



Hello, Dolly

How to make pretty-as-a-picture lace hats

BY LAURIE L. KURUTZ

IT CAN SEEM A DAUNTING TASK to produce a chorus of lovely, wide-brimmed lace hats for *Hello, Dolly!*, *My Fair Lady*, or any number of other classic American musicals. With some simple techniques, however, it's possible to produce many hats in a single afternoon. Using these methods, you can build lightweight hats constructed from circles of millinery wire, covered with sheer lace fabric, and finished with beautiful ribbons.

Assemble the materials

Most of the items you'll need to make these hats are things you would probably find in any backstage costume shop. If you've never done any millinery work, you may not have any buckram on hand. Millinery buckram is fabric impregnated with a starch, which allows it to be softened in water, pulled over a hat block, and left to dry into a hard shape.

For each wide-brimmed lace hat, you will need:

- Five yards of medium-gauge millinery wire
- Approximately 4" x 26" medium or lightweight buckram
- Three yards of 45"-wide lace fabric
- Three yards of satin ribbon, 1 1/2" wide

- Three-fourths yard of 1"-wide bias tape
- A zigzag sewing machine
- Size 16 sewing machine needles
- Safety glasses
- Wire cutters
- Thread to match your fabric
- Half-inch wide horse hair, 12" long
- Scissors
- Twenty T-pins
- Hand-sewing needles
- Craft paper to make the pattern
- Masking tape

Measure the actor

This hat will sit at an angle on the back of the actor's head. Measure her head at the position and angle where the hat will sit. If the actor will wear her hair up, take the measurement over that hairstyle. Add 1/2" to this measurement, to allow for an easy fit. You can always add a bit of padding inside the hat to make it fit more securely. It is much more difficult to enlarge a hat once it is built.

Make the paper pattern and mock-up

On craft paper approximately 30" x 30", draw two lines quartering the paper. In the middle of the paper, where the two lines intersect, draw a circle the head circumference measurement. This circle represents the actual head opening. Mark a second line, the cutting line, one inch inside the head-opening line. Mark the following on the head-opening line: CF for center front, CB for center back, RSS for right side seam, and LSS for left side seam.

Measure and mark the brim width

Cut out this brim pattern. Snip through the seam allowance at the head opening, cutting to the actual head-opening line. This snipping will make a series of tabs, which you will bend up and tape to the crown of the hat.

To make a pattern of the side band of the crown, draw a rectangle the height of the crown by the length of the head opening plus one-half inch. In this example, it is three inches tall by twenty-two and one-half inches long. Tape this side band in a circle, overlapping the half-inch seam allowance. Then, tape the side band to the brim at the head opening, with the tabs on the inside of the side band, matching CF, CB, RSS, and LSS. (Photo A.)

It is always a good idea to make a mock-up of each built item so you can test the fit and scale of the hat with the rest of the costume. You can use one hat mock-up for several actors, if the measurements for the head openings are similar. Once you have tried the hat on the actor and marked any adjustments, carefully take apart the paper mock-up, being sure to retain any marks you have made. Transfer all final changes to the paper pattern.

Create the wire brim

Cut a length of millinery wire equivalent to the head-opening measurement on your paper pattern plus one inch for overlap. Gently bend this cut wire in a circle the size of the head opening on your paper pattern. Use a small piece of clear tape to join the ends of the wire together, overlapping one inch. When machine-sewing across this wire, it is very common for machine needles to break. To prevent eye injuries, wear safety glasses when operating the sewing machine. Using the widest zigzag stitch on the sewing machine, slowly zigzag and backstitch the overlapped ends of wire to hold them together. Be sure to retain the size of the head-opening measurement, as this shape will set the foundation for the entire hat. Lay this wire circle on top of your paper pattern to check the accuracy of the shape.

Using the same method, cut, tape, and sew twelve wire circles for the brim of the hat. There will be two layers of circles, one overlapping the other (Photo B). Experiment with different wire lengths to determine how long to cut them so that the circles fill in the head opening to the outer edge of the brim. In this example, I've cut twelve 22" pieces

of wire. Tape the first layer of wire circles together and zigzag them to the head-opening wire oval, and then to each other as well. Lay the second layer of wire circles on top of the first set of circles to reinforce that first layer. To stabilize the outer edge of this wire brim, sew a long piece of wire around the entire outer edge of the brim structure.

Create the side band of the crown

Cut the buckram side band to the height and length desired, plus the half-inch seam allowance (Photo B). Wearing safety glasses, carefully machine zigzag a length of wire to one long edge of the buckram. Back stitch well at the ends. Overlap the half-inch seam at center back, and machine sew the seam. During the next steps, keep the wired edge at the top edge of the side band.

Cover the side band and top of the crown with lace

Cut a circle of lace fabric big enough to cover the sides and top of the side band, plus three inches of seam allowance (Photo C). Cover the side band with the lace fabric, pinning the fabric to the side band at the CF, CB, and SSs. Because you have added that extra three inches of length for ease, there will be fabric hanging down below the bottom of the buckram, which you will trim away later. Fold the excess fullness of the lace fabric in attractive one-inch pleats along the unwired edge and pin them in place with T-pins. Check the circular shape of the crown against the paper pattern and the head opening of the wire-brim structure. The crown and the brim must match in their shapes because they will be sewn together later.

Wearing safety glasses, carefully machine sew through the buckram and the pleated fabric around the bottom of the side band, one-half inch from the edge of the buckram. If you find it difficult to get this crown under the foot of the sewing machine, you may hand sew it.

Re-check the head opening against your paper pattern and the head opening of the wire-brim structure. Now cut off the excess fabric hanging below the buckram. With the one-inch bias tape, or a bias strip cut from the lace fabric, bind the raw bottom edge of the buckram and the fabric.

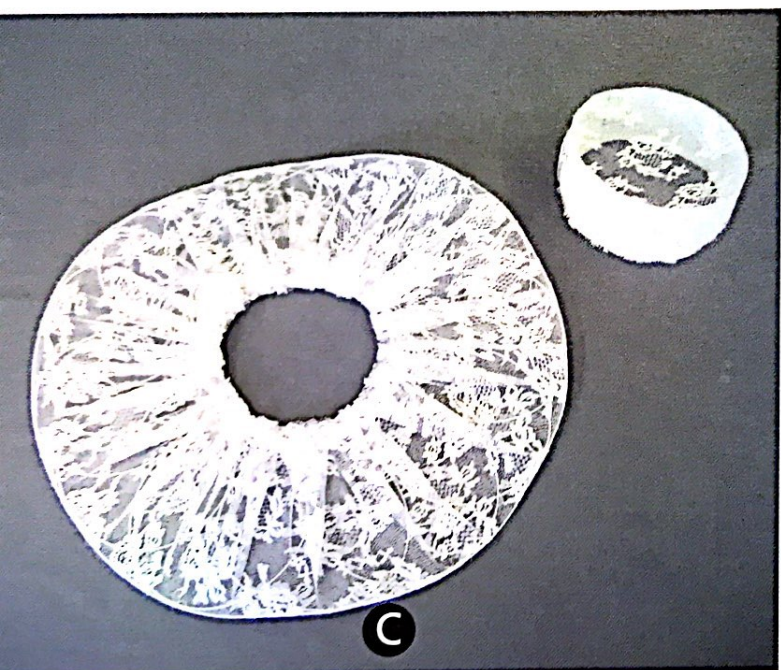
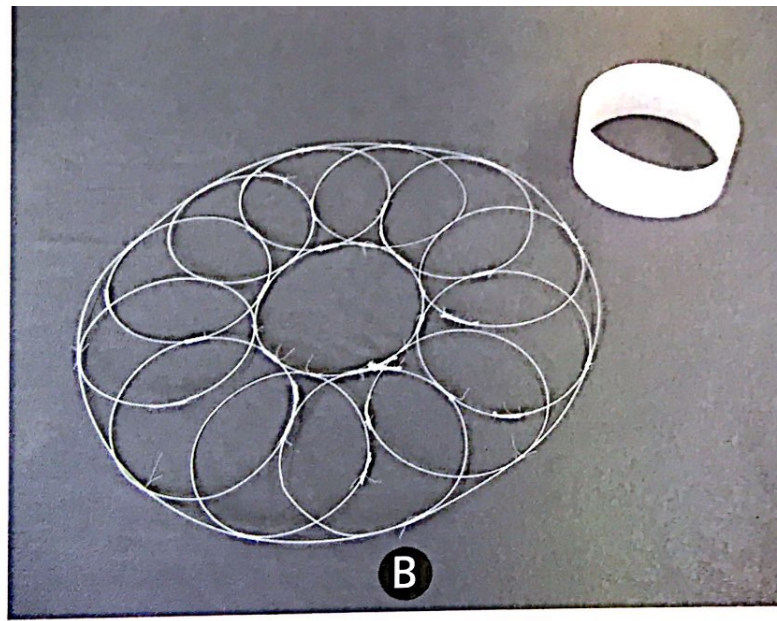
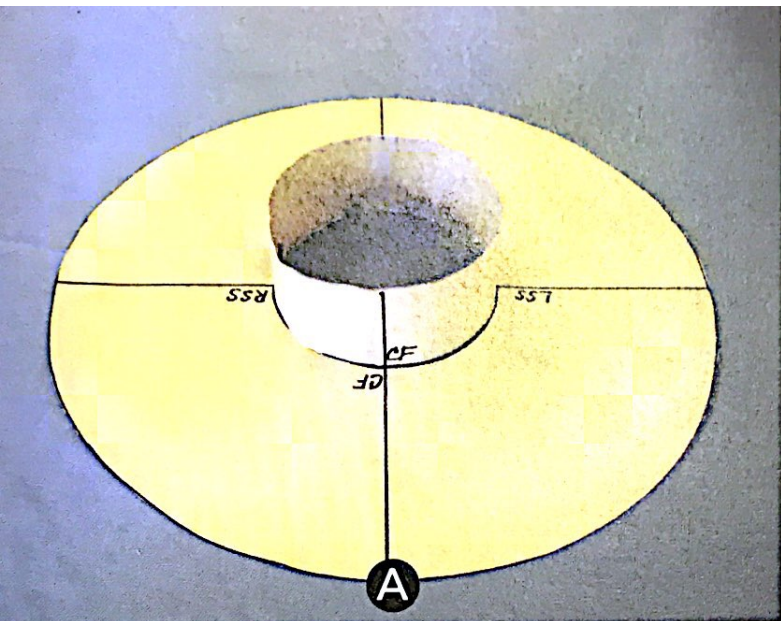
Cover the wire brim

For the lace brim covering, cut a circle of lace fabric twice the diameter of the wired brim structure. Lay the lace out flat and center the wire-brim structure on it. Fold the outer edge of the lace into the center of the head opening and pin it in one-inch pleats next to the head opening (Photo C).

Using a zipper foot, machine sew just inside the head opening. Then cut away the lace fabric inside the head opening, leaving one inch of lace fabric as seam allowance.

Sew the crown to the brim

Gently slip the lace-covered crown through the head opening, with the seam allowance on the *outside* of the crown.



Place the pleated side of the brim facing down to frame the actor's face. Make sure to match the CFs and CBs of the crown to the brim, then pin in place. Using a strong, double-threaded, hand-sewing needle, hand sew the crown to the brim with two rows of stitching.

Finish the hat

To keep the hat firmly on the actor's head, cut four lengths of horsehair or matching ribbon, each four inches long. Fold these lengths into two-inch loops and sew them just inside the head opening of the crown. Place two of them at the temples, and two at the side backs of the head opening. When it's time for the actor to get into costume, you will loop bobby pins through the ribbons into the actor's hair to hold the hat securely in place (Photo D).

Finally, cover the seam allowance on the outer edge of the side band by tying the decorative ribbon around the crown, and let the ends float down the actor's back. Bend the wire brim into an attractive shape to frame the actor's face.

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