

ROMANTIC REMINISCENCE



"I try to fire my customers' imaginations with every small detail."

Most of the store's wares—illuminated by the remarkable Venetian glass chandelier above—prompt shoppers to dream up creations of their own. The opulent pink and red purses that Basia fashioned on 19th-century metal frames are likely to spur requests for a dress to match.

Adorned with tiny vintage silk portraits of women wearing hats, the beaded goose eggs suspended from the ceiling (above, right corner) serve as inspiration for the exquisite feathered, flowered, and plumed hats that Basia creates for the annual Royal Ascot equestrian event each June. (She always trims each one with an Edwardian hatpin from her formidable collection.)

Though Basia keeps sketchbooks and archival materials on



hand to help customers envision designs, the best come about "just from a conversation—sometimes with no drawing at all. I'll get requests for such things as a brocade maxicoat with ribbonwork trim or a waistcoat trimmed with Italian-Swiss lace and embroidered with golden threads."

Basia is justifiably famous for her stunning footwear. "People from all over the world are always sending me their shoes to decorate. Men will often sneak in some of their wives' pairs and have them embellished as a surprise."

Beautiful as any shoe is after Basia's magic touch, the most resplendent creations are those made entirely in the store, with the help of two shoemakers skilled in antique techniques. At left, Basia's English floral garden mules are completely encrusted with a posy of seeds, stamens, petals, and tiny crystals. Lined with the softest kid and set on a Louis XIV-style handcarved wooden heel, they seem ready to transport their wearer to an elaborate ball.