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Handmade hats

STEAMBOAT HATTER COMBINES TRADITIONAL TECHNIQUES WITH MODERN DESIGN TO CREATE CUSTOM HEADWEAR. *by Ben Berman*

Hatters Kay McKenzie and Sam Daniels know a thing or two about craftsmanship. When it comes to making custom headwear, it takes hours of work, from meeting with the client to the physical labor of shaping the hat to its exact specifications. “I’ve always been kind of a craftswoman,” admits McKenzie. The duo emphasizes that work ethic is critical in their line of work. After all, Steamboat Hatter is a custom hat shop that creates everything from cowboy to modern masterpieces. What began as a hobbyist pursuit between the pair has grown through social media; and is now a steady business in Steamboat Springs, with the two hatters churning out new designs each day.

TRADITIONAL ROOTS

McKenzie and Daniels, both sporting roots in crafts ranging from metalwork to stained glass before entering the headwear



business, saw a need for a custom hat shop in western Colorado. After all, quality outdoor wear was a must for the thousands of cowboys and ranchers that defined much of the region’s early history. “Getting this age-old art form back into northwest Colorado is pretty exciting,” Daniels admits.

IN THE STUDIO

Steamboat Hatter’s Colorado roots goes deeper than an appreciation of history: each product at the shop is crafted tra-

ditionally. “Everything is made by hand using age-old techniques,” says Daniels, detailing the shop’s use of hand-tools that have existed since the cowboy age, like woodblocks that are used to meticulously shape every hat. “It’s all done by eye for each customer,” says Daniels. Plus, the old-school manufacturing process offers customers a glimpse into the love that’s being put into what they’re buying, since the design studio and workshop are in the same room.

A UNIQUE CRAFT

Customers are encouraged to browse the shop’s varieties of felts and metal accessories that can be added to each hat to make it unique. The pair even collects vintage sterling and turquoise materials to repurpose into experimental designs. “We’re really popular now with restoring old hats for locals,” says Daniels. “[And] even tourists are bringing in their old hats so we can reshape them and bring them back to life. It’s amazing.” **OLW**



STEAMBOAT HATTER

111 11th. St., Steamboat Springs | steamboathatter.com