

GRAND DESIGNER
KATE LOOKS TO
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BUSINESS ABROAD
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THE HEAD TEACHER:
Rosie Bloom
loves the
atmosphere in
her Hectic Hat
Hire shop
in Fulham

PICTURES BY
LEIGH QUINNELL



If you want to get ahead, get a hat

► **A hat can make all the difference to an outfit – and a Fulham hire shop could be just the place to help, writes Miranda Vinall**

THE hat is back. A familiar sight at the races, garden parties and weddings, hats remind us of the eccentricity of English summertime. Hats are the perfect way to top off an elegant outfit. The right hat can steal the show.

But where can one go to find a couture hat without the designer price tag? Luckily the only hat hire shop left in London is right on our doorstep.

"It's between £30-80 to rent one," says Rosie Bloom, 45, owner of Hectic Hat Hire in Munster Road.

"But to buy a hat might cost you £400, then you've got to trot it out five or six times to justify it."

Rosie's shop is a veritable wonderland of headgear. Hats blossom from every inch of wall space in a cacophony of colour. There is a hat for everyone from feathery fascinators to hats with brims the size of a tyre.

"It's a very nice atmosphere," says Rosie. "Whatever age they are the women come in here and start squeaking and squealing trying all the hats on."

Rosie has been running the shop for six years. She admits: "It's not madly profitable once you've paid the business rates. I do it because it's such a nice thing to do and you meet such lovely people."

Using her experience as a stylist,

Rosie asks her customers to bring their outfits to the shop so she can find them a perfect match.

Within seconds she has picked out a beautiful grey silk hat with a 1930s-style asymmetric slant to match my blue-grey dress and perched it on my head. I feel transformed. "Hats just make you feel pretty," says Rosie.

To source her uniquely tailored

creations, she heads out to the hub of the UK hat industry, Luton.

"It's another world out there – unbelievable," she says.

Rosie will only buy British. "Businesses are closing all the time but the British hat milliners are so talented they deserve the support," she says.

"Lots of ladies can go to Accessorize, M&S, places who do perfectly good hats, but lots of their hats are made in China and shipped over. The quality is inferior to the discerning eye. The quality of an English-made hat you can tell right away.

"Also, they won't be seeing anyone else in their hat at the wedding."

Apart from weddings, Rosie's busiest time of year is Ascot.

"It's mental. We're here till midnight every day with our fascinators on. It's a major military operation," she adds.

Sadie Stanley, 41, of Orbain Road, who helps manage the shop with

Rosie, says: "It's truly hectic. We have to wait for the hat to come back so we can re-box it and get it out to the next lady.

"Some women get hysterical if their hat hasn't come back in time. Sometimes we even have to track down the hats, which can be hard if the lady has had a few bottles of wine and is enjoying partying."

"Yes – we have tears, tantrums but no tiaras," adds Rosie.

After the beating many of the hats take at Ascot, Rosie then retires them out to schools once they are tired.

"I am very fussy. I have to keep the hats looking sharp. I'm not going to give anyone a battered old hat. All the local schools come in for their dressing up boxes or looking for Easter bonnets to decorate," she says.

● Visit Rosie's shop at 236 Munster Road, Fulham, call 020 7381 5127 or email rosie@hectichathire.co.uk



I am very fussy – I have to keep the hats looking sharp

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THINGS
ARE
LOOKING
GOOD:
Designer Kate
Tailyour is
expanding
her business
with funding
and support
from an award
scheme

PICTURE BY
LEIGH QUINNELL**Business and
fashion sense**

► Designer looks forward to developing her online service and cracking the international market with her own label

FINANCE may not be fashionable – just ask Sir Fred Goodwin – but a College Park designer is proving business and creativity can mix.

After running her own company for just 18 months, Kate Tailyour has scooped a business prize as well as making the final of the British Council's first UK Young Fashion Entrepreneur award to earn an industry tour of India.

The 29-year-old, who describes her spring/summer range presented by *Britain's Next Top Model* winner Alex Evans as 'relaxed luxury', is one of 10 small business owners to share in a £10,000 service support fund.

Thanks to the WestFocus enterprising business awards, Kate is enlisting help to develop the online retail side of her firm and is taking a postgraduate certificate in enterprise and innovation.

She said: "Especially when you work in your own business, you are working on your own a lot of the time so it's nice to be recognised and for someone to say you are on the right track."

Kate, who lives with cabinet maker husband Liam Bignmore, worked with designers Tracey Boyd and Veronique Leroy before setting up shop from her

Waldo Road home in the north of the borough.

She decided on a ready-to-wear brand to 'bridge the gap between high street and high-end collections' and creates a 'wardrobe' of about 30 women's pieces each season.

For ethical reasons, all clothes are produced in the UK, and Kate is expanding the styles available in fair-trade cotton and organic silk.

The label is available via boutiques, five online retailers and Kate's website, but the designer

has her sights set on cracking the international market. She has a Middle East agent and is in talks with a New York stockist.

However, expansion is proving tricky during the recession. "Obviously this season buyers are being more cautious with their budget and are not taking on new designers," she said.

"Buyers need to see you around for a couple of seasons to build confidence. You have to grit your teeth and keep going for a while.

"You have to really love it, because there are a lot of challenges." **Kate Youde**

● Visit: www.katetailyour.co.uk



You have to really love it because there are a lot of challenges

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► Classes boost the ability of children to communicate well
► Even shy youngsters gain an improvement in their word power

CAROLINE BUTCHER

FROM the most proficient chatterboxes to the bashfully shy, local toddlers are proving you are never too young to learn the art of good conversation.

The Talking Tots programme, which is run in Shepherd's Bush and Fulham, helps toddlers find their voice by building speech, confidence and listening skills.

Chiswick mum Caroline Laycock, 33, launched the local franchise of the UK-wide programme last September.

"The main purpose is to boost children's natural communication and language development," she said.

Lancashire-based paediatric speech therapists Tracey Park

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It's refreshing to see activities matched to the children's age

and Lisa Houghton started the programme in 2005, and there are now 27 franchises around the country.

The 45-minute classes offer a fast-moving series of parent-and-baby games, encouraging children to interact, practise listening for their name and waiting their turn, and learn to recognise sequences and opposites.

"These are fun sessions and practical activities, and I know as a parent that it's really refreshing to see activities matched to the children's age," Caroline said.

"The classes have been designed by therapists who know that children develop so much during the early years from zero to five."

Caroline used to work as a management consultant in the City, but opted for a change of pace after the birth of her daughter Kate 18 months ago.

"When I saw Talking Tots it really ticked all the boxes for



SPEAK FOR YOURSELF: Mum Michelle O'Sullivan and two-year-old Finn at Talking Tots (left) and Caroline Laycock, leader of the H&F branch (below)

PICTURES BY JUSTIN THOMAS



me, and I bought my franchise in June last year," she said.

"I really enjoy watching the children benefit from the classes. It has a scientific background but it's dressed up in a fun, enjoyable way.

"The best we can do for our children is give them a good head start in life and improve their confidence and communication skills. Listening is also important, because communication is two-way."

West Kensington mum Michelle O'Sullivan, who lives in Milson Road, has been attending the Shepherd's Bush sessions with her two-year-old son Finn for two months and says the difference is remarkable.

"He was quite shy when he started – he needed to do some

language skills and be around kids his own age," Michelle said.

"There has definitely been an improvement in communication skills and speech, and he's stringing more words together."

Caroline runs morning classes at Shepherd's Bush Methodist Church in Lakeside Road, St Dionis Church's Mission Hall in Parsons Green and Coffee and Crayons in Fulham Road.

She runs classes for one to two-year-olds and two to three-year-olds, and is aiming for a more advanced class for three to four-year-olds.

• Call Caroline on 07969 975007.



ORDER UP: Chef Stephane Druart at Bird in Hand

BIRD FOOD HELPS PUB TO SUCCEED

THEY say a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush, and West Kensington pub-goers are certainly embracing the old motto.

Publican Daren Seager took over the Bird in Hand pub in Masbro Road just 10 months ago, but is already drawing in hordes of customers after sprucing up the historic drinking spot.

Daren, 43, lives in Hammersmith with wife Lulu Gwynne, who owns the hugely popular Betty Blythe gourmet grocer in Blythe Road, Brook Green.

He has previously worked in interior decorating and carpentry, and his eye for good design is evident in the newly refurbished pub, featuring bold-patterned wallpaper, period-style mirrors, a well-stocked central bar and atmospheric lighting.

"When I took it over, I felt it was really important not to lose that local pub feel," he said.

"But it was very dark and I tried to lighten it up a bit and make it a bit more family friendly."

Daren and his business partner Thomas Finnigan have also introduced a new menu of gastronomic treats.

The revamped pub cuisine offers contemporary twists on old favourites like fish and chips, sausage and mash and gammon steak, as well as more unusual fare such as pigeon breast served with crispy pancetta and a new potato and chicory salad.

The menu also features an extensive range of vegetarian options, including a mouth-watering combination of griddled courgettes, carrots, butternut squash and halloumi with rocket and pesto, which can be ordered as either a starter or main course.

Daren said: "We're a food-led pub and try to give people nice comfy food with a gastro twist to it. We change the menu about three times a week and we also have traditional roasts on Sundays."

Most main courses are priced between £10 to £14, but the pub also offers a half-price menu for both lunch and dinner on Mondays, and for lunch on Tuesdays, Wednesdays and Thursdays.

The pub boasts an extensive range of wine from around the world and an ever-changing selection of ales including London Pride and Bombardier. **Caroline Butcher**

• The Bird in Hand is open daily from noon to 11pm. For more information, ring the pub on 020 7602 3060.

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It was important not to lose the pub feel

CLICK ON

www.talkingtots.info/westlondon