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*Fashions in
the field*

Hats off to country couture

Rose's hat-trick bowls maidens over

By JEAN EKEROTH

WITH the television series *Mad Men* reinvigorating stylish dressing that flatters individuals from all walks of life, women and men in rural areas no longer have to wait until they visit the city to indulge themselves.

Glamorous sunhats or garden hats are the latest addition to Rose Crane's Gwendoline Grace and Gatsby Hats bespoke range.

After initially thinking the cost of producing an individually designed hand-made sunhat would make it prohibitive for ladies, style-conscious women at the Wheatbelt Women's Day, Bruce Rock, convinced her to begin the successful offshoot to her more dressy hats.

Gwendoline Grace and Gatsby Hats is based in Tammin and its products have already been seen on coiffured heads at the Kalgoorlie Race Round, the Melbourne Cup, weddings, outdoor parties and barbecues but now her more casual hats also provide a stylish alternative to other outdoor activities in the garden, street, beach or even the sheepyards.

"Of course it's very important to look gorgeous in the sheepyards," Rose says mischievously.

"But most importantly, they'll last, they're comfortable to wear and they fit properly."

The bespoke range is named after her grandmother, her philosophy and her favourite movie.

Rose was great mates with her grandmother, Margaret Gwendoline and remembers lots of photos of her looking elegant in hats in her youth.

The 'Grace' is part of Rose's philosophy about life.

"People should treat each other with grace and be kind to each other and we probably need more grace in the world, not less," Rose said.

The 'Gatsby' represents her men's line and was inspired by the Panama hat worn by Robert Redford in *The Great Gatsby*, the first movie Rose saw.

"They had the best parties in *The Great Gatsby* and it made a big impression on a 10-year-old as the clothing and hats were stunning in that movie," she said.

Rose's interest in hats developed from a young age.

Growing up in Jerdacuttup, west of Esperance, she later attended boarding school where her appreciation for hats instilled by her grandmother meant she was one of the few students who never got into trouble for not wearing the uniform's summer boater and winter grey beret.

After an extended and mis-spent youth dabbling in fashion design at Bentley TAFE and a year as an exchange student, Rose earned a place at the notoriously hard-to-get-into WA Academy of Performing Arts before finding work in her chosen field as a radio and television journalist with the ABC.

Coming from an agri-politically active family and having an uncle who was a Liberal senator helped the inexperienced journalist cope with the demands of the job when she was first thrown in at the deep end at Alice Springs during the native title debate following the Mabo decision in 1993.

Her eight years as a television journalist contributing to news programs and the highly respected *The 7:30 Report* included stints in Adelaide, Sydney and Darwin.



▲ Rose Crane (left) and husband Scott Uppill with dog Sam.

When Rose was asked to come back to Perth as executive producer of the rural department, it was too good an opportunity to pass up.

So how did Rose end up setting up a millinery on a farm in Tammin?

It was while attending a CBH function that Rose first met, fell in love with and then married her graingrower husband Scott Uppill, who is also now Tammin's shire president.

"I didn't really intend to fall in love with a farmer, I was a career girl," Rose said.

While on long service leave just after getting married, Rose attended a bi-annual millinery conference in Adelaide.

With her work continuing to keep them apart except for weekends, Rose decided that living apart from her husband was not ideal and resigned from her full-time job.

Other contributing factors that reinforced the realisation that love and life were finite were sportscaster Wally Foreman's untimely death in 2006 and Rose's disappointment in the behaviour of

some of the agri-political factions during the Australian Wheat Board scandal.

Today her bubbly enthusiasm for life can still be heard over the Radiowest airwaves as she fills in presenting the Rural Focus program from Merredin or Northam while the regular host takes a break.

The Uppill farm has been in the family for over 100 years and Rose has set up a studio where she can indulge her creative side and show customers her range of artisan Gwendoline Grace and Gatsby Hats in comfort.

Rose said her showroom on a farm in the middle of nowhere provided a welcoming experience for women to worry about things other than the rain.

She continually refines her millinery skills by regularly attending professional courses such as millinery summer and winter school in Melbourne.

With two radio jobs, Rose has built up her business over the last 18 months creating hats at night-times and weekends.

"It's very much a home-grown organic artisan-style business," Rose said.

All her dress hats come in traditionally-styled, elegantly-lettered octagonal pink boxes handmade at Westcare, one of the State's largest employers of disabled people.

"If someone invests in a beautiful hat, it should have a beautiful hat box," she said.

"A beautiful handmade hat that fits is investment dressing and my philosophy is that it is like a pair of shoes - if they fit well and you love them, they should have somewhere nice to live."

Rose's hats use different

straws, like sinamay, a type of straw made from the leaf of a banana plant, in a variety of qualities and weaves.

She only uses quality products like crystal beads and beautiful Thai silk fabrics, sourcing raw materials like grosgrain from millinery suppliers in the Eastern States.

Rose's initial business focus is in the country as she understands the challenges of country life.

Her hats received a good reception when they were seen for the first time on the catwalk at the Dowerin GWN Machinery Field Days last year and were also displayed at the trade fair before the annual Cambinata Yabbies Dinner Extravaganza, Kukerin and a pop-up shop at Yallingup in January along with other Perth designers.

"I feel very honoured when people choose one of my hats so they're all made with a lot of care and love and I hope they get to go on many adventures," Rose said.

"You've got to have a bit of fun and flirtation if you're going to the races and I always say to the girls 'if you don't get free champagne in a Gwendoline Grace hat, I have failed in my duty as a milliner'."

WANT TO KNOW MORE?

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- ▶ Rose Crane
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