

# THE MAKING *of a Milliner*

BY JILL DEBARDELABEN



I grew up in a small neighborhood outside of St. Louis and was known as the daughter of the town's seamstress. Every day our home was bustling with customers needing this hemmed or that taken in. I always loved being a part of the action, and by the age of 4 I was already my mother's apprentice — whether I was helping pin patterns, threading needles, or just performing my little teapot routine to appease waiting customers, I loved being a part of that world and seeing designs transform before my very eyes.

By the age of 13, I started my own sewing business, creating clothes for my friends to wear to concerts or church fundraisers. Whenever a Barbie needed new clothes, I was the one my friends would call to make sure she always had the latest look, and we had an outfit to match. My cousins would even visit from California and sneak my designs back to Los Angeles so they would feel like they were ahead of the trends. When I finished high school, I was unsure of what path I wanted to pursue. I went to Southern Illinois University and studied art, but after a few semesters I decided that fashion was something I could not ignore as a career choice. I left my small Midwestern town and moved to the big city of Chicago. ➔





In Chicago I attended what was known as Ray Vogue College, and I had an amazing time. I quickly found like-minded people and we would put together photo shoots or fashion shows in downtown hotels like The Drake and The Palmer House. I loved designing clothing until my history of fashion teacher, Veronica Chin, suggested I watch the movie “My Fair Lady.” My life changed from that point. I was mesmerized by the scene when Eliza Doolittle goes to the Ascots, and I decided that perhaps I would like to pursue making hats. I suddenly had vivid memories of going along with my mother to her personal milliner and seeing tables covered with wool hoods, feathers, silk flowers, and notions. I remember my mother picking and choosing the perfect combination to have a unique frock like no other. Even though I had already begun to sell my clothing designs to boutiques throughout the Chicago area, I decided I could truly combine my passion for art and fashion in creating headwear.

My career soon took off and my hats were available on Michigan Avenue. I continued to do shows at the Chicago’s Merchandise Mart

such as StyleMax and the One of a Kind Show. After years of trying to self-manufacture, I decided that I love to create one-of-a-kind designs that are as unique as my customers. I always try to have fun with my creations and allow the women who wear them to feel just as special. I recently refreshed my craft by going to London and studying under Prudence Millinery and taking a sabbatical in Paris. Since then, I have found inspiration in my own designs.

Everything I create is designed from repurposed materials such as recycled sweaters, vintage wool coats, and bits and baubles that I find in my travels. I believe it is so important to continue to pursue what you are passionate about, regardless of where life may take you. My younger self had no idea that I would be designing hats today, but I’m positive that she would love all that I do. ❖

*To learn more about Jill DeBardelaben, visit [loganstyle.com](http://loganstyle.com).*

*Photography and styling by Bianca Xunise  
Modeled by Gabrielle Abena and Kasey Busiel*