

When You Buy A Fur

by Jo Ann Breckenridge

AND THERE were mink coats and a strapless ermine formal with a wrap to match and a leopard sport coat and a white mink shortie all floating around on pink cloud hangers. And the terribly handsome man said, 'All for you, fair lady,' just like a King Arthur knight. And just as I was putting on the mink, the alarm clock woke me up!"

Whether you dream of mink or mouton, Vicky's discovered you'll need to take more with you than a full piggy bank or a willing father when you go fur shopping. To get the most from your dollars and cents you should know that Hudson seal isn't seal at all—its muskrat; that raccoon-dyed opossum is all opossum, and that Russian marmink isn't mink—its marmot.

If you don't want your "ermine" evening wrap shedding bunny hairs on your date's tuxedo, learn how furs are named. According to Federal Trade Commission rules, any simulated fur must have a descriptive, three-part name. The first word is the article simulated. The second is the method of processing. The third is the actual fur. You'd buy the coat as a mink-dyed muskrat—but it's all muskrat.

You might get Dad to change that "no" to "yes" if you explain to him that a fur coat is not as expensive as the price tag indicates. Unlike a cloth coat, the individual skins in a fur garment can be replaced when worn or the coat restyled when out of fashion. You can be sure, of course, that prices are high. Fur workers' wages have doubled in the last few years and longer coat styles require more pelts than shorter lengths did. Unless money is no object with you, you'll probably choose your coat from one of the following moderately priced furs.

From a humble beginning, coney (rabbit) has risen in good American fashion to a fur of distinction. Inexpensive because it is plentiful, not because it isn't good, coney is plucked, sheared and dyed to look like beaver, seal or leopard. Pick a coat with thick, abundant fur. Feel it, inside and out, to see if it has



Full length coats, above, are blended muskrat.

been patched. The best grade has as few seams as possible. Be sure the dye is even throughout. You'll pay \$39 to \$200 for your coat of coney.

Mouton-Dyed Lamb

A winner in most any college popularity poll is mouton-dyed lamb. Before you write a check for \$50 to \$300, make sure that the skins have no ridges, which become accentuated with wear and that there is no unevenness of pile or patched pieces because the fur will separate at the seams later on. Once a mouton is your own precious possession, send it only to reliable cleaners or the hair may lose its water repellance and become curly or matted.

Processed to look like mink, mutation mink or Alaska seal, muskrat coats cost from \$350 to \$1,500. Because muskrat pelts do not wear evenly throughout, they are cut into sections and made into flank and back coats. Back coats wear better, but flank coats are softer and less expensive. Pick a thick fur with glistening uncurled hair.

Pipe, sweater and butch haircut are the trademarks of a typical college man today, but back in the days of the flapper, even campus Joe swaggered to classes in a shaggy, long haired raccoon coat. Seldom seen in this style today, raccoon is now sheared and sold natural or dyed to resemble beaver, nutria or mink. A very durable fur, \$400 to \$600 will buy the coat for you.

Most expensive of the medium priced coats is beaver which costs from \$800 to \$1,500. It makes a

(continued on page 12)

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(continued from page 10)

good, serviceable coat. Its color is bluish- or reddish-brown, the blue tone costs more.

Vicky discovered that price doesn't always indicate good wearing qualities. Chinchilla and broadtail are costly, but wear poorly. If you want a coat that can be thrown over lecture room chairs, caught in sudden showers, pounded on at football games and still look nice at the late winter formals, choose a fur noted for wearing quality. Your coat might be of badger, beaver, mouton-dyed lamb, raccoon, skunk, Alaska seal or Persian lamb.

If you're wondering whether to buy a good grade of low-priced fur or a cheaper grade of expensive fur, most furriers advised Vicky to invest in good grade low-priced fur. Look at the fur in inconspicuous spots where the pelts won't show, as under the arms, under the collar and cuffs, the front underlap or facing and the bottom. You can judge the quality roughly by a fur's luster, uniformity of color, depth and texture, softness and pliability of leather. Signs of poor fur are bareness or unevenness of hair, matted areas, dull or faded colors and split or brittle ends. If normally straight hairs are curled at the tips, avoid the coat. It won't wear well. The tips are dried out or "singey" as the furrier says.

Furrier's Terms

Before you invest in a fur coat, learn what furrier's terms mean. *Blending* is a process darkening the tips of the fur hairs, without dyeing the whole fur, as in "mink-blended muskrat." This is done with a feather or fine brush dipped in dye or with an air spray. Synonymous terms are "tipping," "feathering," "topping," "shading" and "beautifying." *Glazing* brings oil to the surface of the fur so that it will be lustrous and glossy. Natural fur oils are brought out by beating the fur, after wetting it, with a ruler-like stick, or by ironing it with a warm iron. If the fur no longer has enough natural oil, a wax- or resin-impregnated paper is laid over the fur, then it is ironed, transferring the oily substance to the fur. Sewing or gluing cotton strips on the skin side of a pelt to reinforce the seams is called *staying*. *Leathering* refers to the process of thinning out bushy pelts by sewing strips of leather between strips of fur.

Mutation

Don't be worried by the term "mutation mink." *Mutation* is simply a sudden change in the species, as when a dark-colored male and female mink, with dark-colored forebearers, suddenly produce a light-colored litter. These light colored skins are rare and therefore expensive. Most furs, dyed or natural, will eventually fade. To the furrier, fading is *oxidizing*. *Let-out* is a method of making a pelt longer, narrower and more graceful by cutting, stretching and resewing. There are no horizontal seams visible in let-out coats. A less-expensive method of manufacturing than let-out is *skin-on-skin*. This means sewing the trimmed skins together just as they come. Both horizontal and vertical seams are visible. To make red fox look like silver fox, the pelt is often *pointed*. In this process the peltries are dyed black and then "pointed" by gluing in white badger hairs.

A fur coat is a major investment for anyone, so care for your coat once it's yours. Even if it is a wear-

forever fur that would look good after use as a welcome mat, avoid getting your coat wet. But if a sudden shower does catch you, shake the coat thoroughly and hang it in a cool flow of air as soon as you can. Shake it again when dry and, wet or dry, keep it away from heat. Never brush or comb wet fur. If the coat is soaked, send it to a furrier for immediate attention.

One of the first ways to save your coat, Vicky found, is to get a correct fit. Skimpy seams strain skins and help cause rips. So buy the coat one size larger than your dresses. It is a sound idea to try it on over a suit. Walk toward a mirror. The coat should open and close with your steps, not remain open. Your shoulders should bear the weight of your coat, not your neck.

Wear It Right

The way you wear your coat makes a great difference in the length of its life, Vicky warns. Keep your coat buttoned when standing, unbuttoned when seated, to ease the strain. Don't overload the pockets. Carry those stacks of books carefully, not tucked under your arm, to avoid rubbing the fur. A narrow ruching sewed at the back of the neck helps keep the fur clean. When you carry your coat, fold the fur side in.

Always hang up your coat or the fur may be flattened and crushed. Use a padded hanger and before hanging, shake it gently. Humidify your closet with a sponge in a little bowl of water on the shelf. Vicky warns you not to place insecticides or moth preventives in direct contact with the coat or you may find it bleached.

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