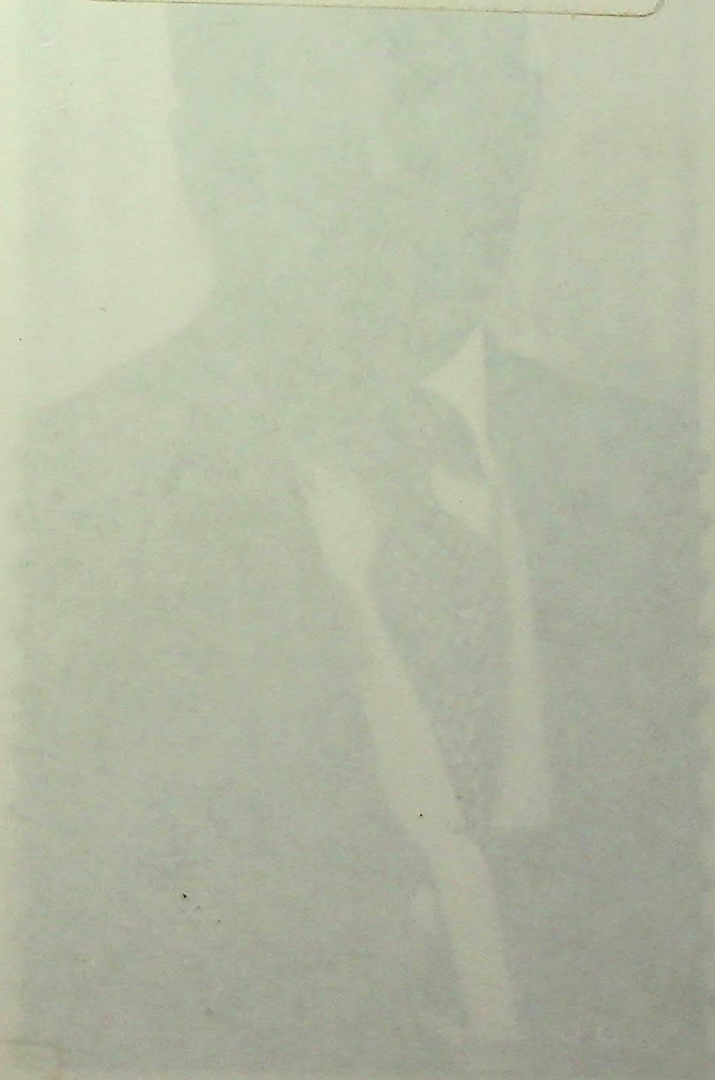


Paul
Poiret

Doibhe Cronn
N. Gordon Bowe



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paul poiret



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THE NATIONAL COLLEGE OF ART & DESIGN

"THE RISE AND FALL OF PAUL POIRET"

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THE FACULTY OF HISTORY OF ART AND DESIGN

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PAUL POIRET 37 RUE PASQUIER A PARIS

Bernard Naudin's graphics for Paul Poiret's salon in the rue Pasquier



POIRET AS CARICATURED BY OBERLÉ.

INTRODUCTION

This thesis is a study of the life of the French couturier, Paul Poiret, from the years 1904 to 1924. This period in his life saw him rise rapidly to stardom and to this day he remains unchallenged as one of the greatest creators of haute couture in the early years of this century.

He emancipated women from the corset and offered them simple, elegant clothing cut from the finest fabrics. His sources of inspiration were many and varied but he drew heavily on the cultures of the Far East and created dresses which resembled the oriental styles embodying fine detail and rich colours into his own creations.

Poiret's interests were not strictly those of a couturier. He had a great passion for all artistic forms. Many of his friends were artists and sculptors such as Brancusi and Dongen. In the year 1911 he founded the Ecole Martine of Interior Design and his perfume business Rosine.

Although ahead of his time in terms of foresight and vision, he unfortunately clung steadfastly to his idealistic values and failed to take into account new developments as his career progressed. As a result he tragically fell into debt and finally into bankruptcy in 1924.

In exploring the reasons for his inability to remain as a driving force as a couturier after the first World War it is necessary to examine the factors which inspired him to innovate the fashion of his day, that at the same time prevented him from changing his own unique style in order to take account of the ever changing face of fashion.



A FEW OF POIRET'S EARLIER SKETCHES

CHAPTER ONE - "INSPIRATIONS"

Although Poiret did not establish his own fashion house until 1904, the factors which influenced him before this time were important not only in the development of his own unique style as a couturier, but also in the manner in which he considered his creations to be art forms rather than products in a business sense.

Born in Paris on the 29th of April 1879, the son of a cloth merchant in the Rue de Deux-Ecus, he spent all of his early life in Paris. Naturally his parents' business had some bearing on his future career, but they did not share his enthusiasm for his chosen path straight away. Poiret's grandmother was instrumental in introducing him to the theatre which was the start of a lifelong association with it as a patron but, more importantly, as a designer for many of the actresses of his era.

In his youth he was apprenticed to an umbrella maker, much to his distaste, but his father insisted because he thought it would give his son a sense of discipline and a trade. During this time he taught himself sketching at home. The sale of his first sketches gave him the incentive to make inroads into the fashion business.

In 1896 he began to work for the couturier, Jacques Doucet. Doucet immediately advanced Poiret 500 francs. This was such an unprecedented move that Poiret's father took it upon himself to check this money back to source to ensure it wasn't gained unlawfully. This was typical of Doucet, a man who seemed totally detached from his business, yet was extremely generous. Doucet's house was renowned for its high quality classical clothing. But along with his business Doucet was as well known as a collector of art. His collection was the largest in Paris at the time and included a great range of artistic

styles from many continents. The artists ranged from Watteau, Boucher and Latour from the Louis XV and XVI period to the contemporary art of the Impressionists, such as Monet, Van Gogh and Degas. One of his most impressive acquisitions was 'Demoiselles d'Avignon' by Picasso and his collection was also augmented by African sculpture. He welcomed fellow enthusiasts to view his incredible collection and he introduced Poiret to art. This left a strong impression on Poiret, not only in terms of his later creations as a couturier but also in his love for other forms of artistic expression.

Whilst in Doucet's employ Poiret was entrusted with the design of a robe for a famous actress of the time, Rejane, which gave him his first opportunity to impress the Paris crowds. He rose to the occasion creating a stunning oriental robe which gave him some notoriety as a designer in his own right.

After a time Doucet found Poiret's creations too extravagant and new and they parted their ways. Doucet's influence as a couturier was to find further expression in another of his students, Madeleine Vionnet, who joined him at a later date in 1907. Her first collection with Doucet was considered to be revolutionary not only in respect to Doucet's hitherto conservative style but also in terms of the new style of Vionnet's work for which she was later to be acclaimed as the only true creator of haute couture in the twentieth century. She herself established her own house in 1912. She perfected the style of fluid-bias-cut garments in filmy fabrics and pale tint which reflected the time she spent with Doucet. Ironically she was one of the key figures along with Gabrielle Chanel who outmoded Poiret's designs in the 1920's.

After Poiret's departure from the house of Doucet he was later employed as an assistant in the house of Worth, the most respected couturiers in Europe that supplied all the royal courts and members of high society. Founded by Charles Fredrick Worth, an Englishman, the business had been handed down to his two sons,



Drawing by Jean-Louis Boussingault to illustrate an article written by Poiret under the pseudonym of Al. Terego for *La Grande Revue*, May 1909. The old v. the new. A dowager scrutinizing a creation of the revolutionary young designer Paul Poiret.

son and Jean. Gaston was the one who hired Poiret; he felt that would bring new flair and originality into the firm, because there was a new demand for simple, practical dresses even amongst the most famous royal courts. Upon hiring Poiret he addressed him for the first time saying:-

"We are in the position of a fine restaurant, wishing to serve nothing but truffles. What we need here is a department for fried potatoes."¹.

Unfortunately Gaston's brother, Jean, was of the old school of thought and despised Poiret as much as Gaston liked him. His argument was that their father had supplied his clients with exactly what they wanted (traditional, classical clothing) and that they, in turn, had won the House of Worth patronage that extended throughout the whole country for generations. He felt therefore that to change their style would be detrimental to their business.

The situation wasn't made any easier by Poiret's self-confidence which was far greater than his age or experience warranted. He did, however, design excellent dresses in the style for which he had been hired, the 'new' style Gaston wished to incorporate into the House of Worth.

Although Poiret's creations were in strong demand they were sometimes met with disapproval from the more conservative older members of Worth's clientele. On one occasion in particular Polish Countess Barlatinsky frowned upon one of Poiret's more exotic creations not belonging to the modern spirit which she disliked, much to the delight of Jean Worth. However that particular creation went on to be worn many times over.

Regardless of the animosity between Jean Worth and Poiret at the time Poiret was to later write in his memoirs that

"The dresses that left the hand of
Jean were marvels of art and purity"²

He went on further to describe the method by which Jean set about designing. He drew sketches from paintings of the classical masters and then dictated his ideas to his dressmakers who would then set about perfecting his ideas under his supervision. The method was what impressed Poiret immediately but on another level it was to influence his philosophy on the alliance of art and couture, especially at a later stage when Poiret himself was to become the old-fashioned master with the arrival of another new style in the twenties. He almost mirrored Jean Worth's sentiments when he said in a lecture in Paris many years later:

"Am I mad when I try to put art into
my dresses or when I say couture is an
art."³

This sentiment was however to develop at a later stage and their end products were always to be diametrically opposed.

The tension between Poiret and Worth was increasing as time went on and it finally became unbearable when they received a huge order for classic ceremonial garb for the Coronation of Edward VII in England. The order was so large that it left little scope for Poiret's imagination and he handed in his resignation to Gaston who accepted because the tension had become unbearable between Poiret and Jean and Poiret's talents could not be utilised in light of the recent occurrences.

After his departure from the House of Worth, Poiret quickly began to establish his own business and then only really began to show his true abilities.

FOOTNOTE

1. Yvonne Deslandres
Paul Poiret
Thames and Hudson
1987
page 205

2. Yvonne Deslandres
Paul Poiret
Thames and Hudson
1987
page 207

3. Yvonne Deslandres
Paul Poiret
Thames and Hudson
1987
page 106



Gouache by Lepape of a Paul Poiret model, 1914. Blondel collection

RIGHT:
MADAME POIRET'S COSTUME FOR THE PLAY
'LE MINARET' WITH A PURPLE MUSLIN TUNIC
AND RED MUSLIN TROUSERS. THE PURPLE HAT
HAS A PEARL FRINGE. (PHOTOGRAPH BY HENRI
MANOEL).



CHAPTER TWO - "RISING STAR"

After all of his formative years spent learning his art Poiret now had all the necessary knowledge appropriate for his entrance to the Paris scene. Influenced by his former employers, the theatre and contemporary artists, he was not lacking in ideas but he still lacked the precise direction that he had to pursue. He needed a medium to personify the ideas he had. This medium came in the form of Denise, his future wife, the daughter of a textile manufacturer, who supplied Poiret's parents. He met her in the autumn of 1902 on a visit to Paris when she stayed with his family.

She had a tall, lean figure which was in contrast to the fuller figures that were fashionable at the time. Added to her unusual charm, Denise and Poiret shared an interest in the same artistic subjects and Poiret soon fell in love with her, but it was two and a half years until her parents consented to marriage. About the time of their marriage Poiret's work seemed to find direction when he designed exclusively for his wife. He changed his style to cater for her slim figure. He raised the waistlines to under the bust, making the dresses look longer, narrower, and more graceful. This style which he developed for his wife was to become the new model of beauty for the years to come and the first sign of the revolution for which Poiret was to become responsible.

For the better part of six centuries dresses had been based on a fitted bodice and skirt with a framework in a cone shape supporting the skirts. Poiret despised these dresses because they divided women into two distinct bulks, the bosom and the bottom. Poiret referred to this style as S-bends and commented that women of that time looked like they were 'towing a barge'. In abandoning this style he simultaneously rid the necessity for corsets that had been a standard for so long and the classical shape that they caused in the line of the dresses.

His attitude although certainly revolutionary was very much part of the developments that were taking place around him. The feminist movement was beginning to make an impression on the blatant sexism of the time and medical opinion was beginning to turn against the corset because doctors claimed that they inhibited circulation. Poiret admitted that he was aware of the impending changes in fashion when he said

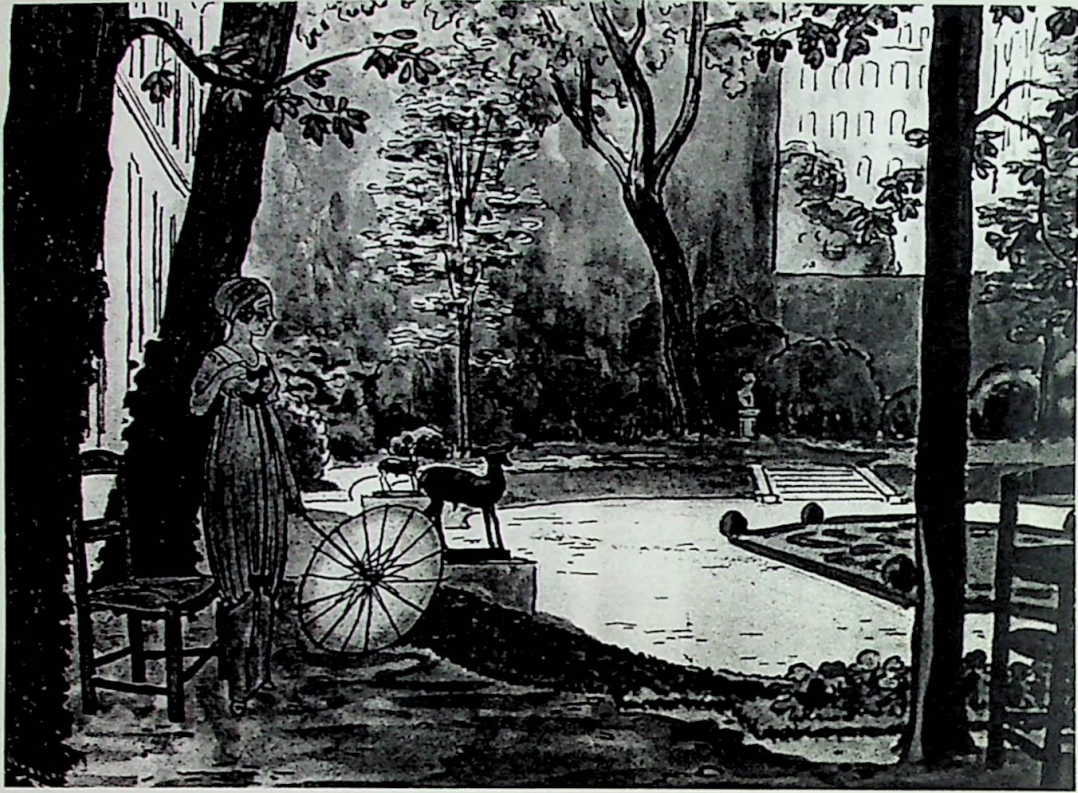
"I do not impose my will upon fashion and even less my whims. I am merely the first to perceive women's secret desires and fulfil them in advance."¹

So it seems that he sensed the impending changes and was inspired to be radical in his approach to couture.

His earliest styles were influenced by early Greek styles where he simplified their draping and which was referred to as the 'Hellenic Style'. He took the point of support away from the waist and focused it on the shoulder where, as Poiret put it

"Fabrics flowed from this ideal point.... and draped the body in a way that is completely natural."²

He replaced the corset with a thin lightweight rubber garment which fitted the contours of the body like a skin which became known as the girdle. In Poiret's eyes the girdle only served to ensure that none of the body's contours were hampered by the dress. Later this style was referred to as 'Empire' which referred to Napoleonic dress. This term was not strictly accurate but served to clarify the distinction between the old style and Poiret's 'new look'. Although these gowns were provocative they were still chaste. The necklines tended to follow the line of the collarbone rather than



Watercolour by Pierre Brissaud: Paul Poiret's gardens at the avenue d'Antin with a model in the foreground, 1910

plunge. Poiret's intentions were diametrically opposed to insinuations that were made about his gowns accentuating nudity as was Pope Pius X of the previous decade when he hit out at low cut evening gowns, saying that "no woman who wished to be considered a good Catholic should wear such a gown whenever Cardinals or Church dignitaries are present". But contradictory to this statement, some diplomatic wives threatened to stay at home and others were planning a new fashion to maintain their allure and their papal loyalty.

From the years 1907 to 1911 Poiret spent a great deal of his time travelling with his wife. During his travels he absorbed all the various cultures that he encountered and took great interest in all the various artistic features of each country. His travels included visiting Russia, Eastern Europe and Germany. He encountered a number of art schools such as the Werner Werkstatte or Viennese Workshop which specialised in interior design. It was formed by Josef Hoffman and Koloman Moser in 1903 who, like other contemporary artists of their time, were concerned to get art off the easels and pedestals and out into a broader role in life. Their goals were to translate the innate moral strength of good design and craft into commercial appeal. Poiret was very impressed by this especially because it was for the first years of its existence free of real commercial need which saw its most elegant and idealistic creations, but the tightening of cash prohibited this at a later date. Interestingly it didn't really succeed in establishing the broad clientele or affect the widespread design reform initially envisioned. It did, however, serve to inspire Poiret to set up his own design school at a later date, although he disliked the teaching methods, which he considered to be very strict.

It was during his travels combined with his early influence that sowed the seeds of an idea to establish a distinctive 'Poiret' image by creating a look which embodied not only couture



“sorbet”↑

A FASCINATING DESIGN BY
PAUL POIRET SHOWING HIS
DRAMATIC FLAIR WITH COLOUR
AND LINE.





es
w
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in
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su
fa
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C-
P-

Rosine

Poiret had from an early age a keen interest in perfumes but his early experiments did not prove conclusive. In 1881 he made a concerted effort to achieve his aims. He approached a chemical friend of his, Dr Midy, and they set up a laboratory on 39 Rue du Colisee to develop a range of scents. After the initial range had been developed he set up a bottling and packaging plant which employed about 30 staff initially. In doing so he was the first couturier to establish his own perfume. It was to be another 10 years before his lead was followed. The early range had such titles as 'Rose de Rosine', 'Aladin' and 'Nuit de Chine'. He was so concerned that his products would be well received that he took infinite care with the presentation and advertising. His advertisements and catalogues were characterised by the flamboyant style which had become synonymous with his name. He sent his clients scented cards and the texts of his catalogues were entrusted to a famous writer of that era, R. Boutet de Monvel.

His scents were available only from his outlets and especially at his main outlet at 107 Fauborg Saint-Honore in Paris where he also marketed his range of interior decoration and prints from the Ecole Martine. He soon extended his range of products to include toilet water, scented soaps, beauty cream, eyeshadow, rouge, foundation cream and powder. The range was very successful in keeping with his phenomenal success, so much so in fact that the established perfumers who initially scoffed at his bold enterprise, soon began to worry. So much so in fact, that Monsieur Laroche from the famous perfume business of the same name approached Poiret to franchise his business for him, but Poiret refused.

but all the other applied art forms such as furniture, perfumery and interior decoration. This idea was rather like the look which Laura Ashley has created today.

In 1910 Poiret was the first designer to utilise photography as a means of advertising his collections. Some of these photographs appeared in the Gazette Du Bon Ton but it was the more traditional form of illustration that Poiret utilised to its full extent. In 1908 he released a slim elegant volume 'Les Robes de Paul Poiret' which was illustrated by Paul Iribe and later, in 1911 'Les Choses de Paul Poiret' illustrated by Georges Lepape. These exclusive editions of his innovative designs were in themselves an innovation in terms of marketing by Poiret and the illustrations were appropriately vivacious and colourful to offset Poiret's designs.

Poiret had at this stage begun to develop his style further. He augmented his early tunic style in 1909 by adding an overskirt which became known as the 'lampshade' line. These overskirts were usually of a fine gauze or net type material with a strengthening hoop at the bottom giving the appearance of a lampshade. Later on that same year he followed it with his most famous look, the hobble skirt. Poiret, at this stage now a leader of fashion, set about completing his goals to establish his whole range of applied art forms to the public.

In 1911 he set about putting his ideas into action. He set up two companies

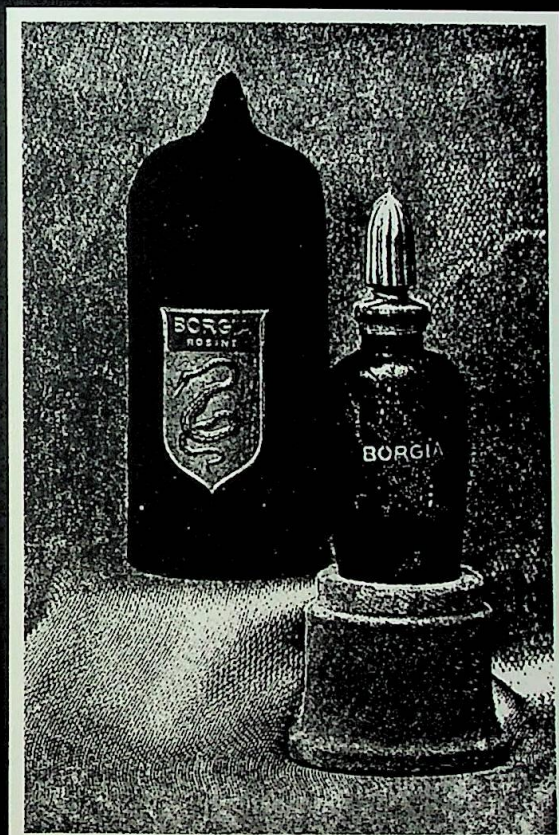
- (1) Rosine - his perfume line named after his daughter;
- (2) Ecole Martine for interior design also named after another of his daughters.

(1)

Rosine

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Raoul Dufy's draft for the Ecole Martine cards and letterheads, with the motif of a basket of stylized flowers, a common feature of his textile designs. Ink on paper

In the same year he set up

(2) The Ecole Martine for Interior Design

Although other design schools were founded before Poiret decided to embark on this project, they were different in a number of ways compared to the manner in which he wished to work. The design schools such as the Wiener Werkstatte worked on a hierarchical system where the established designers dictated directly to their understudies the design and construction of their creations. Poiret however had different ideas. His intent was to tap the uninhibited and untrained talent of a number of young schoolgirls from an unsophisticated background so that they could create freely without any outside influences. Poiret enlisted the help of the wife of the painter, Paul Serusier to oversee the girls he had enlisted. Madame Serusier soon abandoned the project however, because she felt that the girls rejected any attempts to formalise their designs. Poiret was secretly pleased because this was in keeping with his original idea and he then simply entrusted them with a supervisor.

He devised a very simple method for the girls to work with. They would go on outings to the countryside and various public buildings and roughly sketch their impressions on site. They would then return to the Ecole Martine and further develop their ideas, with prizes for incentives and Poiret would choose the work most suitable for adaptation. He collaborated with a number of specialists and artists in making the designs into actual products. Amongst these collaborators were Dumas for wallpapers, Monod for embroidery, Rault for drapes and the painters Mario Simon, Raoul Dufy, Fauconnet and Paul Iribe. It was Raoul Dufy who worked most closely with Poiret's projects for a time. Poiret recognised the compatibility of Dufy's style with the creation of prints for fabrics. This led him to set up with Dufy's agreement,

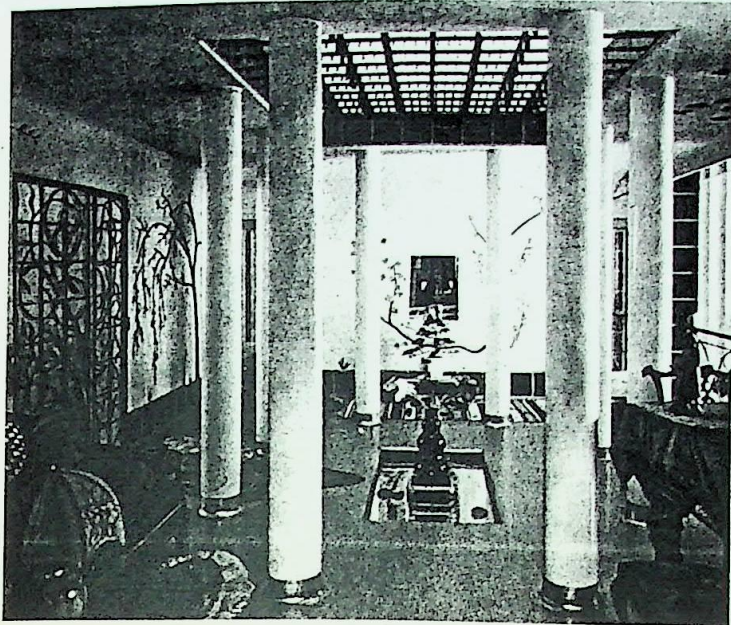
a workshop for fabric printing in the Boulevard de Clichy, which he called the 'Little Factory'. They were helped by a chemist Monsieur Zifferlin who advised on all the practical aspects of ink etc. Poiret thought that Dufy's genius would do the rest and he was not mistaken. Dufy produced an array of sumptuous prints done on the fabric from Poiret's supplier, using the technique of block printing. Dufy was one of the first people to use this technique on silk whereas it had previously been used only on cotton fabric. There was a strong relationship between the Martines and Dufy and they visited each other often at their respective workshops. The factory did not last long however because the large company, Bianchini-Feier was quick to offer Dufy larger resources and he departed to work for them although Poiret and himself remained friends thereafter.

In 1912 the work of the Martines, as the girls had become affectionately known, was exhibited at the autumn salon in Paris alongside other avant-garde fabrics, wallpapers and furniture and was much admired by Parisians. Their style had now become quite developed. Their method of working had a great influence on their designs and much of their work represented floral influence, in particular roses (Poiret's own symbol), anemones and lilies, which led to a very natural look although their creations were very much in an avant-garde style. Poiret eventually opened a branch of Martine's at 15 Baker Street, Portman Square, London. This branch was overseen by Monsieur Boulestin, which showed the influence that they exerted at the time. At a later stage Poiret decided to further educate the girls in all manner of crafts, such as working with glass, including stained glass, pottery and even carpet-making which they learned from a Monsieur Fenaille. Poiret decided that they should be knowledgeable about all the facets of applied art so that their ideas would not be ridiculed while at an early stage. He felt that they should be almost self-sufficient, a trait which was apparent in almost all of his projects and business ventures.

The Martines work was now very fashionable and in strong demand. Poiret had guided them until they had reached a high level of proficiency and their work was apparent in all his salons and branches. They also decorated the houses of numerous personalities of the time such as Baron de Precourt, Van Dongen and later the actress Mademoiselle Spinelly in 1924. Mademoiselle Spinelly was a distinctively Parisian personality with a penchant for modern, excessive designs. When working on the house of Spinelly with a free reign, they painted frescoes freehand onto the wall of trees tangled together and they created a remarkable effect in the atrium where set into the golden mosaic floor was a sunken pool in front of a mirror with Roman pillars surrounding it. This created rather a dazzling effect and is one of the best examples of their work.

Poiret never one to concentrate on one project at a time, set off on a world tour with several mannequins (models) in 1913, yet another first for a couturier, to exhibit his latest collection and though it had its hitches it was a resounding success and Poiret was hailed as the King of Fashion in the United States of America. At the pinnacle of his success the hobble skirt, for which he was famous, was now enjoying widespread success and the clashing colours he employed gave his designs a unique quality. Because of his widespread success, he was instrumental in setting up the society of French dressmakers to protect the designs from being copied and sold abroad under a different label as had been happening in the USA in recent times.

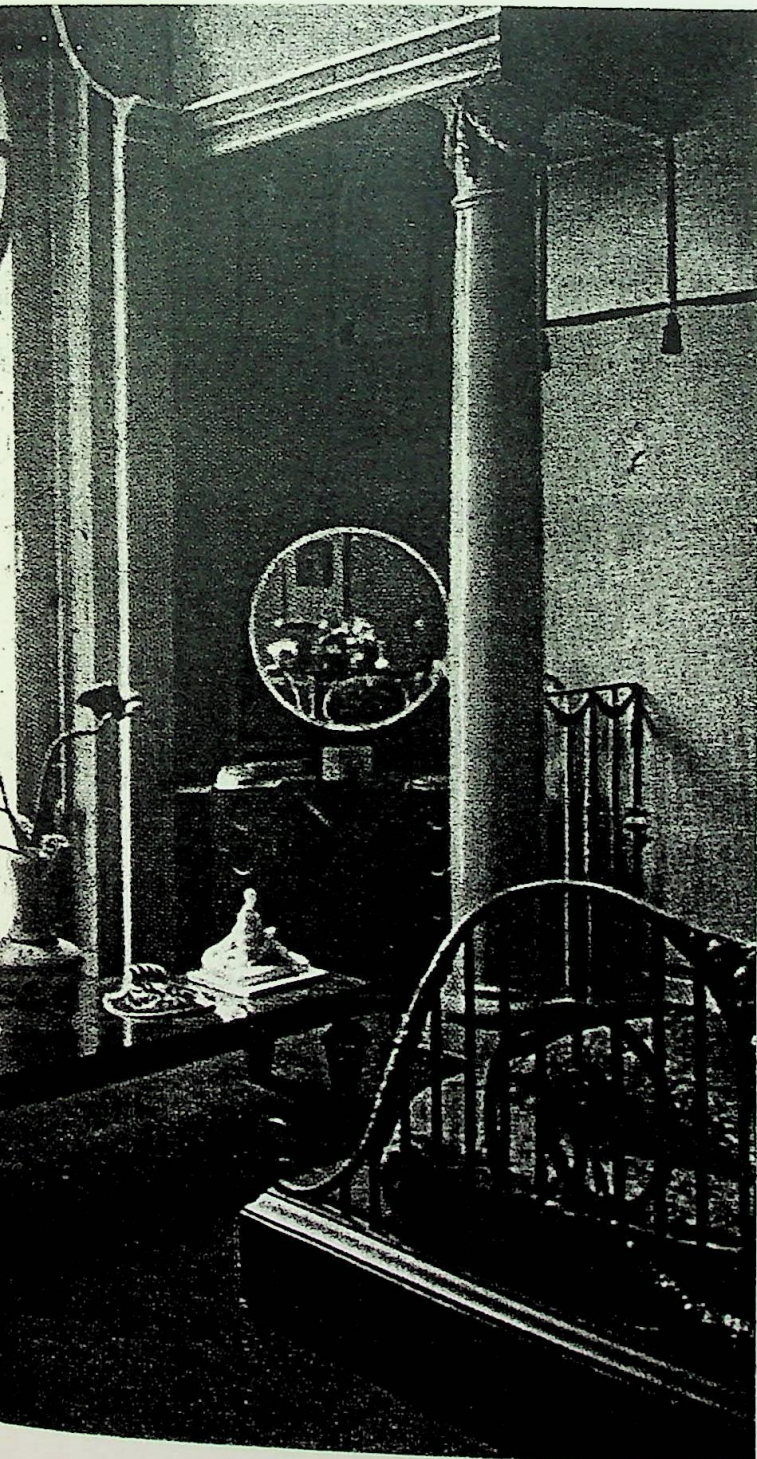
He favoured simplicity but his gowns were often decorated and trimmed with flowers or fur. His range of styles although diverse almost always incorporated some elements of an oriental style and as his career progressed he started to use heavier fabrics although along much the same lines and always retaining a simple elegance in his work, regardless of the colour scheme. Outrageous hats were the order of the day and they



LEFT:
THE NEO-POMPEIAN ATRIUM, WITH A FLOOR IN
GOLD MOSAIC AND A HUGE SKYLIGHT SUPPORTED
BY LACQUERED COLUMNS. DECORATING THE WALLS
ARE RELIEFS OF TREES WITH GILDED LEAVES.
AT THE CENTER, A MIRROR-LINED POOL.

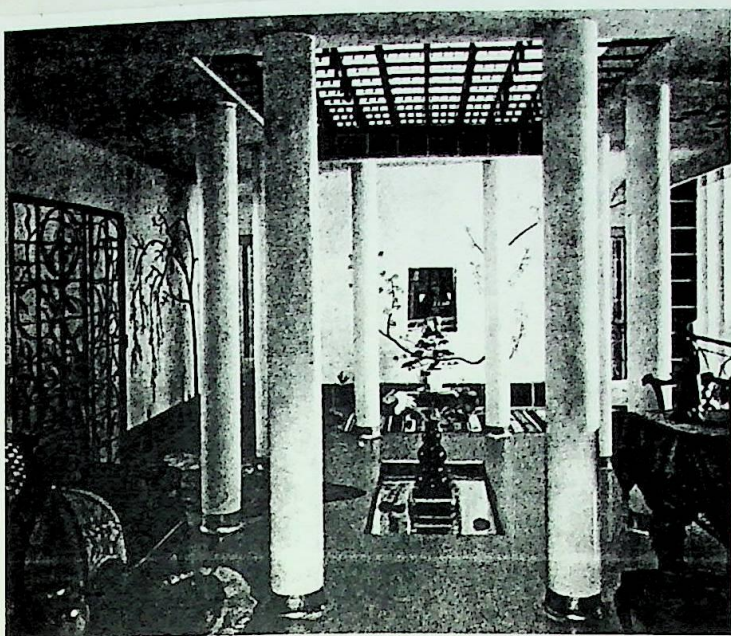
BELOW:

A CORNER OF THE ATRIUM, CREATED BY THE
ATELIER OF MARTINE, A CONCERN OF CONSID-
ERABLE FAME FOUNDED BY PAUL POIRET IN 1910.
NOTE THE PROFUSION OF CUSHIONS ON THE DIVAN.



ABOVE:
DOMERGUE, PORTRAIT OF "SPI". A PROMIN-
ENT STAR, SPINELLY WAS SUCCESSFUL IN
LONDON AND THE UNITED STATES AS WELL
AS IN PARIS.

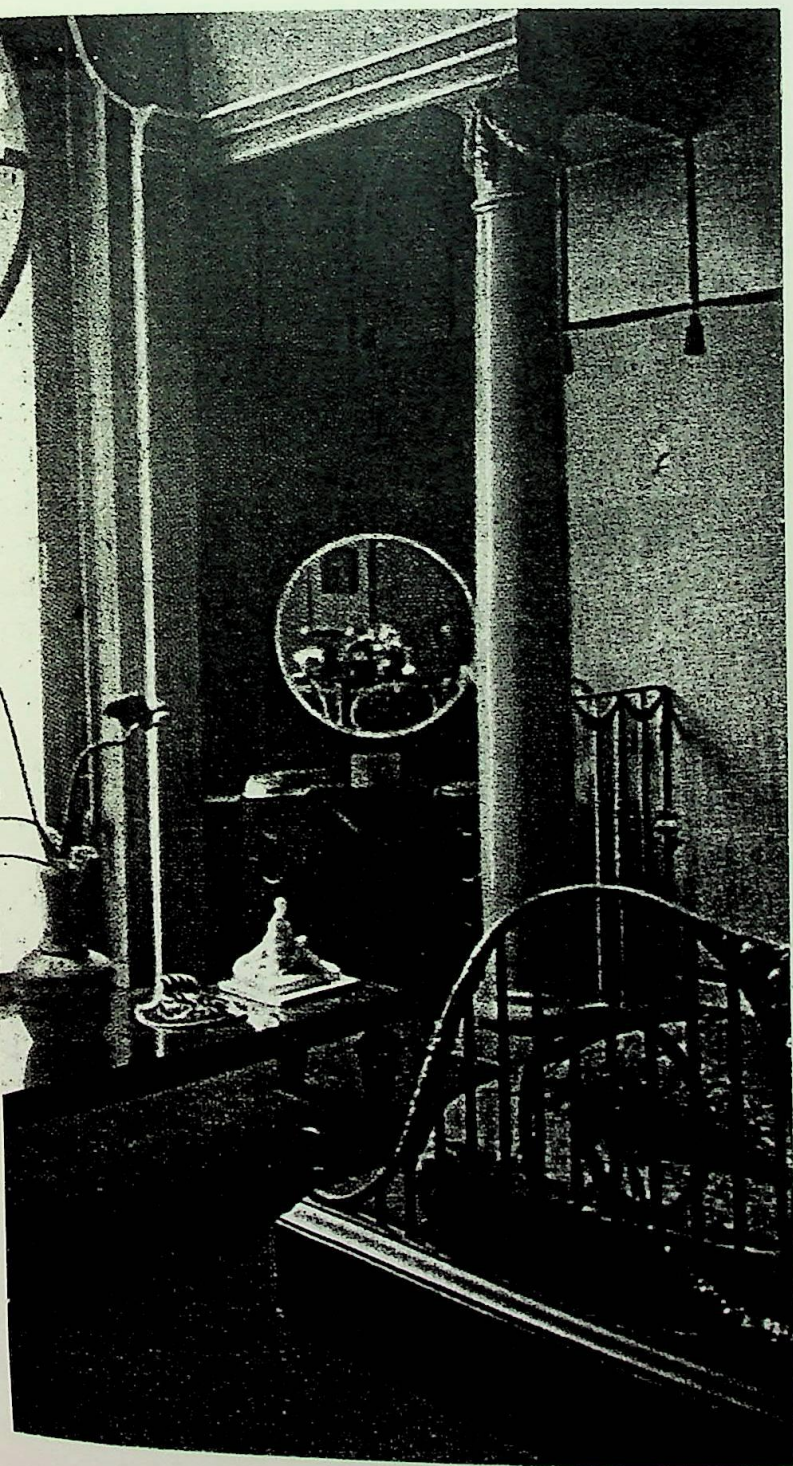
LEFT: THE BEDROOM: IT IS AGAIN PAUL IRIBE
WHOM MIKE SPINELLY ASKED TO DESIGN HER BE-
ROOM: DRESSING TABLE IN RARE WOODS, LAST
WROUGHT-IRON BED UPON WHICH A DOLL REIGNS
AMONG THE CUSHIONS. DON'T BE SURPRISED IF,
IN THIS SETTING, YOU SEE SPINELLY GET UP WEAR-
ING THE KIMONO OF AN ORIENTAL PRINCESS
IN PYJAMAS BY D. B. (1910-1911)



LEFT:
THE NEO-POMPEIAN ATRIUM, WITH A FLOOR IN
GOLD MOSAIC AND A HUGE SKYLIGHT SUPPORTED
BY LACQUERED COLUMNS. DECORATING THE WALLS
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IN THIS SETTING, YOU SEE SPINELLY GET UP WEAR-
ING THE KIMONO OF AN ORIENTAL PRINCESS
IN PYJAMAS BY POIRET." (L'ILLUSTRATION)



"lassitude"

DINNER GOWN BY PAUL POIRET ; DRAWN BY GEORGES LEPAPE . NOV 1912 .

PLATE VIII . WHITE SOFT VELVET COVERED WITH A TUNIC OF BLACK
TULLE EMBROIDERED WITH POLYCHROME FLOWERS .

offset the simple line of his creations because they seemed so out of context with his modest free-flowing dresses. The turban however was to become his favourite design. Madame Poiret herself possessed many different versions of the turban in rainbow colours and she had become almost as famous as Poiret himself and was the first to exhibit many of his designs and thus became the social ambassador of Poiret's sweeping changes. In fact in 1913 at the peak of his career, he declared that "Denise is the expression of my ideals". He claimed to have transformed her from a simple, inelegant beauty to what she was when he wrote in his autobiography

"Few people who loved and admired her after she became my wife, would have picked her out in the state I found her in... she had no allure whatever but I had the eye of an artist and a couturier and I perceived her hidden graces".³

Even at the pinnacle of his career Poiret often shocked and surprised people with his outlandish designs. Not least when he arrived at the races in France, the premier social event, with mannequins dressed in pantaloons and turbans. The pantaloons being loose trousers which caused quite a stir. The whole range of designs for which Poiret had become known was known as the Directoire line, a term used to describe his simple free-flowing, colourful creations.

Poiret's incredible success during this period was not solely attributable to his reinvention of the style of women's clothing. It was a change that was borne by necessity rather than inspiration alone. A number of factors contributed to this



"salomé"

EVENING GOWN BY PAUL POIRET ; DRAWN BY S.A. PUGENT. MARCH 1914.
 PLATE 28. PLEATED BLACK TULLE ON A WHITE GROUND, EMBROIDERED
 WITH LITTLE JET STUDS ; THE BODY SUIT OF BLACK LACE ; THE TOP OF
 WHITE TULLE EDGED WITH JET.

necessity. Firstly the advent of the motor car brought easier transport and with it the opportunity for weekends in the country and all the ensuing activities, such as sport and motor garments; afternoon and evening dresses necessitated simple designs to facilitate that particular lifestyle. Another factor could be that the build up of excessive extravagance had reached such a level that collapse was inevitable and facilitated the acceptance of Poiret's simple style rather like an economy always follows a pattern of recessions and booms. So it was almost as if the times demanded somebody with the foresight and vision to revolutionise couture to meet new demands.

Regardless of these factors Poiret was the prime exponent of couture in the period from 1904 - 1914 and when the First World War began it was then his fortunes began to change.

FOOTNOTE

1. Yvonne Deslandres
Paul Poirer
Thames and Hudson
1987
page 62

2. Palmer White
Paul Poirer
1973
page 27

3. Palmer White
Paul Poirer
1973
page 28



Paul Poiret choosing material from his range of folkloric fabrics

CHAPTER 3 - CHANGING TIMES

The advent of the First World War brought with it sweeping changes. The normal order of day to day life was radically disturbed. All the luxuries that were normally taken for granted were diminished by the war effort. This was doubly the case at this time especially in France because a land war of this magnitude had never been fought before and nobody was prepared for the massive scale and length of the conflict which was to last this long on home ground. The availability of materials was to a large extent restricted to use in only essential areas such as the army and other associated organisations related directly to the war effort. Coupled with this the restriction of imports due to the German bombing of cargo and passenger ships meant that goods of ostentatious value or snob value were of little importance in the consideration of the authorities in imported goods. Therefore the fashion industry was seriously impeded in its ability to continue in the same manner as before the war.

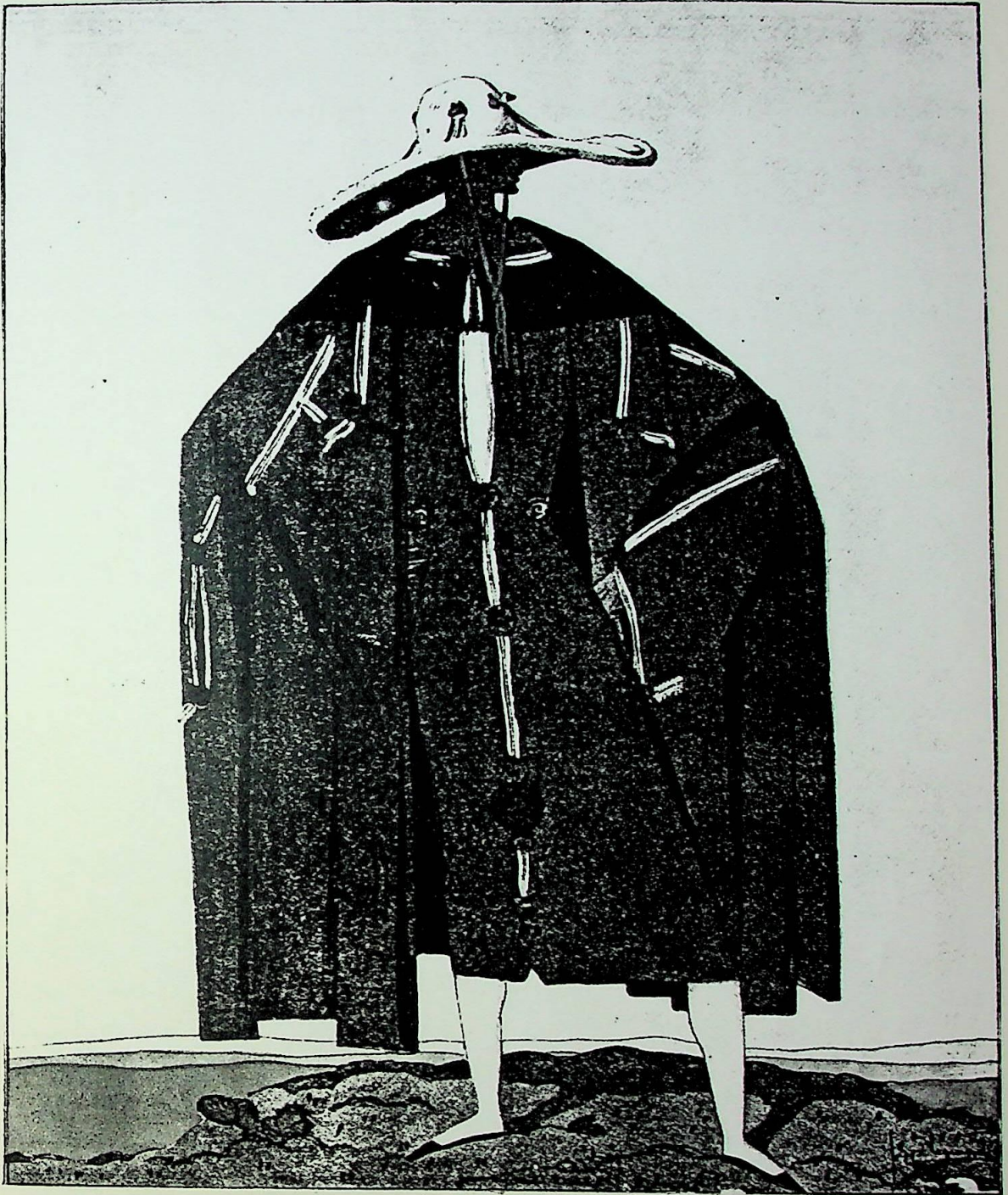
Poiret, himself, was enlisted into the army along with the other nine million men conscripted in France alone. He served with the army tailoring division which fortunately for him saved him from mobilisation to the front. Much to his superiors' surprise he could not even sew on a button to a uniform, as he had always worked from his own sketches, designated people to make up patterns and toiles in order to complete the final product. In typical Poiret exuberance he attempted to bring some flair into officers' dress uniforms but this was met with stern disapproval from his superiors. The most notable and probably the only creations of Poiret during the war was his design of stage ware for the famous actress come double agent, Mata Hari. Beyond this he did not even keep a notebook during the war and subsequently after the war he didn't have a stockpile of ideas from which to draw from for inspiration after the war.

The latter years of the war brought with them sweeping social changes. Women's liberation took another step forward when women proved that they could work in jobs in factories and other jobs that had been previously considered unsuitable, when the men who had in the past been the exclusive holders of these positions were mobilised to the front of the war effort. This served to bring about a change in attitude towards women and as a result fashion began to cater towards these newly liberated women, who not only had gained new social freedom but had disposable income from their wages. Dresses as a result slowly began to rise above the ankle and despite Poiret's liberation of women from the corset some still chose to wear modified models to control their figures from the waist to mid-thigh. It was obvious that fashion was about to go through yet another change to mark the beginning of the 1920's which was to become known as the 'Jazz Age'.

Although Poiret's style changed after the war he did not keep in step with the developments brought about by this new age and new attitudes. He had only 55,000 francs left after the war with which to re-establish Martine, Rosine and his fashion house. Along with his financial difficulties there were other factors which inhibited his progress after the war. His four year absence from the couture scene had prevented him from encountering a potential set of new clients, who as a result were not familiar with him or his products. Couture had also become increasingly simplistic in both line and design. Poiret knew that he was going to have a difficult time re-establishing his business when he said

"Until 1923 I thought I was going to win through. But it was very difficult."¹

His attempted return to the Paris scene was not very successful. The reasons for this were varied but it was mostly because his particular style was rapidly becoming outmoded. This,



"tangiers," OR THE CHARMS OF EXILE

AFTERNOON DRESS AND CAPE BY PAUL POIRET ; DRAWN BY GEORGES
LEPAPE . FEB 1920 . PLATE 7. BOTH GARMENTS ARE OF HEAVY
MOROCCAN SACKCLOTH ; WHITE - EMBROIDERED SEAMS AND WOOL
POMPOMS ; THE BELT IS A GALLO - ROMAN COPPER ARMBAND ; THE
STRAW SUNBONNET IS THE TYPICAL HEADGEAR OF THE WOMEN OF
TANGIERS .

however, was a gradual process and he continued on in much the same manner as before. In the past he had thrown lavish parties to promote his products, such as the Feast of Bacchus in 1912. Such parties always had a theme and guests would arrive in costume. He often hired musicians and dancers for their entertainment and provided vast quantities of champagne and cuisine for his guests' consumption at great expense to himself. After his journey to Morocco in 1918 with his son, Colin, and Raoul Dufy who had collaborated with him in the past he tried to recapture the attentions of his former clients. These parties were not as successful as he had hoped and he soon realised that his former importance had now greatly diminished. His visit to Morocco did however serve to inspire him to create some stunning creations with a North African aspect, of rich colours and loose flowing robes. Unfortunately this was not in keeping with the current trends and the Parisian scene had now become one of swinging Jazz of clubs and parties far removed from the extravagance of the past decade, as Poiret found out to his detriment after expending vast amounts of his ever decreasing assets.

The beginning of the twenties heralded the arrival of the little black dress. Gabrielle Chanel, the young designer, further innovated couture with her new style of sweaters and pleated skirts and Madeleine Vionnett's body clinging style combined with a turn from all things oriental ensured that Poiret was out of step with current trends, yet he made no moves to modernise his style and instead started to design almost exclusively for the theatre creating even more outlandish designs that no longer had any real commercial value, but that were outstanding in terms of beauty and design. Creations such as a stunning silk coat in oriental silk for Mademoiselle Spinelly were typical of the style of garments he now designed. In fact her whole wardrobe was by Poiret when she left Paris for New York in 1923 to star in a production. The developments that occurred in the 1920's in fashion had never before occurred. Women for the first time wore their skirts to knee level and cut their hair short, two drastic changes



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Poiret and models, 1925

FOOTNOTE

especially from the post war period. Dresses also became bosomless, waistless and hipless and eventually the dresses became identical back and front. A number of developments had occurred in the early years of the twenties. In 1922 the discovery of Tutenkhamun's tomb had a great influence on the fashion of the time exerting an Egyptian influence for a number of years and the breakthroughs in travel greatly influenced the wardrobes of discerning ladies. This was not the direction which Poiret followed and subsequently his business concerns rapidly diminished, leading to his eventual bankruptcy in 1924.

FOOTNOTE

1. Yvonne Deslandres
Paul Poiret
Thames and Hudson
1987
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Born in 1883 in the Cevennes, a mountainous region in the south of France to a family of itinerant market traders, she was to further revolutionise fashion after Poiret's era had ended. Her first models were loose knitted jackets that were very masculine in cut, worn over button-collared blouses and simple straight-cut skirts that ended at the ankle. At the time these clothes were radical, easy to wear and became instantly popular not only for their simple elegance, but because there was no longer a need for buying, fitting sessions and the clothes could be bought 'off the peg'.

Like Chanel, Poiret's forte had always been innovation, but Chanel was also a saleswoman with flair which made up for her lack of new creation. She began to make an impact during the years of the First World War when women's new found freedom found expression in her designs. Her salon in the centre of Paris was well placed and her simple clean-cut look was the right attire, chic yet practical for these women's new, active lives.

Poiret's perfumes inspired Chanel to create her own. She approached the master perfumer Ernest Beaux. He had been contemplating the idea of a new type of perfume and when Chanel approached him with an idea that she wanted a new scent, a composition that didn't resemble any of nature's natural scents.

CONCLUSION

In examining the reasons for Poiret's inability to remain as a driving force in the fashion industry after 1924 it is necessary to compare and contrast his career with a designer from the twenties who succeeded in continuing to be successful over a long period of time. The most obvious choice from that era is Gabrielle Chanel whose fashion house still exists to this day.

Born in 1883 in the Cevennes, a mountainous region in the South of France to a family of itinerant market traders, she was to further revolutionise fashion after Poiret's era had ended. Her first models were loose woollen jackets that were very mannish in cut, worn over sailor-collared blouses and simple straight-cut skirts that ended at the ankle. At the time these clothes were radical, easy to wear and became instantly popular not only for their simple elegance, but because there was no longer a need for boring, fitting sessions and the clothes could be bought 'off the peg'.

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After painstaking research Beaux made up 10 samples. Chanel chose the fifth one as most to her liking. In choosing a name she stuck to her choice - the fifth sample became Chanel No.5. Unlike Poiret, Chanel had the vision to see right to the logical end of her products. Poiret sold his products under the Christian name of his daughter, Rosine, so they never capitalised on his personal fame. Chanel, on the other hand, saw the new scent as a way of keeping her professional identity valuable. At the time of the launch of Chanel No. 5, the firm of Coty offered to buy all the perfumes of Rosine and to launch them as rivals. Poiret, as always, unable to overcome his resistance to commerciality, refused and Rosine subsequently folded.

Poiret's resistance to commerce stemmed from his viewpoint that all his creations were art forms and not just products. This probably arose from his early days when he was employed by Doucet and Worth and took many of their philosophies with him when he set up his own fashion house. Martine, his other company, suffered the same fate even though it was being celebrated in an Art-Deco exhibition in Paris just after it folded in 1925. His business philosophy had almost been one of self-sufficiency. With Rosine, he produced, packaged and advertised the whole range himself which drew heavily on his resources in order that he would retain complete control over the product. This was successful for a time because he had the necessary capital, but as soon as his fortunes began to diminish, it drew heavily on his resources. Coupled with the fact that when he was no longer in the limelight as a couturier, his product name was not synonymous with his own and the public who were not familiar with his early work didn't identify the perfumes or interior design with his name.

Chanel realised this early on and franchised her perfume No. 5 to two brothers, the Wertheimers, who ran one of the biggest perfume companies in France, and set up the company 'Parfums Chanel'. This arrangement however was not without its own difficulties, when the company brought out a cleansing cream under

her name and Chanel objected thinking she had agreed only to the making and selling of perfumes through the company. This problem was eventually sorted out but the fact remaining that she had invested a minimal sum of 100,000 francs and yielded massive profits.

Poirot realised that these changes in fashion were occurring but it was a mixture of personal pride and an unwillingness to change that saw him continue obstinately in the same direction as he has always done in the past.

In 1925 after his bankruptcy he was unable to continue and resigned himself to this fact. His wife divorced him in 1929 and he moved to the South of France to write his memoirs. He never achieved any measure of success after this period and he eventually died penniless in Paris on the 28th of April 1944.



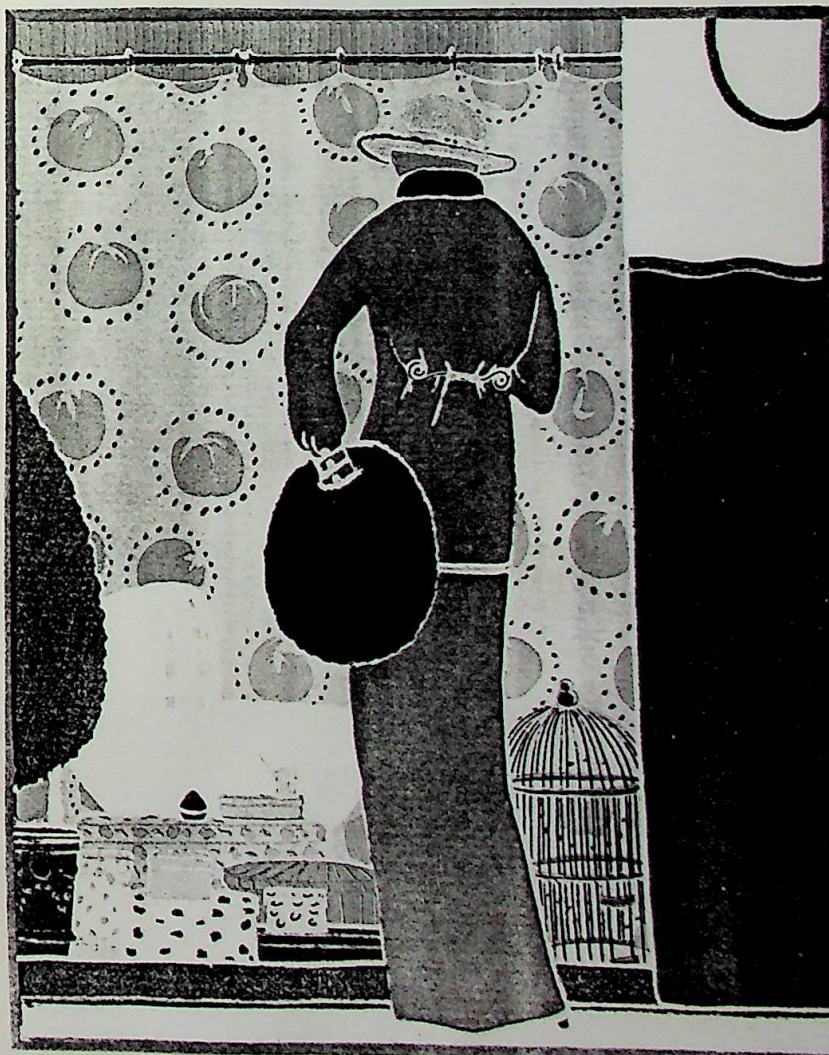
"have I come too early?"

THEATRE WRAP BY PAUL POIRET; DRAWN BY GEORGES LEPAPE. DEC 1912.

PLATE VI. COBALT-YELLOW SILK TRIMMED WITH SKUNK; THE ARM SLEEVES AND THE CLASP ARE EMBROIDERED IN THE SAME SHAPE AND ALLOW THE BLUE-GREEN SATIN LINING TO BE SEEN.



LEFT:
 "WOMAN AND PUPPETS";
 MARIONETTES; DRAWN BY GEORGES
 LEPAPE .FEB 1913. PLATE II. PLEATED
 GOLD - GAUZE SKIRT BENEATH A
 BRASS - FRAME SKIRT OF PERSIAN
 BROCADE .THE PANTALET AND THE
 LONG - SLEEVED BLOUSE ARE OF PEPT-
 ED SILK MUSLIN WITH GOLD BRACELETS
 AT THE WRISTS , ANKLES AND NECK .



RIGHT:
 "TOO MUCH TO CHOOSE FROM";
 TAILORED SUIT BY POIRET; DRAWN BY
 GEORGES LEPAPE .JAN 1913, PLATE VI .
 MUTED GREEN CLOTH WITH VERONESE
 GREEN EDGINGS; BRAIDING OF BLACK
 VELVET, BRIGHT STEEL BUTTONS; THE
 JACKET IS PUCKERED AT THE WAIST BY
 A ROLLED HEM OF VELVET FORMING A
 SORT OF HALF-BELT; OTTER COLLAR .



"the cherries"

COUNTRY OUTFIT BY PAUL POIRET ; DRAWN BY GEORGES LERAPPE MAY 1913.

PLATE IX. EMBROIDERED WHITE CREPON TRIMMED WITH TUSSAH SILK ;
 ITALIAN STRAW HAT TRIMMED WITH SILK RIBBON AND SMALL EMBROIDERED
 FLOWERS .



"goodness how cold it is"

WINTER COAT BY PAUL POIRET ; DRAWN BY GEORGES LEPAPE . OCT 1913 .

PLATE IV . CUT SILK VELVET TRIMMED WITH SKUNK .

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