

Curved tucks

Layered bias strips create dramatic texture and detail

Have you ever admired an evening gown that appeared to be constructed from gracefully curving, overlapping fabric tucks, and wondered, “How did they do that?” Wonder no longer.

Fashion designers call this surface embellishment “fluting” because it resembles the carved grooves, or fluting, on classical architectural columns. It looks complicated, but I’ll show you a method for achieving the illusion of intricately sculpted tucks that depends on one of the simplest elements in sewing: bias-cut fabric strips. The strips are folded in half and individually applied in stepped layers onto a foundation fabric.

Use this dramatic effect in all-over designs, or confine it to one area of a garment. Like the grooves on a column, these faux tucks may run in straight, parallel lines, but they are at their best when worked into eye-catching curves and braided details and used to conceal garment seams.

This is an elegant detail for everyday garments as well as glamorous special-occasion wear. You can apply the tucks to fabric yardage, or you can strategically stitch them onto a garment foundation.

My version of the technique that is taught at fashion-design schools is much simpler, more easily controlled, and gives a cleaner finish. I’ll show you how to use this method to achieve the basic, parallel fluting effect and the “braided” fluting effect, in which the tucks are shaped into curves and their ends overlapped.

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Simple folded bias strips form a stunning and complex surface design that re-creates couture fluting. Pattern: Simplicity 4079. Fabric: Silk dupioni (MoodFabrics.com).

Stitch folded strips in parallel rows

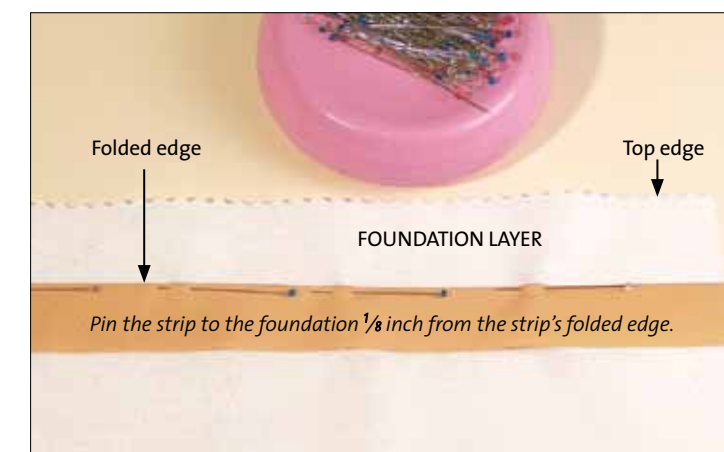
This method requires constructing a garment foundation, like an underlining layer, to which the folded bias strips are applied, creating the appearance of skillfully sewn tucks. This gives greater control over the tuck shaping and direction and supports the garment’s shape. In the basic technique, strips are stitched in even, parallel rows (vertical, horizontal, or diagonal). Choose any thin, stable fabric, such as cotton muslin, batiste, or cotton shirting, for the foundation layer. Cut the bias strips for the tucks from fabrics with body, such as silk dupioni, satin, crepe, or broadcloth. Reinforce lightweight fabrics with fusible interfacing.

1 For the bias strips, multiply the desired finished tuck width by 2, and add 2 inches for seam allowances. For example, for 1-inch-wide finished tucks, cut bias strips 4 inches wide. To cover an entire garment with tucks, triple the fabric required for the garment, and purchase a little extra just in case. Assuming a

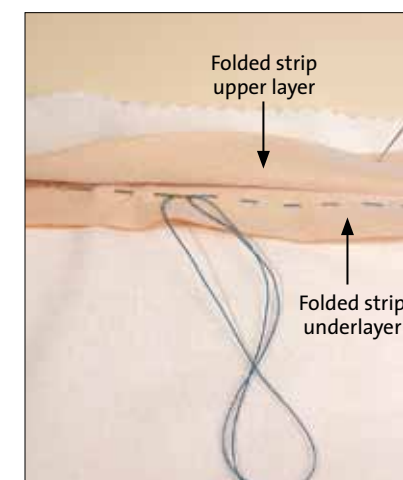
4-inch-wide bias strip, 1/2 yard of 45-inch-wide fabric yields 5 1/2 yards of bias strips, and 1/2 yard of 60-inch-wide fabric yields 7 yards of bias strips. Avoid piecing the bias strips end-to-end to prevent introducing seams into the design; because of this, the technique creates some fabric waste.

2 Cut the bias strips. Fold each strip in half lengthwise, wrong sides together, and press, stretching slightly.

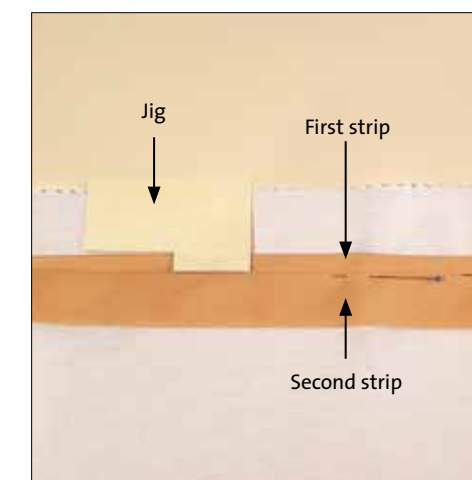
3 Position the first folded strip onto the foundation layer. In the samples shown, the folds point up, so they are applied from the top down. For folds pointing toward the garment’s lower edge, work from the bottom up. Pin 1/8 inch away from the fold. The strips are applied like shingles, with each one lapping the preceding strip’s raw edges.



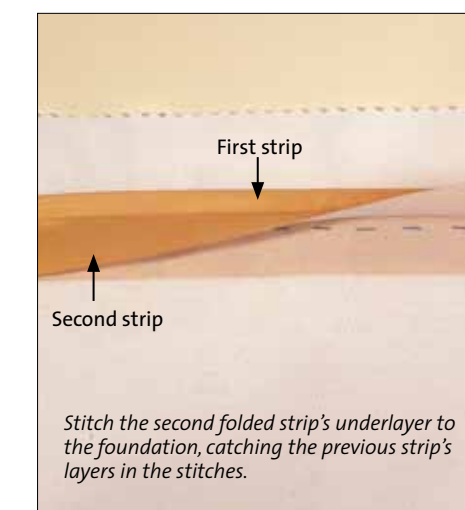
4 Lift the strip’s upper layer. With a single strand of thread and a hand-sewing needle, sew a running stitch through the strip’s underlayer and foundation fabric, stitching 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch away from the fold.



5 A “jig” cut from cardstock helps keep the spacing between the strips’ folded edges consistent. Use a jig or a seam gauge to position the second strip atop the preceding one. Pin the second strip 1/8 inch from its fold.



6 Stitch through the strip’s underlayer, the previous strip, and the foundation. Repeat this process with the subsequent tucks, until you’ve covered the foundation. To finish, see step 6 on page 23.



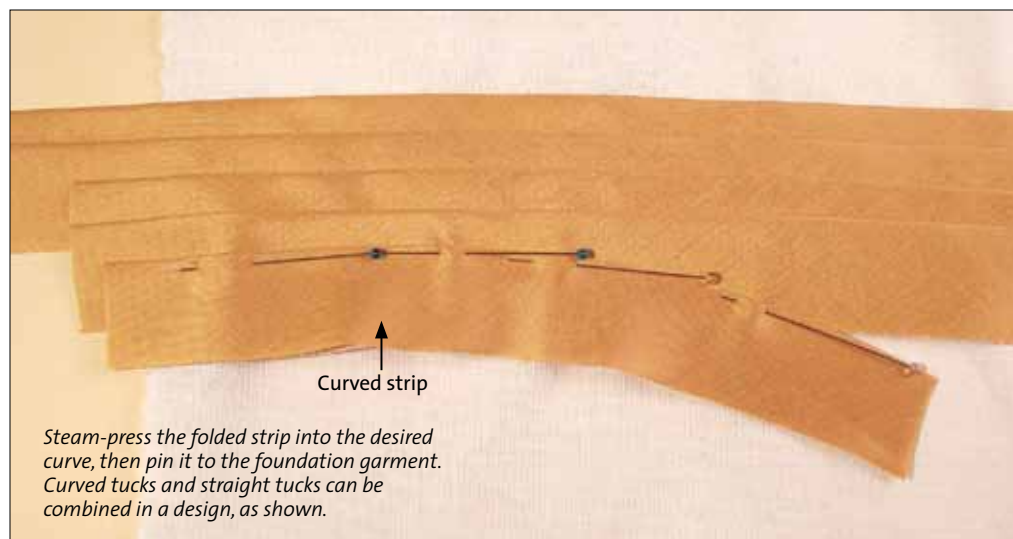
Sculpt folded strips into curves

For the curved effect, the folded strips are shaped by steam-pressing before they are stitched to the foundation. You can use this variation to create a braided effect with each strip's end overlapping its neighbor in an alternating pattern, ideal for concealing

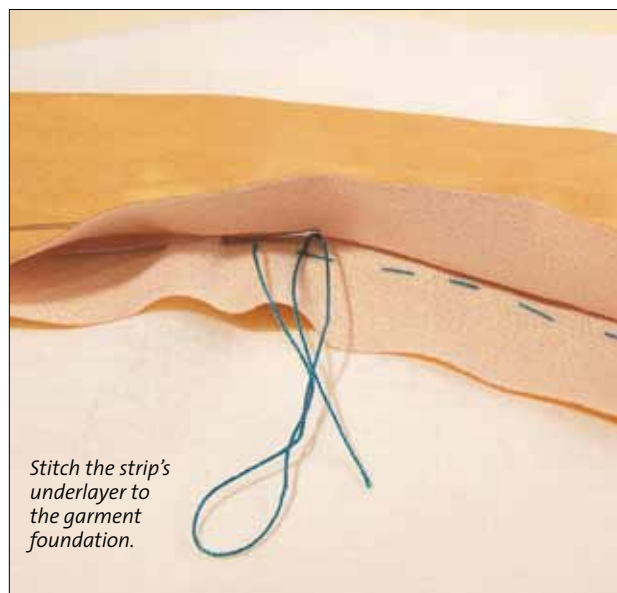
seams (as shown on the vest, page 23). You can also use it to create more complex sculpted or directional designs that run to a garment edge (also on the vest, page 23). In addition to working vertically, the braided variation requires working from side to side.

1 Plan the curved tuck design for the best results. Make a paper template of the garment by copying the pattern without its seam allowances, cutting out the pieces, taping them together at the stitching lines, and drawing the design. To conceal garment seams with the braided effect, first plot the tuck positions at the seamlines. Transfer either the complete design or simple reference lines onto the assembled garment foundation with a fabric pen or pencil.

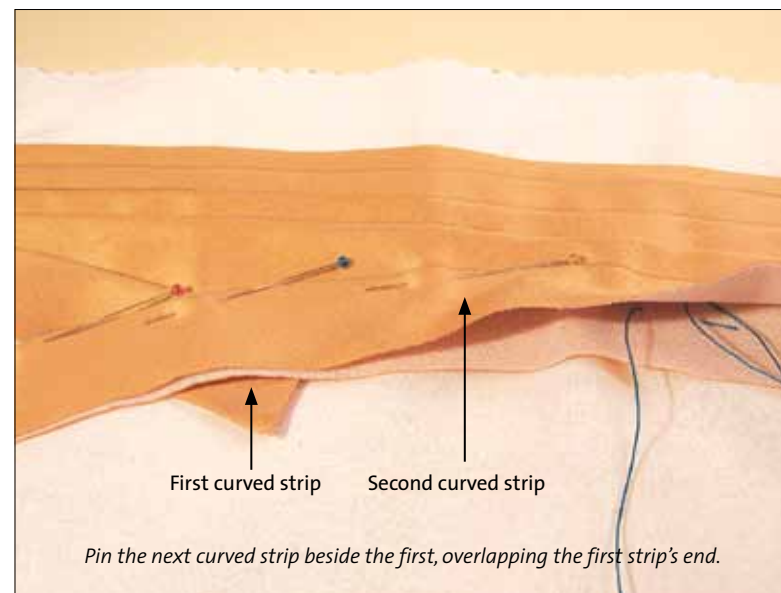
2 Prepare the fabric strips as directed in step 2 on page 21. Use your template as a guide to steam-press the folded strips into the desired curve, stretching gently. Then, pin the curved strip onto the foundation, close to the strip's folded edge.



3 Lift the strip's top layer, and hand-stitch its underlayer to the foundation 1/8 inch to 1/4 inch from the folded edge. Steam the work, and smooth it by hand to eliminate any bubbling.



4 For the braided effect, you now begin working on alternating sides. Pin the second folded strip next to the first one, overlapping the first strip's end. Hand-stitch the second strip's underlayer to the foundation as before. Again, steam the work, and smooth it by hand.



5 After stitching each curved strip, trim the excess fabric from its bottom layer. Also, trim the previous strip's end to reduce bulk. Continue to apply and trim curved strips in the same way to complete your design.



6 Once the final strip is sewn in place, stitch across its bottom edge to secure its top layer. Then, baste around the garment's edges within the seam allowance and trim off all excess strip ends. The garment foundation's wrong side shows the running stitches that secure the strips, so you must line the garment to conceal and protect the stitches.



This elegant vest illustrates three of the effects described. The basic technique creates the parallel tucks at the shoulders; the sculpted effect creates the curved tucks throughout the body; and the braided effect creates the overlapping design on the vest's right side (as worn).

WEB **extra**

For a tutorial on making the frog closure shown on the vest, visit ThreadsMagazine.com.

Photos: (p. 20) Jack Deutsch, stylist: Jessica Saal, hair and makeup: Patrycja for Halley Resources; (p. 23, right) Sloan Howard; all others, Kenneth D. King. Styling credits: top—BCBG (Macys.com), earrings—Robert Lee Morris (Macys.com), pants—Calvin Klein (Macys.com)