

HAT FASHIONS:

Hats are a "must" this summer, says leading designer Otto Lucas - for dresses have never been so plain and unadorned, so you just have to let all your excitement go to your head; there's nowhere else for it to go. So this year's hats are, above all, important.

For example, this castshell Ascot hat, its brim smothered with red peonies frothed with green tulle.

On the left, a black "after-six" e cloche; on the right a green tulle helmet e cloche. And talking of tulle, here's a picture hat in moss green, overshadowed by a filmy veil.

An aqua silk e cloche, with a dramatically slanting front.

We were so intrigued by all this ingenuity that we asked to be shown behind the scenes, where they know how to make straws without dropping bricks. The actual materials, and the equipment, are very simple; but it takes years of experience before you reach the stage - as this house has - of being the biggest single dollar-earner in the business. How's that for size?

Having penetrated so far into the holy of holies, we gathered up our courage and asked - could they dream up a Pathe Hat for us? Certainly - Mr. Lucas would design it himself, with the inspiring co-operation of model Eileen Beeton.

The crown comes after the brim. You'd have done it the other way round, wouldn't you? So would we - and that shows how little we know. And from a trayful of flowers which look all the same, it takes an expert to pick out the ones that will be just right.

Now comes coral tulle to finish it off. We were flattered when he decided that the Pathe Hat should be suitable for Ascot - the kind of hat, in his own words, "to make any girl look pretty".

The finished article catches the eye of world-famous model Barbara Goalen - and a very critical eye it is, too; if she'll take it, we're made!

Keep your fingers crossed...

So now you know; all you need's a bit of straw, a bit of tulle - and about twenty years of learning how to do it.