

hot right now **spring racing style**



Avant-garde ... (clockwise from left) designer Jenny Vidler with some of her Confection hats in Mrs. Press; (bottom) the Ship hat. Photos: Domino Postiglione

Lil Jen

Head-turning flair

Hat season is here and a Sydney designer is reintroducing women to whimsical millinery, writes **Natasha Silva-Jelly**.

The hats created by Sydney-based milliner Jenny Vidler (aka Lil Jen) are quite simply out of this world.

Handmade and adorned with vintage treasures collected from around the globe – think deco French buckles, Czechoslovakian glass, Swiss lace and even a glittering pirate ship – no two are the same.

Granted, wearing a showgirl-style sequined flamingo on your head to Randwick may not be for everyone but there's no arguing the fact that Vidler, a visual arts graduate, is passionate about her craft.

"I was awakened to the art of millinery when I lived in London, which is the centre of the millinery world and the royal family have kept it alive," Vidler says. "It also tapped into my own exhibitionist streak because wearing a hat is like taking on an alter ego. The thing I love about millinery is it's connected to fashion but it's more freestyle fashion, or artistic whim. I don't really work on trends, I create pieces that resonate because they are beautiful and whimsical."

Inspired by "Edwardian folly and dandyism" and created with a "coquettish femme fatale" in mind, Vidler dubbed her bespoke hat label Confection because, as she puts it: "The pieces are meant to give you that sensory saturation of walking into a candy store and wanting to devour everything but not being quite sure where to look first."

Having first hit the radar last year when her signature "Ship" hat was chosen as a thank you gift for Cyndi Lauper by the

producers of *Australian Idol* – it then went on to make a cameo appearance in an episode of *Make Me a Supermodel* – Vidler's confections can now be found in deco-style dressing cabinets in vintage havens Mrs. Press and Dirty Pretty Things where, according to owners, the eye-catching creations have piqued the interest of punters.

"Jenny is a creative genius and her hats are too fabulous," the founder of Mrs. Press, Clare Press, says.

"There is one topped with two pink-feathered flamingos with eyelashes. All her edges are hand-stitched and the details inside, like

16-pleat linings, are amazing."

Press admits she expected it to take a while for clients to come around to Vidler's flamboyant way of thinking. "But then we sold a Ship hat the first day and we've had steady interest ever since."

The fact that millinery – especially show-stopping pieces that have their roots in ages of grandeur, in a time when women chose their hat *before* their outfit – is back in fashion is no doubt driving new interest.

Earlier this year, London's esteemed V&A Museum held the *Hats: An Anthology* by Stephen Jones exhibition, which charted the glorious history of headwear and showcased the work of Jones, who has designed for the likes of John Galliano and Rei Kawakubo of Comme des Garçons for nearly two decades. "Stephen Jones is a master and so inspiring, you can tell he designs from the heart and that is the spirit I am trying to capture with Lil Jen. I take my hat off to him," Vidler says. No pun intended.

'Wearing a hat is like taking on an alter ego.'

Jenny Vidler



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