

Hats Off for the Horses:

*A Visit With Milliner,
Sally Faith Steinmann*



By L.A. Pomeroy

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From her one-woman studio on Cape Cod, milliner Sally Faith Steinmann creates the equivalent of wearable confectionary – one-of-a-kind hats for the race track, polo field, show ring, or wedding chapel -- as stunning and charismatic as any equine champion.

Steinmann, 51, turned a passion for horses, and girlhood joy for dabbling in ribbons and tulle into a successful business, Maggie Mae Designs® (whose custom Derby hats fetch \$700 to \$1200) and a generous avenue for fund-raising, that has been changing the lives of retired Thoroughbred race horses for the better.

“The only formal training I received in sewing and design was Home Economics class in high school, where I recall making an awful pink skirt and tunic,” she says with a laugh. “As a child I was always making things, including colorful, paper horses with fanciful yarn manes and tails, and outfits for them to wear.”



Above left: The "Creator" hat - Photo by Tom Steinmann

Above: Creator, the horse - Photo by Matt Wooley,
www.equisportphotos.com

“(Anna Sewell’s book) *Black Beauty*, was the first to have an impact on me. I loved how the story was from the horse’s perspective. That is something I continue to remember when I think about the living situations of horses. Sewell poignantly demonstrated how we are caretakers of these wondrous creatures that possess not only individual personalities, but spirit, emotion, and memory, as well!”

Shortly after graduating from Wellesley College (Massachusetts) where she focused on Women's Studies ("Looking back, this added to my appreciation of the history of ladies' millinery.") Steinmann's mother gave her a pattern for making a felted wool hat.

"The process seemed like magic. But the fun truly began when I started trimming the hats. I began to reconnect with my childhood love of fabric, and once again, was enthralled with shaping and weaving life into things that could be worn."

She took her "adorned chapeaux" to a local Cape Cod gallery. Tourists and locals began to notice and buy her hats, and after a few years selling wholesale, she launched a website: "Women began to find me that truly loved hats and wearing them, to all occasions, including horse events." Steinmann named her new business in honor of her beloved muse and tabby cat, Maggie Mae. (A 2011 "Leopard" line is dedicated to Maggie Mae, who crossed her rainbow bridge in October 2010.)

Horsin' Around for a Reason

"Over the years, an increasing number of customers were horse lovers like me. By creating Derby hats, my passion for hats led me back to horses." And much like Sewell's Black Beauty, the modern day saga of ill-fated 2006 Kentucky Derby winner, Barbaro, touched her. "Following his death, I felt compelled as an artist and horse lover to create something to honor this amazing athlete's life on and off the track." The result was a hat she called, 'Run for the Roses.'

"After the Barbaro hat, I read about rescues and retraining facilities emerging to care for race horses who were injured or too old to race or breed." As a result of her research, she launched a new web page -- Hats and Horses: A Lifelong Love Affair -- to showcase various organizations.

In May 2009, she worked with Thoroughbred Charities of America and Foxwoods Resort Casino on a Derby fund-raiser for the Eight Belles Memorial Fund (in honor of the filly whose Kentucky Derby race was her last). She then created a hat saluting Rachel Alexandra for the Kentucky Derby Museum's annual hat contest/exhibit, and in 2010, her 'A Rose for Big Red' homage to Secretariat, was also exhibited there.

Steinmann wanted MaggieMaeDesigns® to do more. "In 2009, I created Hats Off to the Horses: The Road to the Derby as an annual fund-raiser. My objectives were to generate substantial funds for Thoroughbred retirees and participate in educational outreach about retired racehorses' needs."

Hats Off to the Horses is a six-month online Derby hat auction (November 1 to April 11) with proceeds going to the Old Friends Thoroughbred retirement facility in Kentucky. Each hat is personalized to the retired Thoroughbred it is honoring through the hat's style, color (of the horse and racing silks of its stable) and overall effect. "People tell me they can feel the spirit of the horses in these designs, and sometimes the hats even look like the horses themselves!"



Above top: The "Little Silver Charm" hat - Photo by Tom Steinmann

Above: Little Silver Charm, the miniature horse - Photo by Matt Wooley, www.equisportphotos.com

Old Friends provides her with photographs and a horse's biography. Steinmann then goes online, spending weeks uncovering articles, race videos, "anything that will provide me with a clue about each horse's life and spirit."



Above: The Bull Inthe Heather" hat

- Photo by Tom Steinmann

Right: Bull Inthe Heather, the horse

- Photo by Matt Wooley, www.equisportphotos.com



"The experience of creating these hats has changed my life as a milliner, and the process is the most challenging and creatively stretching of my career. A lot of research goes into each hat before I get near the cutting table. I get to know each horse in order to create a fabric representation that truly reflects its individual conformation, spirit, and career."

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Along the way, she begins to draw, and to "collect pieces of fabric and trim that might – or might not – become part of the final project. Sometimes, the process is so intense that I need to back away for a few days, allowing the vision to become clearer or details to rise to the surface. If I get out of the way and trust the process, the final design, simmering just below the surface, will float to the top and reveal itself."

The resulting millinery design sometimes takes even her breath away. "I mean that from a place of humility and gratitude. It is because of the horses that these designs evolve. Their gentle spirits, athletic beauty, and inspiring personal stories are stitched, layered, and woven into every hat."

The first horse Steinmann honored from Old Friends in the Hats Off to the Horses online Derby hat auction was Black Tie Affair, the 1991

Breeders Cup champion who passed away in July 2010 after complications from laminitis. "Black Tie was the Black Stallion, Black Beauty, King of the Wind, Flicka, and The Pie, all rolled into one. He embodied courage, charm and class, and it's there in every stitch, fold, and layer of his hat.

"I still have yet to have my own horse, but maybe the dream of having horses in my life has come true after all. We all need heroes, who win our hearts and inspire us to do

better, and be better in our lives. I'm happy to say that Black Tie, now and forever, is one of mine."

If you would like to learn more about helping retired Thoroughbred race horses and make one of her Maggie Mae Designs® one of your own, point your browser to learn more about the auction at www.maggiemae.com/OldFriendsAuction.htm

Opposite bottom left: Black Tie Affair, the horse
- Photo by Matt Wooley, www.equisportphotos.com

Opposite bottom right: The "Black Tie Affair" hat
- Photo by Tom Steinmann



Above left: The "Gulch" hat (2 views) - Photos by Tom Steinmann
Above: Gulch, the horse - Photo by Rick Capone

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