

Simplicity as a High Art

By
Lady Duff-Gordon.



One of "Lucile's" Simplest Yet Loveliest Gowns. Of Pale, Rose Colored Messaline, It Follows the Lines of the Figure as the Draperies of the Ancient Greeks.

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SIMPLICITY is the highest art in dress. It seems easy, but it is one of the most difficult arts. If you desire proof of this statement recall how a bad dressmaker trims and retires, overtrims and overloads a gown with trimming. The excess of garniture hides the defects in cutting and the faults in sewing—or, so the inept dressmaker thinks. The output is vulgar, inharmonious—a positive pain to the artistic eye.

To provide a triumph of simplicity there must be perfection of cut. To assure the perfectly cut gown there must first be an eye as sensitive to the line as a singer to a false note.

The simple gown is chiefly in one color. Or if there be variations they, as a rule, are merely different shades of the chief color. If another color be introduced it should be one that blends easily with the principal one of the costume. Combinations are always a risk, and contrasts are more than liable to be vulgar. Approach reverently a combination of colors. When in doubt adhere carefully and safely to the one-color costume. Adopt the same shade as to gown, hosiery, shoes, gloves, wraps. Until you are absolutely sure of your "color eye" attempt not the multiple colored hazard.

The right use of colors is an art which only one nation has ever perfected. The Chinese have learned all that is to be known of colors. Study any mandarin coat or any pair of wide silk trousers that have really issued from China and you can find in them, no matter how richly or elaborately embroidered, no chromatic flaw. While this is primarily true of the Chinese, it is nearly as great a verity in regard to Japan and India. The Orient is the cradle of perfect

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coloring. A thousand years ago the Chinese learned all there is to know about colors.

The most glaring mistake and the commonest made in colors is that too brilliant ones are chosen. A woman's vanity should forbid this. If the color of her gown is too brilliant it will pale her individual brilliance. The overdressed woman's personality is lost in her clothes. The well-dressed woman accentuates the note of her own personality by her apparel.

In this respect is a valuable lesson to be learned from the Orient. You approach an Oriental rug with the intent to purchase. The color seems to you striking. Yet observe how the dominant color blends with the next in tone and how that melts into the next, and all into the far perspective of faint background as the mountain peak into its surrounding purple or the sun-lit waves of the sea into the blue rim of the horizon. One color in a costume should sink into another as do the tones of a well-modulated voice. Let there be no shrieks nor strident tones in your apparel.

While you may learn the art of blending colors from the study of Oriental garments and silks and rugs, you may go to a more available source for knowledge of its principles. Go to nature for your lessons. In my home at Versailles I sit for hours at my window looking out upon my gardens and learning color lessons. Or in an upper chamber of that home I sit and watch the sunset fade into the dreamy tones of twilight and observe how they melt into the purple night. If you watch the chang-



Walking Suit for the Early Autumn of Mustard Colored Broadcloth in Light Weight. The Hat is of Slightly Lighter Shade.

ing sea and sky and tree you will not make many mistakes in selecting the colors for your gowns and hats.

There can be no triumphant simplicity without a study of form. Consider that young girl whose attire fascinates you by its absolute simplicity of line. Those lines are fascinating because true, and true because they fit the nature and the time. Women, who, to their suffering, have been compared with many objects, seem to me to greatly resemble trees.

That young girl is like a slender sapling. The person who designed her gown, whether it be a modiste of Paris or Vienna or a tired mother in far-off Oshkosh, has more or less consciously followed the fashion of the young tree. Therefore there are no curving lines, but straight ones. No garniture "cuts" the sweet simplicity of the lines. From shoulder to hem there is no rudely interrupting line. All is white and quaint and sweet. The only color in the maidenly costume is the delicate wreath of pink rosebuds encircling the broad-brimmed whiteness of her hat. That costume is not only an exquisite frame for her fresh young beauty, but it is a lesson in exquisite simplicity. Fancy that rosebud girl dragging about a fortune spent in a moleskin gown! I have seen girlish beauty eclipsed, lost for the time, in such a gown. The unbecoming magnificence caused her to look old and insignificant. She sought distinction and she achieved commonplaceness.

Fabrics play an important part in the attainment of simplicity. "Costly your habits as your purse," etc., does not apply to the choice of materials. A splendid brocade might be a good sartorial investment for a queen whom the demands of state forced to wear it, but it would be a crime of extravagance for a young girl. For her are muslins and soft silks, crepe de chine and cobwebby mulls. It is only the woman of splendid presence, with many years behind her in life's path, who may assume the brocades, the heavy velvets and the weighty silks.

The first commandment in the decalogue of dress is "Dress as becomes you." The second is "At all costs, simplicity."



Visiting Toilette for Debutante, of Chiffon, with Girdle and Linings of Silk.



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