

How-To



Recreating a 18th Century Chintz Lined Straw Hat

Lynn McMasters

A photo of a large, 18th century Dutch straw hat in an auction catalog inspired this 21st century recreation.

You never know where something is going to lead you. I was very intrigued with the hat (right) when I saw it on [Christy's site](#), and usually when I see a hat I really like, I want to make one.

I have never seen anything like it before. I have seen examples of English, American and French large brimmed straw hats with chintz fabric under brims, but those are round. The auction lot notes list a reference to the French book, *Modes en miroir: La France et la Hollande au temps des Lumières* [Broché]



18th C. Dutch Straw Hat. Image from Christie's Auction.



with a similar example. This out-of-print book is about a museum exhibit that contrasted the Dutch style from the French style of the Enlightenment period, and how they influenced each other.

Owned by the [FriesMuseum](#), the hat in the exhibit book is a gorgeous example, and it looks like it was never worn. It still has the ribbon ties, which are the most interesting part of this hat because they have very beautifully embroidered ribbon; not

just with a floral motif, but a tricolor flag. It is difficult to tell if it is the flag of the Prince of Orange, Louis Bonaparte (Napoleon's brother) or the Kingdom of the Netherlands, as so much changed between 1790 and

1813. I traced the pattern (below) just in case I ever get a chance to get some ribbon made like it.

I found eight [examples](#) of this type of hat from the FriesMuseum (right top). They really show the variety in the fabrics and shapes. The curator, Gieneke Arnolli, told me that all hats of this type come from



Hats from Friesland. Images from the FriesMuseum.

Friesland and are part of the traditional costume of that province. The darker colored ones date from 1800-1850, and were worn to funerals with a large black veil over them. I found it interesting that not only did





Dutch costumes from *Kabinet van Mode en Smaak*, 1781-1800 (above). Straw hat and lace cap from side (bottom left).



women wear these large asymmetrical straw hats, but they also wore them over a [wired lace cap](#) of the same scale and shape.

The three illustrations above from the *Kabinet van Mode en Smaak* published 1781-1800 show early Dutch costume. The two plates on the outside show more cosmopolitan dress, while the lady in the center is



Hat brim lining, c. 1725-1750 (Item [O73116](#)). Photo courtesy of the Victoria and Albert Museum.

wearing traditional dress. She is wearing one of the lace caps with a straw bonnet over it. If the shape of these hats was not improbable enough, notice the two sets of ties. Madelief Hohé curator of the [Gemeentemuseum Den Haag](#) told me that the one set holds the hat on your head, and the other longer uncut tie is used to balance the hat on your head using your hands.

Another early period illustration (bottom left) shows both the straw hat and the lace cap from the side. It shows that the straw hat is a little larger than the lace cap, mostly in the back, where it seems to hang over by about 3" or so. This one seems to have embroidered ribbon ties as well.

The Victoria & Albert Museum (V&A) also has an example of the fabric that might have been for one of these hats, (below) but was never added to a hat.

I do have one problem with their conclusion that it was going to go on one of these hats. Maybe you can figure it out what my concern is. Take a look at the enlarged view on the V&A [website](#) and see what you think. My answer is at the end of this article.

The fabric is a seven-color chintz using both printing and resist dying methods that came from the east coast of India, the Coromandel Coast. The history of these fantastic fabrics is quite interesting because they were so desirable in Europe.

For trade protection reasons, they were outlawed in France and England. But, because they were brought into Europe by the Dutch, the coastal town of Hindeloopen (one of the eleven cities in the province of Friesland) was particularly known for its use of chintz fabrics in their dress, including hats like this.

The [robe](#) at right from the Metropolitan Museum is an example of one that would have been worn with this straw hat.

Making the Hat

First of all I needed a pattern. It was lucky that the Christy's hat listed the dimensions: that meant I could take an image of one of these hats photographed from straight on and enlarge it up to the dimensions to get a pattern. I did it all on my computer, but it could be done without one as well.



Cotton and linen robe (1720-1740), Netherlands (above).. Metropolitan Museum of Art, Isabel Shults Fund. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art.

Even a small image can be traced onto a piece of paper, measured and using a ratio, it is possible to figure out how much of a percent enlargement is needed to get it to the end measurement. The drawing can be enlarged at a copy shop, and I'm sure they will even help with the enlargement math.

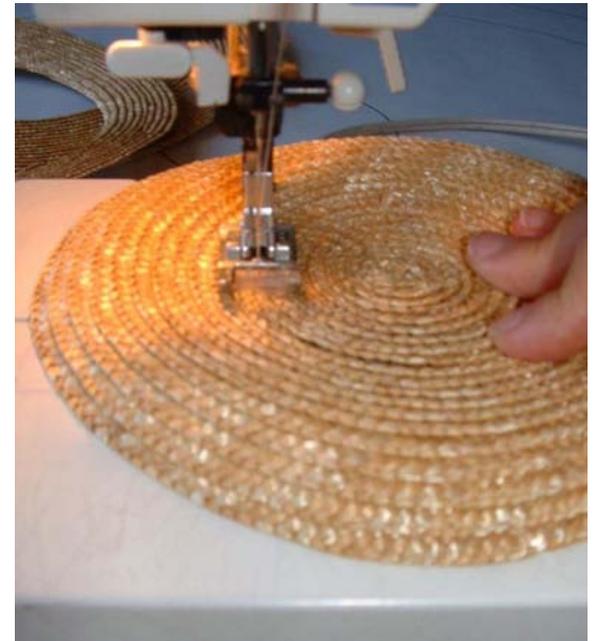
Sewing the Straw

Over the years I have made many straw hats. If you are interested, you can access articles on my projects from my [home page](#). As a rule I like to do as little sewing of straw plait as possible. That is why I usually start with large straw hats and either cut them down or add to them with straw off of a hank.

Because sewn straw hats are sewn together with a chain stitch, they can be easily taken apart by pulling the thread, like opening a large dog food bag. This time I did not have any natural hats at hand, so I grabbed some pieces of hats left over from other hat projects. I had the outside ring, a ring just a little smaller than that, part of a crown tip, the very center of a crown tip, and a hank of 7-8mm plait.

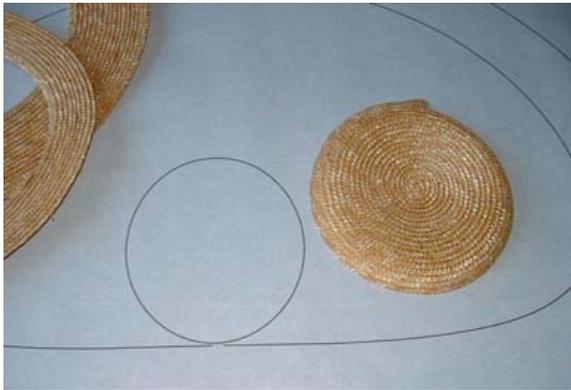


First I cut the ends of the crown tip pieces at a 45° and slipped the cut ends tightly together. I sewed them together with a 5mm long straight stitch on my machine to closely match the stitch length of the existing chain stitch.



I followed the row around to finish off the circle. I like to work in “needle down” mode. That way I can stop, lift the foot, and check to see that I’m in the right place without having to think if the needle is down or not.

The straw crown piece looks like it is large enough to make the entire crown once I block it, so that is done.



I laid a large straw ring over the pattern, where it will need to go, and put a straight edge over it so that I could mark the edge of the pattern piece.



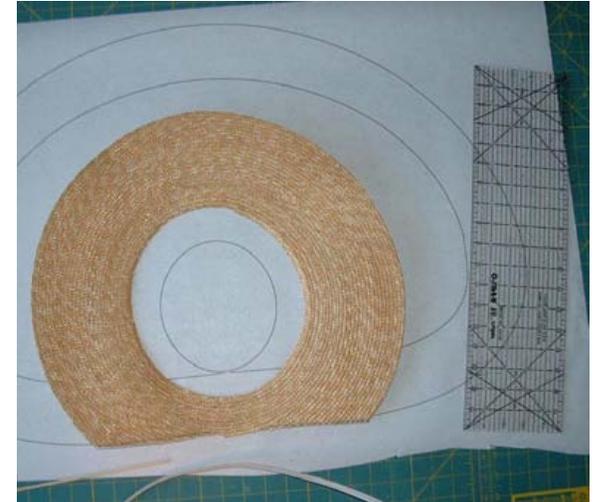
I sewed a staystitch line over this mark before I cut the straw. It is always important to do this so the straw will not fray.



After cutting the large piece I sewed the smaller ring to the larger cut ring.



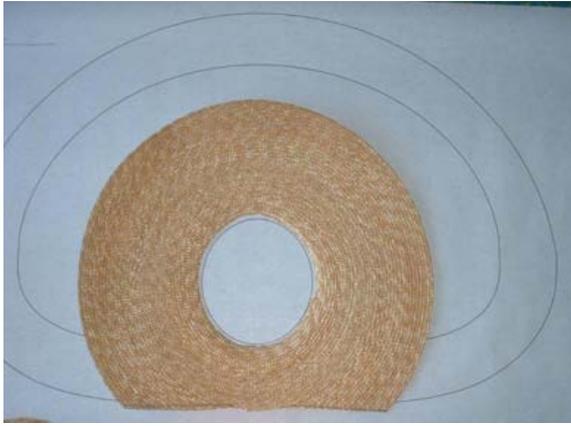
The photo below shows the joined rings over the pattern so I could see just how many rows I need to add to fill in the center.



I’m sewing straw plait to the center of the ring. I really should have added these rows before I sewed the smaller to the larger ring. It would have made this task much easier, because, as photo below shows, I really have to bend the piece to get it in my machine.



Here is a photo of the center section of the hat over the pattern.



I couldn't help it, I had to take a quick look at just how far along I was.



Over the years I have changed the way I sew straw on my sewing machine. I used to place the row I was adding over the row that was already sewn on. After a while, I figured out that if I placed the row I was adding under the sewn row, things worked much better. And even better, if I was sewing the straw over a layer of crinoline or fine buckram, then the stitching from the

previous row created a stop that made it easy to get the row into just the right spot. The picture below shows a piece of crinoline the shape of the pattern sewn to the brim.



Here I am adding more plait to the brim by sliding the row between the crinoline and the last row added.



Seven-end plait (which is the standard plait for common straw hats) is fairly easy to work with, because of where the criss crosses of the weave run. It has four evenly spaced apparent lines that run down the

strips. So, when you are sewing hats, you lay row after row of the straw half way over, or under, the last row, and you sew $\frac{1}{4}$ of the way in from the edge of whichever row is on the top.

This is the brim with ten more rows added.



This is the brim after adding on another ten rows.



Here it is with the final rows added and the edges trimmed after some stitching along the bottom edge to prevent fraying.



Sizing the hat

I covered a large piece of corrugated cardboard with foil so that I could steam the brim to flatten it and size it (stiffen it). To do this I dissolved a packet of unflavored gelatin in about 1 cup of water and brushed this onto the backside of the brim. I laid it down on the foil and waited. You can also pin it down, so that it could dry flat.



In order to make a block for the crown, I traced out 4 rounds from the pattern.



This was not tall enough, so I glued those to more cardboard and cut 4 more.



I glued them all together then, I slipped the block into place to check for size.



I covered the cardboard block with foil as well, and the inside of the crown was brushed with the gelatin mixture.



The gelatin makes the straw crown soft enough to stretch into a slight oval. Then, I slipped it over the block and pinned where needed. I also used rubber bands to hold it tight to the block.



I added another thin coat of the gelatin over the top of the hat, pinned it down, and let it dry in the sun.



Edging and Mulling

When it was dry, I sewed another strip of straw plait to the outside edge of the hat for extra structure. I also added a little extra on the bottom corners because, for some reason, I cut away too much earlier and was not happy with the shape.



I then added mull on the underside of the brim. I used a quilt batting called

“[Dream Cotton](#).” I like it over flannel for two reasons: it’s lighter in weight and it stretches. So, I could stretch it around to the front to cover the ½” edge with no wrinkles.



I cut out a hole in the Dream Cotton for the crown.



Because the batting stretches, you do not have to slash the seam allowance. You can just stretch it as I did here. Joining the Brim and Crown



I placed the crown over the opening to check just where to cut the free ends of the plait, so that they will match.



I lined up the rows from the brim and the crown, and then pinned it into place so that it could be sewn together.



I sewed them together by hand with a running stitch, trying to hide the stitches between the weave of the plait. While sewing it, I also was stitching the batting into place inside the crown.



Covering the Under Brim with Fabric

I chose to use cotton quilting fabric for my hat. I would have loved to have access to real chintz but they are a little difficult to find where I live, so I settled for a fabric that had the look of a period.



I drafted my pattern on the computer but it might even be easier to do it with a pencil and ruler. One just needs to trace around the outside of the brim, then measure out 2.75" to 3" from that line all the way around and draw another line, then measure out 1/2" from that to create a seam allowance. All the pieces can be cut from 3/4 yard of fabric. I only made the right side of the pattern, so it could be laid out on fold. This saved a lot of time and measuring rather than if you were making the pattern by hand.



I also cut one oval from the pattern plus seam allowance. I used 1/4" and a 2" wide bias strip that was about 22" long.



I first stretched the bias band around the edge of the cardboard crown block to determine where the center back seam was suppose to be. I sewed this and pressed one edge up about 1/2" and sewed the other edge to the oval. There is no need to clip the seam allowance as there is plenty of stretch in the fabric with only a 1/4" seam allowance.



I slipped it into place to see if it fit.



I pressed up the 1/2" seam allowance on the large under-brim fabric.



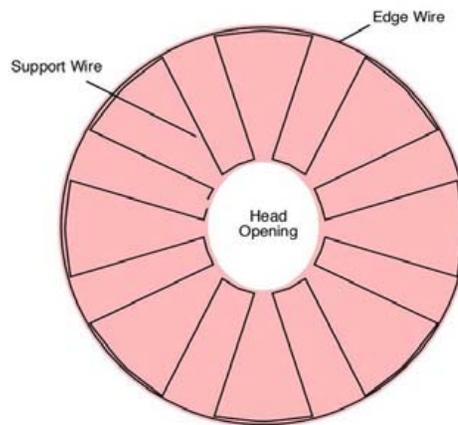
I laid the fabric over the pattern and used the dashed line (I added to the pattern at the seam line) to sew (with a about 2 yards of very strong thread) a measured running stitch right on the fold line of the pressed seam allowance. I guessed that a running stitch of (¼" in 3/16" out) would give me the number of knife pleats that I wanted. As you will see later in the article, that gage worked for the corners but it was not working for me in the round section, so I changed that to be (¾" in 3/16" out). This gave me pleats that were much farther apart in that section.



Before I stitched down the fabric, I decided I needed to wire the outer straw edge since it was not possible to stiffen the straw enough with sizing. I got an e-mail the same day from FriesMuseum that the hats have wires along their edge that support them, along with the wires that are in the lace caps. So, I added two millinery wires along the edge and added three ½ wide corset bones that I glued together. I usually sew wire along the edge of large straw hats, but I glued these in place because the hat was getting a little unwieldy to stick back under the sewing machine.

Note: when it is too late, you always remember things. I was almost done with the hat, when I remembered an illustration in *From the Neck Up* that showed just how to sew wire onto buckram to support a very large hat. I even used that years ago in one of the very first Edwardian hats I made. It would have worked very well for this hat.

Here is a drawing of how the wiring would go for a round hat.



Two wires are sewn to the brim one along the outside edge and one that goes back and forth from the outside edge to the head opening.

The hat needs to be centered on the fabric before the gathering stitches can be pulled tightly. I did this in sections and pinned the fabric down as I moved around the hat.



There is an area across the back of the hat that does not get gathered.



Hat Lining

I flipped the hat over and used the block to mark the head opening. It was easy to locate the hole and a line the block by feel.



I cut into the fabric to make an opening which left a $\frac{3}{4}$ " seam allowance to the inside of the line.



I clipped the seam allowance to the line.



I pinned the lining into place and whip stitched the lining to the fabric.



Sewing the Fabric to the Straw

I carefully glued the un-pleated area and then sewed the fabric to the straw with a curved needle. I first passed the needle thru the 3 layers of the dart.



Then I drew it thru the straw across from the dart. Then, repeating the same stitches at the next dart I moved around the edge of the hat in the same manner.



The corners with the majority of pleats were the most difficult, so I pinned them into place before trying to stitch them down.



Before adding the ties, I checked the period drawing to see just how they might have been added. I also took another look at the FriesMuseum hat that still had the wide balancing ties to see how they were tied on. I chose some burnt orange petersham that I had in my stash for the smaller ties and dyed some wide silk ribbon with turmeric and pink lemonade Kool-Aid to get that intense egg yellow to match the yellow in the print.

I folded the edges of the ribbons over a couple times and sewed them onto the edge of the under brim thru the hat. I tried to make the smallest possible stitches on the top of the hat. You can do that by angling your stitches so when you come back up you are not in the same spot that you went down.



Below and at right is the finished hat from the top, front, and underside.



Where did this all lead me? It started with trying to translate French, Dutch and Frisian in order to search websites, and then to getting some interesting e-mails from two museum curators, also a great deal more knowledge of early printed fabrics. I never really knew that the early printed fabrics were so complex (up to seven colors) and how advanced India was as a manufacturer even in the late 1600's. It was a wonderful learning experience.

So, did you figure out the answer to the question at the beginning of this article?



None of the hats of this type have a seam in the fabric behind the head opening. There is no need since the brim is totally flat. Perhaps sometime after the fabric was cut to shape in 1725-1750, a chunk was cut away, and that was why it was not added to a hat, it's a mystery.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank both curators mentioned in this article: Gieneke Arnolli, of the FriesMuseum, and Madelief Hohé of the Gemeentemuseum Den Haag. This article would have had to have a lot of guesswork without out their help. I have never come across two more helpful curators than they where. Even though the FriesMuseum is moving, Gieneke answered my e-mails. I also want to thanks Laura Dippold for her patient proofreading, as I'm not a very good writer and seem to make the same mistakes over and over. Also, thanks to Katherine Adrian for help with some of the photos.

Lynn McMasters learned to sew with help from her mother, aunt and grandmother. At first it was doll clothes then it was real clothes then it was home decorations. She took it a little farther and started making patterns for period clothing and hats for porcelain dolls. After that is was period costumes and hats for real sized people, which lead in the end to a line of period hat patterns. Her [website](#) is her portfolio: you can see a decade and a half of work and order patterns there. She loves to pass skills on by teaching and writing articles like this one.