

Hats MGUE

SINCE 1910

by Christina Probert

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

So many people have shared their talents with *Vogue* over the years: artists, photographers, designers, craftsmen, writers, but also *Vogue's* own editors whose perspicacious choices have shaped the magazine. I am grateful to Frederick Fox who was most generous with his time and information about the millinery world. I am indebted to Alex Kroll, Editor of Condé Nast Books, for his guidance throughout, Georgina Boosey for her editorial wisdom, Liz Bauwens for the book's design, Anna Houghton for her patience in coping with pictorial and editorial hurdles.

C.P.

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Key to captions

Information is given in the following order: edition; artist or photographer; designer or maker (the last always in *italic*). Editions are identified by initials:

Av American Vogue Bv British Vogue Fv French Vogue Gv German Vogue

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INTRODUCTION

'Where did you get that hat?
Where did you get that tile?
Isn't it a nobby one and just the proper style?
I should love to have one just the same as that!
Where'er I go they shout "Hello!
Where did you get that hat?"

James Rolmaz

The smartest hats have always been recherché. A Paris hat was every fashionable woman's desire at the turn of the twentieth century, a model created with the intangible flair of the French modiste. 'Go to Reboux looking tired, dejected,' suggested French Vogue in 1924, 'and you'll return happy and delighted - the ugly become beautiful, or at least that is the illusion, which is half the battle.' Naturally this handmade, unique (but oh so flattering) confection was expensive and thus attained the snob value which Rolmaz noted; it was a fashionable and social headstart. In choosing a hat, considerations like the time of day at which it is to be worn, practicality, price, the dictates of etiquette, climate and season, all pale into insignificance by comparison with the aura which a beautiful hat can create. The aura may be one of beauty, or merely of self-confidence, but it is this which has continued to make hats an important fashion accessory; a hat can catch any mood, match any style of dressing, while the rules of etiquette and custom change continually. 'To be just to oneself,' admitted British Vogue in 1918, 'one should be biased in the matter of hats.'

It has always been considered chic for one's hat to be individual, while maintaining the current look. Now, when the majority of hats are no longer 'models', the embarrassment of encountering an identical hat at Royal Ascot has become more probable. In other areas of hat-wearing the opposite is the case: for schools, police, similarity is the vital factor to emphasize group characters, not those of the constituent individuals.

The history of hats is long and varied. For centuries they have been sartorial status symbols: visible signs of wealth, religion, nationality, political beliefs, occupation. At times when communications between and within

Vastly flattering: oversized felt hat, its side 'à retroussis' to emphasize the mass of hair. Characteristic of the time, the downy ostrich feathers are almost as imposing as the hat itself. AV 1910

1910



A whole stuffed owl ornaments this wide straw. AV 1910. Burgesser.



The fashionable mourner, in tiny white poke bonnet with yards of black crepe.

AV 1917

countries were difficult, such symbols helped to identify outsiders. In the Roman Empire, to be crowned with a laurel wreath was a mark of respect for heroism; aristocratic ladies wore jewelled headdresses which, as marks of birth and standing, symbols of wealth, changed according to fashion. In Renaissance Italy the retinues of the leading families wore distinctive hats, of individual colour and design for each house, as visible reminders of their power, patronage, politics and wealth. Hats also have religious symbolism: the Pharaohs' headdresses had mystical significance; ecclesiastics today wear hats to display their rank and faith. There are widely held theories that the shape of hats changes with, and even forecasts, the social, political and economic climate. As a women's fashion accessory, hats continue to play a significant role; in 1910 etiquette demanded that hats should be worn out of doors, whatever the weather and the time of day, and often indoors too. Now, when hats need be worn only on formal occasions, they are generally worn as a matter of personal choice, in style, size and colour tempered only by the dictates of current make-up, hair and dress fashion.

At the end of the nineteenth century, fashionable hats were generally small, perched high on the head, dominated aesthetically by the clumps of false hair which every smart woman wore; alternatively, bonnets were large enough to engulf the whole coiffure. As the silhouette became less bolstered, skirts narrower, hair more natural, hats began to increase in size and visual importance. *Vogue* reflected the great emphasis on millinery, running extensive editorials on new styles, for example 'Tracing Some of Our Recent Feminine Headgear to Queer Sources' in August 1909, which found tribal and national prototypes for fashionable shapes. Since the smartest hats were made to measure, *Vogue* ran a regular column called 'Vogue Points for Milliners', detailing the construction and ornamentation of a selection of new hats.

During the second decade of the twentieth century, hat styles changed fast and dramatically. Radical changes were taking place in the way in which women dressed: corsets became softer, less bulky, clothes too. Skirts shortened to reveal the long-hidden shoes, but the hat remained stable, unchanged in function or basic construction. It was fashion's emblem, its centrepiece, as it developed from season to season.

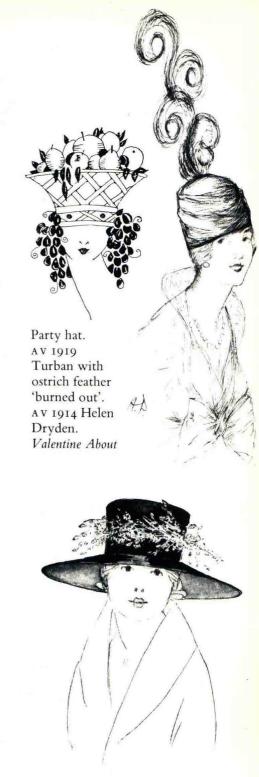
In 1909 emphasis was on the crown of the hat: turbans were created for day and evening, with or without brims, in two or three toning fabrics, with floral decoration. Pleated and folded swathes of rich-coloured and textured fabrics formed berets. Soft 'Rembrandt' hats had wide brims, as did firmer summer styles of straw and tulle. French millinery terms gave the Paris touch: a cone-shaped hat with flattened crown covered in velvet was the 'Chasseur d'Afrique' hat, for it resembled the hats worn by the French army in Morocco, 'peau de rat' was a pliable felt, feathers were 'gorge de pigeon',

'canard sauvage'. In 1910 hats were vast, the shape traditionally worn by Little Miss Muffet: a crown so high and broad that it appeared perpetually in danger of falling over the wearer's eyes. The whole confection, of leghorn and lace for summer, glazed straw, chip for winter, was ornamented further by huge bunches of roses, whole stuffed birds, feathers, whose arrangement changed subtly and frequently. Velvet, moiré, lace, satin and tulle were new alternatives to the ever-popular straws. The 'ruban de toile ciré' was the latest ornamentation, a straw ribbon with glazed finish, also moiré, taffeta, velvet or faille ribbons which replaced satin.

By the outbreak of the Great War the whole mood of hat design was changing. There was a new vertical emphasis which superseded the broad, rather heavy style of earlier hats. Fanciful names continued to be given to the smartest shapes and materials: the 'tête de nègre' straw crown had a 'fancy ostrich feather burned out to make it delicate'; the 'Chapeau Niniche' was a bandeau hat raised at the back and towards the side, ornamented with flowers and ribbons. Evening shapes, too, emphasized the hair: in 1914 coloured wigs, in mauve, green, white were the latest thing when worn with a bejewelled and befeathered bandeau. In wartime fine lace veils of varying lengths came into fashion; American Vogue in 1917 showed French hats and veils 'designed to console very young widows . . . for the Parisienne never altogether lays aside her coquetry. She can not. It is inborn.'

'One of the newest hats' said British *Vogue* in 1917, 'is a *cloche* designed by Lucie Hamar'. This earliest version looked very unlike its twenties sisters: it had a tall crown widening to the summit, a large brim. This brim was very versatile, it could be pinned up at front or side, or even back, or could be turned down to shade the eyes with the addition of a veil. 'Ever so many hats are one-sided affairs,' said *Vogue* in 1918, 'on the right side of course.'

Colours, fabrics and trimmings for hats varied enormously between 1910 and 1920. At first plain colours with brightly contrasting trimmings were used, one colour being promoted each season. Fur was always a popular winter addition to hats. Later in the decade printed and embroidered fabrics, lace, dotted net, moiré, velvet, silk, tulle, faille, crin and taffeta became alternatives to felt and to the myriad straws, varying from coarse chip to the finest lace-woven variety. Smartest ornaments in 1909 were feathers in long swathes, particularly ostrich and écume feathers (which were very fine indeed), voluminous rosettes of Malines tulle, straggly squirrel tail aigrettes and plaited silk, soft velvet. Later, flowers were used, whole stuffed birds, ribbons. By the end of the decade ornament had become less overpowering, supplementary to the hats' design, except for parties, when they were laden with miniature pagodas, flower-baskets, jewel boxes. 'A great change has come about in the buying of hats,' noted *Vogue*: 'it is the new idea to choose a hat solely on account of its decorative effect.'



The cloche in 1917, satin faced with straw. BV 1917. Lucie Hamar

1920



A very informal straw, the most popular material for hats, this page left. With roses under the brim, and long ties to ward off breezes, it was ideal for a summer afternoon spent reading in the garden. Two afternoon hats, above, worn with the highly fashionable lingerie blouses which were as pretty and frilly as the bodice beneath. The hat on the right is a 'Rembrandt' shape, with ruff effect under the brim and curled feathers; the other is more formal, with high crown and firm brim. Opposite is an early antecedent of the hard hat. Rigidly constructed, it has the high, wide crown giving the falling-over-the-eyes look characteristic of the first decade of the century.

AV 1911 Z. P. Nikolaki

AV 1909 Vivien Valdaire





