



Re-inventing the grace of hats

By IJEOMA OGWUEGBU

It's been 24 years since Graces Hats, one of the country's oldest milliners, opened its doors for business. To mark its anniversary, the outfit has embarked on a journey of reinvention.

"We are reinventing ourselves now to take into account new realities on the ground in Nigeria, with regards to materials available for use in making our designs," says Mrs. Chito Mark, the creative force behind the outfit.

"We are looking to unveil and highlight the use of indigenous materials in creating dynamic and unconventionally stylish designs. Since some

imported materials have been banned from use, we believe the future lies in the use and reinvention of what could be termed 'old school' designs and materials. This will cause local designers to look forwards and we want to be in the forefront of this new movement. This could also be seen as a compliment for great ideas from the past, as a lot of the inspiration for our new designs come from the past."

As part of this effort, Graces Hats have unveiled a new line of turbans and hats made from locally produced materials. Also as part of events marking what Mrs. Mark sees as a 'double celebration', which is the anniversary and end-of-year sales, Graces Hats will be giving discounts of up to 50% on purchases made between October 25th

2004 and January 10th, 2005. She says this is a way of saying thank you to numerous customers.

"A lot of customers have stood by us over the years and this is our way of showing gratitude to them, to show we really appreciate their loyalty to us. Without customers, we would not be where we are today."

As for what will be in for 2005, Mrs. Mark believes that, like the theme for their anniversary, everything in fashion will be about reinvention.

"That will be the look of things to come in 2005. More exotic, African designs. 2005 will really be the year for the reinvention of the gele to a completely new level. Look out for the more versatile gele look next year."

