

This month...

Issue 95 - February 2014
Next issue: February 19th, 2014

Elsa Cappelli's Artisan Hats

Hand Stitching Straw Braid

Lisa Jayne McConnon

British School of Millinery Events

And More...



 **HATalk**

the e-magazine for those who make hats

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ARTISAN HATS

ELSA CAPPELLI & THE EYESIGA MUKAMA CRAFT GROUP
ETHICAL & SUSTAINABLE MILLINERY



London milliner Elsa Cappelli is a successful accessories designer, textile artist and lecturer with a passion for using hat making as a tool for social change. Working collaboratively with women in remote regions of the world, she designs and develops materials and products that draw on indigenous techniques and processes in order to create sustainable employment opportunities.

In conjunction with the [Bushfire Children's Home](#) in Eastern Uganda, Elsa began working with the Eyesiga Mukama craft group in 2007. Elsa trained the women in this group, most of whom are single mothers and widows, to plait palm leaf braids from sustainably harvested wild date palms and to make high quality hat forms from these braids.

Operating on a not-for-profit basis, Elsa set up the [Artisan Hats](#) label to sell these hats on behalf of the craft group. She also sells the plaited palm leaf braids, which have many applications for millinery and other crafts. Through the Artisan Hats project, the women of the Eyesiga Mukama craft group have been able to earn extra income to support their families. Elsa's aim is to build long term relationships with the communities she works with and to support their social well-being, in the belief that we are all connected and we can all make a difference. We asked her to tell us a little more about this inspiring project and her own millinery background...

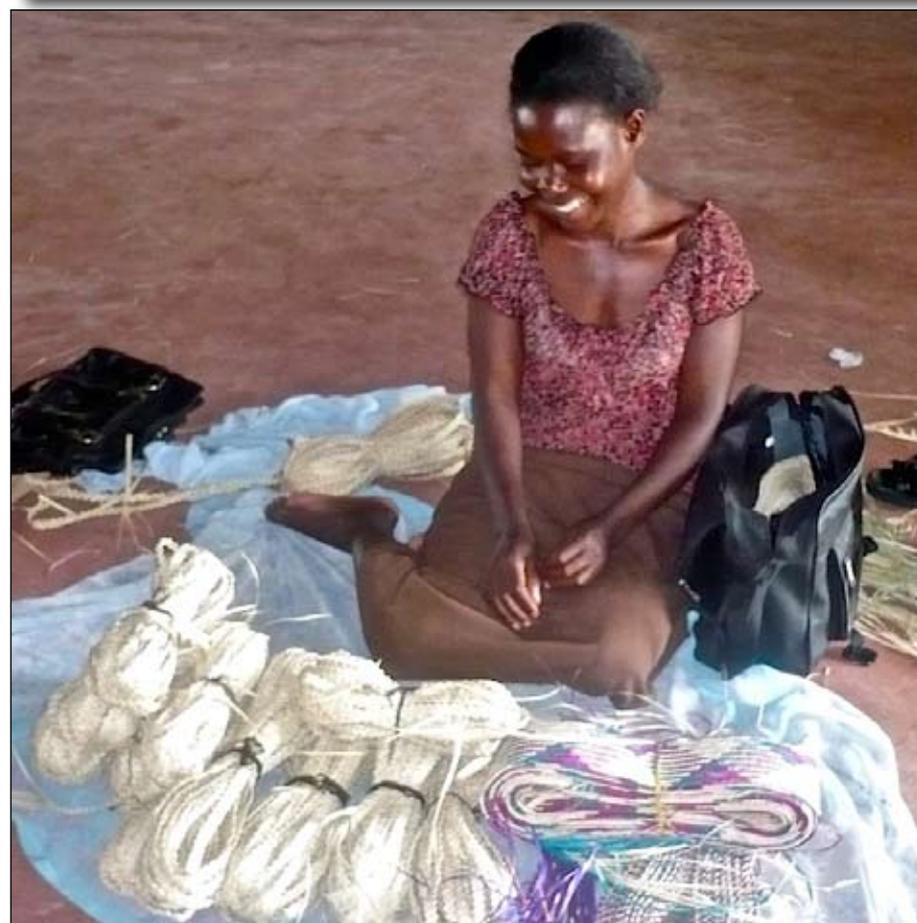
How did you get involved in working with the Eyesiga Mukama craft group?

I first went as part of a team of people to do outreach work at a children's home in Uganda. I had had the idea for the project before I went and it was very positively received. I started by teaching a traditional European 4 strand rustic plait and then developed other, more textural, plaits over the years.



Tell us about the project that you've set up in Uganda.

The project is designed to source natural and sustainable millinery materials, and some other items, in as ethical a way as possible. It was set up as an income generation scheme for a group of women living in challenging circumstances in rural south-eastern Uganda and has been successful in this. The most important aspect of the project, however, is that it provides a culturally sanctioned way for women in that community to meet together as a group - the benefits of that are that they make new friendships and can learn from, support and encourage one another in the difficulties they face.



IMAGES -

Previous Page: Scovia in an Artisan Hat.

Top Right: The plaiters during their weekly craft group meeting.

Bottom Right: Edith with her plait bundles.

How do the plaiters generate an income from the work that they do?

They make the plaited braids from locally occurring palm leaves. I pay them a high return for the plaiting (more than fair trade would dictate) and sell them (mostly in the UK) on a not-for-profit basis, just about covering import and admin costs. The group are also able to produce some small basic hat shapes that I trim, under the Artisan Hats label. I am planning a range of interior products too.

Where did you learn the art of couture millinery?

I trained in the 1990s with the amazing Graham Smith - an incredibly skilled and inspiring perfectionist. Everything had to be immaculately made out of the finest materials. It was a wonderful experience!

Where do you spend the majority of your time?

I am currently based in London, but spend as much time in the country or in Uganda as I can.

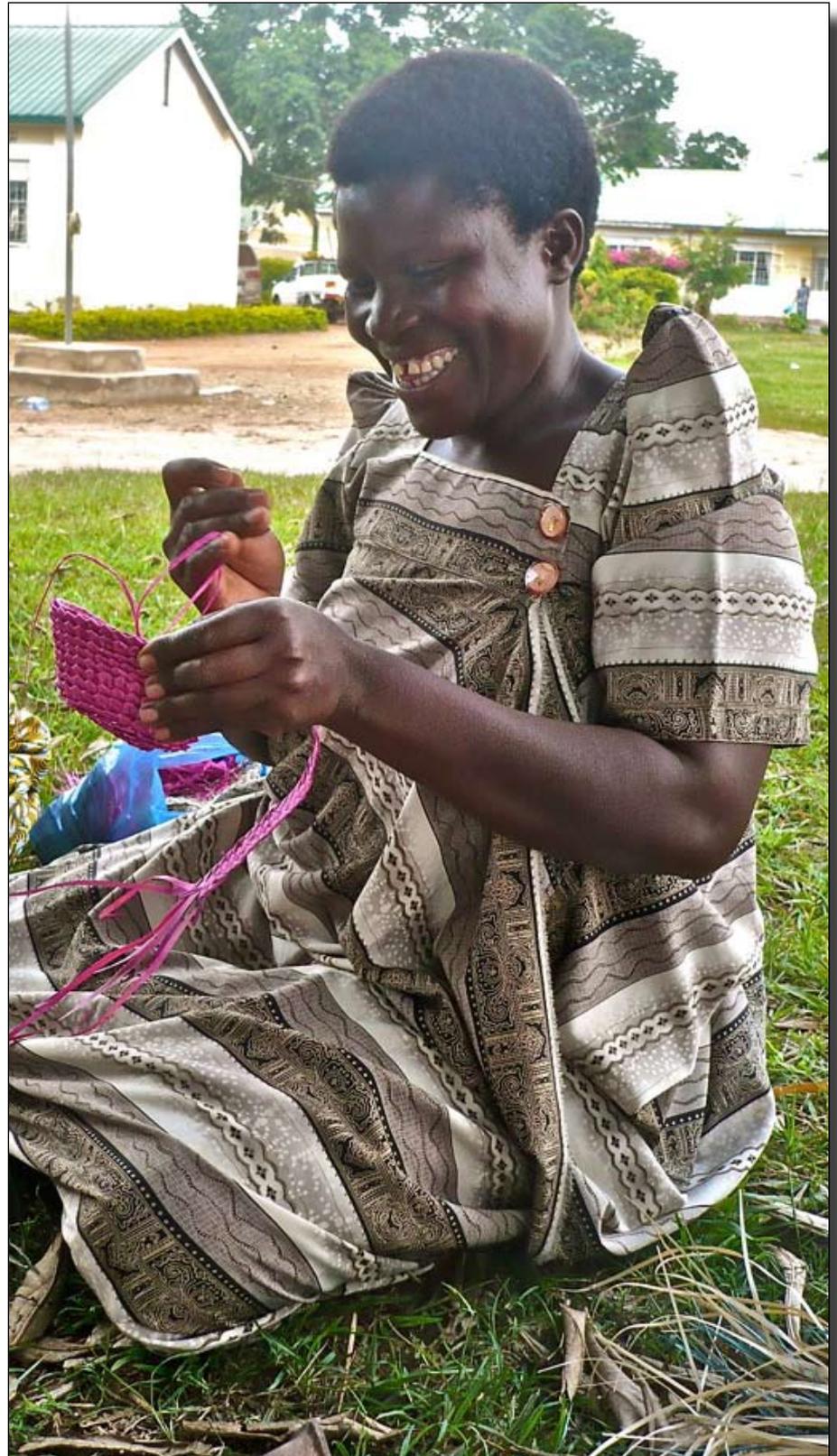


IMAGE -
Right: Apofya sewing an Artisan Hat.



What type of hats do you design for your own Elsa Cappelli label?

My hats are non-traditional forms. I make a new block for most of the shapes I produce. I am currently working in palm braids and other natural fibres. In fact, all my materials are natural and (apart from perhaps the wire) made in an environmentally sustainable way. I make hats that are not related to fashion but sit more in the arena of craft - unconventional forms that are outside of

fashion and trends. I don't do seasonal collections, but make shapes I feel like making and try different ways of working with the materials each time. Each piece is unique, never to be duplicated.

Where do you sell your work?

I sell pieces through exhibitions and through commissions.

IMAGES -

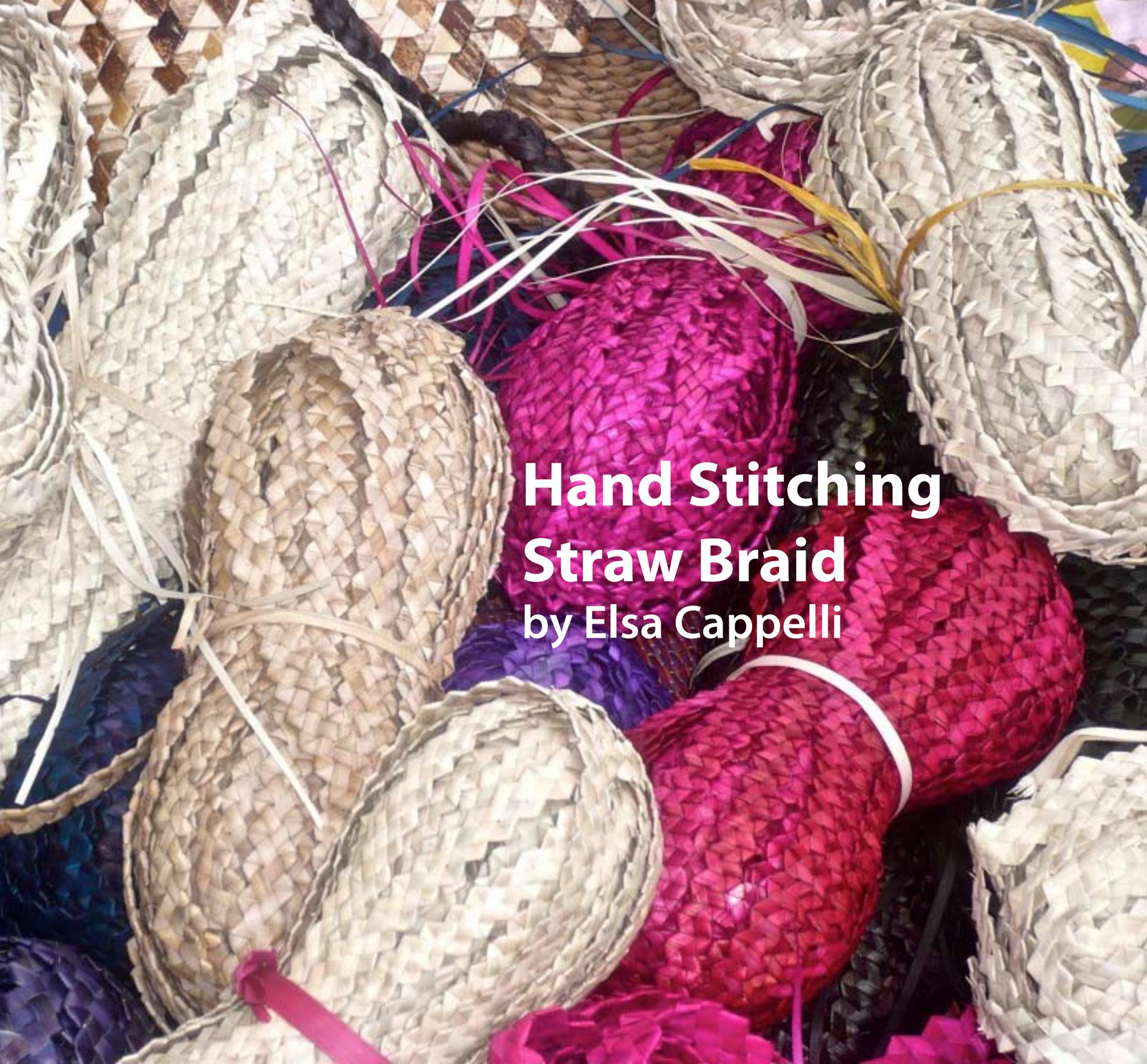
Top Left: An Elsa Cappelli Spiked Headpiece.

Top Right: An Artisan Hat, trimmed by Elsa.



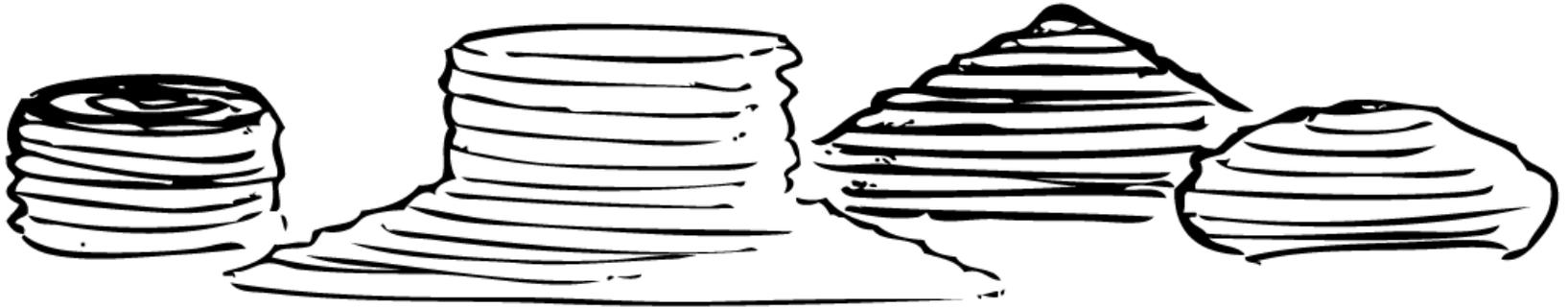
The women of the Eyesiga Mukama craft group are pictured above, each wearing their own Artisan Hat. The beautiful, environmentally friendly and ethically produced plaits which they create by hand come in 20 meter bundles which cost £15 each. Ideal for use by milliners and other craft practitioners, the plaits are available in a limited range of colours, as well as natural, annatto and 'black'. To purchase these plaits and support the Artisan Hats project, email info@elsacappelli.org.uk.

You can find out more about Elsa Cappelli and her work in Uganda at www.elsacappelli.org.uk. Or you could come along to her presentation and supply sale at Atelier Millinery during London Hat Week this March. To reserve a place at this free event, go to www.londonhatweek.com.

A close-up photograph of several hand-stitched straw braids. The braids are made from natural straw and are dyed in various colors: natural (light brown), bright pink, deep red, and purple. They are arranged in a cluster, with some showing the intricate weaving pattern. The background is dark, making the colors of the braids stand out.

**Hand Stitching
Straw Braid**
by Elsa Cappelli

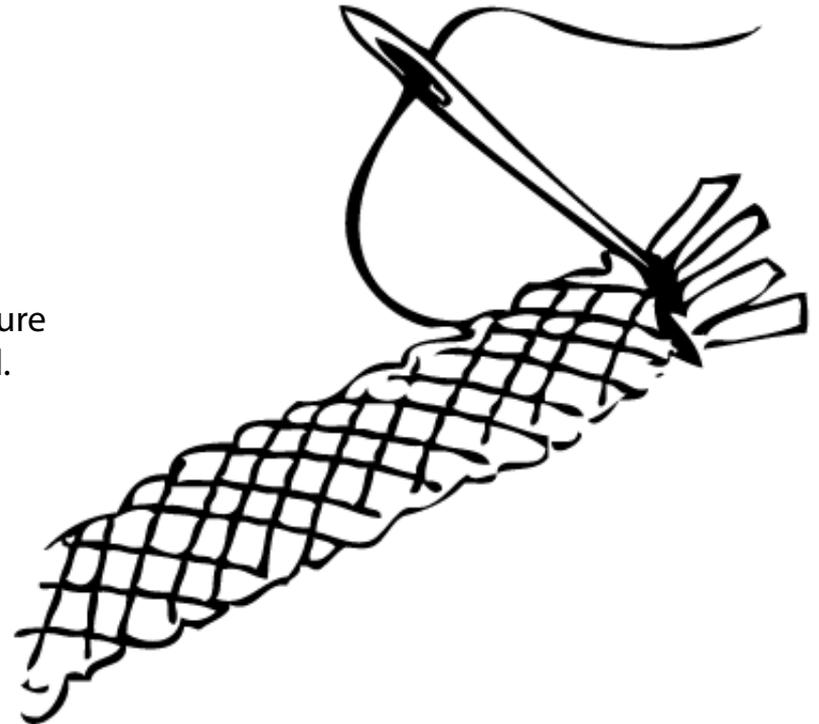
It's so exciting to realise the possibilities of a new material and we'd love to see what you can make out of the Ugandan Artisan plaits. Email photos of your creations to mail@hataalk.com or post them on HATalk Social. If you'd like to work with these plaited braids but have never made a stitched strip straw hat before, Elsa's tutorial will get you off to a great start.



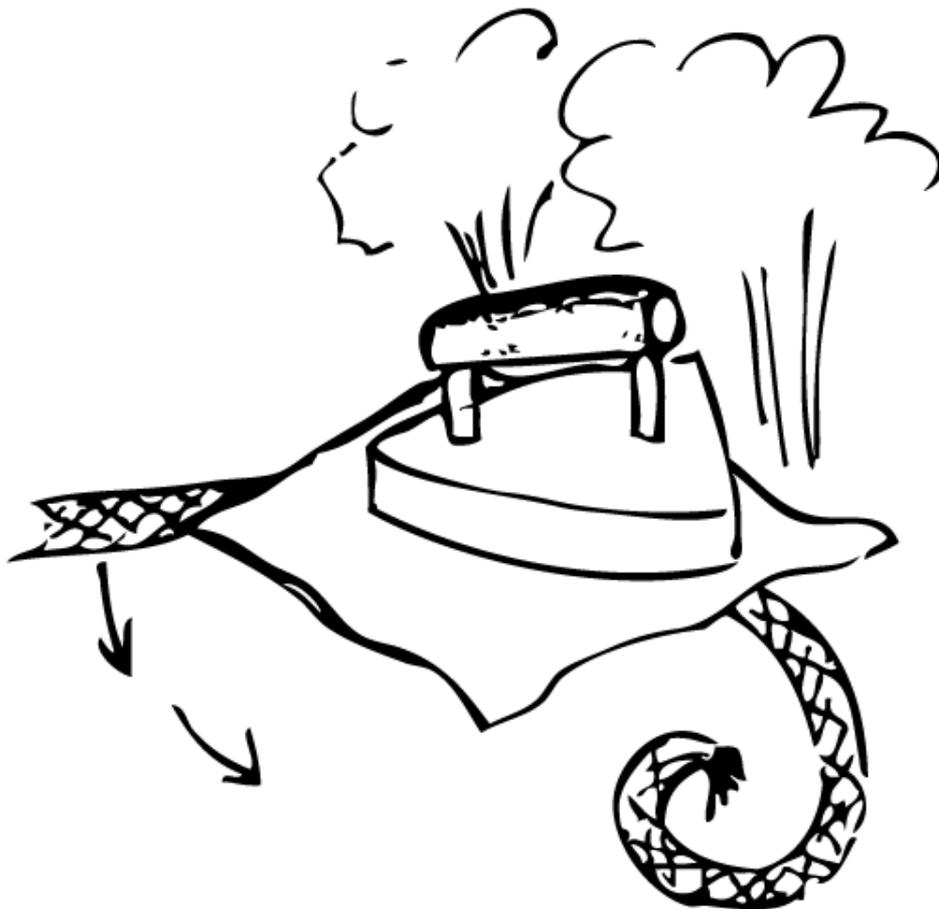
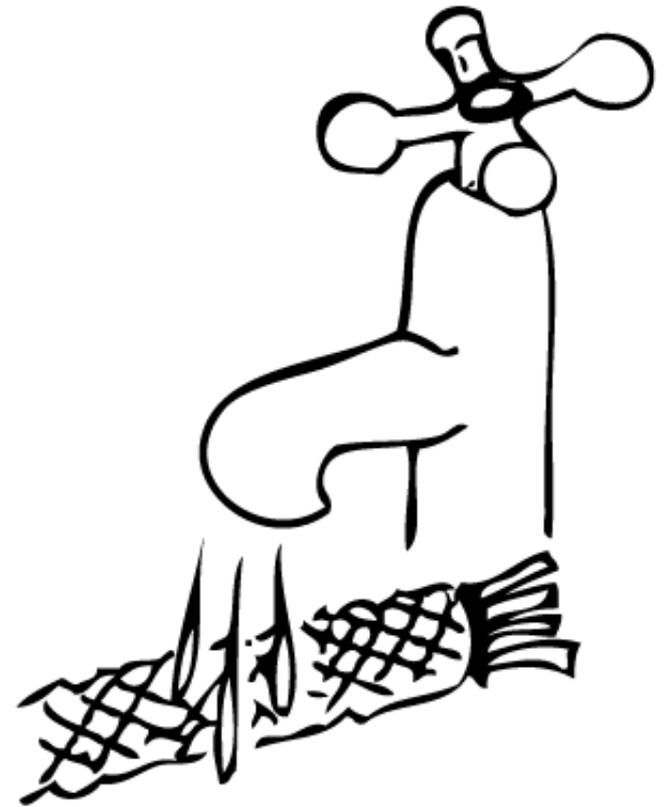
A wide variety of hat shapes can be created with straw braid, with or without a block. Here are some basic instructions for starting off your straw braid (strip straw) hat...

Preparation:

A) Stab stitch through the braid a few times to secure the ends and prevent it from becoming unravelled.

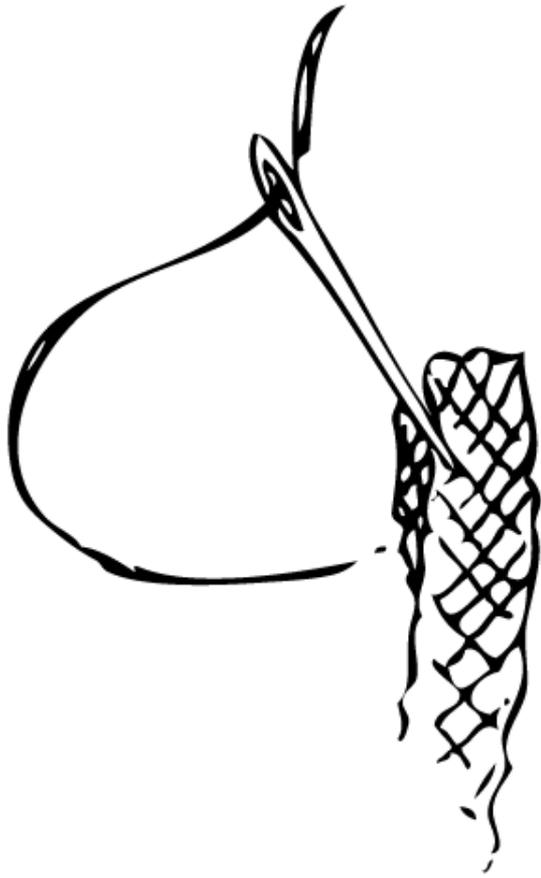


B) Lightly dampen the first 30 cm to soften the plait so that it will form a tight curve.



C) Press the braid into a curve with an iron through a damp cloth for as much length as you need to start off your shape, gently coaxing the plait.

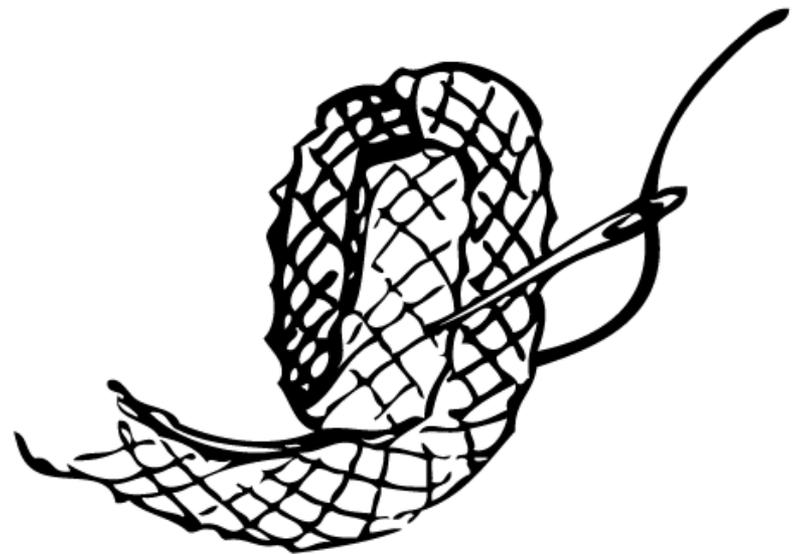
How tight a curve you create will depend on the style of hat you are making - if it has a round centre or an oval one.



Stitching:

D) Fold under the first 3-5 cm and stab stitch in place, carefully hiding your stitches in the weave of the plait.

E) If the braid is quite firm, fold it under and around to create an elongated spiral, positioning it slightly under the previous row so as to have enough overlap to stitch through. Stab stitch where necessary to hold in place, then fold it back to the right side at the next tight curve - just do this once or you will end up stitching the braid the wrong way up (only an issue for braids that have a defined top-side).





F) Keep curving and stab stitching the braid slightly under the previous row to form a spiral from which to start your crown.

Gently pulling the braid as you sew it will bring the shape downwards. Easing a little extra braid into the spiral will flatten out the shape more.

You can, therefore, control the shapes you make by applying pressure or feeding in extra braid as you stitch.

Extra Tips for Hand Stitching Straw Braid:

- Use stab stitch in a backstitch form to sew the braid.
- Try to use a similar point in the weave of the plait for each stitch so that the braid is evenly stitched together and stitches look neat from underneath.
- If you require a flat tip to your hat – e.g. a pillbox or boater crown – press the plait flat with an iron through a damp cloth if the braid is flat. If the braid is more textured and you want a flat tip, pin out the tip on a board or block to flatten, then steam it to set and let it dry.
- To create an angle/change direction downwards – e.g. a flat tip turning down to form a sideband of a crown – gently fold the braid backwards in half down the length, then let it open gently to form a 90 degree angle. One half will sit under the tip, the other continue down to become the sideband. Fold forwards down the length (the other way) to bring out – e.g. starting a brim coming out from a crown.



Hat of the Month



by Lisa Jayne
McConnon

This flower-inspired headpiece is striking because of the depth and movement achieved with texture and shading. Its creator, Lisa Jayne McConnon, has been making hats for as long as she can remember.



Having taught herself the basics of hat making at an early age, Lisa had her sights set on becoming a Fashion Designer. A college interview panel noticed her flair for the theatrical, however, and persuaded her to study Costume instead. She enrolled on a BA course in Costume and Make Up for the Performing Arts at [London College of Fashion](#) and was taught the art of Theatrical Millinery from the renowned [Jane Smith](#).

Lisa finished her BA course completely hooked on hat making and desperate to learn more so that she could pursue millinery as a career. She worked in retail for two years, saving up enough money to return to her studies, and then enrolled on some short courses at [Kensington & Chelsea College](#) to further develop her millinery skills. She went on to complete an HNC in Millinery at KCC, studying under Kirsten Scott, Julie Rooke, Jane Smith and Ian Bennett.

Currently based in Stevenage, England, Lisa now has her own label - [Lisa Jayne Millinery](#). Using both the theatrical and the couture skills which she learned during her extensive training, she is able to offer a really interesting range of hats and headpieces, including our February Hat of the Month.

This piece has a blocking net base, which Lisa shaped on a fascinator block. Once dry, she covered the blocking net form with velvet fabric, added an inner petersham headband and attached a comb. She then made the

focal point of the piece, the central flower, out of plastic leaves, which she coated in glitter glue, and beads. Next, Lisa cut shapes out of various shades of pink sinamay and hand rolled the edges of each one, using pva glue to hold the rolls in place. She hand sewed the sinamay pieces to the base and then added the glittery flower and an assortment of pink coque feathers and goose biots to tone with the overall design.



To see more of Lisa's hats and headpieces, visit her website - www.lisajaynemillinery.com.

The British School of Millinery

A Round Up of Recent Events



HATalk Editor Becky Weaver went along to a number of interesting [British School of Millinery events at the end of last year...](#)

St Catherine's Day Lunch

I love meeting other hat enthusiasts, so I was thrilled to find out about the British School of Millinery's busy schedule of autumn events. The BSM is based in Cheltenham, which is relatively local to me, so I eagerly booked my tickets. With a celebration of St Catherine's Day first on the list, I headed off to Cheltenham wearing my favourite pillbox on November 25th.

St Catherine's Day was instituted by the Catholic Church to commemorate Catherine of Alexandria, a first century Christian martyr. Although the holiday has since been removed from the Catholic Calendar, the date is still remembered by milliners, for whom Catherine is said to be the Patron Saint. On St Catherine's Day, it is an old French tradition for girls to pray for husbands and to hold a feast for any unmarried women over the age of 25. These women, known as *Catherinettes*, customarily send postcards to one another and wear green and yellow hats made for them by their friends

In the early 1900s, French milliners got into the spirit of

this hat wearing holiday by holding big parades to show off their wares and Paris Couture Fashion Houses began putting on lavish parties for their unmarried female employees over the age of 25, who would wear extremely elaborate green and yellow hats.



As interest in both hat making and wearing continues to grow, milliners around the world are seeing St Catherine's Day as a great opportunity to celebrate hats and the people who make them. I arrived at Jaime Oliver's Italian restaurant to find a lovely mixture of experienced milliners and hobbyist hat makers who had travelled from all directions to attend (above).

Over lunch and a glass of wine, we introduced ourselves and chatted about our work and all things hat related. While we enjoyed coffee and dessert, Denise Innes-Spencer, Creative Director of the British School of Millinery, gave an insightful talk on face shapes and offered tips on selling hats. There was also a raffle for some fabulous prizes, including one of Denise's own handmade hats, with all proceeds going to the [Alzheimer's Society](#).

Who Wants to Be a Milliner?

The following week, my husband Chris and I headed back to Cheltenham for a real millinery spectacle - the British School of Millinery's *Who Wants to be a Milliner?* competition. Run in conjunction with [Cheltenham Fashion Week](#), the event was held at the chic Chapel Spa on December 4th. Three top milliners - [Dillon Wallwork](#), [Lisa Burrows](#) and [Jessie Clifford](#) - were all given the same design brief, set by Bridget Bailey of [Bailey Tomlin Hats](#), and identical sets of materials, hand picked by Bridget and donated by [The Trimming Company](#) (below)



Bridget, whose hats are often featured at the [RHS Chelsea Flower Show](#), challenged the competing milliners to design and make a hat for a lady to wear on the preview day. "Chelsea is mid-May, at the start of summer," Bridget explained in the brief. "The colours I have chosen are inspired by flowers with black to set them off. Your client is the lady who has time to go to special events and wants to look stylish, elegant and original. You may choose two materials of your own choice, something from your own workroom, vintage or new."

Denise Innes-Spencer, MC for the evening, interviewed each milliner in front of the live audience and then sent them backstage to finish their designs. While waiting for the final pieces to be unveiled, we were treated to a fantastic cat walk show, featuring pieces from Dillon, Lisa, Jessie and Bridget's latest millinery collections. Next came a break for canapés and cocktails, giving us time to mingle with the other guests. It was an extra special pleasure to meet some amazing [HATalk Social](#) community members and see the hats they'd made for the event. In the above photo, Chris and I are pictured with (from left to right) Debbie Annette, Shelagh Picton and Marion Lowe.



Decision time came immediately after the interval, when we all had to vote for our favourite hat. After the votes had been counted, Lisa Burrows (top left and below) was announced as the winner. Her hat, a black topper sprinkled with rosebuds and veiling (below), was meant to look as if a visitor to Chelsea Flower Show had unknowingly walked too close to a trailing rose plant. Jessie Clifford came in second place (centre left) and Dillon Wallwork in third (bottom left). All three milliners won vouchers to spend at [Guy Morse-Brown Hat Blocks Ltd.](#)



Millinery Masterclass

Still buzzing from the night before, I got up early the next morning to attend the BSM Millinery Masterclass at Gloucestershire College. Their final collaboration for Cheltenham Fashion Week 2013, the British School of Millinery had arranged for Dillon Wallwork and Bridget Bailey (right) to spend the day imparting their specialist techniques and trade secrets to ten eager students. As both of these world class milliners are normally based in London, it was an excellent opportunity for milliners from the West of England and Wales to access expert tuition closer to home.

The group was split into two, with Bridget concentrating on her signature rolling and shaping techniques (bottom left). She demonstrated how to make her beautiful sinamay feathers, which were featured in [HATalk Issue 76](#), and then supported the students as they created their own. Dillon, who specialises in couture trimmings, taught the rest of the students how to make a pinok pok bow and organdie roses (bottom right). After lunch, the two groups swapped tutors so that everyone could learn as much as possible.



Image by Mark Bond



Images by Elicea Andrews - www.elicea.4ormat.com

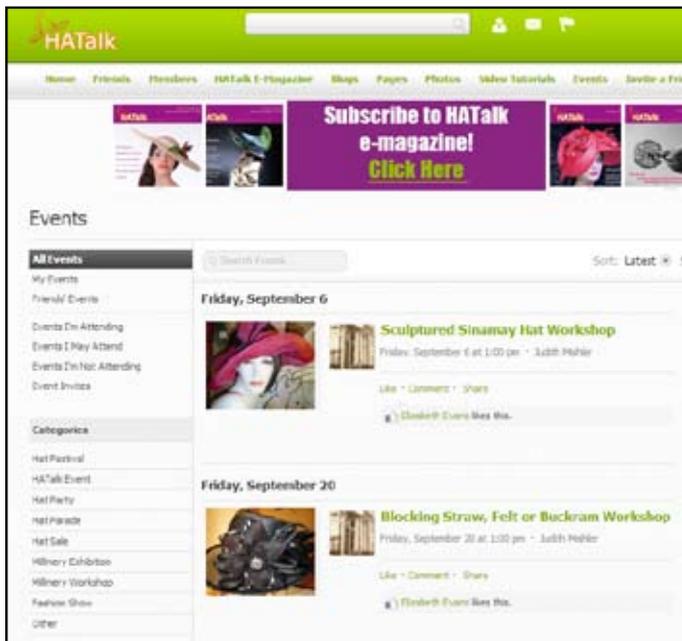


During the morning, I popped downstairs to attend another Cheltenham Fashion Week event which was taking place at Gloucestershire College at the same time - a talk by fashion designer **Selina Blow**. Selina, sister-in-law of the late **Isabella Blow**, has strong links to millinery as a close personal friend of **Philip Treacy** and it was very interesting to hear her views on fashion and creativity. After the presentation, Selina surprised the students by making an unexpected appearance at the Millinery Masterclass (right)!

To find out what special events the British School of Millinery are planning for 2014, go to their website - www.thebritishschoolofmillinery.com - or follow them on *Twitter*.



Image by Mark Bond



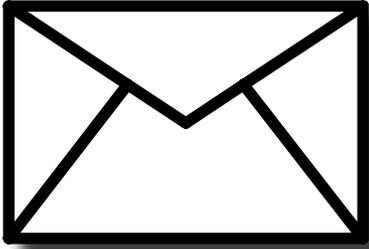
Our goal is to promote hat making and hat wearing throughout the world, which is why we'd love to hear about any hat related events that you're planning. As the British School of Millinery has shown, there are all kinds of ways to engage people with hats, many of which will create opportunities for you to attract new customers.

If you're feeling inspired to organise a millinery event in your area, please tell us about it. If possible, we'd love to come along and report on it. You can also use the free [HATalk Social Events calendar](#) to list and promote your special hatty occasion.

LONDON
Hat Week

March 6 - 12, 2014

[Click here for more details.](#)



Letters to the Editor...

Send us your questions and comments! Do you have a problem needing a solution? Or information that you'd like to share? Email us! mail@hataalk.com

Question:

My scissors always seem to go blunt very quickly. Do you have any tips for keeping scissors at their best?



Answer:

Scissors need to be really sharp to cut fabric neatly and if you use your good fabric scissors to cut coarse materials, such as sinamay, they will go blunt very quickly. Georgina Abbott of [Atelier Millinery](#) recommends that you invest in a few pairs of scissors to use for different purposes and that you label them accordingly (above). Always follow your labels and make sure that any visitors to your studio do the same. Using your best fabric scissors to cut millinery wire, even one time, will mean that they won't stay as sharp as you need them to be.

THE BACK PAGE



Pantone's 2014 Color of the Year

Color experts at Pantone have named PANTONE® 18-3224 Radiant Orchid as their Color of the Year.

"While the 2013 color of the year, PANTONE 17-5641 Emerald, served as a symbol of growth, renewal and prosperity, Radiant Orchid reaches across the color wheel to intrigue the eye and spark the imagination," said Leatrice Eiseman, executive director of the Pantone Color Institute®. "An invitation to innovation, Radiant Orchid encourages expanded creativity and originality, which is increasingly valued in today's society. An enchanting harmony of fuchsia, purple and pink undertones, Radiant Orchid inspires confidence and emanates great joy, love and health. It is a captivating purple, one that draws you in with its beguiling charm."

For inspiration on incorporating Radiant Orchid, and the rest of this season's on-trend colors, into your new millinery collection, check out Pantone's full [Spring 2014 Fashion Color Report](#).

Blogger of the Month...

Jain Kidsley, from the UK, is the February HATalk Social Blogger of the Month, with her recent blog [Oh Oh Chapeaux: use the right equipment \(not for the faint hearted\)](#). Hat makers everywhere will be able relate to Jain's short and witty account of an almost extremely serious workroom disaster!

Contact Us!

Questions? Comments? Email us at mail@hatalk.com or post on our [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#) or [HATalk Social](#) pages and we'll be sure to get back to you.

