



Wednesday 4 November 2009

Welcome to your Midweek Moments. For anyone out there who lost money on this week's Melbourne Cup, the articles and stories in the following pages hopefully should cheer you up a bit. And for people who actually had a win on Tuesday, well... don't spend it all at once, and read on anyway.

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Wardrobe Mistress

The life of legendary Hollywood costume designer, Edith Head.



Tempress: Mae West in one of her sultry and memorable Edith Head creations in She Done Him Wrong (1933)

Episode 2 - Rising Star

After answering an ad for position of costume design artist with Paramount Studios, Edith Head's portfolio impressed the chief designer, Howard Greer, so much that he hired her on the spot. It was only after Head was securely established in the position that she confessed to Greer that her dazzling portfolio had been faked by 'borrowing' work from other students.

Greer was so impressed by Head's sheer audacity that he forgot to be outraged by the deception itself, so he permitted her to remain in the job. By that stage she was already proving herself as a talented designer in her own right anyway.

Not long after Head's appointment at Paramount, the studio's design team was augmented by popular fashion designer Travis Banton, whose talents were so sought after that he started to pass some of his workload on to Head. This led to her first screen breakthrough, when

Banton gave her the assignment of dressing Clara Bow in the 1927 silent film, *Wings*. Although her work in this film finally started to get her some attention, for the next decade she basically remained in the shadow of Howard Greer and Travis Banton, working as Banton's assistant. However, as both Greer and Banton both enjoyed particularly wild lifestyles with lots of partying, booze and debauchery, they came to rely more and more on Head, giving her ever increasing responsibility.

In 1927, Greer left Paramount to open a high-end fashion boutique on LA's famous strip now known as Rodeo Drive. That left Banton as Head's primary mentor. Her years as Banton's protege proved to be the making of Edith Head as she picked up most of her skills and knowledge in this time, not just about design but about the film industry as a whole, its operations, protocols, nuances and politics. It was also during this period that she started wearing what would later become her trademark dark sunglasses. Originally, these had a practical purpose, as the shades of dark blue and grey gave her an idea of what certain colours would look like on black and white film. However, the glasses quickly became part of her individual look.

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In 1933, Banton gave Head the responsibility of creating Mae West's entire wardrobe for the film *She Done Him Wrong*, as Banton himself was spending a couple of months in Paris. This turned out to be Head's breakthrough assignment. Mae West's sheer and seductive outfits in the movie caught everyone's attention. West herself was so enamoured with Head's skill as a designer she requested to work with Head on many occasions afterwards, even as late as 1970 in *Myra Breckinridge*. But back in 1933, Head's success with *She Done Him Wrong* was really just the beginning. Several decades of fame, fortune and gorgeous outfits now lay ahead of her, although so did a certain amount of controversy.

Tune in next week...

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Vanessa Thurling's multi-coloured extravaganza

What first attracted you to this quilt?

All those little triangles. As most quilts seem to be made up of squares, the triangles in this design took the challenge to a whole new level. I've always been the kind of person who thrives on a challenge, so those triangles really caught my eye. Plus, it was something a little bit different.



What about the fabric?

I actually used four different fabrics in this quilt, even though the design was only for two. I'd had one of them for years, in fact since before I was married, stashed away in a cupboard. I'd bought it about 10 years ago because I liked the colours, but didn't do anything with it. I bought the other three fabrics from Blueberries, which always seems to have the nicest materials and the best range. As I live in Newcastle, it involved a bit of driving back and forth, but it was worth it.

How long did it take for you to make it?

I was afraid you might ask that. Um... over a year. Well, I had my second child in that time, so I was a bit distracted. If you condense the time I actually spent on the quilt, I suppose it would come down to about six weeks.

How many other quilts have you made?

This was only my second quilt. The other one was for a baby's cot, so was much smaller and not so much of a challenge. I've also made a couple of cushions, but they're also a lot easier because of the scale.

Til next week!

The Blueberries Team.

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