



THE ENDURING FEDORA

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The fedora hat was named after a character in the Sardou play in which it first appeared in 1882 ("Fedora"). How fitting that a hat designed for the stage should be re-interpreted by a theatrical millinery designer like Philip Treacy. Traditionally the fedora was a hat worn by men, but later in the 20th century the fedora was fashioned for women in brighter colours and with an upturned brim for an air of femininity (Peck, "The History of the Fedora"). The object I have chosen to study is a woman's gray felted fedora by [Philip Treacy](#) (FRC 2009.01.402). The beauty of this hat lies in its inexplicable delicacy. A warm, woollen hat such as this (in an oversized shape, no less) should by definition appear bulky. Yet the talented Treacy has made such a hat look as light as air.

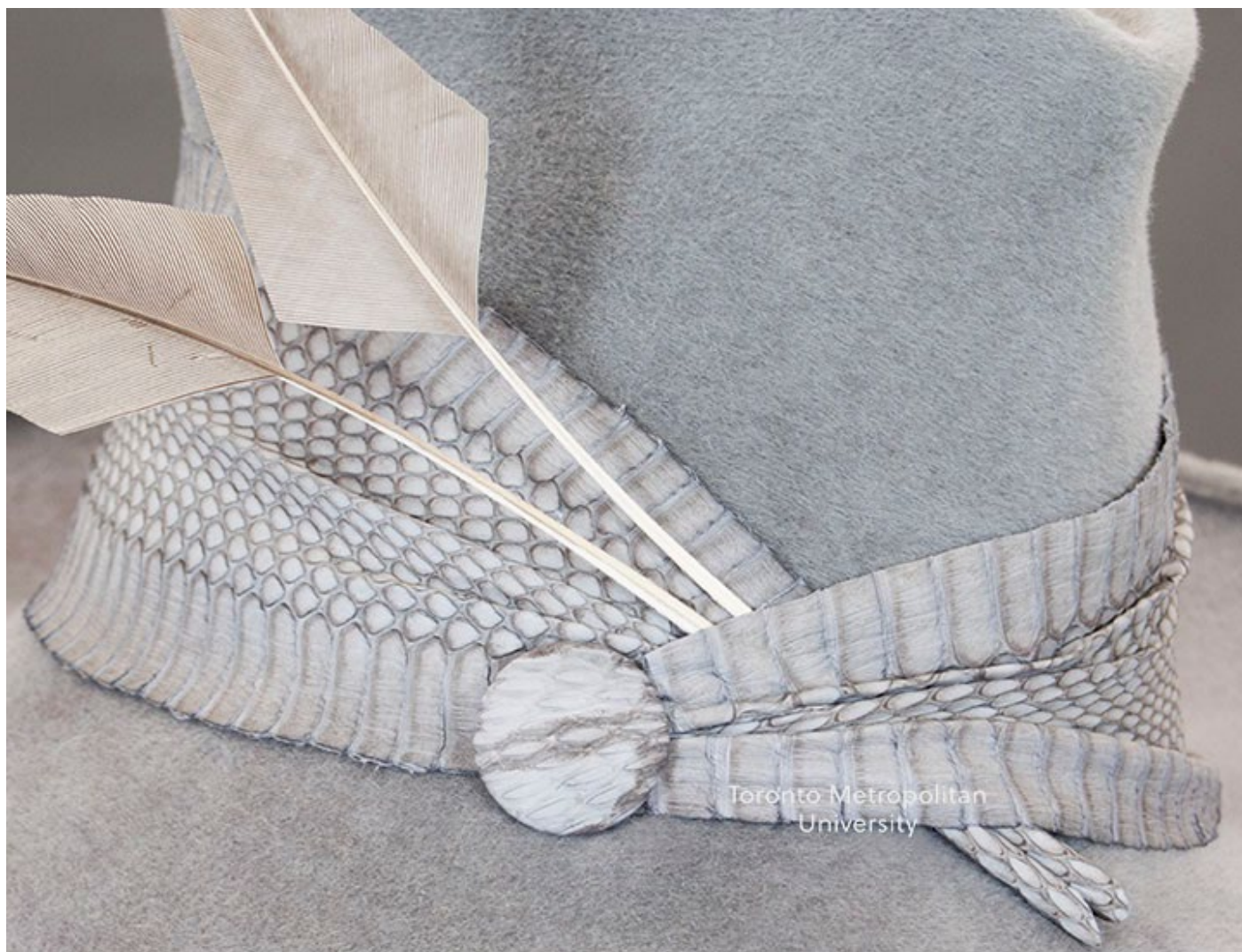
The first thing to be noticed about this hat is its beautiful soft curves. The round, gently sloping brim is 4" (10.16 cm) deep around the hat, with a 1/4" (0.635 cm) of topstitching folded up and over the brim towards the sideband of the hat. Based on the appearance of the stitches, it was most likely done by machine. The brim bends upwards gradually towards the back and right side of the hat, peaking at 2 1/4" inches (5.715 cm) at the right back of the brim.



Gray fedora felted wool hat with two brown clipper feathers. By Phillip Treacy, ca. 1990s. FRC2009.01.402. Detail of band. Gift of Kathleen Kubas.

The sideband of the hat was blocked in a fedora-style, though the shape has been exaggerated in a number of ways. At its highest point, the sideband of the hat sits at 6" (15.24 cm). This peak is on the opposite side of the peak of the hat's brim, creating a balance within the accessory. The sideband is slightly dented in a number of areas, most notably at left centre-front, right centre-front and left centre-back. These dents look intentional and there are no apparent signs that they were created by the wearer.

The crown of the hat is one of its most interesting attributes. Blocked on a teardrop-shaped hat block, the crown is built up 1 1/4" (3.175 cm) along the sides and then sharply dips into the teardrop shape. All of Treacy's blocks are handmade by Lorenzo Ré in Paris (Davies 126). The point of the teardrop points slightly off-centre, creating a pretty asymmetry that would frame the face of the wearer. Asymmetry is not uncommon in millinery, as angles that parallel those of the face tend to appear too harsh and geometric when worn (Dreher 12).



Gray fedora felted wool hat with two brown clipper feathers. By Phillip Treacy, ca. 1990s. FRC2009.01.402. Gift of Kathleen Kubas.

A beautiful blue-gray band curves around where the brim meets the sideband at 3 1/2" wide (8.89 cm) for the majority of its length. This appears to be a dyed replica of a Cobra snakeskin. Like the crown of the hat, the band of skin is slightly off-centre. It narrows considerably towards the front left side, where the skin overlaps and is secured with a skin-covered button. The skin folds in three places where it narrows towards the left centre front of the hat, creating an interesting texture with the skin. Tucked between where the skin overlaps are two clipper feathers that lean on a low angle towards the left side of the hat. The feathers are mostly brown and white, and these two colours pick up on the lighter nap of the wool and the darker scales of the skin. At their widest point they are about 2 3/4" wide (6.985) but narrow dramatically to a fine point at their tips. The feathers extend approximately 8-9" (20.32-22.86 cm) from the hat. The feathers contribute significantly to the delicate air of the hat, giving it lightness and a touch of whimsy.

The wool of the hat has a long luxurious nap that has been brushed in a counter-clockwise direction. It is made from rabbit wool. The colour of the wool is a blue-gray. Its texture is soft and plush, and one could imagine that this would be a very warm hat. This hat was most likely intended for wear in a cooler climate or season. The felt is thick, and would be too hot for the summer.



Drawing of Philip
Treacy hat detail.
FRC2009.01.402. By
Millie Yates.

The inside of the hat is lined with a blue silk satin with a gold piping at the crown. A stretchy Petersham ribbon circles the head size collar. Treacy's logo is stamped where the lining touches the crown, and in a label at the centre-back of the hat. There is a content label that reads "100% Poils de Lapin" which is French for "100% rabbit hair".

The hat is in very good condition. The only apparent damage is one small, circular dent on the right sideband just above the skin band. Felted hats may not be worn during humid or wet weather, because they are heat-set and moisture can cause the blocked shape to wilt. The edges and curves of the hat are still very sharp, and the feathers do not appear to be bent or distorted in any way.

A number of sensory reactions occurred to me when viewing and handling this hat. The first was my reaction to the texture. The softness of the hat is felt before even touching the hat's plush surface. The thickness of the felt looks compressible, as though if it were squeezed it would bounce back. The juxtaposition of the soft rabbit hair next to the scaly, sleek snakeskin is eye-catching. It is interesting that Treacy has used entirely natural fiber and skins in his design: from the rabbit felt, to the ostrich feathers, to the snakeskin and even the silk lining.



Light brown felted Breton
trimmed with Mongolian
sheep fur, resulting in a
halo-like effect. By Oscar
de la Renta. ca. Post 2000
- 2008. FRC2009.01.703,
Gift of Kathleen Kubas.

The balance of shapes and weight within the form of the hat is another hallmark of Treacy's work. He always works in front of a mirror when creating his forms because to him, mirrors tell the absolute truth about a design. He has said: "If something is off, I need to be able to see it, and then I can spot millimetres from miles away...I believe in that millimetre" (Davies 38).

This hat was worn by Kathleen Kubas who loved wearing hats and was known as 'The Hat Lady' in Toronto. After she passed away, her family donated over 300 hats to the Toronto Metropolitan University Fashion Research Collection. Her hat collection included other top millinery labels like Stephen Jones, Oscar de la Renta, Bentley Tomlin, and Eric Javits.



Toronto Metropolitan
University

Black velvet beret. Black veil with chenille spotted and black rhinestone details. Veil is full face with two long trains. By Kokin New York. ca. Post 2000. FRC2009.01.488. Gift of Kathleen Kubas.



Toronto Metropolitan
University

Black Mad-hatter women's
hat with silk flowers and
fur-like feathers. By Philip
Treacy. ca. Post 2000-
2008. FRC2009.01.512.
Gift of Kathleen Kubas.

Her affinity for the fedora style of hat is evidenced by a number of other hats in this style made in different colours and materials like a pink satin fedora (FRC 2009.01.03) and a cheetah-print rabbit wool felt hat (FRC 2009.01.405), also by Treacy . The cheetah-print hat in particular bears a striking resemblance to the gray fedora. Its crown is blocked in a similar tear-drop shape, its sideband is circled by trim and its brim turns up towards the back of the hat. It even shares the same navy-blue lining! The pink satin fedora provides an interesting contrast. Made entirely of a hot-pint satin, this hat is smaller in size than the felt has but shares the upturned brim towards the back of the hat. Its brim is circled with topstitching every 3/16" (0.47625 cm). Its lining is equally as bold as its exterior, with a vibrant butterfly pattern in black, pink, orange, blue and green. The classic fedora is an enduring shape in Treacy's work, fashioned differently from collection to collection. At one time, hats were an essential part of everyday dress. This change in fashion has meant that contemporary milliners like Philip Treacy can treat their designs as exciting challenges and opportunities for new innovations.



Drawing of Philip Treacy hat. FRC2009.01.402. By Millie Yates.

The majority of Philip Treacy's designs today retail upwards of \$1000, and his couture pieces often sell for much more. Treacy's work is favoured by royalty and popular-culture royalty alike. He has designed for Grace Jones, Lady Gaga, Camilla Bowles and created 36 hats for the royal wedding of the Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, William and Kate. Born in Ireland, Treacy studied at London's Royal College of Art and graduated in 1990. His eye-catching designs quickly rose the young designer to fame. Though he is primarily known for his namesake line, Treacy also designs for many established couture houses in Europe, such as Chanel, Dior, Givenchy and Alexander McQueen. In the millinery world of today, Treacy's name is ubiquitous.

The colour palette of the hat is elegant and natural, but it is its design that is most intriguing. Treacy does not create ordinary hats; it is the sharp shaping, smooth curves and dramatic feathers in this particular design that command attention. It is this touch of originality imbued in even his most classic pieces that makes Treacy's work so remarkable.

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