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LeMaire and aids turn out a rush glamour job

## Costume Wizards

BY DON EDDY

**Material is scarce, so movie stars are gowned in everything from lace tablecloths to curtains**

ONE day this summer, a young woman rushed into a smart shop in Los Angeles, Calif., selected four fancy lace tablecloths costing \$975.40 and ordered casually, "Wrap them, please."

The salesgirl couldn't help asking: "What on earth will you do with four of them?"

"Cut them up," explained the customer brightly. "I just love to cut up lace tablecloths."

It was silly but true. The customer was Dorothy Stepling, wardrobe shopper for 20th Century-Fox. She carried her purchases back to the studio. There, seamstresses snipped out the lace, appliquéd it onto net, made the net into a sumptuous lace gown. You may see it on Gene Tierney in "The Razor's Edge" and never dream it was made from tablecloths.

### Lots of Ingenuity

THINGS like that have been happening in Hollywood ever since the war created a famine in fine fabrics which persists even after a year of peace. Dressing the stars, which sounds like an attractive chore, also has become one of Hollywood's more ingenious big businesses. About 1,000 dextrous artisans, many from famous European salons, spend more than \$8,000,000 annually making movie lovelies lovelier. Their resourcefulness is a Hollywood legend.

Take damask, for instance. Not long ago, René Hubert, designer on the staff of Charles LeMaire, incisive Chicago-born wardrobe

chief at 20th Century-Fox, dreamed up a wedding gown which had to be made of heavy damask satin. When none could be found, Hubert took ordinary satin, appliquéd it with taffeta and presto! had a damask that fooled the camera.

Velvet also is scarce. Studio shoppers searched in vain for red velvet to use in a gown for Alice Faye. They were ready to give up when a seamstress on her way to work one day noticed a red-velvet overstuffed chair in an upholsterer's window. She telephoned the studio: "I've found it!" Shoppers bought the chair, stripped off the velvet, used it to make the gown.

**One Dress: \$2,750**

"ONE of the nicest brocade evening gowns we ever whipped up was made of window drapes we found in an interior decorator's," LeMaire confesses.

Costs of improvisation are high, but Hollywood's finery has always been expensive. Almost any dressy costume for a star costs \$500; many cost much more. The record is supposed to be about \$2,750. Although no star wears the same gown in two pictures, it is always remodeled several times for lesser players and finally worn by extras until it falls to pieces.

Gowns were fitted on the stars personally until Verna Billings moved in. She began to make figures (not "dummies," please!) by draping stars' nude torsos with skin-tight muslin which she marks, removes, sews into shape and pads full of cotton. She makes one for each actress — three or four for top stars — and must change them if the prototypes get thinner or fatter.

In wartime, many colored fabrics were hard to come by. Navy blue,

*Continued on next page*



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