

COMMERCE

Despite phasing out in the West, hats remain popular in Asia

April 25, 2016



Stephen Jones spring/summer 2016

By FORREST CARDAMENIS

SEOUL, South Korea While hats are no longer staples of fashion in the West, they endure in the East.

Subscribe to **Luxury Daily**
Plus: Just released
State of Luxury 2019 **Save \$246 ▶**

At the Cond Nast International Luxury Conference on April 21, milliner Stephen Jones discussed his career, collaborations and the fashion of headwear. Royalty has kept hats popular in Britain, but Eastern culture ensures that fashionable headwear will last well into the future.

"I love making big fancy hats for a runway in Paris just as much as a baseball cap, but it needs to have fun and humor in it and needs to be somehow optimistic," said Mr. Jones said. "The rest of you can be falling apart, but your hat has to say a great thing about you."

Head to toe

Speaking of his own hats, Mr. Jones said that the defining characteristics are fun and humorous. His hats do not make a dour or enigmatic impression, but should convey an optimistic attitude about a person.

Mr. Jones credits the "exuberance and extravagance" of Zandra Rhodes in the 1980s as influencing his style, as well as his work with Jean Paul Gaultier and John Galiano as being significant steps.

As he made a name for himself working with high-profile designers, business took off. Mr. Jones introduced a wholesale collection, attained licenses in Asia and eventually became known as one of the most significant and radical milliners of the era.

On working with designers, Mr. Jones acknowledges that these creators often enjoy success because they hold a belief that their idea is the best in the world and collaborate with an open mind.

"It's an extraordinarily fantastic, privileged position to be in, because you get to really dive into the mind of that designer," Mr. Jones said. "For example, I have an idea of what's beautiful or ugly, but my idea is maybe six months old and I have to find out if they have moved on in that six months, and maybe you only have 15 minutes to do it.

"You have to have this friendly relationship and understand each other," he said. "And from that, you can develop the hats."

Hats have waned in popularity in France since Mr. Jones' early days, but they have stayed fashionable in Britain. They were popular among royalty, giving them a national heritage that has assured prevalence.

The diminishing presence of hats was one reason Mr. Jones wanted to work in France, as he sought to revitalize the accessory. The fashion continues in the East, with a tradition of head-decoration being particularly common in South Korea with both genders.

"People will look back at the end of the 20th and beginning the 21st centuries and wonder why people didn't decorate their head all the time," Mr. Jones said. "It's the only time in history it's never happened.

"In every country in the world, including Korea, there is a huge tradition of head decoration and hat wearing; it's a further expression of style," he said. "People often say, 'Well, hats are sort of this ridiculous accessory to be swept under the carpet,' and I say, No, because it's so visible,' and designers understand that too.

"If you want to change your appearance in a very quick way, you can put on a hat and it's done."

Brands without hats

British brands continue to tout their love for the hat.

Last June, Harrods is helping consumers prepare for the summer social season with a millinery event.

From June 6-7, the retailer is bringing in experts and designers to assist consumers in picking the perfect topper for their ensembles, whether they are going to the Royal Ascot or a garden party. The walk-in event provides access to all Harrods customers, making it an easy appointment as they shop on the weekend ([see story](#)).

While less popular among brands from other countries, there is always an occasion for a good hat.

U.S. fashion brand Marc Jacobs collaborated with Yestadt Millinery to create a new version of the Marc Jacobs ski hat for the 2014 winter season.

The hand-sewn hats were formed on a custom wooden block and created in New York with the help of Yestadt Millinery. Creating a local collaboration helped Marc Jacobs not only provide bespoke hats for its consumers, but also focus on local talents and manufacturing ([see story](#)).

"I remember once asking [John Galliano], he said, if you are dressing up, why would you stop at the neck? It's above the neck that it gets very interesting, it's above the neck where we communicate," Mr. Jones said. "Those are my clients too. It's people who enjoy dressing up and don't stop at the neck, as John told me."