

Cloche Hats with Flair and Style

By Diann Eason

One of the iconic images of the Model A era fashion is the cloche hat. Carolyn Reboux, a French milliner, is considered by many as the designer of the felt “helmet shaped” hat in 1923.



Reboux would create the hat by winding a length of felt around a customer’s head, shaping, tucking, and cutting until she and the customer were pleased with the final image. Reboux was the first person in fashion design to add a veil to a hat, “swathing the feminine face in a mist”. She also started the use of colored veils on hats.

As you peruse era magazines, pictures, and visit antique stores, you will see a variety of adornments on era hats. While the hat coordinated with the main garment, shoes, or purse, the adornment was almost anything that creativity, the time of day, and the season of the year would allow.

The movie industry was influential in hat design. Hats worn by the “silver screen” stars, Greta Garbo, Louise Brooks, Marlene Dietrich, and Carole Lombard created excitement and creative opportunities. Lilly Dache, a French milliner, and an apprentice of Reboux, was a flamboyant immigrant beloved of Americans. She designed for many movie producers. Dache has been described as a homely child with a thin face, strong facial features, and green eyes, with straight red hair framing her face. As a child she started her creative millinery design by twining grapes in her hair and made hats out of the leaves.



Haven 1929



Garbo 1930



Dietrich 1928

Fall and winter hats might have a felt flower, a metal buckle from a worn out shoe, grosgrain ribbons, matching fabric attached in an interesting design, beads, velvet ribbons, feathers, and buttons.



Spring and summer hats allowed for the use of softer fabric flowers, cellophane flowers, beads, netting, embroidered flowers and designs, and straw braid.



An adornment for a hat mirrored the owner's personality, adding a bit of society flare, or sparkle in the light of the moon with the use of rhinestones. Adorning your hat made you stand out in a crowd and gave you a style all your own.

As you shop for your new era hat, keep in mind you may change the adornment to suit your fancy, your ensemble, or the celebration. Have fun, be creative, and wear your hat with the grace of a Model A Era woman adorned with a fabulous adornment accent to suit your personality.

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