

On A Roll

by Darlene G. Davies

Diana Cavagnaro Says It With Hats

Perhaps you spotted her at the recent Victorian Ladies Society High Tea. You couldn't miss her. She was the sweet-faced lady dressed in Victorian garb from toe to a head topped by a creme colored straw hat with blue and creme brim and decorations. The chapeaux completed an altogether pleasing Victorian correct outfit. Of course if we emphasize hats, we must be referring to talented hat designer Diana Cavagnaro.



A small sample of Diana's hat designs

Cavagnaro's dress was the work of designer Valentina, formed with vintage pieces from authentic period clothing. The top, nicely coordinated with a powder blue softly patterned skirt, was created from an off-white damask tablecloth. The period-inspired outfit was replete with craftsman details like cross-stitching and eyelet trim. Because of Cavagnaro's adherence to designer accuracy, her accessories were of course, perfection – matching blue graduated bead necklace, blue beaded drop earrings, short lace gloves with very subtle creme colored polka dots – delectable.

Cavagnaro has a very loyal following among fashionable San Diego women and her circle of clients is enlarging all

the time. Her millinery creations have been described as "works of art that happen to be worn on heads." An apt description. In the hat business for 23 years, she traces her beginnings to a stint at the Old Globe Theatres where she served as an assistant milliner. She learned the craft of hat making here and passes on her wealth of knowledge to current students at Mesa College. Being a creative individual, she has multiple projects going simultaneously – do we know any artists who don't? For instance, she is currently producing a series of instructional videos about the process of hat making. Her initial video, *Straw Hat Class*, is selling briskly and a second one is in production.

It is no surprise that Cavagnaro's busiest time is during the Del Mar racing season. She makes dozens of hats for women to wear to opening day and appears on television to advise about current trends and styles. The hub of hat activity is her studio loft, located downtown in the historic Gaslamp Quarter. Inside is a kind of turn-of-the-century sitting room where a variety of hats for any occasion can be found.

While making hats is Cavagnaro's profession, she also weaves the hat thing into volunteer activities by working as part of the American Cancer Society's Look Good Feel Better Program to teach cancer patients how to wear hats and tie scarves. She is founder and chairperson of the annual Easter Parade and Hat Contest in the Gaslamp Quarter, a fundraiser for the UCSD medical center Department of Pediatrics Hematology/Oncology. Connecting the dots between work and volunteering, Cavagnaro donates part of the proceeds from sales of a pattern designed to get away from the medical look and promote self esteem in patients undergoing chemotherapy or radiation. In recognition of all she does in the community, she was recently given the Channel 10 Leadership Award for her work with cancer patients.

This energetic woman's activities are extensive, and even a partial listing tells us she is remarkable. San Diego has so many gifted women whose stories are fascinating, and obviously, Cavagnaro's is one of them.

