Hat attack: Fashion makes a cloche call

by Sharon Mosley

Got a big party to go to tonight? Why not whip up a Parisian-style cloche, circa 1920s Coco Chanel? In less than an hour, according to millinery designer Eugenia Kim, you can look like some of the world's most glamorous celebrities, including her customers Gwyneth Paltrow, Madonna or Beyonce.

"The women who wear my designs are confident and have a certain sense of humor," Kim says. "They are not afraid to be the center of attention."

MAD HATTER - Millinery designer Eugenia Kim has translated her know-how to a new book, 'Saturday Night Hat,' that shows15 hat how-tos and covers the basics of hat-making. CNS Photo courtesy of Potter Craft/Publishers.And now Kim has translated her millinery know-how to a new book, "Saturday Night Hat" (Potter, $20). This guidebook contains 15 hat how-tos and covers the basics of hat-making, and the patterns are easy enough that you can start the project Saturday morning and wear it out Saturday night.

Kim's love of hat-making began when she shaved her head after a bad haircut and wore a cloche she had made of red feathers at Parsons School of Design to go shopping in downtown Manhattan. The rest is history.

"Several store owners immediately took notice of my unique chapeau," she recalls. "By the end of the day, I had appointments with three boutiques to show my collection."

The cloche is still one of Kim's favorite "Saturday Night" designs - a hat put on the fashion map in the 1920s by Paris designer Coco Chanel, who accessorized her menswear-inspired clothes with the close-fitting "bell" hat. The jazzy fitted hat is once again making a statement in fashion head wear.

After college and the corporate world, Kim's cloche hats signaled her fun-loving side; she identified with those party-girl flappers. "The 1920s were the original girl-power decade," she says, "and my absolute favorite era. After women won the right to vote in 1920, it was so time to party."

Cloche-wearing women of the Jazz Age - such as Zelda Fitzgerald, Dorothy Parker and Anais Nin - inspired the New York milliner, who has made the bell shape popular once again.

"My mother bought me a Singer sewing machine that stayed unused for years," Kim admits, "until the day David LaChapelle, the world-famous fashion photographer and my personal favorite shutterbug, commissioned my cloches in primary-colored, rainproof vinyls for a photo shoot only two days away."

Kim's book includes not only the pattern for this reversible six-panel tailored cloche, but patterns for many more fun hats, including berets, beanies, pillboxes, fedoras and newsboy caps. She also includes useful resources and tips from how to care for your hats to a glossary of sewing and hat terminology.

If you're never sure exactly where to wear your hat and where to take it off, here are a few of Kim's rules:

WHEN TO TAKE IT OFF

Hat etiquette for ladies has been a bit more lax, since some hats were pinned securely to one's new "do" or tied with ribbons and would have been awkward to remove in public. There was a time when every man wore a hat and had to tip it when he saw a lovely lady. After John F. Kennedy stopped wearing hats to major events as president, men followed his lead. Nowadays, you're lucky to find a man with enough taste to wear a nice hat.

KIM'S RULE NO. 1

Take off your hat when you're eating. It's totally gross to see cock feathers swimming in your soup because you were too lazy to take if off pre-chow.

KIM'S RULE NO. 2

When attending a movie, a concert, or a Broadway show, take off your hat as a courtesy to the people who don't have front-row tickets. The only exception to this rule is if you happen to have a bald head.

KIM'S RULE NO. 3

When attending a funeral, or when your pet dies, or even if you lose your iPod, show some respect and take off your hat. The perfect accessory - a moment of silence.

KIM'S RULE NO. 4

If you're on a Roman holiday and have a hankering to see the pope, visit the Vatican and leave your chapeau unchaperoned (that is, show some respect and take off your hat).

KIM'S RULE NO. 5

When you're on your way to court - and let's hope it's for jury duty or just a parking ticket - be sure to remove your hat as a sign of deference.

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