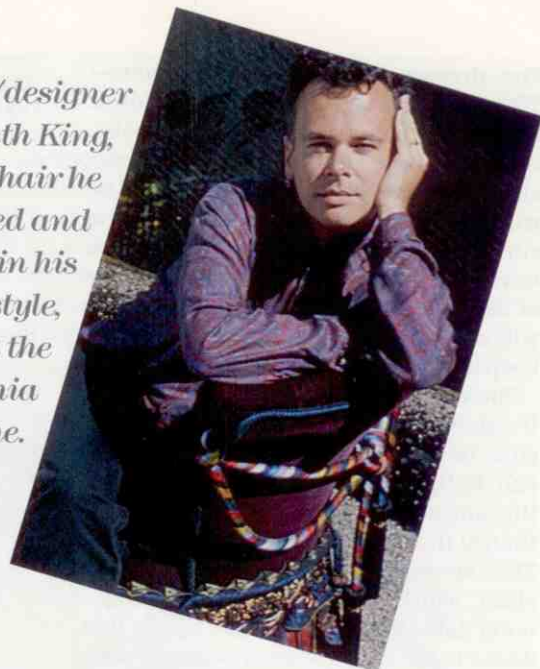


*Author/designer
Kenneth King,
on a chair he
embellished and
upholstered in his
signature style,
takes in the
California
sunshine.*



no matter how glamorous it looks, a strapless dress that the wearer feels she's about to spill out of is nothing but a nightmare. Not only should she be able to raise her arms in the garment without incident, she also shouldn't have to spend the evening pulling it up. I engineer the strapless garments I make around the idea that if they don't stay up, they won't be worn. Here's a step-by-step and layer-by-layer look at how I make a bustier or strapless dress that you can wear without worrying. You can use my techniques to make any strapless close-fitting garment, whether a skirt is attached to it or not.

The key idea is that the fashion fabric is just along for the ride. It does nothing to hold the garment together or in place. The fashion fabric is simply the top, visible layer of a precisely fitted, very sturdy corset, constructed inside the bodice or bustier, out of boning and additional fabric layers, as shown in the drawing on the facing page. This eliminates the need for foundation garments, and also eliminates the stress normally put on the fashion fabric.

Adjusting the pattern

Typically, patterns for strapless garments have princess seams over the bust and in back, although you can work with darted bodices as well. In either case, for the engineering to work properly, the bodice has to fit quite snugly, so start by making a muslin to check the fit. The muslin needs to have the same shaping and stiffening details as the finished garment, but disregard any facings included in the pattern, as these will be replaced with the lining layers.

Establishing the waistline—I have a standard flat-pattern correction I make to all strapless patterns before making the muslin, but after I've made any other flat-pattern changes that may be needed to adapt the pattern to the client's measurements. To ensure that the garment doesn't feel like it's shifting or slipping down in front, reposition the waistline (by drawing a new one on a waist-length pattern, or by slashing and spreading a long-line pattern) so that the new waistline is lower than the old one by $\frac{7}{8}$ in. in front, $\frac{5}{8}$ in. at the sides, and $\frac{3}{8}$ in. at center back.

For a waist-length garment, this will be the actual waistline. Make the muslin, easing on the twill tape and tacking boning (both described below) to the outside of the muslin before it's tried on. Have the wearer move around and bend at the waist, and then add or subtract length if necessary.

For a long-line garment, make the muslin, add boning and easing, and have the wearer fasten a piece of elastic (snug, but not tight) around her waist, on top of the muslin. Then have her bend from the waist side to side and front to back. The elastic will settle at the actual waistline. Mark this onto the muslin and transfer it to the pattern, then to the underlining pieces on either length garment. We'll install a waistband inside the garment so that the bottom edge of the band is positioned to correspond with the actual waistline. When worn, the waistband will find the actual waist and stay there.

You'll need two patterns—Because the outer, fashion layers have to fit around the body plus the inner, foundation layers, they need to be slightly larger in circumference. You can make two separate

pattern sets now, or alter the original adjusted pattern after you've used it to cut the inner layers. In either case, the outer layers have to be enlarged by a total of $\frac{3}{4}$ in. around the figure to accommodate the extra fabric. Here's how to do it:

Since the pattern is typically for only half the garment, you need to add only $\frac{3}{8}$ in., distributed equally among all the pieces. On each pattern piece draw a line near the center parallel to the grainlines, slash, then spread each piece so the total spread on all pieces equals $\frac{3}{8}$ in.

Unless you plan to add piping around the outer edges, as I often do, you'll also want to make the outer-layer pattern slightly longer at each finished edge so that it conceals the lining underneath. Add $\frac{1}{8}$ in. to each of these seamlines before cutting the outer layers. Use $\frac{5}{8}$ -in. seam allowances throughout.

Button openings need flies and boning—As described on p. 56, I add boning to both sides of a button closure, so I need to allow at least $\frac{5}{8}$ in. (for the boning's width) to each side beyond the center lines where the buttons and buttonhole ends will be. If you don't add boning, the bodice's tight fit will create unsightly gapping and strain lines at each button. Zipper closures don't need boning because they distribute the strain equally along their full length, as boning does, but you must be sure to use a metal zipper (plastic ones aren't strong enough) and a lapped construction.

I add a fly so that skin won't be visible through the buttonholes. I make a flap the length of the opening from two layers of lining and one layer of woven interfacing, and catch the flap in the seam of the underlap, or button, side. □