



"Jacquard San-Ta-Si."

"Paulette Chiffon."

"Chippendale Print."

"Brocaded Cinderella."

"Syn-Sa-Ni Jacquard."

The Artistic Triumph of American Silks

SILK weaving, that ancient of the arts, has reached within the confines of our own American shores a greater degree of all-around perfection than ever before has been achieved. Our artists have faced their problem on a huge scale, they have designed and built their structure to withstand the ravages of criticism and of all general wear and tear, to the end that the result of their untiring efforts stands before us today—one to be wondered at as it is to be admired.

If one stops to realize that, when the war started, America had no stand at all as a silk manufacturing nation, one begins to perceive the rapid strides that have been made and the magnitude of the thing that has been accomplished. When importation suddenly ceased and women were forced, over night as it were, to buy only American silks, there was great consternation in fashionable circles. The home-woven product was not at all popular from any standpoint and what were we to do without all the lovely foreign stuffs that had, by long usage and satisfaction, become the rightful possessions of women wearers? The situation seemed hopeless.

Now, after but five short years have passed, America is not only producing her own irreplaceable silken fabrics, but so completely have the tables turned that she is actually sending them abroad so that the Parisian designers may use them in fashioning their far-famed creations. A strip of modest, American silk takes a trip across the water, sojourns for a brief time in gay Paris and returns transformed into a gown wonderful to behold—a balanced composition of American and French art. This is, indeed, a novel state of affairs and one of which we can, in all humility, be justly proud.

In order to accomplish this feat of manufacturing art it has been necessary for those engaged in the making of silk in this country to assemble large staffs of trained artists and artisans. Not only have they had to gather these groups together but they also have had to train them in the matter of efficient production commensurate with unsettled and sometimes tragic labor conditions.

IT used to be said about America and any artistic production of this character that we could not do thus and so on account of high labor costs, inartistic backgrounds of education, etc. But quantity production in this as in many other branches of manufacture, has been refined and perfected until today we are in the strategic position of giving demonstrations of how it can be done. In other words, we are leading the world, and each day we are developing greater perfection in the matter of silk weaving, keeping visions ever more glorious before our excited eyes.

So great is the radical change that has come over this American silk situation, that women

today are proud to wear the materials that are characteristic of their own country. It took no propaganda for citizenship to achieve this marvel. It was the worth of the material itself that did the deed. And those among our women who do not know that the handsome brocades, the delicate chiffons, and the heavy drapery silks they wear are American to their souls, may be astonished to learn that these, more beautiful than foreign fabrics, grew from the conceptions of their own artist citizens and were woven in mills right around the corner.

WHEN America in her silk weaving childhood looked into the problem of collecting designs for the silks that she contemplated printing she knew not where to turn her gaze. Any number of designers were loose about the country but their innate abilities were suffering keenly from a total lack of knowledge about the processes of printing, die making, stamping, etc. First of all these aspiring artists and designers had to be hunted out and educated and it was right here that the Art Alliance of America stepped in to do an invaluable service in helping to disseminate the necessary information. It was not long before designers were bringing forward patterns strong in originality and in American feeling. To be sure they went to the museums and to their antique fabrics for their inspiration but, fortunately, in this connection they had at their disposal treasures hard to equal.

After the designs have been assembled in each season, then the Art Alliance invites all American silk weavers and manufacturers to an exhibition where they may see displayed the results of the work of the American designers. There they are privileged to buy the patterns, or to criticize them or to offer suggestions for greater perfection in days to come.

Many of these American patterns on printed silks and chiffons have met with astonishing success. As fast as they can be produced and put upon the market they are gobbled up by those women who are hungry to appear in anything so artistically satisfying. The soft tones of the printed chiffons are particularly desirable and as for the intricately woven metal brocades and brocaded chiffons, nothing of the kind more marvelous has been achieved in any country at any time. We are living through an era of notable silk design, some of the specimens of which will be sure to live on for years to come.

ONCE, some years ago, an importation of Martin silks, designed by Poiret, created such a stir among appreciators of this sort of thing that they were the talk of the town. Pilgrimages were made to the counters where they were on sale and those fortunate enough and wealthy enough to be able to purchase a yard or two were envied by hosts of their longing neighbors. Now, with wonder, those same

admirers may behold silks printed in America, many of which compare most favorably with those of a former day—and they can more readily achieve the ownership of these new silks which are lower in price than the imported ones—even though we still hear surreptitious groans at present prices. Really, however, they are surprisingly low in price considering the art and the craftsmanship shown in their manufacture.

After all, it is the weaving of silk which has been so admirably perfected in this country. Where once the manufacturer confined his efforts to the simplest of silks and satins, now he indulges his art in all sorts of intricate weaves. There is one sort of silk that has the same threads of the same color woven most interestingly into blocks, one of which shimmers in one way and the other in quite the opposite way. Then there is another variety of weave which shows little Turkish towel humps of silk on one side—these in a light shade of some color—and on the opposite side there appears a plain, satiny surface of the same color in a darker shade. It is ever a question in the mind of the costume designer which side shall be used for the right side, for each is as beautiful as the other and the result of the mental controversy is often a subtle combination of back and front, as it were.

SOME of these new weaves are known as "Jaquards." In them the two tones of one color have been so elaborately combined that we see motifs repeated over the surface of the silk and all worked out as a matter of clever weaving. Others of the new silks are woven with a quite open mesh, some of the threads being knotted and some plain so that the effect of the material is of something soft and pliable, not to be rivalled in the matter of beautiful draping on gowns.

Then there are the chiffons and Georgettes and indestructible voiles printed in the loveliest of hues and tones. One technically uneducated is quite bewildered when asked to contemplate the vast number of colors that have been used and the involved manner in which the printing is done. The bare truth remains, in spite of surrounding details, that never before have we been confronted with such perfection in the matter of soft and silky fabrics and that we, having been given this new standard of art in dress, cannot help but allow our imaginations to wander on indefinitely into ways that will make of us American women beauties in spite of ourselves.

Dyes that were once so unspeakable when the word American was tacked to them—they, too, have been piling up some of this new standard of perfection until they leave nothing to be desired. In the way of sparkling color they hold their own, and we are told that they have developed, along with this

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attribute, durable qualities for which we can only give thanks. We, long sufferers on this account, needed that touch to our native fabrics.

The recent evolution of color appreciation in silks as well as in dress is one of the thrilling aspects in this matter of the lustrous new fabrics. American women used, somehow, to be afraid of color. Some scoffers intimated that they were not educated to the point of properly appreciating it. But at any rate, there was a time when they, as a rule, showed little enough of beauty in this direction. Now, when real subtleties of shades and tones are actually presented for their choosing, they show themselves keenly desirous of that very thing.

The actual existence of all these gorgeous silks is one thing and the art of their construction into gowns is another. Then that is where American costume designers have added beauty into beauty, for it is they who have achieved the last degree of artistic triumphs in the way they have handled the fabrics created especially for their uses.

Some of the greatest favorites are known by the fantastic names of "Khaki-Kool," "Fantasi," "Paulette Chiffon," "Indestructible Voile," "Dew Kist," "Kum-si-Kumsa," "Moon Glo," etc.

All through the frocks presented for Southern and early Spring wear the strong influence of the newly woven and printed silks is evident. In every direction we see them made up in ways that are new and styles that are thrilling. In fact, silks hold a more conspicuous place in our dressing than they have in some years past and the reason for this condition is that the silks are growing better and better and that their qualities of sheer beauty and becomingness have come to be a stern necessity in the wardrobe of every woman.