



French Fashion Dolls Considering Hats for Travel (photos and hats by Barbara DeVilbiss)



Hat by Barbara DeVilbiss



Antique Derby

A Potted History of French Fashion Dolls by Agnes Sura

In the early 1860s a new type of doll appeared in the Paris markets. It was known as a *poupée* (doll), a *poupée peau* (leather bodied doll), or a *poupée mode* (fashion doll). The first of these dolls had china heads and unjointed leather bodies. These are the dolls that we know as “French Fashion Dolls”.

Originally china heads with painted eyes and stiff necks, the heads were soon changed- made in bisque with painted or glass eyes. Early makers were Huret and Rohmer, followed by Bru and Jumeau with many other dollmakers, such as Barrois, Dehors, FG, etc. with a number of unmarked dolls.

The unjointed kid bodies became gusseted kid bodies with jointed wood bodies, kid over wood bodies, “blown kid bodies” (made by fitting the kid pieces, usually lined with fabric, into the molds, making a very

light jointed body), gutta percha (rubber-like substance which is now very fragile), and the Gesland body (a jointed metal body covered with cotton and then stockinet with bisque hands and lower legs).

These dolls were play dolls and, sold with just a chemise, they were meant to be dressed with clothing from the specialty doll shops of the day or from patterns available in magazines. “La Poupée Modèle”, published from 1863 to 1924, is the best known of these. Mme. Lavellée-Péronne, the publisher had a shop in which she sold 18” dolls, including the Lily that fit the patterns in the magazine, however any 18” doll could be a little girl’s Lily. The fashion dolls dominated the market from the 1860s to the 1880s when they were supplanted by the bébé dolls or child dolls, also with shops that

sold everything a little girl doll could need.

Shops sold in doll size everything from clothing to all the accessories that were necessary for a young lady of fashion, since the doll gave a girl a glimpse of what her life would be as a young lady of fashion.

Interestingly enough one hundred years later a new fashion doll, Barbie™, arrived on the scene to again give little girls a glimpse of adult life. Also interesting is the fact that the new 12” fashion dolls with which we are now playing are just about the size of Barbie™!

Agnes Sura is a doll collector, researcher, writer and seamstress known most recently for her interest in *Bleuette*. Dolls with wardrobes and original doll clothes patterns intrigue her, hence her interest in the French Fashion dolls. Agnes' new book, *Pictures of All the Patterns in La Semaine de Suzette: Nous Habillons Bleuette "We Dress Bleuette"* 1905 to 1960, is now available: Send \$32 to 489 Wilson Hill Road, Hoosick Falls, NY 12090