

IN STITCHES

Problem-solving tips for cloth dollmakers

by Colette Wolff

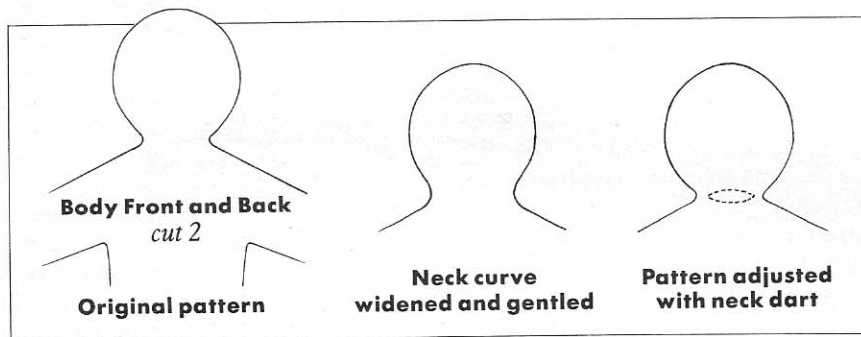
Problem: No matter what I try, the necks on the one-pattern "flattie" dolls I make either wrinkle or wobble.

Solution: When this happens, the fault usually is with the design. Although I haven't seen your pattern, I'll bet that the neck is narrow, or sharply indented in relation to the head above and the shoulders below. And that's the source of the trouble.

There are two remedies. You can (1) redraw the pattern, widening the neck as shown in the accompanying illustration. If changing the silhouette of the doll isn't an acceptable solution, (2) after stuffing a doll made from the original pattern, work the wrinkles into a small dart across the

neck, leaving the fabric smooth and taut above and below. Pin the dart, measure its depth, blindstitch the dart. Now draw the dart on the paper pattern, duplicating the depth and length measurements. One dart in front may be sufficient to correct the wrinkles and wobbles, but one in front and in back will probably be better. The next time you make the doll, stitch the darts into the neck before sewing the front to the back.

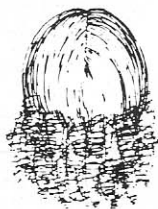
With either of these solutions, the neck can be stuffed firmly and smoothly, and it will support the head securely. But if you choose the second solution, the doll's side profile will show a bit of shaping as well.



ILLUSTRATIONS: COLETTE WOLFF

Problem: My cloth dolls look best in wigs with long curls, but stitching or gluing the yarn into position is tedious. Is there an easier way to set long curls into yarn wigs?

Solution: The best method I've tried to date involves heat. Immerse strands of yarn in water; wind the wet yarn evenly and tightly around wooden dowels of a suitable diameter; put the yarn in an oven set at 200 to 250 degrees and bake until dry (about 25 minutes). Unwind the yarn, cut it into curls, and tack each curl to the head with matching thread. Double or triple the yarn for thick curls. For period hair styles, cover the wig area of the head with an application of straight yarn and tack a mass of curls to the back of the head, or tack a few curls over each ear.



Yarn hairstyles with long curls applied over straight-yarn wigs



I've used this method with both wool and acrylic with good results, though there are drawbacks. While using hair spray on the curls will help to keep them tight and springy under normal conditions, atmospheric dampness will cause the curls to relax. Prolonged dampness will reduce the curls to waves. And if you wash the wig, the yarn will return to its original straightness. Touch-up with an old-fashioned curling iron helps, but you'll probably have to reset the curls using bobby pins, rags or curlers, and allow the yarn to dry naturally.

If any of you have a better method for curling yarn that you're willing to share, send it to *In Stitches*, *Dollmaking*, 170 Fifth Ave., New York, NY 10010. ▶

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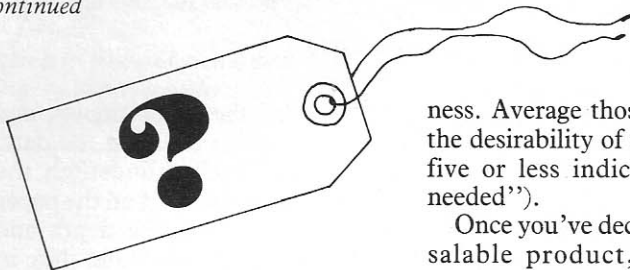
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CAROLEE CREATIONS

IN STITCHES

continued



ness. Average those numbers to rate the desirability of the doll (a score of five or less indicates "more work needed").

Once you've decided that a doll is a salable product, determine how much you spent for materials (cover everything: snaps, the thread you used, your label); multiply the hours you spent making the doll (shopping included) times your hourly fee; assign amounts to overhead, sales, packaging and originality. The total is your *ideal* wholesale price; retail will be two or three times more. Then research every shop in your area that sells dolls to your kind of customer, listing prices next to descriptions. Find out what other cloth dollmakers charge. Compare those numbers with your ideal price. A *realistic* price for your doll lies somewhere in between, and the reality may be a blow to your expectations. If it is, look for ways you can cut costs and labor without affecting sales appeal. Or ask yourself if the satisfaction you derive from making a beautiful doll compensates for the dollars you can't collect. Whatever price you finally decide on, remember that you deserve to get as much as the market will bear.

Problem: *I want to sell my handmade cloth dolls but don't know how to set a fair price.*

Solution: Though it may be hard for you to see your dolls as a product for a market, because of all the time, skill and love you've spent on making them, that's where you have to start. Define your dolls; are they play dolls, collectibles, novelty items or holiday decorations? Are your buyers collectors, parents or grandparents, gift shoppers or home decorators?

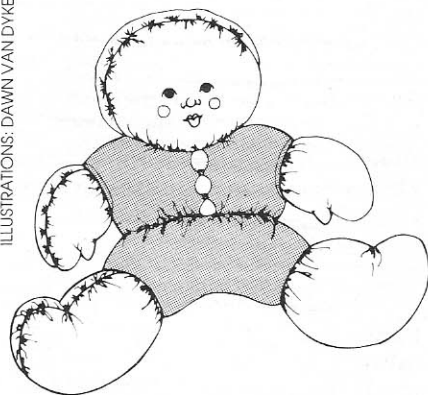
Now look at each doll as if it were made by someone else. Pretend that you're a prospective buyer examining the doll and, on a scale of 1 to 10, grade it ruthlessly. Evaluate the craftsmanship; quality of materials; durability; color appeal; figure and feature proportions and shape; unity between the age, sex and mood communicated by body and facial features; suitability of clothing and wig to character; personality; unique-

Problem: *I want to use a knit fabric for the bodies of my dolls, but all the patterns I have specify muslin.*

Solution: If you use a knit that doesn't stretch, you can probably substitute it for the muslin without difficulty. Very stretchy knits, however, are out of the question, and even knits with limited stretch will cause problems. The knit casing will stuff and stretch into a chubbier figure than the pattern's designer intended; facial features and the wig may no longer be appropriate for the personality projected by the enlarged body; and clothing made from the designer's patterns won't fit the doll. Also, because many knits are heavier than muslin, you may have trouble turning small to tiny casings right side out.

If you like the muslin-bodied doll designs but prefer to work with knits, make the doll in the recommended

ILLUSTRATIONS: DAWN VAN DYKE



fabric first so that you'll know how it works and looks. Then make it using your favorite knit. Compare the two dolls and, if necessary, adjust the pattern accordingly. ●

Colette Wolff has been making cloth dolls and teaching cloth dollmaking for 20 years. She publishes her original patterns under the name Platypus.

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