

HATalk

Issue 54, September 2010
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the e-magazine for those who make hats



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Making Hats in the South of France

On Location at Chateau Dumas

Last month, Editor Rebecca Weaver attended a week long millinery course in France. Now, she tells us all about it...

When Lizzie Hulme, proprietor of the sumptuous Chateau Dumas (right), invited me to come along and observe one of her Millinery Masterclasses, I didn't need much persuading. It was hard to imagine that spending a week in the summer sun of Southern France learning from expert milliner Dillon Wallwork could be anything but amazing.

From the moment I set foot on the Chateau grounds, my lofty expectations were not only met but were exceeded. The 18th century Chateau, which was featured in the August 2010 issue of UK magazine Homes & Gardens, was everything I had imagined such an enchanting place could be. Painstakingly renovated to keep its old world charm whilst providing all the modern comforts, the decor is completely in keeping with the character of the property and the place is full of Lizzie's antique finds from local *brocantes*, or 'junk' shops. With an in-house chef and maid service, all of the little touches which make a luxury holiday so special were in abundance. Three delicious meals each day, either inside or on the terrace, and use of the extensive grounds, including an open air swimming pool (below right), were available to everyone staying at the Chateau. The Studio (below left), where all the Creative Workshops take place, was conveniently located just across the courtyard from the Chateau itself.



Outstanding location aside, what I was really there for, of course, was to learn from Dillon, a milliner with plenty of expertise to pass on. With over 25 years of experience in model millinery, Dillon began his career in the workroom of Mitzi Lorenz and later took a position at Philip Somerville Ltd. He was promoted to Design Director at Philip Somerville, working on collections which were worn by socialites, celebrities and members of the Royal Family. In 2009, Dillon began designing hats under his own name - **Dillon Wallwork bespoke hats**.

The Masterclass was aimed at Intermediate Beginners and Dillon began the week with a demonstration of the blocking process, sharing lots of little trade secrets along the way. We were then free to get started on our hats. The Studio, formerly the Chateau Coach House, was light, airy and full of vintage textiles, hat blocks and millinery tools. Here are some photos...



Dillon blocks a windowpane sinamay brim.



The stockroom - full of goodies.



A demonstration of blocking veiling.



Cathy & Adrian try out some vintage ribbon on orange felt.



Lisa hard at work in the Studio.



Everyone working on their own projects.



Learning the art of bow tying.



Flin's finished hat.



While some people had brought their own materials, there was a good selection of straw, sinamay and felt available to purchase at the Chateau. With everyone working on their own styles and using different materials, much of the teaching was done one on one by Dillon and his assistant Adrian Phillip Howard, who were

both happy to come alongside anyone who needed advice, inspiration or a helping hand with anything. This allowed each of us to work at our own pace and get the most out of having two prestigious milliners so close at hand. Dillon interspersed demonstrations throughout, covering many techniques including blocking veiling, getting a hidden wire in a sinamay brim, bow tying and organza flower making.



It was an international group, with students coming from Australia, the USA, the UK and Austria. Though from different backgrounds and with different personalities, the common interest in millinery helped the group to gel really well. As millinery can sometimes be a lonely occupation, it was nice to be around so many other milliners and to have the chance to brainstorm, swap stories and tips and ask each other for help when things didn't go to plan.

As I said before, it was all the little touches that made the week so special

- things like a lovely picnic ready for us in a nearby glade (top left) after a hard morning's work, a surprise birthday cake for Scottish student Elizabeth (top right), gourmet cooking at every meal (bottom left) and the thoroughly relaxing atmosphere of the whole place. I left feeling inspired by my surroundings, the teaching and by what we had all accomplished in just one week. It was an enriching experience which I would highly recommend.



Learn more about Dillon Wallwork's Millinery Masterclasses on the [Chateau Dumas website](http://chateaudumas.net). Limited places are still available this Autumn - email enquiries@chateaudumas.net for more information.

Hat of the month

by Yvonne Ellison

The students attending the Millinery Masterclass at Chateau Dumas made some amazing hats. The Hat of the Month this month is one of them - a double brimmed sinamay hat made by Yvonne Ellison...

After working hard all week on this creation, Yvonne made a fashionably late appearance to dinner on the last evening of the course wowing everyone with her stunning look. She had travelled to France from her home in Michigan in the USA to attend last month's millinery course. Admirably, she came alone on what was her first ever journey to Europe. This was not the beginning of her millinery journey, however.

A hat enthusiast since she was a teenager, Yvonne remembers sitting in church and admiring all of the big fancy hats worn by the older ladies. At the age of fourteen, she started to wear hats to church as well, despite the fact that many of the other girls her age weren't doing so. She even tried her hand at making hats, the first being for her mother.

Fifteen years ago, Yvonne, now 51, started to get into hat making in a big way. While excited about what she could create at home, she soon realised that she wanted to learn more about millinery than she could teach herself. She began to attend classes and workshops whenever she could. She found a teacher in Detroit who could teach her about felt and visited her whenever she could. After doing this for nine years, she decided she was ready to learn about straw. At this point, she began studying in Chicago and Saugatuck under well-known milliners Eia Radosavljevic and Wayne Wichern.





Throughout this time, Yvonne was simply making hats for the sheer love of it, without a view to selling them. Eventually, the idea of having her own business began to develop, not least because she was running out of space to store all the hats she was making! Yvonne decided to give it a go and named her business *Where Did U Get That Hat?*. Her daughter Shalanda helped out by handling the day to day running of the business, leaving Yvonne free to concentrate on being creative.

Rather than adding to her inventory, Yvonne decided to spend her time on the course making a hat all for herself - one to wear to church on her birthday. She had come with a colour scheme already in mind - gold and cream to match an outfit already picked for the occasion.

Yvonne blocked the crown from a cream parasol straw hood, lined with blocking net, and both brims were made from sinamay. As you can see in the above photo, Yvonne attached the cream brim first, at an upturned angle, and then added the gold brim, turning it down. Both brims were blocked on the same block to ensure that they were the same size and shape.

Having two brims added so much elegance to the hat that Yvonne wisely decided that simple trimmings were the best accents to finish it off. She attached a string of 24 karat gold and cream beads (right), beautiful cream silk roses, which you can see on the previous page, and some gold and cream sinamay leaves. The string of beads was handmade for her by friend Lucy Yeager, who has a shop called Gift Options in Saginaw, Michigan. The roses came from a local hat factory which we had visited as part of the course.

Yvonne's business continues to grow steadily, with her clientele mainly church going hat wearers. She has been featured in *Hat Life* as well as her local press. She dreams of the day when she can quit her day job and devote even more time to her true love - making beautiful hats.

You can see more of Yvonne's work on her [website](#).



Les Estivales Du Chapeau Septfonds 2010

The July Chateau Dumas Masterclass coincided with the famous Hat Festival in nearby Septfonds. Les Estivales du Chapeau ran from July 14 to 18 and was a real treat to visit. Here's an overview of the Festival and hat competition...



Septfonds is located in the Quercy region of France, a region with a rich hat making heritage which began in 1796. In this year, Pétronille Cantecor saw some local women sewing straw braids. Realising that hats made with similar Italian straw braids, commonly known as Leghorn straw, were increasingly in demand, she decided to start producing hats from local straw. She began a factory and was very successful. Others soon followed suit and hat making became the area's main industry. At the peak, over 2,000 people were working in the hat factories, known as chapelleries.



Unfortunately, the changing global market and cheaper straw braid available from China has greatly reduced the hat industry in the area, with only a few factories remaining. The locals are very keen not to let their special skills die out, however, which is why *Les Estivales du Chapeau* was started in 1993. Over the years, celebrations, which are organised by an extremely hard working team of volunteers, have been held in nearby Caussade as well as Septfonds, but this year the two towns joined forces and resources in Septfonds.

As always, this year's Festival included live demonstrations of traditional straw braiding and straw sewing (above left), as well as straw blocking on vintage hydraulic presses like the one in the right-hand photo.



With a Country and Western theme, there was lots of live music and street performances to entertain those browsing the stalls of local and international milliners (left and below). Milliners like Tracy Chaplin, originally from the UK, and Japanese Tokutaro Hirano were in attendance.

The Hat Competition is an important part of the Festival, and for months entries had been arriving from around the world. All of these were on display in the local school for the first three days of the Festival, alongside an interesting exhibit about hat making in the area. Visitors to the exhibit could cast their vote for their favourite hat. The winner of this ballot would receive the Public Prize.



Judging took place on Saturday, July 17th. As Dillon Wallwork is such a distinguished milliner and was in the area to teach the Masterclass, the Festival Committee asked him to be President of the Jury. The rest of the jury consisted of ten other members, all of whom work in the millinery industry in various capacities. Some of the jury were French, while others had travelled from other nations, including Japan, Korea and the Netherlands, to participate.

The jury (pictured below) watched each hat being modelled by local girls. Hats were grouped into four categories: General Hats, Straw Braid Hats, Hats for St Catherine, Patron Saint of hats, and Hats for the Catwalk.

They took time studying each hat from all angles and then each independently gave them two scores on a scale of 1 to 10 - the first for beauty, the second for technical structure. The two numbers were then added together to get a final score. All jurors' scores were totalled, winners decided and everyone present was sworn to secrecy until the evening, when the winning hats would be unveiled to the public during Septfonds' own Haute Couture catwalk show.



Les Estivales Winners....



General - 1st Prize & Public Prize
Made by Chizuko Oodaira
Kobe, Japan



General - 2nd Prize
Made by Herbert Chambart
Saint-Père-en-Retz, France



General - 3rd Prize
Made by Tracy Chaplin
Alan, France



Stitched Braid Straw Hat Winner
Made by Terasawa Fumi
Osaka, Japan



Special Jury Prize Winner
Made by Meta Leefkens de Wijme
The Netherlands



St Catherine's Winner
Patrick Bosano
Aubagne, France



Catwalk Hat Winner
Made by Virginie de Broc
Paris, France

Dillon, along with other new members of the jury, were later honoured in an Investiture into the *Confrerie du Chapeau of Caussade et Septfonds*, a local society which recognises those who work in or support the hat industry. The highlight of the Festival was in the evening - the long awaited fashion show. The whole town turned out for this special event which included live music, dancing and the brilliantly presented catwalk show (below) including all of the hats from the competition.



Madame Blandine Azan, who has been a key organiser of *Les Estivales du Chapeau* for the last eighteen years, is pictured in the above photo (left) giving first place winner Chizuko Oodaira (centre) her prize. Madame Azan held the position of Honorary President of the *Chapeau en Quercy* society

and helped to oversee all of the festivities. She was pleased with this year's event and is already looking ahead to next year when she hopes to see even more traders and hat competition entries. She also hopes to include some millinery workshops in next year's Festival programme. Stalls cost only fifty euros for all four days and traders don't need to worry about finding a place to stay, as exhibitors are housed with local French families at no cost and their lunch and dinner each day is provided in the *Salle de Faite*, or assembly hall. Septfonds is approximately a fifty minute drive from Toulouse airport and there is a train station in Caussade, making the area easily accessible from other parts of Europe and further afield.

You can start planning what you'll enter into next year's competition now. Entries must be received by the end of June 2011. For more information about **Les Estivales du Chapeau** or to get entry forms for the competition, email Madame Azan at azan.gerard@club-internet.fr.



Working with Blocking Net

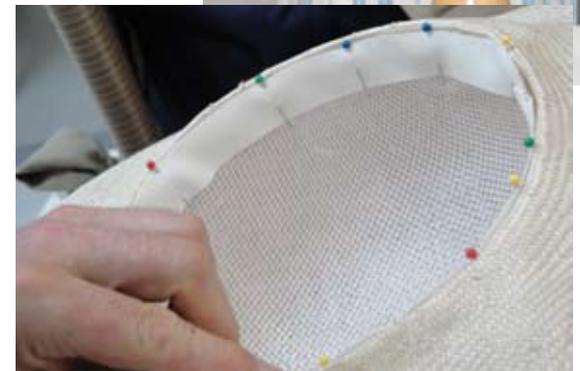
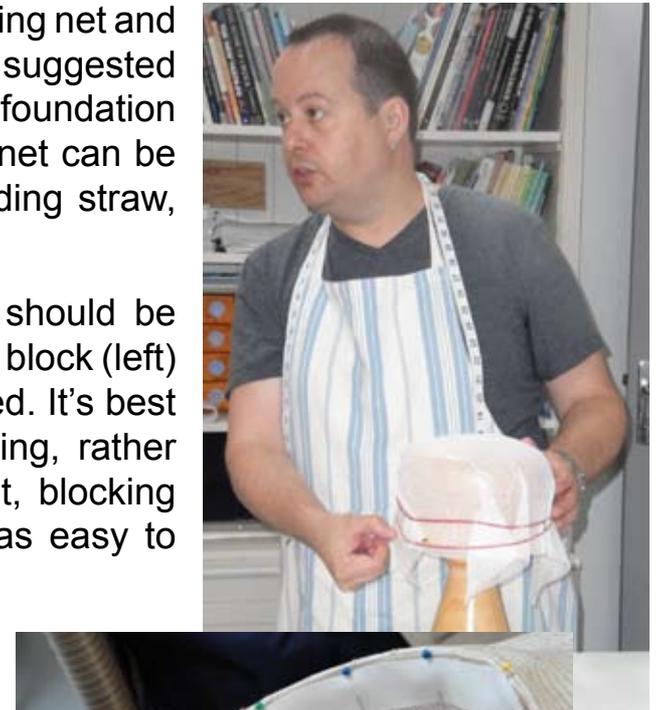
Among the many helpful tips which Dillon shared during the course at Chateau Dumas, one of the most interesting was about using blocking net. In Issue 30, we wrote about the history of blocking net and how popular it used to be. We also reported that it was no longer available from Parkin Fabrics, previously the UK's largest stockist.

Since we published that article, Parkin Fabrics has reintroduced blocking net and it is now available in black or white from [their website](#). Dillon (right) suggested using blocking net, also known as Paris or Dior net, as it is a good foundation for a hat - helping it to keep its shape and remain sturdy. Blocking net can be used under all types of crowns, including straw, sinamay and felt.



Blocking net is quite expensive and should be used economically. To cover this crown block (left) a 15 inch (38cm) square has been used. It's best to gently steam the net before blocking, rather than immersing it in water. When wet, blocking net becomes very soggy and is not as easy to manipulate.

Once you've dampened the blocking net using the steam, you can pull it over your chosen crown block and secure it to the bottom of the block with four pins. Now wrap an elastic band or blocking spring around the block and take the pins out. Carefully work your way around the block, pulling out all the pleats and using more pins to pin the material back to the bottom of the block. Apply more steam as needed. Getting the net blocked as smoothly as possible is important to ensure that no bumps show through to your crown.



Once the blocking net has completely dried, you can block your crown directly over it. In the right-hand photo you can see a straw hat lined with blocking net. A hat lining can then be sewn in if desired.