

From the Daily Journal Archives

Museum Studios Profile

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For Every Hat a Head

Wayne Wichern is a delight. His studio tantalizes with colorful, unique, and masterfully crafted headwear. Wayne is a master milliner, a hat maker extraordinaire. He grew up in Wyoming in a farming family, and moved to Seattle, at a young age, to explore floral design. He was always interested in dance and moved to NYC in the late

70's to explore a career in ballet. At 21, he was considered a late starter and supported his training by selling dancewear and shoes at a famed store in the Theatre District. I grew up in NYC and happened to be in a children's ballet company at the time, and we mused about the possibility that he might have sold me pointe shoes all those years ago.

Working in the dancewear store cultivated an interest in costuming and costume crafts and one thing led to another, and here he is making glorious hats for weddings, the Kentucky Derby, special events and he even had a hat featured at this spring's Royal Wedding of Harry and Meghan! Students come from far and wide to take Wayne's hat making workshops. Hat making is having a bit of a renaissance in the wake of TV shows like Downton Abbey and The Crown. Nonetheless, it is not a huge field and students love the classes. The combination of Wayne's expertise and the studio location near SFO make his workshops popular. He also crafts custom creations, and though he now splits his time between Seattle and the Bay Area, his presence here is unmistakable.

Sitting in his cozy and colorful atelier, I was struck by the hat blocks – wooden forms used to shape the hats – works of sculpture themselves. You really get a sense of the tactile nature and identity bathed in each hat. Wayne noted that people often say, "hats don't work on me" and his response is, "it depends on the size, shape and variety" whether it be a cloche, sun hat, beret, topper, upturned breton or derby hat, a hat can create an effect. Hats have a transformational quality; every hat has a bit of a personality. People notice a hat and there is a certain 'theater' to wearing a hat. Made of felt or straw, with veils, ribbons, floral or other embellishments, you can tell each of Wayne's creations has a story to tell. There is a Lithuanian proverb: For Every Hat a Head!

