

LESSON XVIII

THE DESIGNER IN THE WORKROOM

A DESIGNER'S work in the millinery workroom, as in that of the modiste, is to evolve new and beautiful ideas, using the fad or fashion of the hour as a keynote, and varying its application in unlimited designs.

Most designers have some special style of chapeau in which they excel; one is more happy in her bonnets than in hats; another gives us finer designs in large hats; another seems to evolve lines of most artistic beauty in the draping of toques, etc., etc.; rarely does one find a designer who is equally excellent in every line of head-wear, and it is well that it is so.

But though one may have a prolific brain, when it comes down to sifted facts we all imbibe ideas—maybe unconsciously—from outside sources; from the designs of others, from old or modern paintings and drawings, and a hundred and one various inspiring visions.

Paris is still, as it has been for many centuries, the fount of Sartorial Art. It was not always so; before the eleventh century Italy led the fashions of the then civilized world, but with the advent of the first traveling tailor and costume maker (who was a Frenchman) the tide turned, and from then on France led in the cut and make of clothing both of men and women.

It was, however, the men in those days who wore, like the birds they robbed, the gayest plumage on most picturesque hats. The headdresses of the ladies for several hundred years were disfiguring rather than enhancing to the wearer; but by degrees the hideous caps and horns disappeared, women showed more of their hair, and its dressing and decoration became an art, leading in time to the other extreme, when the structures of hair and the added trimming, such as feathers, bows, flowers,

baskets of fruit and flowers, and even ships in full sailing rig, rose to such proportions that the roofs of the sedan chairs of that period had to be taken off to permit of the ladies sitting inside.

But Art is a goddess that will not be denied, and soon her sway caused saner and more beautiful ideas to prevail, and from the time of Louis XVI Parisian designers have been the arbiters of fashion for the world we call civilized.

Women's chapeaux were at first the work of men, the name of milliner being a modernization of "milaner," as a native of Milan, Italy, was the first to travel in this capacity, and Milan hats are to this day highly esteemed.

After a time the clever French women took most of this trade out of the hands of the men, and with the exception of a few notable "men milliners," have held the prerogative ever since.

Paris has, however, long since ceased to be the only place where one finds really artistic designers. True, she still leads in dictating the season's modes, but she is willing, and even anxious, to accept the suggestions and follow the ideas of her American customers, for it has come to pass that the American woman has "grown up," and has come into her *heritage* of artistic ideas, and every refinement that culture and ancestry can yield her.

Artistic taste is due to temperament, and where this exists the simplest materials lend themselves to artistic combinations and beautiful effects.

The French excel in dainty, graceful designs because of their volatile, mirth-loving temperaments; the Germans can never reach these heights, because their temperaments are just the reverse, while it has been proved in several workrooms that next to the French the Irish temperament is the most artistic.

The more artistic the general training of a person, the more ready are they to appreciate and profit by the fine productions of others; hence we are glad to see and grateful for the privilege of studying the "models"

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brought from Paris each season by the enterprising importers.

Twenty-five years ago in Paris and London the houses that catered to America and the Colonies put aside for this trade any designs that were too extreme or "screaming" for the fastidious home buyers; but times have changed, and the American woman is now considered the best dressed in the world, and the leaders of American society are the women who dictate, quite as much as the *élite* of France.

We must concede their full merit to the Parisian designers, and those milliners who are sent over by their employers from season to season have an inestimable advantage which should bring great good to the workrooms they are connected with; the influence of such an education should be felt by the least little apprentice in the place, that every small detail of work may be the better for the investment of capital and the artistic experience of the head of the department.

In saying this we cast no reflections on the home designer; each workroom has its own class of customers to please, and each can adopt and adapt just as much of the Parisian ideas shown as suits their especial trade. Often the home design is an improvement on the model—judged from the standpoint of individual needs.

A great many "Openings" show hats marked with the tag of a Parisian firm which never saw Paris; some, if truthfully offered as "Designed in our own workrooms," would reflect great credit on the house; others are libels on any firm whose name they "borrow"; and few are so made as to deceive the knowing ones.

It is a fact, however, that the first pattern hats of the season, put on the market weeks before the first case arrives from Paris, are, as a rule, more practical and better sellers than those later evolved after the imported ideas; the home designers evidently know best what the bulk of the home market needs.

But the retail milliners, and especially those that cater

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to an exclusive and private trade, find their success in being able to create designs for the *individual*. The hat *must be becoming*; it must have just enough of the prevailing mode to be up-to-date, but its finest artistic touch must be its individual tone as being a part of the wearer's personality.

Paris models cost in Paris from one hundred to one thousand francs; to this add 60 per cent. of duty, besides freight, packing, and the expenses of the buyer, and the cost is easily doubled. Yet the wholesale importers often sell such hats for less than they cost them in Paris, for the simple reason that they make their profit on the materials milliners buy to reproduce the models, these copies ranging from about half to one-fifth the cost of the originals, besides the many detail ideas that can be employed in other designs, at very considerably lower prices.

It is amazing the really artistic designs in fairly good materials that are produced by manufacturers, and also retail milliners making a specialty of low-priced hats.

Simplicity is the keynote of true art; it is not the quality of materials nor great quantities of trimming that count, but graceful lines and a *harmony of values* in the design. One simple idea, correctly carried out, is far more effective than a mixture without any special *motif*.

The Parisian designers use, as a rule, simple shapes; to these they give the lines their inspiration dictates; then the shape makers copy those lines, and "new" frames are produced.

But there are other creations that do not depend on any shape, such as a piece of velvet or felt draped over a frame, or on a hat; such designs are hard to copy; no two pairs of hands drape a given piece of material just the same way, and often in a model the piece used is simply a queer cutting left over from some garment, which makes it impossible to copy. Actually, the only and right thing to do is to take the idea and supplement

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it with one's own artistic ability to produce a *similar* effect.

The study of paintings and good illustrations in art galleries is an excellent and most delightful method of inspiration for the designer, especially when fashion favors some special "period" of a by-gone age. There are the several "Louis" periods, the "Directoire," Empire, 1830, 1850, etc.; and we do occasionally revert to even earlier times, and adapt to modern ideas some pretty effect used by the belles of ancient times.