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HATS OFF TO DESIGNERS

HEADPIECES HAVE EVOLVED INTO A FASHION ACCESSORY THAT IS NOT TO BE OVERLOOKED

PHOTOS: SHUTTERSTOCK



Hats have moved on from being a practical item to become a fashion statement that brings out one's character.



Designer hats are just the way to use the trend on your head and express something totally fresh.

Headpieces, in all varieties, have been around since ancient times. The first evidence of a man pulling an animal skin over his head as protection against the elements. Thus adorning the head has reshaped from purely practical reasons to utterly decorative utterances. Whether it is a ceremonial or religious reason or the intrepid declaration of fashion and style, the headpiece, or hat if you will, delivers swift affirmation for any wearer.

Hats, as we know them, are said to date back to Egyptian times, and the first pictorial evidence is from a Thebes tomb painting, featuring a man with a conical straw hat. While women, centuries ago, were often expected to have their heads covered by veils, handkerchiefs, hoods, caps or wimples – the art world delivered the proof.

“At first they were symbols of wealth and stature – only royalty were allowed to wear them,” says New York milliner Albertus Swanepoel. “Hats were also

worn as protection during war and against weather elements and then only in the 20th century they became an expression of style.”

The word “milliner”, however, dates back to the 1500s Italy where “milener” (a Middle English word for a Milanese native) was used for anyone selling fancy goods in the city of Milan. At the time Milan was specialising in straw, ribbons and bonnets – all perfect in the gentle art of hat-making.

“Fast forward to the first half of the 20th century and there was definitely a strict hat-wearing etiquette for both women and men in Western culture,” says Allison Bard, general manager of Australian headress brand Helen Kaminski, which has a pop-up store in Pacific Place mall in Admiralty.

“Attitudes toward hat wearing then changed dramatically in the mid-1960s after US President John F. Kennedy and First Lady Jacqueline Kennedy both started to appear in public ‘sans chapeau’ – the TV series *Mad Men* seems to confirm these radical changes in hat-wearing etiquette that turned hat-wearing ‘on its head’ in this period.”

Today, designers have realised that headpieces, or hats, have not ➔

I AM SERIOUS ABOUT MILLINERY ... THE CHALLENGE IS TO KEEP IT MODERN AND VALID ALBERTUS SWANEPOEL

LOUIS VUITTON RECENTLY FEATURED ONLY HATS
IN ITS WINDOW DISPLAY IN ITS TOKYO STORE



ABOVE
Models wearing hats from Australian
headress brand Helen Kaminski,
which has a pop-up store in Pacific
Place shopping mall.

ABOVE RIGHT
Hats add a mysterious element and a touch
of glamour.



been saturated in the fashion realm and so people, from British fashion designer Giles Deacon to more mainstream luxe-brands such as Gucci, are employing a head-cover focused strategy.

Even Hermès now has space solely dedicated to hats in select stores and Louis Vuitton recently featured only hats in its window display in its Tokyo store. In Hong Kong, Lane Crawford had Japanese milliner Katsuya Kamo bring his talent to the department store for an exhibition – for men and women to admire.

Although geography or gender play much less of a role in hat-wearing today, there are still cultures around the world that include hats in the usual repertoire of dressing – cities such as New York on the one spectrum and Iceland on the other are often seen as hat hot spots. Celebrities have also brought new attention to hats – Justin Timberlake’s impressive array, Pharrell Williams’ collection of exaggerated chapeaux made by Los Angeles designer Nick Fouquet, and Beyoncé, who is rarely seen without a head embellishment.

In Japan and South Korea, men and women embrace the fashionable and functional aspects of hat-wearing. According to Bard, other parts of Asia are slowly but surely adopting the hat-wearing trend, especially with the boom of the travel industry in the region.

“In talking to consumers we found a very strong association between hat-wearing and travel in the Hong Kong and mainland China markets. The US and Euro markets are mostly driven by fashion but also functional aspects like weather protection or sports,” Bard says.

Women, in general, spend much more money on bags and shoes ➔

RIGHT PHOTO: THINKSTOCK

THE OTHER OPTION IS, LIKE LADY GAGA DOES, TO USE HATS TO ATTRACT SOME ATTENTION



Hats can take a surreal look, such as this headwear. Photo: Thinkstock

TOP RIGHT
A cap from Helen Kaminski's spring/summer collection



SPORT THAT LOOK

When to wear a hat by the brand Helen Kaminski:

At the beach – a day in the sun demands a wide brim hat for sun protection and a hint of glamour. It has the added benefit of giving the appearance of wearing more, when you are in fact wearing very little.

To brunch – a fedora will transform your favourite casual weekend look into a smart “put together” outfit, and it won’t interfere with conversation or people watching.

While hiking – a versatile and functional hat (water- and/or ultraviolet-resistant) will provide comfort and weather protection no matter the season.

To the country club – a well-chosen hat or visor delivers “chic” to relaxed dressing.

At a bar or in a nightclub – it’s a great way to stand out from the crowd and be noticed.

than on hats. “Although designer hats are individually made by hand, and not in a factory line, like bags, they still don’t get the respect that other accessories do,” Swanepoel says. “There is definitely a resurgence in wearing hats as a fashion accessory. But if fashion goes through a minimal phase, they disappear.”

The South African-born designer has hats in department stores such as Barney’s in New York and has collaborated with the Philippines group of stores, Bench, but makes every hat that comes out of his Manhattan studio by hand. “I am very serious about the craft of millinery, respecting the age-old traditions, but the challenge is to keep it modern and valid.” Being in a niche market, Swanepoel explains that the challenge is to stay ahead of imports and to remain individualistic in his approach.

Whether off to church with a vintage wide brim from the grandparents, or with an elaborate Philip Treacy to the races, hats have a certain sense of occasion. But as the trend of handmade and artisanal continues, designer hats (mostly made by meticulous hands) are just the way to use the trend on your head and express something totally fresh. Or the other option is, like Lady Gaga does, to use hats as publicity stunts and to attract more than just a little attention. †