

## Under Paris Skies

When I left Philadelphia in mid-October, I expected rainy, overcast skies and a chill in the air to greet me at my destination. Instead I arrived to find Paris and Parisians under the spell of Indian Summer. Unlike New York, Paris has virtually no skyscrapers and so when the sun shines, the whole city lights up. That grim public face that Parisians are famous for seemed softer around the edges – or perhaps it was just a trick of that beautiful light. In any case, Paris felt warm and relaxed. The frenzy of fashion week was behind us, the exorbitant price of hotels had dropped to a reasonably absurd level, and I could get a table at my favorite restaurants without having to book months in advance.

I was in Paris to do a little business, see family and friends, take in the ballet and opera, and indulge in favorite pastimes and rituals, such as eating and drinking (it was white truffle and *cépe* season – heaven on earth!) and keeping up-to-date on what the well-dressed *Parisienne* is wearing. I am happy to report that, although the Parisian teen-ager in her low-rise, skinny jeans and sneakers is practically indistinguishable from her American cousin, the chic Parisian woman is still alive and well and strolling the Boulevards of Paris in her high heels and Hermès scarf.

Although we saw a lot of bold plaids and hounds-tooth checks on the fall/winter runways last spring, most *Parisiennes* still favor classic, well-cut neutrals with small splashes of color in their accessories, the most important of which is still the artfully-tied scarf. In fact, the importance of the scarf in the Parisian woman's wardrobe can never be underestimated. They come in every color and pattern, size and material, and everyone wears them. One of the many reasons for their omnipresence in the *Parisienne*'s wardrobe is that they take up so little space. They can be folded and tucked away into drawers. Space is at a premium in Paris. Apartments are tiny and bedrooms are even tinier. The over-stuffed, walk-in closet in the American bedroom simply does not exist in Paris, or for that matter in most of France. The Frenchwoman's wardrobe must fit neatly into an Armoire – those beautiful, ornately-carved, in some cases centuries-old, pieces of furniture, which actually hold very little by American standards.

As a result, the *Parisienne* chooses each piece with great care and learns from an early age how to do more with less. She likes a bargain as much as her American cousin does, but she won't buy something just because it is on sale. She may take months to find the perfect little jacket to go with her new skirt, but she is patient and she is relentless, and, in the end, she gets exactly what she wants, at the price she wants to pay.

When I want to observe the *Parisienne* in her natural habitat, I go to *Angéline's*, my favorite *Salon de thé* on the Rue de Rivoli, where I met my friend, Sylvie, one afternoon, for tea. Sylvie is a tall, stunning blonde, who is always impeccably put together. She is a native Parisian, a terrific cook, speaks four languages and travels the world for Air France. It was a lovely warm afternoon, and the lovely ladies of Paris were at their loveliest. When we finished our tea and *macarons*, Sylvie and I strolled down the Rue de Rivoli to the *Musée des Arts Décoratifs*, which is devoted to fashion and the decorative arts. It is actually part of the vast Louvre complex. The fashion wing is currently hosting a magnificent retrospective of the great couturier Balenciaga, with over 160 pieces on display spanning more than four decades of his work. His clothes have a sculptural, almost architectural, look to them, particularly in the draping, which left me in absolute awe.

The next day, as I drove south from Paris to spend a long weekend with family in the *Vendée* region, it occurred to me that most of the Balenciaga daytime ensembles I had seen the day before were so classic and timeless that they would look absolutely right on any of the lovely ladies I had seen sipping tea at *Angéline's* the day before. While we are not all lucky enough to have an original Balenciaga hanging in our closets, we can all work towards building that perfect wardrobe by investing in the best quality, classic pieces we can afford, and learning how to do more with less, as the *Parisienne* does. Besides, as I tell my clients, if it doesn't fit into a Parisian Armoire, you probably can get along without it, *n'est-ce pas?*