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## **A top trend**

Swirling amid the rumors and speculation about royal bride Kate Middleton's top-secret dress design last month was the world's fascination with the British tradition of hats for female wedding guests.

From the trendy fascinator, a small, whimsical headpiece, to the more traditional styles worn by Queen Elizabeth, the royal couple's female guests obliged wedding watchers in full force.

Some hope the future queen's millinery interests will inspire women to become hat wearers again, much like the blue dress that the now Duchess of Cambridge wore at her formal engagement announcement became an instant best-seller around the world.

In the weeks leading up to the royal wedding, that was the case in Minnesota, according to retailers.

"We had such a rush on hats," said Dee Holsinger, owner of Bumbledees in downtown St. Cloud. "It was great fun."

Jennifer Sapiro, co-owner of Blacklist Vintage in Minneapolis, also saw a lot of customers looking for hats to wear during royal wedding viewing parties.

"We specialize in hats, so we have people coming in looking for hats," she said. "But people have been saying the wedding has been inspirational."

Susan Metzger, a Minnesota designer and Grand Avenue boutique owner in St. Paul, also has seen more women coming into her store looking for hats.

"Some girls are saying they are going to wear their pajamas and wear a fashion hat to be a part of the celebration," she said about the days leading up to the wedding.

Although Metzger herself wears fashion hats whenever she can, she doesn't believe the hat trend will be fully embraced in America. But she does see Middleton as someone who might inspire fashion.

"When the general public sees how pretty (the Duchess Catherine) looks, they will want to emulate that," she said. "Girls are inspired by her wearing hats."

Sapiro believes Middleton is a fashion-trend setter and hopes the hat trend continues past the royal wedding parties.

"It seems to me, there's almost a hat for any occasion," she said.

Sapiro wears hats while working, going out to dinner, to fashion events, and wide-brimmed hats in the summer. A night out on the town, shopping and cocktail parties are other ways to incorporate hats.

"If you have confidence," she said, "you can get away with everything for hats."

Holsinger says "we just need to get comfortable with (hats)."

And although hats are an accessory, they can be so much more than just an accessory.

"I think they can be worn anytime," Holsinger said. "They're part of the outfit."

Hats don't always have to be about function, Metzger says. In the royal wedding, the hats are all about aesthetics.

"A fashion hat is an extension of the outfit and it completes the look that one desires," she said. "Kate Middleton is a perfect example of a girl who would wear a fashion hat – it's not functional, it's a decoration on top of the head."

Hats can be worn to match, complete, add to and, in some cases, be the main attraction of an outfit.

People will try to match Middleton's style, Sapiro said. The Duchess, as an English tradition and fashion, wears hats year-round.

When customers come into Blacklist Vintage looking for hats, Sapiro often recommends trying on something small and building from there.

Summer hats with wide brims are easy and comfortable for people just starting the hat trend. Same with hats from the 1940s, and "Mad Men" hats from the 1960s have been popular.

With the variety of hats the vintage store carries, Sapiro says it's easy for any comfort level of hat wearers to find something.

Holsinger believes the key to finding the right hat is finding something fun and comfortable.

Metzger says the perfect hat reflects the wearer's personality and is something they feel comfortable in.

Finding the right hat also depends on personality, mood and outfit.

"It's kinda like picking a necklace," Sapiro said. "If you want something a little louder, or a little softer, (a hat) can go with your mood."

For those who want to try the trend, but are not ready to embrace the everyday wear, there are plenty of other occasions where a hat would be appropriate.

Traditionally, hats are worn and accepted in the U.S. at Easter, some Sunday church services and during the Kentucky Derby.

And with some events, like today's Kentucky Derby, the outfit is all about the hat, not the dress.

Hats also have been turning up at themed parties.

"I'm seeing a lot of showers where hats are required," Holsinger said.

And summer and spring are easy times to wear hats.

"I think summer is a good time for hats – we need the sun protection," Holsinger said. "And there are a lot of good summer hats."

Holsinger hopes people will continue to have fun with hats. And if the Duchess of Cambridge remains a fashion icon, we may see more hats in the future.

"I think our eyes are on Kate because she's so classy, beautiful, elegant," Holsinger said.