

Milliner

BY PAUL MARGOLIS

The earliest head coverings were probably animal skins and were used primarily for warmth, rather than style. Over the millennia, however, women's hats have reflected contemporary fashions, as well as the hairdos that were in vogue. During Greek and Roman times, women's headwear included headdresses made of metal and ribbons intertwined in elaborate coiffeurs. In more modern times, women's hats have gone in and out of style, but there has always remained a niche for milliners to create and modify women's hats.

The word *milliner* derives from the hats that were made in Milan, called "Millayne bonnets." In England, makers of these women's hats were called "milaners," which then evolved into the modern English word.

Lisa Shaub, whose shop is on Mulberry Street in Manhattan, is a modern-day milliner who caters to the hat needs of women and

some men with a variety of styles that she creates and sells. Lisa, who says that she "always sewed and loved fashion," has been in the millinery business for the past twenty-two years. After earning a B.F.A. at Mount Holyoke College, she studied millinery at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City. When she finished the millinery program, she created a line of women's and children's hats and began selling them to upscale stores, but she always dreamed of having her own store, because she "enjoys working with people." In 1998, she was able to realize her dream when she opened her own boutique in the Nolita neighborhood of Manhattan.

Most of Lisa's hats are made of wool felt. The fabric is "blocked": placed over plastic head-shaped forms of various sizes and then steamed, so that that dampened fabric retains the shape of the form. Lisa decorates her cre-

ations with ribbons, feathers, glittery spangles, and other ornamentation. Her materials come from Italy, England, and Germany, as well as the U.S., and she constantly searches for vintage decorative touches.

Spring is Lisa's busiest season. "People like hats to fit their style," she explains. "They wear hats when they're going to a wedding and need to wear something cool." She also gets business from women who want to sport a stylish hat at horse races like the Kentucky Derby. While most of her clients are women, she does offer a small selection of men's hats, as well. Lisa's hats cost from \$65 to \$120, and from \$200 to \$300 at the upper end of the price range.

Lisa says that she gets many of her design ideas from her customers, who come from all over the world to buy her hats. "A typical customer may be a schoolteacher, costume designer, professional athlete, architect, writer, artist, or accountant," she says. A number of celebrities have also purchased her hats.

While her craft may be ancient, Lisa's marketing and promotion take advantage of the media available in the modern world. The items found in her web site's online store are the styles most often chosen by her customers. Her work appears on YouTube, and the press section of her site highlights fashion magazines where her designs have been featured.

Lisa's work is a long way from the primitive head coverings that were the first hats or from the gaudy headwear of earlier centuries, and her work is marketed online and through social media. Nevertheless, she is part of a long tradition of milliners whose creations are fashion statements and expressions of their wearers' personalities. ▼

Paul Margolis is a photographer, writer, and educator who lives in New York City. Examples of his work can be seen on his web site, www.paulmargolis.com.

