

# Dressed for an OSCAR

CATHY COLL lifts the lid on Saratoga Trunk, and finds a treasure trove of authentic clothes for film stars and adventuresses



**W**HEN *Out of Africa* won an Oscar for best picture, was it Meryl Streep's performance as Karen Blixen that swung it — or was it the contents of her saratoga trunk? Certainly what tantalised us, scene by scene, was not so much her developing affair with Robert Redford as her glorious colonial wardrobe, an endless succession of die-for-dresses in cream linen and sand-coloured safari suits, complete with appropriate accessories. We watched entranced as her *fin de siècle* life unfolded

before us in perfectly laundered style — and wondered enviously where she found the clothes.

Funnily enough, some of them came from Saratoga Trunk in Glasgow. The shop, named after the large, round-topped variety of trunk used for travels in Africa, specialises in period clothes for the adventurous. Its customers range from people who just like to dress differently to film and TV companies eager to outfit their latest costume drama.

Away from Africa and over at Auchtermuchty, Annette Crosbie plays



Doctor Finlay's Janet in impeccably neat 1940s style, right down to her pinny and lace curtains. Ian Bannen, David Rintoul and Jason Fleming, as her GP protégés in the Scottish Television series, look as if they have been wearing their post-war pants and pince-nez all their lives, but the clothes were "pre-owned" for them.

"People from all over come here looking for props or costumes," says Cathie McLay, Glaswegian owner of Saratoga Trunk. Customers include English National Opera, the Royal Shakespeare Company, the National Theatre, Scottish Opera, the Citizens' and Tron theatres in Glasgow, and the London Theatrical and Film Agency, not to mention a host of international collectors and dealers from Germany, the USA and France.

It is not hard to see why. Exquisitely fragile crepe, ballgowns in bright purple and orange — some more than 100 years old — hang flamboyantly beside 1920s flapper hats and chiffon dropped-waist dresses in muted tones. A high-necked Edwardian embroidered linen blouse can be spotted nestling between an original crocheted vest and a black-sequin-cropped jacket.

**L**OOK up high and you can spy art deco beaded handbags, a set of flying ducks, an original Copeland and Lyle hat box, foreign textiles such as coptic shawls inlaid with silver from India, and crewelwork rugs from Afghanistan, the things people would bring back from their travels to the colonies.

The most popular items at the moment are the original double-breasted 1940s men's suits, much copied by High Street stores this spring — although they look far better on girls. "It's just a shame that the 1990s mum doesn't have the same physique as the 1940s one."

The one limiting factor for McLay, who has amassed a unique collection via auction houses, private donations and house clearances, is space. "What you see here is only about a 10th of what we have. I just can't display it all properly."

Far left: 1920s black chiffon dress with gold detail, £140; 1920s tie-knot pearls with diamante, £30; 1950s pearl choker, £25; Victorian ivory hair comb, £45.

Left: 1970s two-piece dogtooth trouser suit, £45; Victorian silk cream waistcoat, £75; 1940s cravat, £3; grey fedora, £25.

Top: Victorian smoker's cap, £30; Victorian black velvet three-quarter length coat, £95; Victorian lawn high-neck blouse, £80; Irish oak beads and cross, £48.

Pictures and styling: K&M Photography  
Make-up: Suzanne Hurles

