

UMBRELLA ITEMS IN THE NEWS AND IN THE MAIL

Umbrellas: Drenched In History

By CATHY SILVER

THE umbrella — an everyday object we take totally for granted — was once castigated as sacrilegious and caused a near-riot in its American debut. Although today's status-seekers find shelter under umbrellas monogrammed with designers' initials, in the early 17th century an umbrella was a sign of low status, since it meant that one had no carriage.

Umbrellas have a past at least 3,000 years old. In the West, its fictional inventor was Robinson Crusoe, in the novel by Daniel Defoe published in 1719. The umbrella that the shipwrecked hero cleverly fashioned for himself became so well known that later in the 18th century when umbrellas came into wide use, they were called Robinsons in England. Umbrellas are descendants of sunshades (parasols, from Latin, meaning to ward off the sun), and an ancestor of



This model, made in Vienna in 1882, was designed to keep the head centered in all situations.

The New York Times / Bill Cunningham, Bettmann Archive

Where to Fix Your Umbrella

Broken ribs, sprung springs, cracked handles and torn covers. On rainy days umbrellas with such problems usually don't leave the closer. Some end up in trash cans or as metal skeletons in the streets. But some are saved.

"Sometimes I take in 100 repairs a week in all stores or 500 a day in just one," said Robert Story, manager of the Uncle Sam umbrella shops. "Of course, it all depends on the weather."

The 116-year-old business still fixes anything on an umbrella, from ferrules (the ring or cap on the end) to frames. It receives weather-beaten umbrellas by insured parcel post from across the country and abroad.

Customers bored with old covers select new ones or bring in their own waterproofed fabrics; many tailors also re-cover umbrellas.

Although not all umbrellas are worth saving, many are. Manufacturers of Totes and Knirps provide a limited lifetime guarantee for their foldable umbrella frames. Totes services them for \$2 and Knirps for \$3.

Shops in New York

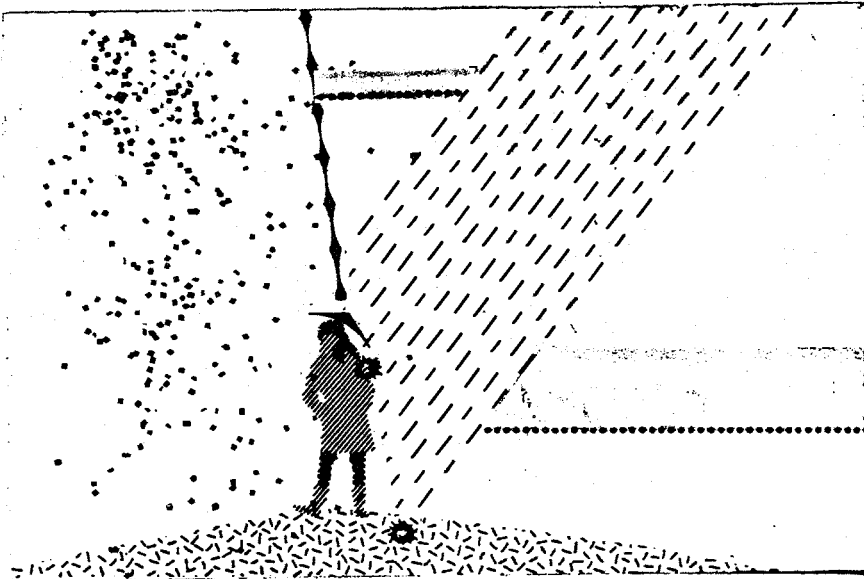
Essex Umbrella Corporation, 101 Essex Street (near Delancey) (674-3394). Gilbert Center, owner.

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Covers, \$7-\$10, with your own waterproofed fabrics, \$7-\$10; frames, \$5 (individual ribs not usually replaced); handles, from \$2; open seams, \$3; springs, \$3; tips, \$1.

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Gloria Umbrella Company, 39 Essex Street (475-7388). Jack Wasserman,



Michael A. May

Leavenworth Jackson with umbrella



U M B R E L L A