



## Hat lady on a mission to bring back lost style

**M**adelyne Imrie didn't have to attend a royal wedding to learn that a hat can be a crowning glory. Her mother was a milliner. Her father made dresses. She grew up surrounded by style makers and appreciates sartorial flourish.

So when she learned the "hat lady" was bringing her exhibition to Clair Hills Retirement Community in Waterloo, Imrie donned a cheery chapeau to match her dress.

"We always wore hats," says Imrie, 94. She remembers having a special hat perched on her head when she met Queen Elizabeth II at the Royal York Hotel in Toronto in 1997.

Imrie came to the hat show with a hat box containing the going-away hat she wore after her 1953 wedding. She joined a mainly female audience to listen intently as Norma Shephard talked about the history and social relevance of hats.

Shephard loves wearing vintage items. Hats are a fashion piece for her, but they also reflect major changes in the social evolution of women and society, she told



Lynn Haddrall

the audience.

Shephard explained the provenance and social context of each headpiece as it was gently removed from its hatbox by her white-gloved husband, Jim.

"All of our foremothers used to wear hats," she said. Women nodded in agreement. But hats fell out of fashion in the 1970s for reasons including social and religious changes, beehive hairdos that didn't work with hats, and the popularity of casual dress.

"I'm doing my best to bring them back," Shephard said.

As founder and director of the Mobile Millinery Museum, Shephard has collected more than 2,500 hats, storing them in a climate-controlled facility in Burlington.

She showcases a selection of vintage

millinery for special events. The historian and author of several books about fashion and hats is also the subject of a biography about her millinery passion. "The Hat Lady" was written by Patricia Boyle.

Shephard's travelling exhibition comes to life when hats are placed on models such as Clair Hills staff members Paula Parejo and Carine Brunet. The two young women brought a youthful perspective.

"I felt pretty glamorous wearing the hats that I modelled for the show. It made me think that we as a generation are missing out," Parejo said. "Some of the styles were so light and comfortable, I think those styles in a regular wardrobe would have dressed you up without even trying."

Shephard started collecting hats almost 30 years ago. It distressed her to see beautiful items discarded in thrift-shop bins. Beyond the beauty and fashion, there is a story of the individual who owned each hat, and the era in which it was popular.

Shephard identifies three major stages in the women's movement that are associated with hats:

Paula Parejo models a 1940s straw picture hat (left) that is rimmed with fabric flowers and simulated cranberries.

On the right, she wears a 1950s black sequined halo turban cocktail hat by Christian Dior.

Left photo by Shelley Boate; right photo by Lynn Haddrall

## Introducing Fibroblast Skin Tightening



### You – and Improved!

#### A state-of-the-art approach to skin tightening:

With age, the supportive networks of skin fibers become lax, causing looseness in the face and neck. Non-invasive fibroblast skin tightening uses plasma, an ionized gas, to tighten skin without surgery or causing damage to surrounding tissues with results comparable to invasive surgery.

Fibroblast skin tightening is able to treat a number of areas, including the following:

- Forehead lines and frown lines
- Crow's feet, upper and lower eyelids
- Nasolabial folds
- Upper and lower lip
- Neck and jowls
- Abdomen and navel



TOTAL SKIN & BODY  
ANTI-AGING SPA

Complimentary consultations

385 Frederick St. Mall, Kitchener  
(15 minutes from Guelph)

519.576.2250 • [www.totalskinandbody.ca](http://www.totalskinandbody.ca)



Meetings Weddings Social Events

**DELTA**  
HOTELS  
MARRIOTT  
WATERLOO

519-514-0412  
www.Marriott.com/ykfdw  
wat.sales.sm@deltahotels.com



6 ISSUES  
FOR ONLY

**\$33<sup>76</sup>**  
Tax included

SUBSCRIBE NOW



Online at  
www.grandmagazine.ca

Or call 519 • 895 • 5214

• The fight for personhood is reflected in large-brimmed, wide-crowned hats and dagger-like hatpins of the Edwardian era. Hats were a visual representation of status-seeking.

• Women's liberation in the 1960s is associated with the rejection of social and legal imperatives of dress, such as hats and restrictive undergarments. "In Ontario, for example, until the mid-'60s, women were required by law to wear fashion hats when attending court proceedings."

• More recently, the demand for an end to sexual victimhood is symbolized by pink pussy hats, made and worn at protest marches.

Audience members peppered Shephard with questions, while admiring a range of hats including those from the Edwardian era, Roaring Twenties, Victorian times, and the Mod Sixties.

She shared a wealth of information as each hat was modelled, sometimes raising eyebrows and eliciting chuckles from the audience.

"Hats can give you a personality or reflect how you are feeling," she said as she shared tips about the history of each piece. Here are a few gems that engaged the audience at Clair Hills:

• "In Victorian times, a red hat meant no knickers."

• "There are very few social imperatives any more about wearing hats, but there were lots before. One that remains today – if the mother of the bride is wearing a hat, don't remove yours until she does."

• During the Second World War, Britain chose not to ration hats, amid controversy. "They decided not to ration them because they were 'spirit boosters' and they could be made of anything. German women were not so lucky. They were rationed in Germany."

• Women once needed a permit for a hat pin longer than nine inches. "Men were writing letters to the editor about the danger of hat pins. There were rules and regulations."

• Bobby Dazzler was a term used for extravagant hats that turned the heads of British police officers, known as Bobbies.



Madelyne Imrie cradles her 1953 bridal going-away hat that she proudly displayed at the hat show.

PHOTO BY LYNN HADRALL

Some hats weighed several pounds.

• In 1912, women would pay as much as \$25 for an extra-long lavish ostrich feather to add to a Downton Abby-style hat that would sit very high on the head.

• Hollywood began to influence fashion choices in the 1930s. Large brims fell out of favour because they interfered with camera angles. Juliet felt caps were popular; they were inexpensive to make in the Depression.

• The triangular convertible cap, popularized in the 1950s and 1960s, required "just lipstick and sunglasses," but it fell out of fashion because women would wear them over curlers, deglamourizing that look.

Shephard loves to hear women share hat stories and, like Imrie, bring their treasures to her shows.

"It does happen a lot and I love the interactive aspect of it. Some bring family heirlooms to be dated and identified and others bring great stories of hats that are long-gone," she says.

"When I present to fundraising groups or audiences comprised of young collectors, people often bring hats for me to evaluate. A similar thing happens at the wedding gown shows and other fashion exhibits that



Norma Shephard wears a 1940s halo hat trimmed in rooster tail. The "hat lady" chooses a different hat for every presentation.

### NORMA SHEPHARD'S STYLE TIPS FOR WEARING HATS

• **Have fun:** Experiment with casual styles before choosing one for a wedding or special event. A summer casual hat can be found for between \$25 and \$50. It will protect your skin and make an ordinary outfit look spectacular.

• **Weddings/special occasions:** Choose one you fall in love with. Try a variety of styles and workmanship but allow a budget of about \$300. If the hat suits you, you'll want to wear it again.

• **Fall/winter selections:** For great winter style, buy from a milliner (in person or online) or shop at the "One of a Kind Show," held annually in Toronto.

• **Canadian milliners worth checking out:** Lilliput Hats in Toronto (lilliputhats.com) and Maria Curcic in B.C. (MariaCurcic.com)

For more on the history of hats go to [hatshowlady.com](http://hatshowlady.com)

I do. We receive a number of interesting donations from audience members as well."

Shephard's exhibitions have raised funds for causes including cancer research, homeless youth, and rural Ontario. She has penned several books. Her most recent one – "Darlings of Dress" – examines children's clothing from 1860 to 1920. She's currently researching a new book with the working title "Fashion Weak." It will examine failed trends.

The Mobile Millinery Museum celebrates its 20th anniversary in 2019 with a show titled Canadian Crowns. Shephard plans to encourage people to wear hats by showcasing contemporary pieces as well as vintage.

Hats no longer hold the prominence they once did in women's wardrobes. But interest always renews when a royal wedding rolls around. Shelley Boate, lifestyle co-ordinator at Clair Hills, was googling royal wedding hats when she discovered Shephard's website.

"I had heard about her years ago but never had the program and thought that it would be a great idea to bring her and her hats in as the ladies love fashion and especially when there is history involved," Boate said.

Shephard watched Prince Harry wed Meghan Markle in May and presided over a number of royal wedding teas this year, just as she did in 2011 when Prince William married Catherine Middleton. Shephard pointed out that fascinators are not a new trend. They go as far back as the 1770s and were popular in the 1920s when they were dubbed "headache bands."

Shephard refers to her hats as "cultural story blocks." In her mission to renew interest in millinery, and preserve the stories hats tell, she hopes future generations will embrace them for more than just utility.

"The greatest joy for me is to see how others have treasured these historic pieces. In fact, finding old hats discarded and devalued at thrift stores years ago is how I got started. It felt like a rescue mission for me," says Shephard.

Paula Parejo, 24, sees hope for hat lovers. "I've never worn hats because I thought I couldn't pull them off, but these styles showed me otherwise," the millennial says. "The only hats my generation really wears for style are ball caps, beanies and sun hats. So, it was fun to try something new that really made me feel dressed up.

"Not to mention I got a ton of compliments and was told by the hat show lady's husband I had a perfect head for hats – so it was a pleasant surprise for me."

This made her smile. Not a bad way to top off the day.

# BIG STYLE

SAMSONITE

LEVI'S OUTLET

SKECHERS

SPANNER

ROYAL DOULTON

RED CORAL

COTTON WAVE

LAURA

TRENDS FOR MEN

# BIG SAVINGS



PADERNO

VIVAH JEWELRY

CORNINGWARE

OXFORD MILLS

TOY BUILDING ZONE

BABY'S ROOM WAREHOUSE

OLDE TYME KETTLE KITCHEN

NORTHERN REFLECTIONS

naturalizer  
SHOES FIT FOR YOU

## St. Jacobs Outlets



25 Benjamin Road East, Waterloo.

[StJacobsOutlets.com](http://StJacobsOutlets.com)