

Costumes and Head Decorations Designed by Paul Poiret



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By One Who Knows.

MONSIEUR Paul Poiret is a genius. The work of a genius is the one thing in the movement of life that can not be ignored nor can it be put aside to await our pleasure in considering it. It is a storm which comes, charging the atmosphere to the breaking point and leaving it fresh and clear for new work and experiment.

M. Poiret is the storm which has swept the whole of Europe. Paris first was Poiret-mad less than five years ago and to-day it is impossible to walk any street in civilization without seeing some touch of his influence.

At present he is visiting America ostensibly to study the tastes of Americans; but if the truth were known, to study the American Indian and adopt in some of his creations the Indian's elaborate personal adornments. This may seem a curious idea to the uninformed, but we all know the great influence the ancient Egyptians have had on our modern dress. It has been used so much that the designers are at a loss to find new suggestions and it is not odd that Monsieur Poiret should be the one to go to the root and discover a means. It is a long trail he has followed, for few of us know that Africa and South America were one continent in ages gone by, and that the chiefs of the Navajoes and Iroquois tribes were but other Pharaohs.

But oceans and centuries have not stopped this worker from his search for the decorative and we are interested to see how our ignored Indian will appear modulated by his French taste. We are interested also to know how modern

America has impressed him. The French being nothing if not polite and discreet, he has been reticent in giving his views beyond this. "That the American woman of all women is the most daring," that "she is the least bound by tradition" and that "America is the place of all where originality should have greatest scope."

LET US for the enlightenment of this daring woman (we do not deny she is daring but perhaps her Puritan traditions are more real than he suspects) pay a visit to this great innovator, and let her judge if, in this garden of Eden, of dress creations, she will eat the apple of knowledge. It is truly a garden that we enter. Monsieur Poiret on the Rue Faubourg St. Honoré. A taxi takes us to the gate in the heart of Paris, but on leaving our conveyance, we have left commercialism and the common behind us, and after as long as Monsieur Poiret thinks our appreciation entitles us, he shows us his rooms, his garden, his creations and to a few his workshops.

The hotel and garden, which form his establishment, are as old as some of his inspirations. It was once a royal residence. Everything is simple and perfectly proportioned. There are two bronze deer by the central walk, and a figure of Venus. Every gown which Monsieur Poiret makes is made for this one perfect woman! Monsieur Poiret says she is perfect, and we are willing to believe him. All other dress designers make gowns for women. Poiret makes gowns for "woman," and here, before we enter his door, let us understand him fundamentally. To his woman's beauty is an idea, a spirit, not

merely a fact; she is not an object on which to hang trimmings, but a jewel to be set. Always in harmony with her surroundings, but at the same time to be protected from them.

HER gowns never conform to the shapes of the figure, as most gowns, which either display or disguise it, but always have a definite form of their own, as has been so in all the finest epochs of dress. He has no interest whatever in fashion, giving all effort to the creation of style; and he has certain fixed principles from which he never varies. Always there is the high waist line, inspired by his Venus, and if some women are not beautiful enough to wear his gowns—it is too bad—for the women. He has his Venus. And Madame Poiret can wear what she will, but the surprise is that many women are more like his Venus than they had supposed.

When we have seen a representation of his collection, perhaps we are taken to his sanctuary. This is where the nucleus of a model is given its expression. So far, we have seen order, arrangement, selection, and simplicity forced to the last degree. Here we have the disorder of a wanton. Thousands of dollars' worth of the rarest stuff lay piled in delirious masses of intermingled colors about the floor. The effect of these masses is indescribable, for no one of us has ever seen such an array of color. The fumes rise from his travels through the world, the stuffs made to his own order and his experiments are endless. All go to make up this kaleidoscope and the return it gives him seems also without limit.

POIRET'S costumes are never trimmed in the ordinary sense of the word. From the very first conception they are built. The ornament to be used, if there be any, is part of the architecture of the dress. Degas, the French painter, who has been so successful in his composition of ballets and intricate groupings of all kinds, said, "The mediocre painter uses twenty people to represent a crowd. It takes a genius to do it with five." Poiret has this kind of genius. Simplicity is his motto. Yet his things never fall in richness of effect.

Callot Soeurs, Paquin, Redfern, and all the exclusive houses in Paris have to some degree submitted to the demands of their buyers. The ornaments used in their gowns and the stuffs from which they are made can be duplicated, but with Poiret, it is a very different affair. Many of his materials are his own design. Or if he buys from a dealer, it is only with the understanding that all of that particular material shall be sold to him, and the cards from which it is made destroyed.

HE has adopted a most novel scheme for obtaining original designs, and this is only one of many directions his inventive mind has taken. Years ago, at the Salon D'Antoine, in connection with the art decorative section, the rotunda of the Grande Palais was beautifully decorated with hangings of so naive and original a character that everyone was curious. It developed that they had been designed by children, and further investigation showed that the Martine School, under Poiret's direction, had been founded. He took only children from the ages of eight to fourteen, who—and on this point he was insistent—who had never before had any "drawing lessons." They were set to work to play with paints, and under his guidance and by letting them come under the influence of the best Oriental art, the results were incredible.

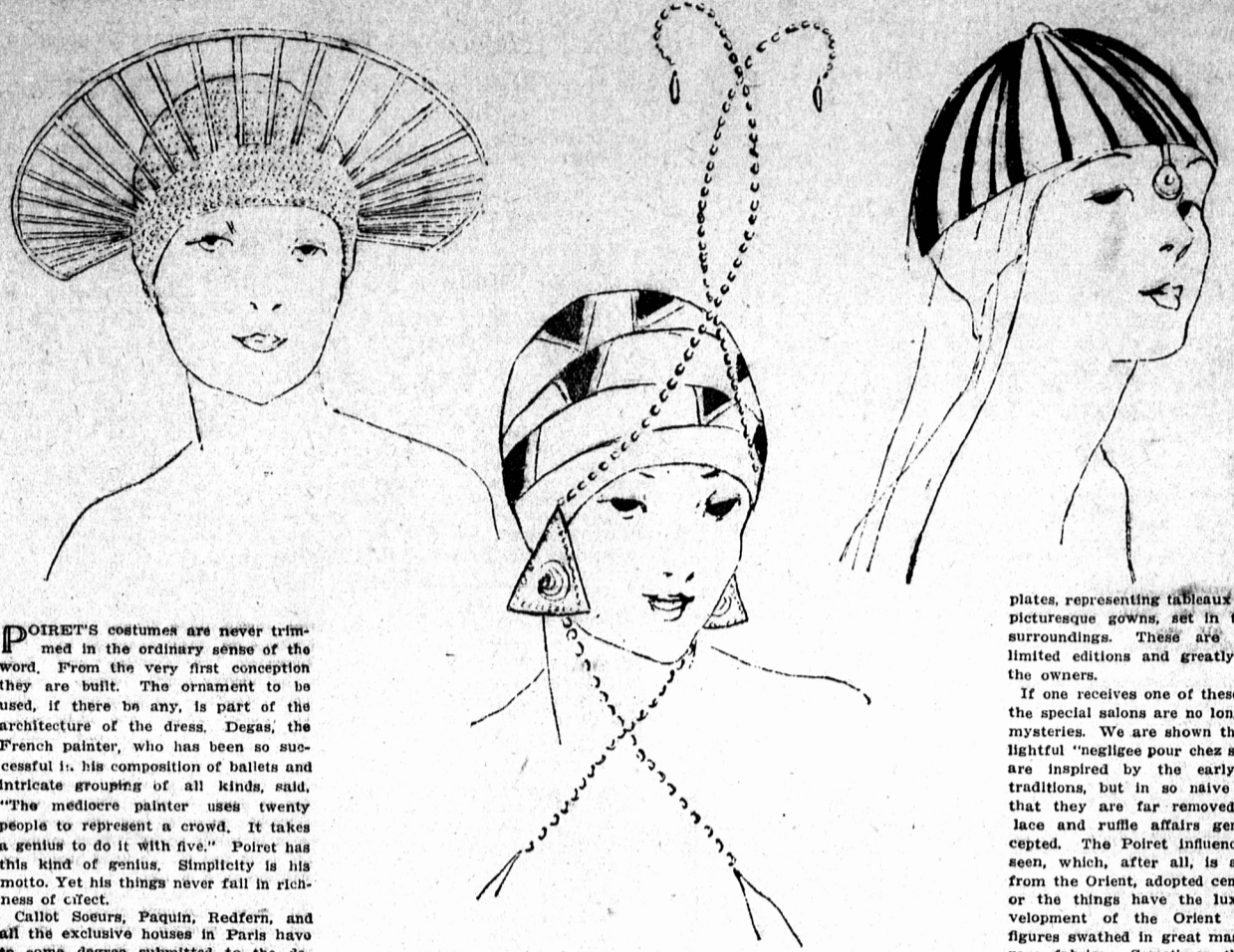
Poiret is a writer of ballads, a violinist of ability and a "composer," shall we say of perfumes? Everything that appeals to the senses, to his mind, it is the work of the artist constantly to readjust.

HE began with what the Empire could yield him in suggestion, the classic influence with its simple masses, and worked backwards against the current, to Rome at its height, still further to the Greek model, and then to its source, the monumental Egyptian. He has gone to the Tyrolean peasant, the Brittany peasant, traced through the looms of the Irish lace-makers to find it reappear through centuries of Celtic traditions in the designs of the Gtuttons, but never stopping until he has reached the source—followed to Persia, where we find him now adopting for the modern mind the enchantment of the Queen of Sheba. He has peeped into the land of Madame Butterfly, which is to China what America is to Europe, and has given us the kimono sleeves and the simple spot of decoration on a simple round hat. What he will give us from China we do not know, but his most cherished possession is a Chinese goddess, for which he has built a shrine.

What wonder, then, with his knowledge of the world's history of luxury, he should be looked to by the critical Parisian as an oracle.

IT is this surprise that makes this innovator's vogue wider each year. Women everywhere have made the experiment of discarding their corset, their elongated waist, their clumsy undergarments and the beautiful Poiret Venus is becoming the dress, to a great degree, of women everywhere.

Let us see how he introduces us to his creations. We are ushered into a room of the utmost simplicity; the carpet is crimson, the chairs and sofas are perfect examples of the simple early French period of Louis XIII, the ceilings are of a great height, the walls are bare except for simple bands of decoration around the windows and doors. A doorway, reaching nearly to the ceiling and very wide, shows us another large salon from which a wide staircase leads to the special boudoirs and reception rooms, decorated in different color schemes for different creations. In the great doorway hangs in long, straight lines, plain silk curtains of bright color.



As we sit in expectancy, we realize that nothing but the most perfectly conceived robes could stand the simplicity of this setting, and we relax under the influence of the room to wait for a black velvet curtain to part and admit a manikin, who glides toward us over the thickly padded carpet.

AFTER we have viewed the succession of what all artists have from the first agreed an unparalleled masterpiece, the silence is broken. Monsieur

Poiret, with the jealous eye of the inventor, asks our opinion; we are part of the public, and so in part his judge, but we feel the situation is reversed, and it is really a severe judge we are before. One who, while presenting his things for sale, remains the dictator. If he approves, he may give us a souvenir of appreciation, for he is most genial when understood. Every year or so he has one of the best French draughtsmen—Le Pape or Paul Trive—make him an album of beautiful printed

plates, representing tableaux of his most picturesque gowns, set in their proper surroundings. These are printed in limited editions and greatly prized by the owners.

If one receives one of these, certainly the special salons are no longer held in mystery. We are shown the most delightful "neglige pour chez soi." These are inspired by the early fantastic traditions, but in so naive a manner that they are far removed from the lace and ruffle affairs generally accepted. The Poiret influence is often seen, which, after all, is a reflection from the Orient, adopted centuries ago, or the things have the luxuriant envelopment of the Orient itself, the figures swathed in great masses of the rare fabrics. Sometimes the peasant idea is used, all the edges bound simply in pale orange.

At the Theater Renaissance last Winter was given "Le Minaret," an Oriental fantasia in which the figures were all gowned in Paul Poiret.

The first model is dressed in a dark unobtrusive suit perhaps, for we are not in the first minute to see the gems of the collection, but in gradual steps we are led up to Poiret's more individual and intimate conceptions of dress.

The manikin are trained with the care of a ballet master. They wear their clothes as only the French woman knows how, with the added grace and the freedom of movement which they have acquired under their present tutor. It may be, the gowns themselves have had a large influence over the movement of their wearers, for in the great simple folds there seems never a hint of restraint.

In and out they pass from the little black curtained doorway. Some seem to be born on the instant; they are so happy and surprising in their flower-like coloring. Always there is a surprise.

The beautiful Andre appears. We have been waiting for her, the most regal model in Paris. The rhythm of her movements, as she advances, is as beautiful as in some Eastern dance. We feel that she could wear anything, and it would hang beautifully. But we are soon aware she is clothed as best her. In a voluminous wrap of a red so brilliant that we gasp. Who would have dared that is who else? But the cleverness of its designer becomes apparent—no touch of the red approaches to within the length of a hair to Andre's white vibrating throat. A great band of purest white ermine sets her head as a jeweler sets a priceless pearl.

This ermine continues to the ground. The artist knows that white will protect any color from contact with another. Andre walks away and we are surprised to see that the white continues down the back. The sleeves also are white. The balance is perfect. She turns again toward us, and standing with the grace of a Greek Tanagra, she opens her arms like two great wings. See illustration.

She has been transfigured before our eyes and stands a slender white hand gold form from the top of her pale hair to the tips of her small white feet. She is a white on gold, gold on white, and in such a setting! Again we gasp. Who could have conceived it? It is like looking into the calyx of a deep purple orchid, for it is with mauve he has lined this brilliant cloak.

The mass of color drops to the floor. Another flower voluminously clothed in yellow appears. This is the yellow of a Persian enamel; and as she turns and spreads her arms, we see a black and silver column of a figure against a great swirling design, Persian in its origin of black and gray.

THERE are many wraps of evening design and there are costumes as light and fantastic as the clouds are royal and magnificent. The famous lamp-shaped gown appears. (See illustration). The bodice is half black and half white, and from a high pink girdle hangs a tunic of thin white silk embroidered in pink beaded roses, designed by Paul Poiret. There are no folds in the tunic, for it is held out at the bottom by a hoop, tilting up in the front and disclosing a pink lining. The effect is extremely quaint and most daring.

The Queen of Sheba enters with a Persian headdress and a long peacock train. The white skirt forms long diagonal lines, as it winds about her form and clings tightly to her ankles.



This evening gown is made of lemon chiffon combined with lemon-colored satin. One long chiffon scarf end falling over the left arm is weighted with a gold-fringed ornament, embroidered in red, green, yellow, blue metallic threads and beads. The same design is carried out in the belt, which is also edged with gold fringe. A beaded motif draws the two chiffon scarfs, which form the drapery, over the satin train.

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