

the **Hat**Magazine



#77

MAY 2018

Visiting Texas

Trade shows A/W 2018/19

Fosshape foundation



A week in and around Dallas Texas

Think of Texas and you think of a different world, one of horses, cows, oil and men dressed in large oversized western hats. Everything in Texas is large, the state alone covers 268,000 sq. miles (larger than France), that is why Texas has always fascinated me, and was always on my hat 'hit list' – so at last it was time to head out west!



★ **Hatco**
601 Marion Dr.
Garland, Texas 75042, USA
Phone: +1 972-414-3500
Email: custserv@hat-co.com
www.hat-co.com

Hatco is the largest producer of hats in the world. It's not a brand name as such but is the company that owns Resistol, the most respected western hat brand, makes the Dobbs and Charlie One Horse collections, and holds the license to produce the US Stetson hat range. It also owns and runs a fur-felt-making plant in Longview, 126 miles east of Garland. Altogether Hatco employs 170 people who produce, from start to finish, one million hats each year. When a few years ago they itemised the process, it was

calculated that from raw fur to finished product the 'hat' passed through 220 pairs of hands.

The story of Hatco begins in the 1920s when a young hat wearing millionaire, E.R. Byer, decided to increase his fortune and invest in the brilliant young hat maker Harry Rolnick. And so in 1927 the company Byer-Rolnick was launched and a new hat factory opened in Dallas, Texas. They produced men's felts in both western and dress (everyday) styles, bringing in innovative blends and techniques under a new brand name 'Resistol Hats', meaning 'to resist all weather'. Demand grew and by 1934, to expand the production, they bought a big ranch in Garland where land was cheap, and built their factory there. From that small beginning the factory has grown and grown.

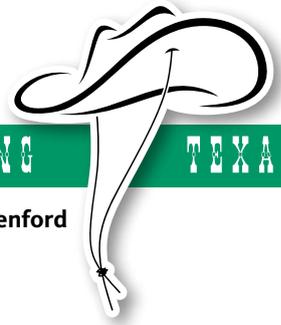
Garland The week began on Monday morning when we took a taxi to visit Hatco in Garland, a northeast suburb of Dallas. "We're going to visit one of the largest hat factories in the world," I said to our driver. "Do they make hats here in Garland?" was his reply, "I didn't know that!" This, I thought, was obviously a story that had to be told...

photos: Carole Denford



Different qualities of fur between the rabbit, beaver and chinchilla





Today the production takes place in two separate interlinking buildings, one for felt and one for straw. The production line works well with raw materials delivered at the back and production gradually moving forward, in one long flow on one large floor. It is well organised, extremely noisy and everyone is very focused on the job in hand. Many of the workers have a long history at Hatco and a great deal of experience, and most have, it seems, at least one other family member working here. The only static part of the production is the three days it takes to dry the partly finished hoods. Ovens (dryers) of all types have been tested, but still don't match that high finish achieved with naturally dried felt. The hats are checked at all stages to put right any damage and to eliminate discarding any quality felts. You certainly get the feeling that whatever brand and quality is in production Hatco strives constantly to improve and innovate, and to be the best in America.

Ricky Bolin, General Manager – 30 years at Hatco

Ricky Bolin has worked for Hatco for 30 years, starting in their outlet store and working his way up to become General Manager. For 15 years, prior to Hatco, he was a professional bull rider with an international reputation. Items on his busy agenda include maintaining a high level of production, keeping accurate costings, increasing exports and looking ahead for new products. He also attends many rodeos and events across America, as well as trade shows, buying trips and meetings with customers.

"We're an 'American Made' company and my number one priority is that we will have the best quality. Resistol is our own brand, favoured by professionals, that we sell all over the world. When the Stetson factory closed in 2004 we were given the license and the rights to manufacture the brand. We now make 90% of all their hats. Our other two brands are Dobbs and the ladies' brand Charlie One Horse.

"Our new CFO, Duane Prentice, came in five years ago with a lot of manufacturing experience. Since then this whole facility has been renovated, improving the flow of products through the factory. The maintenance of old machines that are running every day is a major problem, and so we now shut down for two weeks in July and two weeks in December, when a maintenance crew comes in, strips the machinery down and replaces any necessary parts. If they cannot buy parts, they build their own. This is also an opportunity to do our heavy cleaning.

"New markets and new products are both important to Hatco. At the moment our exports stand at 10%, but are growing, especially to Mexico and Australia. Our newest product is the protective rodeo/riding hat, which is still being developed. This strong felt incorporates a hard inner 'helmet' protecting the head and a chinstrap to keep the hat in place. It is rumoured that wearing protective headwear may be enforceable by law before long, so this is an essential product for us to develop and offer our customers.

My 30 years have been great fun, working with a lot of very innovative people as part of a team. And even though I've been here 30 years I learn something new every day!"

Kaci Riggs, Director of Product Development – 14 years at Hatco

The cowboy and western styles are the responsibility of Kaci Riggs, who grew up like her husband, Cash Myers, in the traditional cowboy lifestyle. They both remain professional rodeo riders, she part time and him full time, and therefore understand well the demands of the industry.

"My husband is a big guy so he takes a bigger brim and wants a hand-creased crown, so hats he wears must have an open crown. Last weekend in Oklahoma he competed in what we call 'The Iron Man' of the rodeo, where twenty of the top guys compete in five totally different events for a top prize of \$100,000. Cash didn't take first prize overall but won two out of the five events, so pretty good! "I design the Resistol, Stetson, and Charlie One Horse (our ladies' line) collections with Bob Posey, my mentor, who has worked here for 50 years. We work together on both summer and winter ranges, presenting a collection of about 50 hats per brand. This usually includes two dozen new styles and the 'best sellers', some that are older than me. The most expensive hat in the range is the 'Diamante' from Stetson, made from a blend of beaver and chinchilla, with its 14-carat gold buckle set with diamonds,

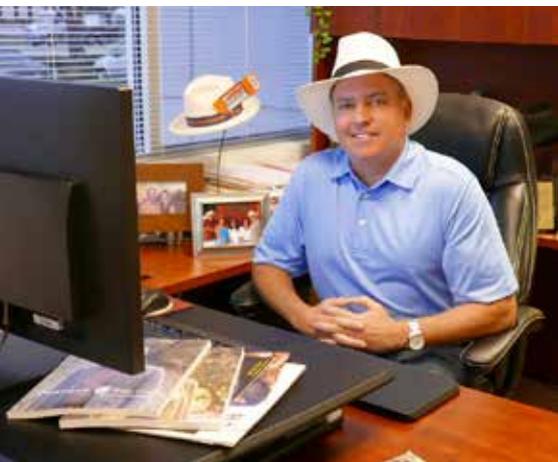


Ricky Bolin – General Manager

The 'pouncing' of the brim with different sandpapers to give the surface a smooth finish



The Diamante, at \$5,000 retail the most expensive hat in the collection



Mr Scott Starnes, president of the Milano Hat Co. The drying area for the straws after varnishing

a 1,000X label and complete with a hand-tooled leather case. It sells for \$5,000 and we sell between 4 and 6 dozen a year – a really special hat!”

Claudia Medina, Product Development – 3 years at Hatco

In the showroom Claudia Medina described her work within the development department. She has a number of different roles, the most important being the design of the dress hats for each individual brand, for both the summer and winter collections. She is also involved in special projects, for instance working with Levi Vintage using Hatco’s archive to create a range for their vintage collection. “My work is extremely focused on the different brands. The largest collection is for Stetson, a classic American brand, where we might have five different qualities all the way up to 100% beaver. For the Dobbs collection we only use rabbit blends so it has a lower price point. Dobbs is younger and more ‘fashion forward’, therefore we can play with colour and be more adventurous with the design. For the last collections we used a lot of double bands and bindings. I get a lot of inspiration when I go to New York, for the shows for the buying, and in April to attend the Headwear Association. Dinner, such a wonderful event. We also attend Magic. Although I work with a bunch of cowboys and cowgirls one of my jobs is to introduce them to this kind of ‘fashion world’. So far it’s going well and sales are increasing year by year.”

★ **Milano Hat Company**
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Garland, Texas 75040, USA
Phone: +1 214-342-0071
Email: customerservice@milanohats.com
www.milanohats.com

John (Giovanni) Milano was born in 1928 in Sorrento, Italy, and although he had a limited education he survived the war by ‘wheeling and dealing’ and using his ‘natural charm’. The move to America came when he met a beautiful Italian-American girl and decided to emigrate to New York.

He applied for a job in a department store, and as luck would have it there was a vacancy in the hat department. This was his first contact with Resistol, the hat company who ran the concession. John Milano had at last found his forté and for the next 27 years worked in sales, and in all departments of Byer-Rolnick, eventually becoming its president. When Levi Strauss bought the company in 1982 they put in their own top team. And so John, with a lifetime’s expertise, and his wife Maria started up their own small factory making straw hats. This was history in the making.

The company later expanded into felt, and became one of the most efficient and progressive hat factories in the world. This was mainly due to the purchase of Milano by Dorfman Pacific in 2004, a move that would give Dorfman a foothold into the traditional western market, and

also into US manufacturing with the Larry Mahan and Justin western brands. Then, when the Canadian company Biltmore came up for sale, they decided to add this to their portfolio, transferring much of the machinery and know-how from Canada in to Garland. This was a very high quality men’s brand, making more fashion-led, hand-finished felt hats, quite a diversification from traditional western wear. However, with the international market for high quality products increasing year by year, the Biltmore brand would supply a new fashion-forward generation, and maybe the next step forward for Milano and Dorfman Pacific.

Scott Starnes, President of Milano Hat Co. – 15 years at Milano and 31 years in the trade

The Milano Hat Co. sells approx. 250,000 hats per year, the majority 70% of which are made in Garland and the balance in their factory in Mexico. Scott Starnes has a big job and is always on the move. He is president of the company, their number one salesman, and VP for Dorfman Pacific in California. Dorfman also have a large showroom and offices in New York, where they present all their brands, and take part in the major trade shows.

“The hat business is like no other,” Scott told me. “In the US we know each other, make for each other, and work as a family because we all have one goal, to promote and increase the wearing of hats! And it must mean something that the Headwear Association is the longest established



After the headband the lining is inserted into the crown

trade association in America. Texas is big for hats, this month alone sees the large rodeo in Houston. It's a 28-night event at the 85,000-seat football arena, where top stars such as Garth Brooks and Beyoncé perform, and every night is sold out! I was just there last week, and everyone in the city is asked to wear a hat and they do. Sadly, even though Garland is home to some of the major hat manufacturers in the world, it is hardly known, even in America. The only publicity it ever got was in the horror film *Zombieland*. There should be large-scale cowboy hats high in the sky, with the wording 'Welcome to Garland the Hat Capital of the World'. Because where else is there more of a concentration of people making hats and manufacturing!"

Larry Hooton, Production Manager – 24 years at Milano

"My family's hat making company closed, and so with my vast knowledge of felt I was offered a position at Milano and a deal was made to supply some of the felt machinery. So in 1994 Milano began making felt hats. Today we employ 100 people, the factory being divided into three production areas, the felt side and the straw side and the Biltmore section. We are just installing a new computer system so every operator will have a 'scan-in'. This will tell us exactly where hats are in the production process, so we can give instant information to our customers. Our entry level is \$50 wholesale for shantung/straw western hats, not cheap but it's the best!"

Victor Cornejo, Brand Manager/Heads the Designer Team – 7 years with Milano

"At Milano we make for four brands: Larry Makin, our top (western) brand and the most expensive; Justin, a younger western brand; Tony Lama Hats; and Biltmore, where we make for both the men's and ladies'. Plus we also produce custom-made hats for many big brands and organisations. When Dorfman acquired Biltmore I was overjoyed, as it was a company I already knew and had worked with for a number of years. In 2017 we celebrated their 100th year anniversary with a new line. So it is a great honour to take the company forward, and a very exciting time to work with the design team and hold the position of brand manager."

★ **Master Hatters of Texas**

2945 Market St
Garland, Texas 75041, USA
Phone: +1 972-864-5523
www.masterhatters.com

Master Hatters are a second-generation family-run company and the third largest manufacturers of western hats in Garland. Until the financial crash in 2007 they had 76 workers and were supplying hundreds of small family stores across America. They were adaptable, innovative, made a quality hat, and business was good. When the crash came hundreds of their customers lost everything and closed. Master Hatters took a hit of about \$1.5 million and staffing

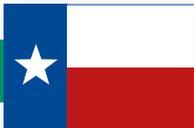
levels plummeted to 16 workers. From that moment manufacturing changed forever and it was a case of either 'do or die'. At the same time manufacturers in Mexico were increasing their foothold in the American market by producing western hats at a far cheaper price. And so, Master Hatters had to find a niche to survive, and they did!

They had a lot of good machinery, some dating back to the 1930s, plus a great deal of expertise, and so with their speed of production, their quality and reliability, and by making good contacts with buyers they turned the business around. Although production and income levels are not exactly what they were 12 years ago, they have clawed back and adapted to the new digital age. There are now on-line face to face meetings with American and international customers, and soon to be put into place is a \$100,000 investment in computer programs.

Second generation Jerry Cook took over the factory in 1977. His father, William Cook, had worked for Mr Rolnick from the early 1930s as one of their original 20 employees. When they moved to Garland in 1939 Mr Cook moved with them as business boomed. When the company was sold it was a time of change: straw hats were just coming of age, they were now more modern, more fashionable and a little more 'western'. The new company wanted to increase production and so William Cook set up his own factory, producing high quality hats for the Resistol brand. Later in the 60s, when Resistol was sold again, to Levi Strauss, he began making under his own brand.

Jerry Cook in his showroom





Jerry Cook began working for his dad at weekends to learn the business. He is educated in finance and business administration and has seen the company's rise and fall. "Since the recession our business has developed in new directions. We began to take on a diverse number of private label customers. One such customer was a retailer that now operates 369 stores and orders between 150 and 200 dozen hats a week, others took a significantly smaller number, but both were important to us. Private label means not competing with well-known internet brands. To take this market we had to completely reorganise our production. Today, if a customer orders in the morning, we can ship the hats in the afternoon. This superfast response means that our customers hold far less stock. In fact, they can turn their stock over 3-5 times every 6 months, meaning far less investment for them.

"Today it's all about the internet, although we don't sell directly, we just supply the people who do. There was a time that to be successful you had to make the best quality headwear. Today the market is dominated by price, innovation, delivery and how fast you can adapt to a market. At the moment we have 40 workers, so we're building up the business little by little. Our customer base needs to grow, it's not diversified enough – but it is what it is and thankfully business is gradually coming back."



Dallas

The district of Bishop Arts is located in the south west of Dallas and was, until ten years ago, a rather forgotten part of the city. It was, however, easily accessible from the city and a cheaper option for the young city worker, as well as an exciting location for a new generation of 21st century entrepreneurs. Thus they began setting up small niche stores, galleries, bars and restaurants, whilst modernising the housing to attract a young, more affluent customer. And in no time at all the area took off and today boasts more than 60 independent stores. Amongst the mix of new businesses were two young headwear brands!

★ The House of MacGregor

614 W Davis Street
 Dallas, Texas 75208, USA
 Owner: Cassandra MacGregor
 Phone: +1 214-942-1966
 Email: info@thehouseofmacgregor.com
www.thehouseofmacgregor.com
 Open: Tuesday-Friday 10am-2:30pm
 and Saturdays 12-5 pm (but check before you come)

Cassie MacGregor was originally from Texas and moved to New York to study hat making at FIT. On completion of her two years' study she worked for a while at Lola Hats, then with Albertus Swanepoel who helped her make contact with the theatrical milliner Lynne Mackey, and from there she obtained a millinery position at Suzanne Couture, where she worked for two years. Returning to Texas ten years ago Cassie decided to set up on her own. She found this workshop over a restaurant and has since built up a good clientele of both young men and women.

"Everything in the showroom has just switched over, from men's to women's, as the clients are now coming in for the Kentucky Derby. Normally I make more men's hats, but not at this time of year, when it gets real busy and the ladies want hats to match outfits. To increase the selection I bring in a few hats from established US milliners. These include Jill Courtemanche Millinery from LA,



Cutting the brims to size House of MacGregor, the showroom





Eggcup Design in Delaware, and from New York Cha Cha's, Lisa Shaub and Jennifer Hoertz. Most customers find me by word of mouth, or from repeat business. Customers either drop in, or call and make appointments, as I have been known to just 'run out of hats' on Derby Week! Prices range for the ladies' collections from \$175 to \$475. But it's the men's side that has been booming lately, led I would say by Nick Fouquet from LA who has transformed the menswear market in the US with hats from \$700 to \$1,500! Mine on the other hand, made to measure, are under \$250 for fur felt styles with flat brims and good trims. In the summer I provide sewn straws (the hoods made up by a hatter in Georgia) for both the men and women, which work well."

★ **Singer & Monk**
506 N. Bishop Avenue
Dallas, Texas 75208, USA
Phone: +1 214-609-8208
Email: singermonk@gmail.com
www.singermonk.com

Adam Daskivich was dressed immaculately when we 'dropped in' to visit the store. So unlike any other guy we had met that week in Dallas, he was wearing a suit with a pocket-handkerchief, a style of dress perfected with a hat. Looking, I might add, like a smart Italian from Pitti in Florence. The store had been open for 14 months so for the second



Adam Daskivich, looking exceptionally smart

time they were in the midst of organising a Derby Party. The enthusiasm and upbeat atmosphere was palpable in the store. The hats were well displayed, together with an assortment of men's accessories, most bought locally from established designers. "We sell 'dress hats' to both men and woman to wear for Derby Day, offering an unprecedented selection of quality US and Italian brands. Our Derby Party next week will run from 12 noon till 8pm, and includes live music, drinks, a coffee bar, hat demonstrations, some local vendors and some special hats being sent by the Italian company Tacchino. We are the only 'dress store' for hats in Dallas, so our customers are prepared to come a long way to see us. We carry Stetson, Biltmore, Brixton, Mayser from Germany, Dobbs, Country Gentleman and, from Italy, Panizza and Tacchino; many of these are established brands with a family history. Wearing a hat is 50% confidence and we want all our customers walking out with confidence. I get so much feedback from them. Many customers ask 'are hats coming back?' and I say, hats never left: on the east coast they wear hats all the time! I've always worn hats and so has my Dad!"

★ Meeting the Texan Wives

During my stay in Dallas, Laurel Johnson, milliner, subscriber and good friend, organised an 'afternoon tea' with a gathering of hat makers and enthusiasts. One of the ladies, Nicole LeBlanc, had led an exceptional life as a milliner. Originally trained in America she travelled to Europe and before long found herself at the London College of Fashion for a year, studying under Marie O'Regan. Her next move was to Luton, at Walter Wright, before returning to London for a spell in Philip Somerville's atelier. Finally Nicole moved to Paris and worked at Marie Mercié before her final workroom experience in Florence, Italy. Returning to America she took a position at Fleur de Paris in New Orleans, where she remained head of the workroom for 24 years and also took on the role of buyer. Even through the difficult years after Hurricane Katrina struck, the store managed to keep going. In 1992 Nicole moved to Dallas, but Fleur de Paris couldn't manage without her, so for the next 15 years she commuted to New Orleans to keep the millinery workroom and buying under control. She said at the tea: "And I still never leave the house without a hat. I am going to be featured in the April Playbill of the Dallas Opera, as one of the 'donor spotlights' and I insisted on wearing a hat, because people would not recognise me otherwise!"



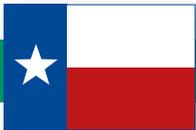
Cassie at her cabinet of small hats and hearpieces



Singer & Monk: the interior display with its many hat brands



Front: Suzanne Larsen, milliner; Laurel Johnson, milliner; Margarita Koye, enthusiast. Second row: Benita Barnard, enthusiast; Carole Denford; Nicole LeBlanc, retired milliner. Third row: Kelley O'Conan, enthusiast; Rhonda Ledbetter, enthusiast; Karla Unkenholz, enthusiast.

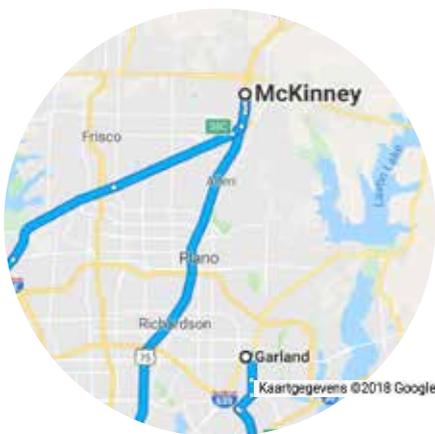


Sharla with her selection of headwear

Jenny's large selection of blocks



The store offers both custom-made and (ladies' and men's) everyday hats



McKinney Thirty miles north of Dallas is the small, historic town of McKinney, once voted 'The best place to live in America.' Today with its main street planted with trees and flowerbeds it retains that certain charm, attracting the new successful younger generation who love its independent stores, cafés, galleries and boutiques. The town is also proud of retaining its elegant horseback police force.

★ **Bay Willow Design**
222 E Virginia Street
McKinney, Texas 75069, USA
Phone: +1 469-617-3733
Email: jmfoster@baywillowdesign.com
www.baywillowdesign.com

Bay Willow Design, located close to the central square, was opened three years ago by milliner Jenny Mathison-Foster. At one end, there is a selection of triblys and everyday hats, and at the other her collection of custom-made occasionwear styles. Jenny's past career, as designer and merchandiser for the stylish store chain Crate & Barrel in Chicago, certainly added that professional touch to the interior. The back of the store opens out to a vast contemporary workspace with high ceilings and large skylight, so perfect for millinery. It was quite a busy time for her as two major events, the Mad Hatter Tea, organised by the Women's Council of the Dallas Arboretum, was celebrating its 30th anniversary in April, and the Kentucky Derby, America's most prestigious horse racing event, was in May; both were 'on the horizon' so there was a lot of work at hand.

We asked Jenny how she had started her career: "I've always been interesting in craft/hand work and so whilst in Chicago I took a class in millinery and was hooked. The hardest part was trying to learn the

craft and find more courses. After moving down to Texas, I contacted Laura Del Villaggio in Austin and continued learning with her. The turning point was the purchase of 125 blocks from a milliner who was soon retiring, which meant I could set up a studio in my house making hats for friends and family. Three years ago, an opportunity arose to take this shop and studio. It was very tempting to sell only hats, but here in McKinney you couldn't live off of hats alone, so I decided to add a carefully selected range of accessories.

"The custom-made hat is an area of the business that is certainly growing. Most hat makers sell online but I find that customers love the contact with the maker and being able to try various styles before deciding. Over the past two years we have organised a few weekend courses here, which have worked really well. As millinery is a never-ending learning process I took a course myself last year in the South of France with Tracy Chaplin, where I learnt so many new techniques. My philosophy is the more you learn the more it helps create interest in hats; it also generates new styles and brings into the workplace a new set of skills."



The inside of Sharla's, designed in a traditional French style



Peters Brothers, ready to serve!



Some (old) tools of the trade used on a daily basis at Peters Brothers

★ **Sharla's**

109 E. Virginia St.
 McKinney, Texas 75069, USA
 Phone: +1 214-544-2200
 Email: sharla@sharlas.com
 www.sharlas.com
 Open: Monday-Saturday 10 am-5pm

A five-minute walk along Virginia Street took us to Sharla's, a large specialist boutique for beauty products and accessories. Sharla Bush, the owner, was very welcoming and enthusiastically took us to the area of the store given to hats. To my surprise there were just two labels, Kokin from New York and Marzi from Italy, both high-end brands designed and beautifully made in their respected workrooms. "The mission of my store," Sharla said, "is to help women become their best. Whether it be for make up, beauty products or accessories we want them to come in and have fun and feel at home. My career has been dedicated somewhat to retail, as my mother owned a flower shop and then moved in to bridal. Since opening this larger store in 2011 I have added some very special accessories, which means travelling to New York and to Paris, to Who's Next in January and September, to seek out top brands or design new products for my customers under our own brand."



Fort Worth

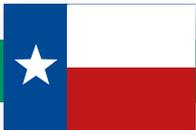
Fort Worth lies 30 miles west of Dallas and still retains the stockyards with the charm and feel of the Old American West. This is where 'cow country' begins, with its rodeos, ranches and cowboys wearing traditional western gear. It's also the only place where twice a day they run a live cattle drive down Exchange Avenue in the Stockyards National Historic District, using real Texas cowhands to drive a herd of real Texas longhorns. Every detail of the cattle drive, from the saddles and chaps to the boots and hats, is authentic and goes back to the mid to late 1800s when millions of cattle were driven through the Fort Worth stockyards en route to the railheads in Kansas.

★ **Peters Brothers Hats**

909 Houston St.
 Fort Worth, Texas 76102, USA
 Phone: +1 817-335-1715
 Email: info@pbhats.com
 www.pbhats.com
 Open: always best to call first -5pm

Jim and Tom Peters were Greek immigrants who arrived in Fort Worth in 1911 with \$600 between them. They purchased a 17x10ft wood building in the downtown area and soon set up in business shining shoes. As a child living in Greece Tom Peters had dyed and worked with hats, and so with this experience behind them they began cleaning hats for customers. Wanting to learn more about the hat business Tom took a job working for John B. Stetson in Philadelphia, where he learnt the making process from master hatters. Returning to the Fort Worth store he began making hats for clients, gradually building a reputation for expertise, and selling to many of the stars and dignitaries visiting Fort Worth. The Peters brothers gradually made a name for themselves across the US. In 1933 the shop moved to its current location, where Tom Peters remained working until he was 93 years old!

The store in Houston Street is now owned by Tom's great-grandson, Joe Peters Jnr, and run by Joe's son Brad. They make to order in the 'old fashioned way' using the tools handed down from generation to generation, and sell a selection of the most recognised brands. There's nothing smart or modern about the store's interior, but it has workers who know felt, know hats, and how to fit a customer.



The year begins in January when Brad and his team take part in the annual stock shows and rodeos, selling ready-made western styles and at the same time taking orders for made-to-measure hats. The order book from these events then sets the pace for the year. The week we were in Texas Brad was 'on the road' so Cody his assistant showed us around the store and explained the making process.

"If we ordered a hat," I asked, "what would be the timescale for delivery?" "About six months after your first visit, where we discuss the style, shape, take your measurements and a template of your head. For this process we use a very basic technique, as size alone will not give a good fit. First a length of hard rubber is taken around the head at the headline, pulled tightly, and then relaxed. From this inside line we cut a cardboard shape, which we try on to the customer for gaps or protrusions and adjust if necessary. We now have a perfect size and shape and can use the crown block nearest to these lines. The first process, using the raw hood, is stretching out the brim. A basic crown block is inserted to hold the shape, the hood is then turned upside down and clamped into the machine. The brim is steamed well, then slowly and evenly pulled out. Felt must dry naturally as otherwise it will shrink back. The hat is then pounced to smooth down the surface and the brim blocked, usually on a wooden block. We offer brim sizes from 2 7/8" to 4 1/2", and most of the sewing is done by hand. When the hat is almost finished we transfer this shape onto a conformiture, so that the hat can be steamed and blocked exactly to the customer's head shape, then the headband is inserted and the hat is trimmed. The final shaping of the crown is nearly always done by hand, as this gives a custom finish and overall better proportions. Some customers return to check the fit and the shape, but for regular customers we just 'ship it out'. We make for both men and women, in all the traditional shades from basic black to silver belly, a beautiful off white, which is quite sought after at the moment. Prices fall into three qualities: 6X, which is pure rabbit, at \$350; 20X, a 50-50 blend of beaver and rabbit at \$550; and 100X, our top quality is pure beaver at \$1100."

★ Cavender's Western Wear

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Tyler, Texas 75701, USA
Phone: +1 903-561-6848
Email: jennifer@cavenders.com
www.cavenders.com

At last year's Headwear Association Dinner in New York, Mr Clay Cavender, vice president, was presented with the trophy for US 'Hat Retailer of the Year'. Set up by his parents, James and Patricia Cavender in 1965, Cavender's is now a multi-state, western-wear empire with stores throughout the southwest. As Texas is their number one state this was a company we had to visit.

One of their outlets is opposite the stockyards in a large, authentic wooden store that Cavender's, in partnership with Luskey's/Ryon's, had recently opened. A unique retail experience offering customers an unprecedented range of hats, boots and western clothing across all ages, and across all price ranges. The day we arrived, McClain Cavender, Clay Cavender's niece, was working here as part of the team. She has worked for the family business for six years, and is now buying many of the accessories for the company's 80 stores as well as assisting with the merchandising. Her father, Joe Cavender, is the president of the company

and the boot buyer for every store. "This store in Fort Worth has more of a 'boutique vibe' and is really special due to its location. We sell a lot of western hats both to Texans and to tourists, who arrive here from around the globe, from the US, Australia, South America and also from Europe. Everyone wants either a hat or a buckle, or sometimes both. My job is to go to the Western Markets (shows) mainly in Dallas and Denver and buy for the forthcoming season. As Texas is extremely hot in the summer we sell a lot of the Resistol, Stetson and Justin brands where Cavender's is probably unrivalled. Then we have our own Cavender's private label collection, and a variety of other styles including children's, western hats, caps, outbacks and fashion hats from Scala and Dorfman Pacific.

"Our most popular style? It's really down to personal preference, but we've seen a lot of shorter brims going through the door. The Stetson 20X has probably been our most popular felt hat; it's not the most expensive but a good quality available in 4 and 4 1/4" brims, and selling for \$450. Colours are also 'in demand' as we've sold a lot in 'silver belly' and lighter colours recently, rather than the traditional black felt. Our price range is wide, from \$150 to \$1,000 as we have to cater for every customer. By the end of 2018 we should have in place an international ordering system – so keep in touch!"



The 'hat & boot' department at Cavender's