

Chapter Excerpt



Chapter 4

New York Hats

When Bill Cunningham mentioned 57th Street, I knew he had lit the beacon to show me where I belonged. 57th Street! The street where I had studied at the Art Students League! The street of Mainbocher and Mago Hayes and, little did I know it then, the street that would figure largely in our lives in the years to come. Immediately I sat down to write Mrs. Cox a very convincing letter as to why she should consider me for the concession. I was able to tell her that Dorothy Waddington, president of the Fashion Group, had said my hats “were better-made than those of top New York houses.” In addition, I mentioned that prominent dress designer Vera Maxwell, whom I had been in contact with, was interested in my “doing the hats for her collection.” The next thing I knew was that by the end of August, I was closing the Rockville Center shop and moving it to 57th Street.

Ann Cox, Inc. was located at 23 West 57th in the old building that was the former home of Herman Patrick Tappe, the famed bridal designer who had dressed New York society since the turn of the century. The “gown” salon, as it was called, was for custom-made clothes, either designed by Ann Cox herself or copied from the French couture. There was also a

ready-to-wear showroom presided over by Gertrude Haley Kane and, in the back, workrooms for the seamstresses. Then a section was put aside for my little operation. The establishment was a couple of buildings west of Bergdorf Goodman and directly opposite the prestigious Henri Bendel, Jay Thorp and Sally Milgrim. Only Bendel's is still there today, while Cox's building is now the huge skyscraper, 9 West 57th.

Ann Cox was a attractive young mother and socialite, who with her husband Colonel Howard Cox had a townhouse on Madison Avenue, and an estate in Southampton, Long Island. Mrs. Cox had little experience or training in the mechanics of clothing construction. However, she had a flair for wearable conservative clothes that suited the lifestyle of her wealthy, socially-prominent customers. The fashion editors of the New York press covered her showings. My hats complemented these clothes so well that I was sure it would be a very successful collaboration.

By the end of the year, I had participated in two important showings coordinating my hats to Ann Cox's collection. The first, at the Plaza Hotel, produced my initial coverage in the garment industry's influential trade paper, *Women's Wear Daily*. The bold headline read, "High Draped or Tucked Hats For Lengthwise Silhouette." The article went on to say, "A new milliner came to the fore yesterday when Albert Geiger presented his first retail collection in the Persian Room of the Plaza at a luncheon showing." It went on from there with a short profile of my previous career, and a five-paragraph description of the clothes and hats. This publicity was soon followed by *Hats Magazine*, featuring a drawing of one of my hats next to sketches of millinery designs by Christian Dior, Mr. Arnold and my friend William J.

The second showing with Mrs. Cox in the Cotillion Room at the Sherry Netherland—where ten years later I would be showing my own couture clothes—was also well received. *Hats Magazine* did another story plus an illustration that included me with the famed Mr. John, Irene and Emme. Amazingly, within two months of my arrival in New York, I was being included with the top milliners of the city. Even the doyenne of fashion gossip, Eugenia Sheppard, made mention of one of my hats in her "Inside Fashion" column for the *Herald Tribune*. Certainly this was the road to success!