

How to Make and Cover a Hat Frame

written by: John Koch

excerpted from "Millinery Marvels" in Threads issue #153, p.49



Photo: Rosann Berry

Soft hats and caps are well and good for casualwear and baseball teams. A really stylish chapeau, however, calls for structure, a shape that supports lovely extravagances from bows to veils.

Traditional millinery techniques require costly equipment, such as hat blocks and steamers, in order to create stiff, shaped hats. I've found an alternative means to make hats. It's done with inexpensive materials and doesn't require much fabric. The supplies are readily available, with the exception of heavyweight buckram, milliner's wire, and wire joiner, all of which can be ordered online. My method is so simple—you don't even need to measure your head.

Here, I share my technique to make the "pod," a brimless oval contoured to fit the head. A hat in its own right, the pod is also the foundation piece for brimmed styles. (To see more detail on these styles, see the full article in Threads #153, p. 49.)

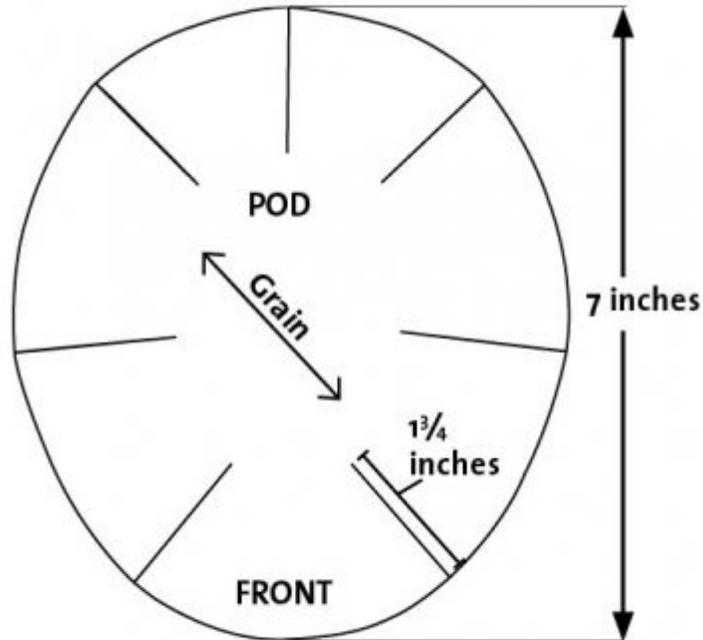
Form a hat base from buckram

The stiff, slightly cupped "pod" is an oval of heavyweight buckram. Lapped darts shape the pod, and lining covers the underside.

Shape the buckram

1. Cut the pod pattern from heavyweight buckram. Download [the template](#). Trace the pattern on the buckram, and cut out the pod shape. Make seven cuts, each $1\frac{3}{4}$ inches long, from the pod's edge toward the center.

Click image below to download template.



2. Shape the pod with lapped darts. Buckram is stiffened with water-soluble vegetable sizing. When wet, it's limp and malleable, but it regains its stiffness when dry. Lightly moisten and overlap each cut to $\frac{1}{4}$ inch at the edge. (For larger heads, reduce the lap to $\frac{3}{16}$ inch to increase the circumference close to $\frac{1}{2}$ inch.) Use a hot iron tip to seal each dart.

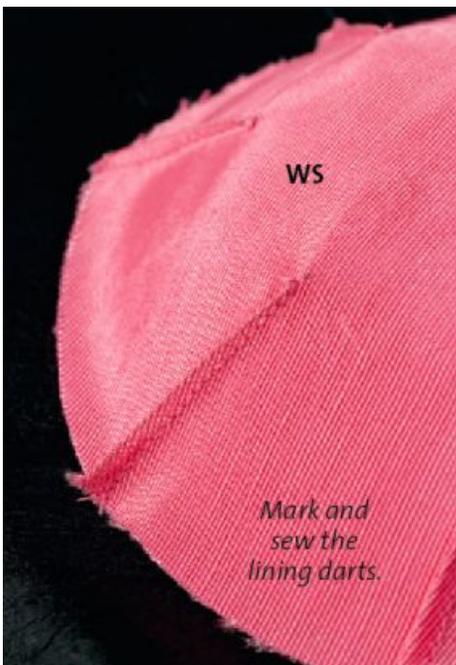


3. Press and shape the buckram. After the darts dry, place the pod on a pressing ham or a tightly rolled towel. Lightly steam and press each dart point to smooth any imperfections.



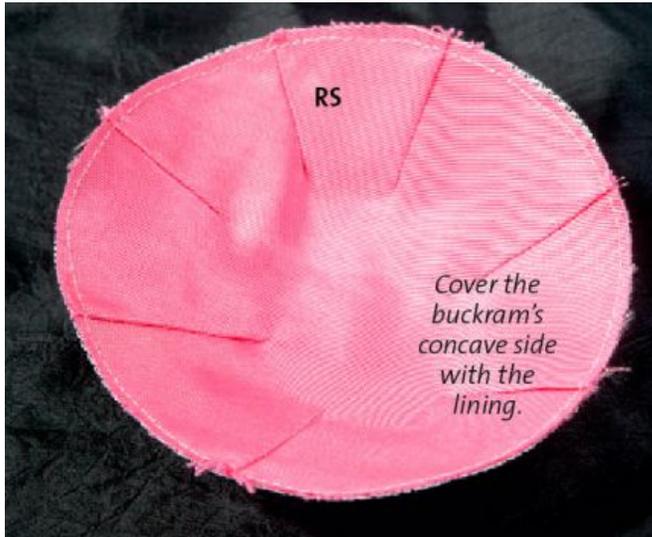
Line the pod

1. Trace the pattern on the lining fabric's wrong side. Cut out the pod outline, but do not make the dart cuts. Mark the dart lines on the lining's wrong side.



2. Sew the lining darts. Fold the fabric on a dart line. Begin your dart stitching at the edge, 1/8 inch from the fold, and taper the dart to a point at the slash line's inner end. Stitch the darts at all the slash lines.

3. Attach the lining to the buckram. Press the darts flat. Position the lining on the pod's inside, aligning the darts. Pin and baste close to the edge.

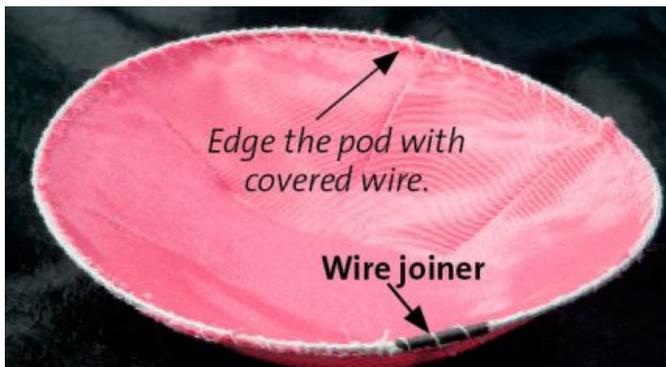


Fashion a little chapeau

Now that you have a hat base, expand on it by encircling the pod edge with millinery wire to strengthen it. Then, cover the pod with fabric, use bias tape to finish the edge, and add an elastic band for fit.

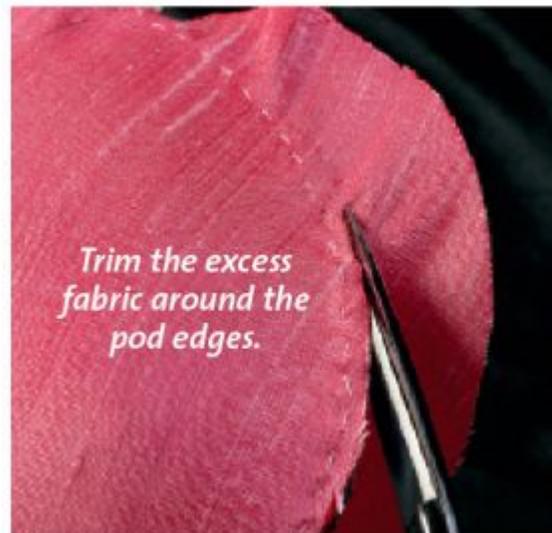
Wire the pod edge

1. Cut 19-gauge millinery wire about 3 inches longer than the pod's circumference. (If you use a wire joiner, cut the wire only slightly longer than the pod circumference). The joiner must be crimped onto the wire with wire cutters (be careful not to cut through). Starting at the pod's back, whipstitch the wire to the edge with button thread. Overlap the wire ends or trim excess wire, and insert the end into the joiner. Crimp to secure.

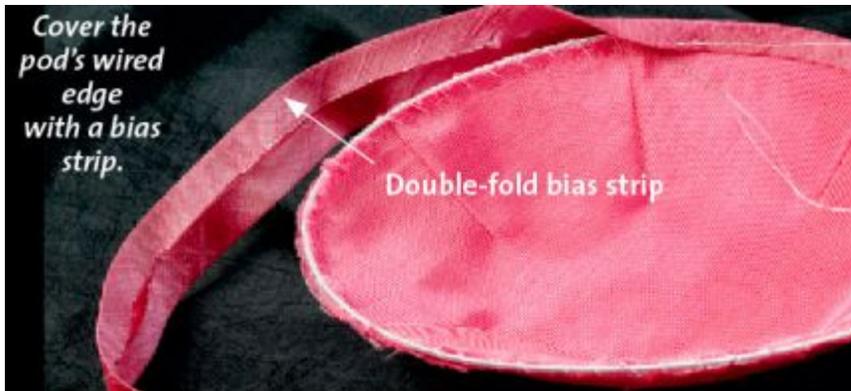




2. Cover the lined and wire-edged pod. Cut the fashion fabric about 1 inch beyond the pod pattern edge. Pin in place as you gently pull each bias. Hand-sew the fabric to the pod, using small stabstitches close to the edge. Instead of weaving the needle through the fabric, make two motions, a stitch through from front to back and another stitch from back to front. Remove the pins, and gently pull the fabric taut as you proceed. Trim the excess fabric when you've finished sewing.



3. Bind the wired edge. Cut a 1 1/2-inch-wide bias strip several inches longer than the pod circumference. Use a fabric that creases. My first choice is the hat fabric. However, if the material doesn't crease, use bias-cut bengaline. It looks like petersham, a traditional hat binding. Cut, fold, and press it into a double-fold bias strip. Start at the pod's center back, and wrap and sew the strip over the edge. Use tiny stitches, and catch the folded edges on the pod inside and outside. Pull the bias strip taut as you sew. Right before the strip ends meet, trim the strip at the center back, leaving a tail long enough to turn under. Lap the turned-under end over the strip's beginning, and blind-stitch to finish.



Sew on the strap

1. Make the elastic strap. Cut black elastic cord 22 inches long. The elastic cord is worn behind the head, covered by the hair. If you think the elastic is too lightweight, double it.



2. Attach and adjust the strap. Knot both ends, one loosely for later adjustment. Sew the ends to the pod's lined side, just in front of center on left and right. Try on the pod, and pull the elastic until snug. Re-knot it to fit. Trim the excess elastic.

Supplies

- Heavyweight buckram in black and white (A pod, as well as a brim, can be made from 1/3 yard.)

- Covered millinery wire, also in black and white, and gauges 19 (heavy) and 21 (light)
- Wire connectors/joiners (optional)
- Veiling (optional)
- Heavy-duty thread (button/carpet)
- All-purpose thread
- Fashion fabric
- Hand-sewing needle (no. 14, "milliner's," or no. 3 "sharps")
- Lining fabric
- Crafting adhesive (Aleene's Tacky Glue)
- Fabric sizing
- Fabric stiffener