

FS Interview: Meet La Touche aka Mr Hat (And Why You Need To Know This Man)

Description

Sincere, inspiring, true are some of the words that come to mind when I think about my dear friend La Touche, aka Mr Hat. We met some many years ago at the 6th anniversary of Work It 90s RnB Party in East London, a mutual friend introduced me to an impeccably dressed tall young man with a big smile on his face, and a good looking hat on his head. La Touche is someone whose wisdom reaches beyond his mere 29 years, his soul intricately deep, his manners reminiscent of noble gentlemen handling affairs in some mysterious way, always looking dapper. Only La Touche is also sincere and open to share whatever his journey has brought to him and for this vulnerability and bravery, I find his presence a powerful inspiration. He is someone able to balance a professional high whilst nurturing a rich inner life based on solid principles instilled by his father, consistently reinventing himself, staying true to his inner compass. This interview is both a personal conversation and an insight into the mind of a young, bright man, reflecting a light onto a generation forced to be flexible within a new digital landscape, navigating both through new waters and reaching back into the knowledge of his forefathers on how to be a better man and make a career out of your passions.

Tell us the story behind your very fist hat.

My grandfatherâ??s love for hats inspired me on this journey that has seen me work with some of the worldâ??s most influential hat brands, travel the globe sharing my passion for all things hats, with collaborations, workshops and hat themed parties. My grandfather had this beautiful black rabbit fur felt trilby from the 1940â??s that I would wear as a child around the house and he promised me that when I was older he would give it to me, and he most certainly did. I was 19 before he passed and he gave me the same hat I wore as a child and it fitted me like a glove. From that day till now I promised I wouldnâ??t be without a hat because for me hats hold a more sentimental value, itâ??s more than just a fashion accessory- itâ??s a work of art.

Although I wear brimmed hats more now than caps, there was a time in my life where you would never see me without a cap. I brought my first â??New Eraâ?? cap unaware that it was a fake to the amusement of my school friends. The coolest guy in school Andre McTaggart took me to one side and gave me the card for the New Era store, which later became my home for the next 11 years. By the time I reached 18, I had well over 200 caps. Once I started working I would buy two caps a week one for me and one colourful or really exclusive cap for my best friend Jonathan Coleman. I stopped collecting New Eraâ??s around 22/23 when my style started to evolve.


STAPLES

You are a hat restorer, a style influencer, you throw hat parties- how do you define a job that doesnâ??t have a name?

Thatâ??s a great question, I donâ??t really have an official title that encompasses everything that I do. I know what I am passionate about and I have been fortunate enough to turn those passions into a business. I tend to work behind the scenes on a lot of projects outside of hats that I donâ??t shout about. For example, I am regularly commissioned by a variety of hotels, members clubs and restaurants to contribute to their existing success providing my expertise in Brand Partnership, Brand Development and Cultural Programming. The more I work with these clients, the more I learn that I am particularly adept at connecting brands and culture.

You frequently collaborate with other businesses and style blogs. How do these collaborations come about and what advice would you give someone looking to collaborate for the first time?

Usually, from word of mouth, random walks have often lead to me doing campaigns and shoots, and of course, social media plays its part. However, as far as being featured on style blogs or fashion brands I havenâ??t done anything, brands have always reached out to me. Now that I am living in New York I am keen to try a different technique. The advice I would give would be to â??startâ?? whatever it is that youâ??re trying to achieve- just start. On my journey, I have never waited for someone to give me the green light or to believe in me, and I have never waited for financial support or for a magazine to feature me. I do it all myself I just have an idea and I start.



What is your most proud project you have worked on?

So far, my most proud project hands down is definitely working with my wife Rachel to curate and host our second New York edition of #Hatsonlynyc at The Soho Grand Hotel. I still find it very exciting to know that an idea I once had back in 2013 has allowed me to travel the globe collaborating with hat brands, work with hat icons like Erykah Badu and create a community of hat enthusiasts continues to blows my mind every time and it is so humbling to see guests attend my events in such unique and fun hats. Rachel and I curated the whole event alone from concept to completion. It was extremely stressful and challenging doing everything on our own with no brand partnerships or sponsors, no team just the two of us. But it was a great success and a wonderful experience. The process was challenging but I am proud that we were consistent in the process.

How has social media influenced your business journey?

Social media influenced my business journey very early on by reminding me to put the consumer first, to build an online and offline community and to always create something of value that supports and celebrates those unrecognised artisanal talents that are often overlooked. Social media is a great tool to help contribute to the success of any business if used correctly.

Youâ??ve recently relocated from London to New York, what are your first impressions of New York work rhythm over your experiences in London?

New York is intense in every aspect of the word, as I approach my first year here I am learning fast that New York isnâ??t for everyone. Itâ??s like being thrown into a boxing ring for the first time, with no training and having to go up against a world heavyweight boxer with the expectation to win. The New York experience is really having a positive effect on my self-confidence, I notice that I am a lot more confident in myself because people believe in me and offer me more opportunities here. Thereâ??s a motivating energy here that you can feel in the streets, around friends and in some workplace

environments that inspires you to join the hustle, to think creatively and to always find a way to make things happen. I love that I can sit in a meeting with a brand or client on the Friday and be given the opportunity to start on the Monday, there really is a sense of urgency here, brands are more daring and willing to take a risk here, and they see potential in creatives regardless of your status. Whereas my experience working in London was completely different, things move a lot slower, theyâ??re not as daring or willing to take a risk and step out of their comfort zone. I always say to people that London doesnâ??t support its own until thereâ??s a hype behind them regardless of what industry theyâ??re in, you see it all the time many individuals from the UK have had more success and support in the states than they ever had in the UK, and then when they see there success overseas thatâ??s when they start reaching out and showing their support. I am here in New York because it works for me.



What is the best piece of advice youâ??ve been given?

My dad always said to us growing up that there is no such thing as *canâ??t* and we will not use that word in our house. My parents were very encouraging especially when it came to things that we were passionate about. We were never forced to live a life they wanted for us for themselves all they asked in return is that whatever we chose to do weâ??d put in the work and be the best at it. I have found that this rule my father implemented, has had a profound effect on myself and my siblings, both individually and collectively we have never believed that we couldnâ??t do something that seemed impossible to others. I find for me I am always more inspired and motivated when others doubt me. When you tell me *I canâ??t* that fuels me to go ahead and achieve beyond your expectations.

Mental health is finally widely talked about, especially concerning mental health in men. How do you get through darker moments?

I look at these darker moments like a home I donâ??t like being in. Although I visit every now and then (as I think itâ??s important to experience these darker moments) I always remind myself that itâ??s only a visit, I donâ??t take my shoes off, and I donâ??t get comfortable. I find having a morning routine really helps me. My morning routine usually consist of me waking up at 6 or 7am, the first thing I do as soon as I open my eyes is give thanks for being alive followed by a list of 10 other things I am grateful for which ends with a meditation and prayer. I then head out and go for a run and upon my return, I have a good breakfast, shower and then get on with my day. When I am in a funk, my go to tools are, speaking out loud what I am grateful for, going for a run because when I run thatâ??s when I feel most powerful, playing music be it listening or actually playing a musical instrument.

How has music influenced your life?

I grew up listening to jazz, soul, RnB, old school gospel, old school reggae and 70â??s/80â??s disco. My father taught me everything I know and love about good music. It taught me to appreciate quality and how it takes time to master such a craft. Those musicians and artists back then really committed to their work and put countless hours into their work to become the best. It was different back then, they committed to the process. It was the norm to work hard for something. This was definitely a tool my father instilled with us as children. When we were learning to play a musical instrument he would always say â??practice, practice, practiceâ?•. I never thought that learning to play the drums at the age of thirteen would lead to me playing drums for Rihanna at the 2011 Brit Awards. This grooming from a young age helped mold my mind-set to think limitless.



Neil Tan @shotbyneiltan

As a child, what was your first encounter and memory of beauty?

My fatherâ??s Fender jazz sunburst 1976 four-string bass guitar. I donâ??t remember exactly how old I was, I believe I could have been five or six but I remember my father sitting me down sharing his story with me on why he loves the bass, who inspires him, the many tours he did with different bands in the 70â??s as a session bass guitar player and how he came to acquire his growing collection of bass guitars. He then showed me his top three. My favourite came in a black 3-ply hardshell case, with a plush red crushed acrylic interior lining that looked and felt incredibly soft. He took the bass out of the case slowly, I was amazed of the immaculate condition he had kept it in after all these years. Its beauty was so profound that it sparkled in the light it was as if he just made it himself. It was somewhat perfect. My young self-felt intimated to touch it, yet alone hold it when my father brought it closer to me to hold. Till this day I still feel a level of responsibility when I hold or play that bass.

Name a book that has inspired you and why?

â??How full is your bucketâ?? by Tom Rath. Reading this book inspired me to remember how important it is to strengthen your mental health and that we should see our mind like how we see/treat our body. To keep fit and healthy we eat better and attend the gym and it should be no different when it comes to our mind. We have to feed ourselves with the right tools and information that is going to have a positive effect and that it is important to train our mind daily.

Do you have a mentor or a muse?

Yes, I have a few different mentors for different things. My father is my main mentor for life, heâ??s a great friend as well as a great father. My favourite thing about him is that heâ??s a great listener. I believe it is extremely

important to have a mentor, someone who keeps you accountable for your actions, encourages you, challenges you and also pulls you to the side when youâ??re going off track. I also have a friend that I reach out to when I want to gain some insights on certain projects that I work on.

Can you talk through a failure or a setback in your business that you learned from?

Years ago I use to work in the entertainment industry working with celebrities on Brand Partnerships. We lost a client because of miscommunication. I remember telling myself that going forward I would go out my way to develop a better relationship with clients and remind myself to be clear and direct in meetings. I learned how important it is to communicate and make sure everyone is on the same page.

Best caring advice for headwear?

Steam & brush is your friend. Invest in a good hat brush and use it whenever you notice a little dust starting to form. In addition with some steam it will help to keep your hat looking brand new. And if you havenâ??t got a hat brush, be sure to invest in one.

What do you do in your free time?

I really enjoy sports and try to play regularly whether thatâ??s football or basketball. I also enjoy playing music. I am currently learning how to play the bass guitar. If I am not doing that I am usually experimenting on a hat.



Photo by Neil Tan @shotbyneiltan

What do you consider your greatest achievement?

Not giving up when I lost my mum at the age of 18 is what I consider to be my greatest achievement so far. I say this because I know I could have gone down a totally different path. One where I probably wouldnâ??t have been able to get out of the darker moments of life, one where I could have taken my own life. I remember the day like it was yesterday, every now and then I am hit with a flash back of myself and family in the hospital saying goodbye to our mother for the last time. Itâ??s definitely the most challenging experience I have ever experienced and even nearly 11 years later it is still very painful to know that my best friend is gone. I remember it was at the funeral that I encouraged myself and made a promise to myself that I wouldnâ??t give up. And I plan to continue to keep that promise.

What does success mean to you?

I tell my father regularly that Iâ??m consistent because heâ??s consistent. Consistency isnâ??t an end goal- itâ??s a process. In the digital age that we currently live in, very few appreciate the process of things, everyone wants everything here and now, we get frustrated if the train says 4 minutes or if a page online doesnâ??t load in the first 3 seconds and God forbid you end up watching a video on YouTube and thereâ??s a 10 second advert. If itâ??s not quick or convenient, we donâ??t want it. Kids no longer want to work for something and put in the time and effort like our parents and grandparents once did, they want and expect overnight success. My father always taught us the benefits of enduring the process of the things we do and go through itâ??s not there for us to fail but to strengthen our areas of weakness for us to become the best vision of ourselves.

Success to me is being consistent during the process.

CATEGORY

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