



LADIES PANAMA HATS

Hats, long beloved by ladies everywhere, are once again becoming a fashion item.

As the 20th Century draws to a close, concerns regarding the environment and the effects of UV radiation have revived the use of hats as a simple but effective protection from the elements.

Hats, however, are much more than protective covering. Whether you are prim, proper, chic, elegant, sexy, sultry, playful or poetic, a hat can reflect who you are, or who you want to be - if only for a little while.

Our new computer's Thesaurus gave us associated words for hat: beret, bowler, cap, derby, fedora, fez, panama, and sombrero. As an avid hat lover, each word brought an immediate visual image. But have only eight types of hat remained popular enough to be recognizable in 1993? Throughout history, hats have been an integral part of every society for protection and ornamentation. For centuries considered essential for daily wear, in the 1970's hats became a symbol of "the establishment", and were discarded in order to be "free."

The 1941 edition of Fund & Wagnall's New Standard Dictionary of the English Language took a full column of text to define hats. There were seven definitions, 35 associated words and 15 specific varieties given to define hats. By 1993, the only hat which had remained popular enough for fifty years to be referenced on a computer as a definitive example of a hat, was the Panama.

Originally, the Panama was a man's hat. Used to shade a working man's or a gentleman's head from the searing heat and unending sun in the Republic of Panama, the hat became widely popular in 1880 when the French began work on the Panama Canal. By the time the Canal was completed in 1914, the Panama hat was a mainstay of a man's summer wardrobe. The ladies, who knew a good thing when they saw it, also embraced the Panama for spring and summer. Adorned with either the traditional grosgrain ribbon headband, or enhanced with satin streamers and sometimes flowers, ladies would don the Panama from Easter through Labor Day as a favorite.

With summer fast approaching, ladies will again be seen in beautiful straw Panamas which shade delicate noses from the Texas sun, and provide a mysterious aura to the wearer as she peers out from under the broad brim.