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Q&A

From the Top: Milliner Rosie Boylan on the hats of *Gatsby*

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"Hats are always important. Full stop," said costume designer Catherine Martin when asked about the elaborate chapeaux featured in Baz Lurhmann's *The Great Gatsby*. "I think that one of the things that defines the period is evening headwear. Hats enhance the characters, create an otherworldliness, and help the audience understand that we're in a time other than our own." In order to fully realize *Gatsby's* sartorial Jazz Age fantasy, Martin enlisted Sydney-based milliner [Rosie Boylan](#) to create cloches, boaters, and beyond for Daisy and co. Boylan, who has worked with Martin and Lurhmann since making headpieces for *Moulin Rouge* in 2000, has been crafting hats for over thirty years. Here, she talks to Style.com about designing for *Gatsby*, pushing historical boundaries, and how to pull off a twenties topper.

—Katharine K. Zarrella

Can you give us an idea of the range of hats we'll see in *The Great Gatsby*?

There are about one thousand hats in the movie. Baz and Catherine love hats. For the men, there are a lot of boaters and caps and homburgs, which were a high-crowned men's felt hat that was introduced by Prince Edward in the twenties. But we were primarily making women's headwear. And that was mainly cloches and then the explosive party headwear that reflects the spirit of the *Gatsby* story. There were about 250 party headpieces, and we styled them to compliment each individual actor's face. Every headpiece was made for a particular person.

How do the hats in *Gatsby* help improve our understanding of the characters?

When Catherine and I are working, it's not only about making a period fashion statement. It's about the character. I need to know what is happening and what they're feeling and that helps me to create something that speaks to the storyline, the character, and the mood at

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that particular moment. Take Daisy, for example. She is always dressed in pale colors and she wears lots of soft floaty garments. Her headwear is very refined, highly crafted, very expensive, but always reflective of the fact that she is a delicate flower. I love the hat Carey Mulligan wears at the end of the film when she's leaving town. She's with Tom at the train station, it's almost fall, and she's got her felt hat on. It's quite restrained but very beautiful and there's a lot of, I suppose, sadness.



How else are hats used to help tell the story?

Well for one, hats help speak to the age and define the era. But I think Baz likes to use hats as a reveal—as a way to introduce characters. I believe, when Daisy and Jordan are first seen in the movie, they're hidden by their hats. It's like the veil being lifted to introduce the characters.

Did you and your team make everything, or did you use vintage hats, too?

We made just about everything, except the lobster headpieces that the trapeze artists wear in the party scene. Those are vintage pieces from Paris. They're exquisitely made. We reworked them because they were incredibly worn out and then gave them a surrealist twist by putting lobsters and butterflies on them. It was a reinvention.

Speaking of the party scene, what did you design to go with the Prada party dresses?

Every Prada garment has a headpiece, and they're all very expressive—lots of feathers, lots of bling. There's a range of beautiful turbans and there are a lot of big headpieces. Some of them are more theatrical in their interpretation of a fashion reference from the twenties, like maybe an Erté. Catherine gave me license to push the fashion of the period, so these hats are for 1920s fashion people who are essentially going out to a fancy dress party. They're for women who are dressing up *beyond* fashion.



Does that mean the hats aren't historically accurate?

No, we did a lot of research. We referenced fashion illustrations from the twenties, and I had a stack of books, but I didn't want to get too stuck in recreating a period. I think it was more important to capture the spirit of the twenties and how fresh and free they were. It wasn't just about looking at pictures of hats, it was about trying to grasp a sense of how the times had changed, and then reflect that in the costumes.

What are some of your favorite pieces in the film?

There is one piece—I call it The Moth—and it's worn by a featured extra with one of the Prada dresses during the party scene. It's made from a big piece of devore velvet and there's a lot of crazy ostrich fringe around the edges. There's another that Elizabeth Debicki, who plays Jordan, wears when she's meeting Tobey Maguire—Nick—on the rooftop of a

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hotel. It's this mauve cloche with a Tiffany's brooch that sits down on her face and sweeps around under her chin.



Do you think that the costumes of *The Great Gatsby* will have a big impact on how women dress?

I'm certainly selling a lot of clothes, and that interest is fueled by *Gatsby*. I think women are really going to tap into the *Gatsby* look because it's quite feminine and soft and joyful, and I think that, post financial crisis, people are looking for a little joy. And women are rediscovering the power a hat has to transform their look and to give them some extra ways of styling themselves. I have young women come into my shop and put on a cloche, and it comes down and frames their faces and they go *wow*.

And what is the key to styling yourself successfully in a twenties hat? Any really successful hat is one that works so well on the person, that you don't say that's an amazing hat, you say, you look incredible in that hat—it almost disappears. So the hat has to frame the face and support the personality and the looks of the person. It's not just somehacky thing stuck on somebody's head. It has refinement, and actually suits the person.

Photos: Courtesy of Warner Bros.

tags: Baz Luhrmann, Carey Mulligan, Catherine Martin, Elizabeth Debicki, Leonardo DiCaprio, Rosie Boylan, *The Great Gatsby*, Tobey Maguire

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