

# S.A. women are out of touch

By MARGARET SMITH

**PIERRE BALMAIN**, the famous French couturier, says South African women are out of touch with fashion. They need to be educated to "desire quality." They do not keep an eye on the fashion centres of the world and are content to wear the same dress for several seasons.

Dressed in a cotton skirt and shirt, I spoke to Balmain in a crowded dressing-room before his fabulous R20-a-ticket show in Johannesburg on Wednesday night.

He admitted, courteously, that mine was a "neat outfit" for a working reporter. But, he said, the smart women of Johannesburg he had met at parties, receptions

and fashion shows, were lamentably out of touch with current fashions.

"If one has money one should spend it—and not boast that the little dressmaker around the corner whips up one's party outfits."

Balmain, in impeccable evening dress, and looking like a solid and prosperous business man, spoke to me with one eye on the fabulous creations that mannequins were slipping in and out of in the background.

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"At smart receptions I have seen low waists, high waists, drapes and skirts of all lengths," Balmain said with a pained expression on his face.

Was this not adaptation to personal tastes and a sign of individuality?

"No," said Balmain. "It is merely a question of being either one, two or three seasons out of date."

But Balmain is full of praise for Johannesburg's much-criticised Oppenheimer Fountain.

"It is quite wonderful," he said. "The bridge of leaping buck and the spray—ah, beautiful, beautiful! It is a pleasing contrast to the city buildings, and a remarkable thing to find in the midst of the city where space is precious and costly."

This proved that South Africans had souls—a fact that seemed to be contradicted by the type of furniture he had seen in Johannesburg stores.

"It is heavy, heavy. It is pseudo-antique and lacks taste and spirituality."

Balmain left on Thursday for a trip to the Kruger National Park. He was reported as saying that his next collection might be influenced by ideas picked up on this trip.

This does not mean that he would introduce zebra skin or leopard fur in his next collection, he said.

"It is far more subtle than that. I may be inspired by a shade of brown in the grass or the line of a stalking animal. But I will not



Balmain — South African women shocked him with their lack of fashion sense.

introduce an African theme as such. I design for the fashion-conscious women of the world and do not look for foreign themes to boost my fashions."

Balmain was not impressed with one of South Africa's major tourist attractions—the mine dances.

"They are too forced, obviously staged only for the benefit of the audience. The rhythm is superb, but it is theatrical and not as natural as it would be under different conditions."

Balmain enjoyed his trip down a gold mine where, he says, "I crawled on my tummy, elbows and knees," far beyond the usual tourist limit.

*Sir Roy will go to U.S. for TV talk*