What the Costume Designer Should Know about Millinery Design

CHAPTER SIXTEEN

The design of millinery, like the design of costumes, demands that the designer have an intimate knowledge of the considerations by which he must be governed, of the sources to which he may turn for ideas, and of the theory of color and color harmony as applicable to millinery.

To intelligently design a hat for an individual, you must bear in mind her figure, her face, her personality, her age, her complexion, and the color of her eyes and her hair.

Just as a garment is designed to make a short figure appear taller, so a hat can be designed to accomplish the same result. The figure of the wearer will determine the shape of the hat—that is, whether it be a flat hat, with broad crown and brim, or a narrow hat with a high crown and narrow brim. An extremely tall person would require a hat that would detract from her height and suggest width; and she would therefore choose a low, wide hat. By the same principle, a short, stout woman would need a hat that would add to her height; and she would naturally choose the high crown.

The face, too, must be studied carefully. A hat may be turned up or turned down—the problem being
to give the individual just the shape she needs to bring out her charms and to hide her defects. It is obvious that a woman with a narrow face would not look well in either an extremely narrow hat which would accentuate the thinness of her face, nor in an exceedingly wide hat which, by contrast, would make her face appear even narrower than it actually is.

So, also, a woman with an abnormally wide face could not wear a hat that is either too broad or too narrow, since the broad hat would tend to make her face seem even broader than it is, and the narrow hat would, by contrast, bring out the extreme breadth of the face. These two classes of women, therefore, should wear hats of medium width.

Like gowns, the designs of hats should reflect the personality of the wearer.

It is just as incorrect to design a light, dainty hat for a severe, business-like woman, as it would be to design fluffy, dainty clothes for her. Her entire costume must accord with her particular individuality; and in the same way, the woman with the sweet, pretty, baby face would look ludicrous in a severe, untrimmed shape—such a type demands the more elaborately trimmed chapeau, which adds daintiness and femininity to her appearance.

In millinery, too, line, material and color all play important parts in determining whether the hat should be worn by the severe type or by the dainty type of woman.

Straight lines are generally used for tailored hats, and irregular lines for the light, airy creations. Pressed silk beaver is frequently used for tailored hats; while tulle, georgette, chiffon, and light weight braids form
the body of the summer hat. Light colors would ordinarily be used for the baby-faced woman; while darker shades would be appropriate for the more severe type.

Naturally, in designing a hat, one would always keep in mind the age of the wearer, and what would be becoming to the young girl would be entirely unsuited to the elderly matron.

The occasion upon which the hat is to be worn is an important element for the designer to bear in mind. He must know whether the hat is intended to be worn on a yacht or at a dinner, and he must mold his shape accordingly.

In order to produce a pleasing effect, a hat should be made so that it has a degree of balance—that is, one side of the hat should appear as much a half of the entire hat as the other. When trimming is used, there should generally be something on one side to offset something on the other, but, of course, there is no necessity for one side to exactly balance the other. Some degree of balance, however, is needed so that the effect is not out of scale and that the milliner refrain from producing too extreme styles.

As a final point to keep in mind on this phase of the subject, the hat must be consistent with the costume as a whole. For example, a woman wearing an elaborate gown and a sport hat would look absurd, just as she would if she donned a dainty chapeau with a tennis costume. Hats are made to correspond with the particular type or style of costume for which the design is intended, and a mixture of hats and dresses with no regard to their appearance as an entire costume is a mark of poor taste.

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Beware of spoiling a hat with over-decoration.
Trimming, when used in moderation, is a beautiful addition to a hat; but when overdone it becomes hideous. There are times when trimming is entirely superfluous, and the smart shape of the hat itself is sufficient to make a perfect unit. The factory-made hat, duplicates of which are made by the hundreds, frequently requires trimming to hide its mediocrity. As a general rule, soft materials require soft-looking trimmings; while materials of heavy texture demand heavy trimmings; but good taste and good judgment should be your guide in the selection of appropriate trimmings.

*Color in Hats*

When considering the colors a woman should wear in her hats, you must first take note of her complexion. The coloring of the skin is the most important part of the general color scheme of the head and face; while next in importance is the coloring of the hair and the eyes.

The pale blonde type cannot wear her own color—yellow—but can wear her complementary color—violet—to advantage. The yellow would serve to emphasize the weak coloring of the pale blonde, whereas the violet would enhance and set it off; for as you already know, complementary colors are in contrast with each other.

A person with a brilliant complexion will find that a white hat, or a hat with a white facing, brings out the bloom of the cheeks and gives color to the eyes and the hair; but white, worn next to a sallow complexion, will make the sallowness more apparent, and conse-
quently more disagreeable. Black can be most appropriately worn by women with brilliant hair, shining eyes and high color.

Colors should be chosen so as to accord with the personality of the wearer—an austere type could not wear loud tones, as they would make her look ludicrous; nor would the strong, aggressive type be appropriately dressed if her hat were of a soft, delicate tint of violet. For the severe type, gray and the darkest shades of brown, blue and violet are appropriate; while for the aggressive individual, one would immediately think of the vivid hues.

It is, of course, necessary to consider at all times how a woman will look in the colors that are being chosen for her; and it is almost as important to consider how she will feel in them. Heretofore, this element has been given all too little attention by the designers; yet it seems indisputable that a woman has a right to feel well in her clothes, just as she has the right to look well in them. This point is made clearer by the further consideration of specific types of personalities.

It is well known that certain types are warmer or cooler than others. One woman may be always cool, self-possessed, the kind of person one longs for when troubled by feverish thoughts. The opposite type is warm, full-blooded, highly emotional, quick to anger and equally quick to respond to joy. While one has the appearance of coolness, the other has the appearance of warmth. Now the cool type can stand warmth—the feel of warm colors like red, orange and yellow; and the warm type, being more emotional, is actually irritated by these same colors. In this consideration
of colors, one need go no further than to consider the absolutely scientific fact that sick people have been known to become feverish when red flowers were placed near their beds.

A brief general principle might be applied that cool colors be preferred for warm personalities, and warm colors for cool personalities.

See Color Type Chart, Chapter Seventeen, indicating just what colors certain types can wear in respect to their physical qualities. But it must be borne in mind that this table is by no means infallible, and that it may have to be changed to accord with the personality of the wearer in particular cases.

The same natural and artificial objects that serve as sources of inspiration for costume designing, may be used to advantage in designing millinery. Obviously, you must adapt the suggestions that come from these various sources to modern fashions in millinery.

A fertile field for suggestion lies in other hats, both modern and old-fashioned. It very often happens that one hat may be suggestive of some other of totally different design. Perhaps you could change the brim and keep the same crown, or vice versa; in any event, the hat will inspire a new idea, which you can elaborate upon as you work, and thus create an original design.

Some of the smartest shapes have been inspired by the most humble hats. Take for example the farmer's hat, figure 88. With a keen imagination and an alert mind, you could find innumerable ways of adapting this lowly hat to the graceful lines of fashionable millinery. There may be so many variations, however, that the resulting design does not in the least resemble the source from which it was taken. How many varia-

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tions there are depends entirely upon the designer's powers of concentration and elaboration. To one designer this country hat suggested the pretty chapeau pictured in figure 89.

Looking at the country hat, the designer decided that the crown looked too high in proportion to the brim; therefore she made the crown lower and flatter at the top; and she further decided that her design would be more attractive with a drooping effect to the brim. She kept the same width of brim front and back but on the sides she made a much wider brim, turning it down to give a becoming curve over the eyes. Straw was selected as the material for the new hat; and for the color scheme she looked to the same source of inspiration, choosing the country colors—taking the yellow of the stubble-field in the straw of the upper brim and crown. For color in bits of trimming, the field flowers naturally suggested themselves in harmonizing shades of purple and lavender, with here and there a touch of pink.

Perhaps if you were designing this hat you would use trimmings of fine straw that look like heads of wheat, which would be entirely suitable; or the idea might occur to you to use a double brim, separated for a short space in front and back, to hold a few more of the flowers that appear on the upper brim. Indeed a hundred and one ideas might come to you as you worked out your original design from the suggestions given you through the study of a simple farmer's hat.

Our worthy ancestors furnished us with rich sources of inspiration for head-gear as well as for costumes, and in every library you will find books on the subject
of old-period costumes. Even such a seemingly inartistic source as an encyclopedia will serve the purpose of the diligent seeker after designs. The millinery designer living in the small town has ample opportunity to create charming and original styles, for there is generally at least one library in the smallest of towns; if not, there are always inanimate objects from which to obtain suggestions.

Plates E and F show how ideas suggested by ancient head-gear may be adapted in the making of a modern hat. Understand, however, that the modern hat that is shown beside its old period source is but one way of working out an original design.

The upper illustration on plate E is an early Egyptian style of head-dress such as was worn by royalty. This particular style, which once graced the head of an Egyptian queen, the wife of Rameses IV, suggested the making of the turban shown directly opposite. The material used is of green-blue crêpe de chine, and the fancy at the front is made of black patent leather. The streamers on both sides, adapted from the hanging flaps of the original design, are made of beads with three narrow bands of leather at the lower edge.

From the two helmets of the Greek warrior, the middle illustration on plate E, a smart polk effect has been worked out. A frill of silk ribbon stiffened with wire is used from side to side across the back, and the result is a simple polk shape of taffetas.

The remaining illustrations on this plate show the head-dress of a French woman of the fourteenth century and a modern turban suggested by it. The modern hat is made of old blue taffeta with strips of tan straw forming a cross-bar pattern over it, while

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loops of the straw are distributed all over the lower edge of the crown.

On plate F the upper illustration shows a French head-dress of the sixteenth century. From this old style, the attractive hat on the right has been worked out into a sort of modified tam-o’-shanter with a top of gray satin. The under part of the wide ears on either side is covered with a figured material, with henna and blue as the predominating colors.

From the Phrygian soldier’s helmet on this same plate, a charming little hat has been designed, using cloth of silver, topped with an uncurled ostrich plume.

The hat on this plate, designed from the Semitic turban, is very close to the original shape in its treatment. It is made of black satin with a wide strip of Paisley chiffon caught at one side, carried across the crown through a jade ornament, and then made to fall in a loop on the shoulder.

In some of these designs you will see that there is but slight deviation made from the old-period hat to the modern one derived from it, in others, that only part of the old-period hat has been used as suggestion. Some designers might take only the crest from the helmet to work out in an original design; others might see an idea in the ear-flaps below the crown, or in a line of the crown itself. In brief, no one head-dress would appeal to two designers in the same way; each would see some different suggestion to be worked out into an original design.

Thus you will see that, by constant observation and adaptation, you will develop your perceptive powers and imagination to such a degree as to be able to take
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suggestions from any living or inanimate thing, and apply them to modern, up-to-date fashions in hats.

In plates G and H, are a number of hats suitable for various types, various occasions, for all seasons.