with a forehead or chin strap." Everyone has different suggestions. Yet for all this rich confusion, discretion is the better part of fashion.

Nothing varies more than silhouette. You can look as different from your neighbour as the moon from the sun—and both of you are right. The only thing that you must have in common is a tiny waist, held in if necessary by super-lightweight boned and laced corsets. There isn't a silhouette in Paris that doesn't cave in at the waist.

The modern variation of the hobble skirt, though also a revival, is merely pre-war, while other revivals go back as far as Velasquez. Piguet's narrow look round the knees, soft drapery round the hips, is something you'd better get used to. Flared skirts continue youthful, easy to wear, particularly when godet-flared from the hipbone as Molyneux does them; or when topped by the shortest of fur boleros, and held in by the widest of belts, as you see at Vionnet. Straight skirts pair best with the new longer jackets.

The cigarette silhouette belongs to Schiaparelli—those long tubular jackets, those skirts discreetly draped up at the back, that busy feminine look round the chin with fur bibs, ribbon or tulle lock-jaw hat strings, those fur or fabric muffs over the stomach, sometimes cut in one with the dress (page 29). Flared-back peplum jackets, curving down at the back, up at the front, come from Lelong and Maggy Rouff, generally allied to back movement in the skirt. Wrapped and tied drapery over the hips is a Balenciaga and Alix speciality, giving a bandaged look. Soft shirred bodices and skirts make Chanel's day dresses feminine and easy to wear.

Newest for evening is that covered look, even in formal dresses—coming in strongly on the fashion tide, while bare strapless shoulders are on the ebb. Long sleeves, high necks, developed in superb fabrics, is the new elegance. The focal point is from the waist down: Chanel's and Vionnet's bodices moulded to below the hips, where they break into flared tulle skirts; Alix's chiffon jersey, drawn tight as a stocking; Molyneux's perfectly proportioned ankle-length evening dresses that destroy our short evening skirt resistance. Balenciaga alternates Velasquez panier skirts with 1880 bustles. Patou uses drapery taken from Tanagra figurines. Paquin wraps mannequins like mummies in elastic velvet, so they can walk if they must. Lanvin does some perfect Turkish drapery round the hips of pre-war evening skirts. There are examples of the full and lean and practically everything between.

Take your trimming, or leave it off completely—as Molyneux, who even eliminates belts. Every form of passementerie, from tassels to admirals' gold braid, runs fluently, but not flamboyantly, through the collections. Chanel's bib-like jewel necklaces sewn on dresses; Francevramant's jewel-studded fur collars; quantities of El Greco ruffs—are all new notes.

Shoes come to the ankle—Schiaparelli's warmest suggestion being fur ankle boots. Evening shoes match the dress in colour and fabric. All agree on covered toes.

Colours are sullen: threatening blues; foggy greys; sea-storm greens and purples, so dark that they have the quality of black. New clear strong colours are billiard-cloth green, cerise, orange, and Lelong's gallant Robin-Hood red and green. Brown and black are an invincible new alliance: pure Constantin Guys.

Daytime fabrics are soft smooth woollens, spongy crêpes, duvetyns and velvets, plus miles of every weight and weave of jersey. In the evening, they grow gorgeous. Heavy damasks, cut velvets, brocades and super-satins: silks in the great tradition.

Fur is lavished on the new clothes in a new way. Not conventional collar and cuffs, but plastrons, bibs, pockets, whole jacket-fronts, backed by cloth. Or your suit may be furless—the better to point up your fur hat and muff.

Most notable among accessories are all the things to clutch in your hand: muffs, fans, coloured gloves, amusing handbags like Balenciaga's giant medallions and velvet sunflowers.



Balenciaga
your face
Velasquez
coloured
swing fu

Paris Variety Show

1939 way to a little waist

URST



HERE is a woman of 1939 in a dress designed by Molyneux. Look at her silhouette. Compare it with the one opposite. Outwardly they're almost the same. The same little waist. The same rounded hips. The same round bust. (Some call it the wasp-waisted figure, some call it the hour glass, some the scissors silhouette.) But the modern woman puts up with no tortures—not while “Lastex” yarn still gives. True, lacing is back, but not grandmother’s kind! And the woman of 1939 gets some figure help from the dress itself—this one is stiffened to stand out at the hips.

The three corsets at the right will persuade you gently. The near one, frilled and beribboned in character, has back lacing but elastic side inserts to allow your hips freedom. The top corset has front honing as well as back lacing, but again elastic side panels—both from Marian Jacks. The last, from Berlei, has an elastic band *inside* at the waistline to minimise your waist.

