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Hats off to Louisville

Kentucky Derby keeps hats in fashion

By TRACEY TEO
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There was a time when a woman wouldn't leave the house without the perfect hat to complement her dress.

Throughout the centuries, women wore big hats, small hats, hats with fur, hats with flowers, hats with veils, hats with ribbons, but whatever style they chose, they always wore one.



Now hats have gone the way of proper white gloves, and for the most part, are seen as quaint fashion accessories of the past. But there is still one place where a woman would have to be mad as a hatter to be caught without one the Kentucky Derby. It's hard to find an event more steeped in tradition, and women wearing hats as proudly as a queen bearing a crown is all part of a long-standing Derby custom.



Nobody knows that better than Louisville milliner Angie Schultz, owner of Attitudes by Angie. It's not Derby Day yet, but as far as Schultz is concerned the race is on. She has lots of hats left to make and time is running out. She just pulled another all-nighter trimming hats that will be sold at several Louisville venues including The Museum of Art and Craft and Rodeo Drive, an upscale Louisville boutique. Even with lack of sleep, Schultz somehow manages to be a fireball of energy, and right now she is knee-deep in feathers and flowers in the basement-studio of her home. She's adding the finishing touches to "Pretty Woman," a fire-engine red hat with regal black and red feathers and a smart tulle bow. Schultz says each of her one-of-a-kind creations has its own personality, so she names them accordingly. It seems appropriate enough. Most works of art have a title, and Schultz's hats are artworks you hang on your head instead of on a wall.



The most exciting two minutes in sports is really a weekend-long style show, as far as many of Schultz's customers are concerned, and it's Schultz's job to make sure they arrive at Churchill Downs looking elegant and feeling confident.

Schultz's reputation has spread well beyond the Bluegrass State, and she has even had a couple of



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brushes with celebrities in search of a Derby hat.

One of her most memorable experiences was a couple of years ago when she got an unexpected Derby Day phone call. Wendie Malick, who played Nina Van Horn on the long-running NBC sitcom "Just Shoot Me," was on the line, and she said she was coming over.

"I met her at a Churchill Downs luncheon and gave her my card," Schultz says. "I didn't think she would ever call me, but she did."

Malick arrived in a limo with an entourage in tow and proceeded to try on almost every hat in the studio.

"I was dressed and ready to go to the Derby, and she kept trying on hats," Schultz laughs. "She had a good time."

Schultz doesn't wait for the Derby to wear a hat. She wears one every day, and today she is sporting a baseball cap with a zebra print bill and colorful velvet pansies. "Some people are finished dressing when they put their shoes on. I'm finished dressing when I put my hat on," Schultz says.

Anne Duncan, owner of Anne's Wig Shoppe in Evansville, doesn't design hats, but she has been selling them for 27 years, and her Derby-going customers have come to rely on her expertise to make sure they select a hat that's right for them.

"Instead of buying a dress and then trying to find a hat to go with it, I recommend that women buy the hat first because it's usually easier to find a dress they like than a hat they like," Duncan says.

"If they come in and find a hat they love but it doesn't work with the dress, they are so disappointed."

She says many women who claim they "don't look good in hats," simply aren't wearing them properly or aren't choosing a style that's right for them. Duncan believes every woman can wear a hat, and offers advice on how to make one work for you.



Courtesy of Angie Schultz ABOVE: Hats designed by Louisville, Ky., milliner Angie Schultz. LEFT: Anne Duncan, owner of Anne's Wig Shoppe in Evansville, has been outfitting Evansville residents with hats such as these for the Kentucky Derby. Many customers have already picked out their hats, but Duncan still has a selection for those in need of Derby fashion. ERIN MCCRACKEN / Courier & Press

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