

# hattrick

CASSANDRA LAFFEY GETS A HEADS-UP ABOUT HATS FROM LOCAL MILLINER BETTINA NEILSON.



"Pea Green" felt peaked cap \$180

I HAD TWO school hats: a summer straw hat and a felt version for winter. They spent the majority of the time squashed in my schoolbag or in my hand, but at least they fared better than the straw boaters at my brother's school which were inevitably punched through the dome to create a flip-top effect.

Ironically Brisbane milliner Bettina Neilson hated her St Rita's school hat too, "Brown and cream!" she says and wrinkles her nose. But luckily for headwear aficionados, her love of sewing, nurtured by her two grandmothers, led to a TAFE certificate in millinery. After creating hats and fascinators through word of mouth, she launched Bettina Millinery in 2010 retailing through etsy.com and in.cub8r in The Valley. Bettina now wears one of her handmade hats or an elegant clip every day.

"I just love hats – I just feel pretty wearing hats," she says.

Inspired by vintage styles from the '20s and '30s and more recently the '50s, Bettina creates bespoke cocktail hats, fascinators and headwear accessories using vintage millinery supplies, antique brooches and exquisite fabrics for one-of-a-kind pieces.

"I like silks - they're beautiful and so lovely to work with or felts. The best part is getting the block – it's a real trade. You have to steam [the fabric], and stretch it and there's lots of hammering and nailing going on and then

stiffening – I love the whole process," she says.

International customers form the majority of her wedding headwear clientele, especially in England and New York where nuptial headpieces are de rigueur for brides and guests alike. Bettina notes American brides favour the Jackie Kennedy-style pillbox hats with a matching fascinator or headband for their bridesmaids that she can create to suit a colour or theme.

Bettina says last year's royal wedding highlighted the art of millinery and while she does have an opinion on Princess Beatrice's Phillip Treacy creation ("The shape of the hat was interesting and it's a good structure but the colour didn't suit her at all."), the jaunty burgundy female-style fedora she wears to our interview was inspired instead by fashion fave K-Middy's Christmas Day hat.

Inspired to revisit headwear, I try on one of Bettina's creations and a curious transformation takes place – I stand taller, automatically correcting my posture and lengthening my neck, almost like a finishing touch. Bettina says it's a stance she's often observed.

"And if you don't [stand proud] it's the wrong hat for you, take it off!" she laughs.

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Bettina Neilson



"The Jacqui" silk pillbox hat \$320