



A hat is a flag, a shield, a bit of armour, and the badge of femininity. It's the difference between being dressed and being dressed up; it's the difference between looking adequate and looking your best. A hat is to be stylish in, to glow under, to flirt beneath, to make all others seem jealous over ... A piece of magic is a hat.  
– Martha Sliter



# A head for business

International award-winning milliner Suzie Mahony from Loughrea, Co Galway gives *Country Living* the heads-up on hats ahead of the Dublin Horse Show, writes Yvonne Kerr.



**S**tepping into the sweet shop of hats that is the studio of milliner Suzie Mahony is a riot of colour, flamboyance and style, but more than fashion is at stake here. "My customers aren't just getting a hat," Suzie says. "They're getting an air of confidence and an edge on their personality."

Grooming an all-Ireland-winning Irish Draught mare and making the annual pilgrimage to the Galway Races as a young girl, Suzie's career was destined to return to the glamour of Ladies' Day.

When she returned to Ireland with her family 12 years ago, after living in London, she decided to try her hand at dressmaking, but her venture took an unexpected twist when her customers started asking for matching headpieces.

"I did some millinery training courses and immediately fell hook, line and sink-



er," she says. "I adore it. I love the freedom of design. You can totally express yourself through the design of a hat." Setting up her own business was a daunting prospect for the mother of three, but the Galway girl hasn't looked back since.

Her relationship with each hat doesn't end when it walks out of her Loughrea studio. The icing on the cake is when Suzie spots her brand-new hat sported proudly by a snappy dresser on Ladies' Day at the Dublin Horse Show or Ballybrit in Galway. And if a client is awarded Best Dressed – as Oniesa Owens was at Punchestown this year – it's the chic cherry on top.

In demand from clients in England, Dubai and even Melbourne, Suzie's talents have also turned heads in the US, where she received a prestigious Hatty Award in January, one of only 20 by US publisher Hat Life Publications. The Hatty Awards are bestowed for creativity, inventiveness and dedication, and Suzie was "absolutely ecstatic". "It was a huge honour," she smiles.

Suzie draws inspiration from everywhere, but the countryside really stimulates her. "Nature would be a big part of it: the colours,

the shapes of orchids, roses, or horse-chestnut leaves," she says. She loves to mix textures and materials, and uses lots of handmade flowers, beading, feathers, leather and straws. Suzie will often dye textiles to match her client's outfits.

If you visit Suzie, expect to be quizzed about your whole outfit. She likes to explore her client's personality, as she believes the hat reflects the person. "It's all about the individual," she says. "There's a hat for everybody. It's all about having the right style."

Suzie loves nothing more than when a flamboyant client gives her free reign to design something with pizzazz. "That's music to my ears!" she says. "Giving a creative person the freedom to design – you will always receive your best results. I'm absolutely convinced of it."

Suzie also designs pearl and Swarovski crystal jewellery and bridalwear and stocks jewellery, handbags and umbrellas: "Every accessory is critical to create the complete look."

Suzie's first exclusive collection, the Orchid Collection, is available at Millie B's boutique in Limerick, and her ready-to-wear collection can be found at Select Boutique in Galway and other boutiques throughout the West. **CL**

## Health & Lifestyle in the Blackwater Valley



**I**f you wish to leave crowded beaches and tacky souvenir shops for a healthier lifestyle, then embark on a voyage of discovery to The Blackwater Valley. Here you will breathe fresh, clean air, enjoy the scenery, be pampered and eat fresh local artisan foods. So read on ...

### 1 WALKING

Unwind and shed the weight of the world in the Blackwater Valley, a great destination for walkers of all levels. Discover the gentle hills, valleys, forests and picturesque villages on the way-marked trails. Or explore one of the many looped walks in the valley: Mount Hilary, Mullaghareirk, Killavullen or Canon Sheehan. Log onto [www.discoverireland.ie/walking](http://www.discoverireland.ie/walking) for more information. If you're staying in town, take a stroll around one of the Sli na Slainte routes.

### 2 PAMPER YOURSELF

Enjoy a full- or half-day pamper package, including mini facials, back, neck and shoulder massages, reiki or reflexology. Then relax in the swimming pool, jacuzzi or steam room at Grove House. Tel: 022-25518.

For a slightly more energetic retreat, head to the Hibernian Hotel, Mallow and take advantage of their Hi B Fitness centre.

This elegant club has a team of fully-qualified and friendly fitness instructors. Call the hotel and leisure centre on 022-58200 or email: [info@hibernianhotelmallow.com](mailto:info@hibernianhotelmallow.com).

### 3 HEALTHY EATING

Eat well – and reduce your food miles – at one of the many farmers' markets or food festivals in the Blackwater Valley.

**Mitchelstown Food Festival 28-30 August:**

Taste and buy the best of local and speciality artisan foods. Indoor venue at Mitchelstown Business Park on Cork – Dublin N8 Road.

**Mallow Food Festival 30 August:** This year's festival will take place from 12-4pm. Music, arts and crafts and, of course, wonderful food to be enjoyed by all.  
**National Organic Week 14-20 September:** An open day will be held at the Nano Nagle Organic Farm to celebrate National Organic Week. Tel: 022-25411.

### FARMERS' MARKETS

• **Mallow Farmers' Market** 4 Home Carpark, Friday, 10am  
• **Killavullen Farmers' Market** Nano Nagle Centre, Friday, 5.30pm  
• **Duhallow Farmers' Market**, James O'Keeffe Institute, Kanturk Thursday and Saturday, 10.30am

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