

Shirred drama

Draw velvet into intense texture

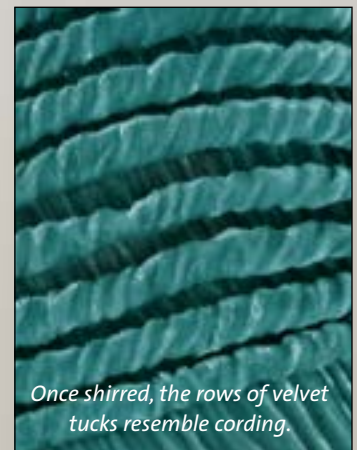
Nothing inspires embellishment ideas like a trip to an exhibition of vintage clothing. Every incredible garment whispers, “They don’t make them like they used to.” But by no means does that suggest that the wonderful techniques of bygone eras are out of your reach.

The silk velvet exterior of the stunning 1930s cape at left, combined with a silk charmeuse lining, offers the perfect tactile experience for bare arms and shoulders. Shirring along rows of horizontal tucks creates vertical gathers that enhance the velvet’s natural sheen and texture. Happily, this rich effect is possible to replicate.

We’ll show you how to re-create the sequence of tucks used on the inspiration garment. Once you master the technique, you can create any pattern of shirred tucks you’d like. This treatment works best for garments with ultra-simple lines.

Judith Neukam is Threads’ senior technical editor.

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Once shirred, the rows of velvet tucks resemble cording.

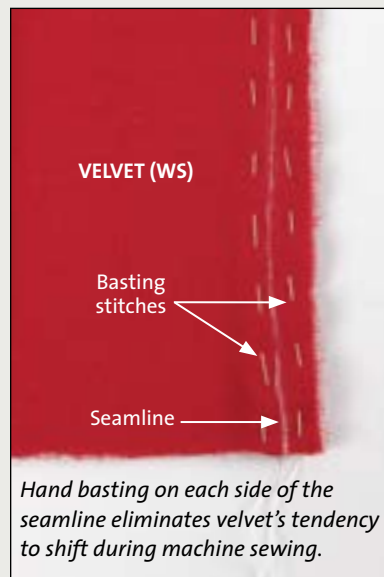
Create Shirred Furrows

To create this textured effect in velvet yardage, first sew parallel rows of tucks on the fabric's cross-grain. Then pull up the bobbin threads to shirr them, just as you would gather any other material. Start with three times the length and 20 to 30 percent more width than the garment requires, and tuck and shirr enough yardage to accommodate the garment. Once complete, use the textured yardage for garments with simple lines and few seams, and avoid cutting through the tucks. It's perfect for working a garment in the round, such as a skirt, or to reproduce the inspiration capelet.

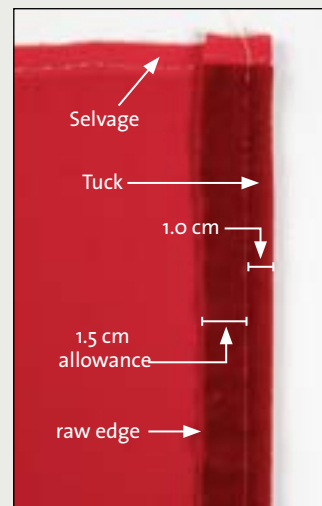
SEW ROWS OF TUCKS

The capelet has several sets of tucks spaced 6.0 cm apart: a set of twelve along its hem, two sets of five across its body, and four along the shoulder line. To re-create the capelet's sequence of tucks, make the tucks 1.0 cm deep and space them 1.0 cm apart. Use seam guides and a quilting guide to maintain constant tuck widths and alignment.

1 If necessary, sew panels of velvet together to make the fabric wide enough to accommodate the intended garment before applying this technique. Fight velvet crawl by hand basting through the fabric layers along both sides of the seamline, then machine-stitch along the seamline. Or use a temporary adhesive spray to affix the edges, right sides together, before stitching.

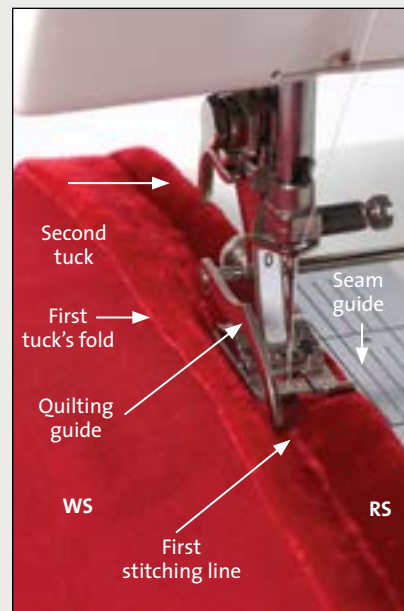


2 Set your machine's stitch length to 2.5 mm to 3.0 mm. Make tucks on the velvet's cross-grain. Start at one cut edge of the velvet. To make the first tuck, fold 2.5 cm of the velvet to the fabric's wrong side. Stitch 1.0 cm from the fold, leaving a 1.5-cm allowance outside the seam. The raw edge will be caught in the second tuck.

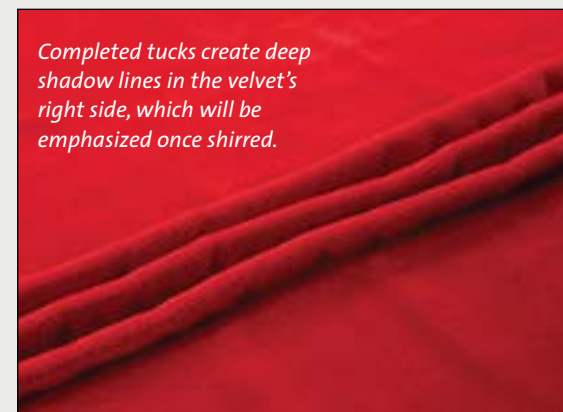


3 Fold the first tuck to the fabric's wrong side. To form the second tuck, extend the folded edge by 2.0 cm from the first stitching line. Follow your machine's quilting guide and seam guides. If your machine's seam guide doesn't show centimeters, use a piece of painter's tape to mark 1.0 cm from the needle. Stitch the second tuck 1.0 cm from the first stitching line, catching the first tuck's raw edge. This creates a hem for the yardage.

After making each tuck, fold it away from the needle, measure the next tuck, and sew it. If replicating the capelet's tuck sequence, make 12 tucks in this first section.



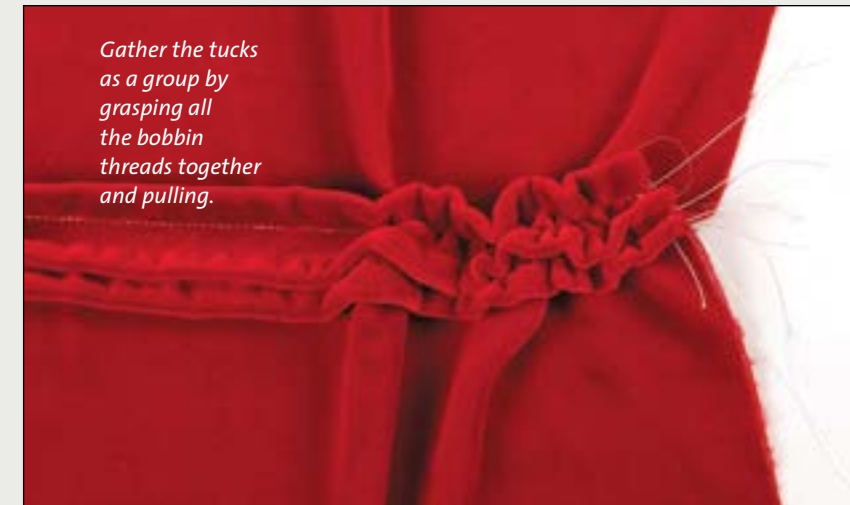
4 To continue the capelet's tuck sequence, measure 6.0 cm from tuck no. 12. Make five 1.0-cm tucks spaced 1.0 cm apart. Measure 6.0 cm from the fifth tuck in the set, and sew a second set of five 1.0-cm tucks. Continue the sequence by measuring 6.0 cm from the last tuck in the second five-tuck set, and make a set of four tucks. Alternatively, space and group tucks as desired.



GATHER THE TUCKS

Shirring the tucked velvet is the key to creating this luxurious texture. Because the tucks run on the fabric's cross-grain, the shirring folds run on the straight grain, giving the yardage an excellent drape and movement. The fabric is so opulent that it doesn't take much for it to make a simple garment spectacular.

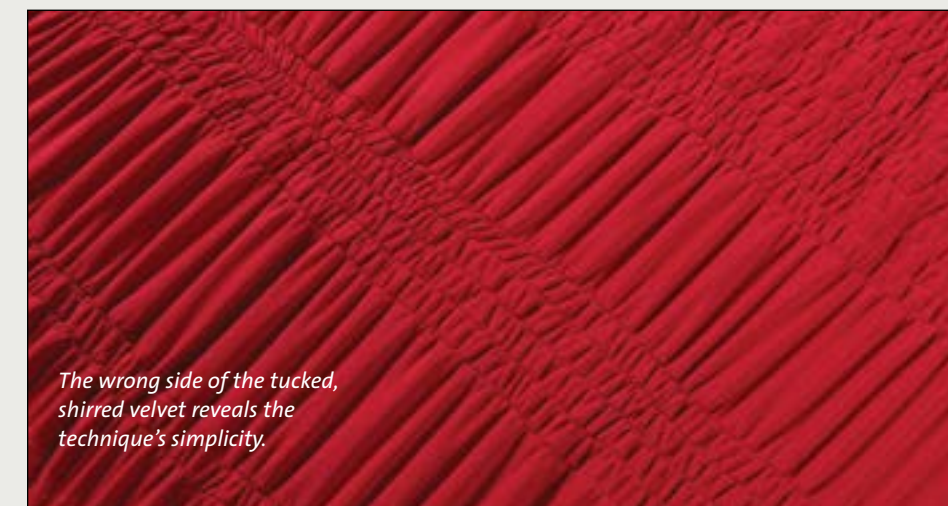
1 When you have sewn all the tucks, knot each set of threads along one edge. Pull the bobbin threads from the opposite end to gather the stitching for a shirred effect. Pull the threads tighter for deeper shirring and looser for less depth and fewer straight-grain gathers.



2 Tie off each bobbin thread once you've achieved the desired shirred effect. It's best not to cut the completed yardage. Instead, use it to work a skirt in the round by adding a separate waistband. Or add a yoke to reproduce our inspiration garment. Use the first tuck as the garment hem.



Photo: (p. 23) Jack Deutsch, all others, Sloan Howard, Capelet courtesy of Western Costume Company



Tip

IT'S ALL IN THE FABRIC. Silk velvet—which frequently has a rayon pile—is ideal for this treatment, and it's readily available in many colors. A less supple velvet will not achieve the same effect, although a panne velvet may come close.