



7.19 Fall 1953 Jacques Fath ball gown of ice-blue satin, worn by Signy Eaton to the Hunt Club Ball. The design was published in *Harper's Bazaar*, September 1953, 232.



Ball (fig. 7.19), to a more dramatic, red-and-black halter neck British design by Victor Steibel that was worn by Mona Campbell to the Ballet Ball in 1953, or the made-to-order Pierre Balmain worn by Grace Gooderham to the Artillery Ball in 1956 (fig. 7.20).⁴⁵ Etiquette books constantly reiterated that one should “select clothes appropriate to the life you lead. The wildly inappropriate garment is usually the mistake of youth, before the discipline of taste and budget has had time to sink in. Although the temptation may be strong, even in maturity, to purchase the dress that would be a knockout for a unique occasion and completely out of key the rest of the time, unless you’re rich, don’t succumb.”⁴⁶ For Canadians,

even ball gowns could be ostentatious. Signy Eaton wore her Rodriguez, which she purchased at Eaton’s in Toronto, to a ball in London, but she considered it “too much” and uncomfortable (fig. 7.21). Because it was designed as “a knockout,” she felt that it was too dramatic and therefore inappropriate. In other words, Signy Eaton, a model for other Canadian women, considered it more elegant to be dressed subtly when out in public, reinforcing the maxim that it was always more tasteful to be under- than overdressed. This is contrary to the advice offered by Americans Emily Post and Margery Wilson, who wrote, “A woman of tact wears her prettiest frocks to other people’s houses; and wears her less decorative ones when she is hostess.”⁴⁷

7.20 Fall 1956 Pierre Balmain ball gown “Agéna,” made to order in Paris for Grace Gooderham, who wore it to the Artillery Ball for her daughter’s debut that year. See also fig. 0.1, p. 2, and fig. 2.6, pp. 56–7.