

BONUS CHAPTER

THE CORSETMAKING REVOLUTION:

The Next Step

Adding complexity: fit

In writing the [New Corset Pattern Drafting Masterclass](#) it has been important to keep it simple, both for those who are fairly new to drafting and to demonstrate the principles clearly. I used a simple historical pattern as a base example, and I used little more than front and back bust, waist and hips and the bust-to-waist measurement to mark out the framework for the pattern.

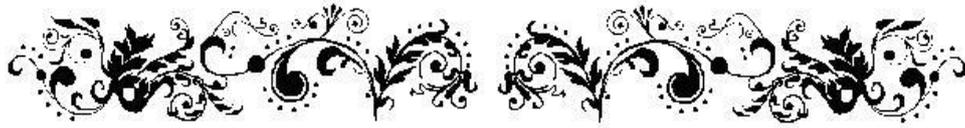
However, if you're going for a more advanced level, I fully expect that you'll already be excited to see where you can expand this method to add levels of complexity of your own that will improve the results even more. Here are some suggestions:

Underbust – using front and back underbust measurements will help draw the corset in under the bust level; on ladies who have a significant difference from bust to waist, this will help get the curve right between the two.

Additional hip measurements – hips come in a remarkable variety of sizes and shapes; by adding an “upper upper hip” or a “mid hip” you'll give yourself more markers to work from when smoothing the curve in a way that imitates the original intention of the pattern.

A pattern for each side – as with any pattern for a non-symmetrical figure, creating a separate pattern for the left and right sides will prove useful, providing the centre fronts and centre backs are aligned between the two patterns!

This is not only useful when considering extremes of asymmetry, such as scoliosis: consider trying it for women whose breasts are different sizes – a remarkably common issue. If the lady tends to have problems with bra fitting, you will be likely to find this useful. When measuring the front bust, simply note where the tape lands on the centre front point, and be prepared to play with the pattern and the mock-up in order to achieve a pleasing shape as well as a good fit. She will appreciate the complexity of your challenge due to her own experiences of the issue, so don't be afraid to fit, fit and fit again!



BONUS CHAPTER

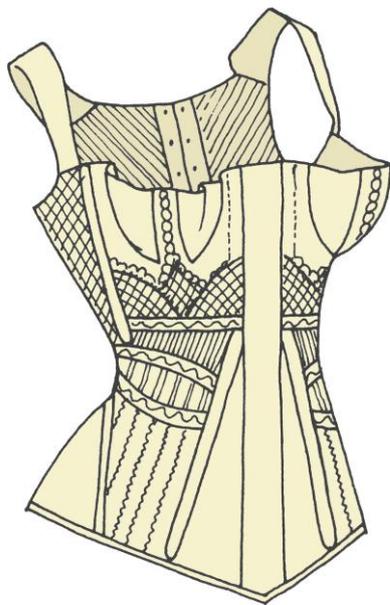
Adding complexity: design

Not every corset pattern has five or six easy, hourglass pattern pieces that run from bust to hip unbroken.

Bust gussets

When contemplating a gusseted corset style for a particular body shape, it is worth considering why a corset would have added bust gussets at all. They're fiddly to draft and fit and are difficult to insert neatly, so there must be overwhelming reasons to use them.

My observation has been that bust gussets were not so much a nineteenth century fashion statement, but a design necessity required for fit.

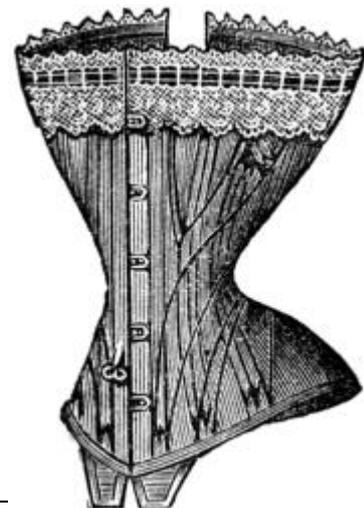


Bust gussets are a device by which the bust section is made significantly bigger than the rest of the garment, particularly the waist. This can help a corset design that has few pieces, such as the Regency and transitional corsets in which gussets first appeared (left).

Corsets with gussets in the later Victorian era are very significantly curved out from waist to bust, suggesting that the gussets were a fitting solution rather than a fashion, and this should be considered when fitting: a small chested lady is likely to be served better by a corset with shaped pieces and no gussets, but a large-busted woman will find them very helpful.

Finally, in the Edwardian era bust gussets give no extra curve at all; they are simply a device to skew the rest of the pattern pieces into that diagonal shape that produced the S-bend figure (right).

Draft gussets for bust shaping in this tutorial by including them into the pattern draft as if they were ordinary pieces that simply have zero width at the waist and hip. Place the fullest part of the gussets at bust level, thinning out to nothing towards the waist.



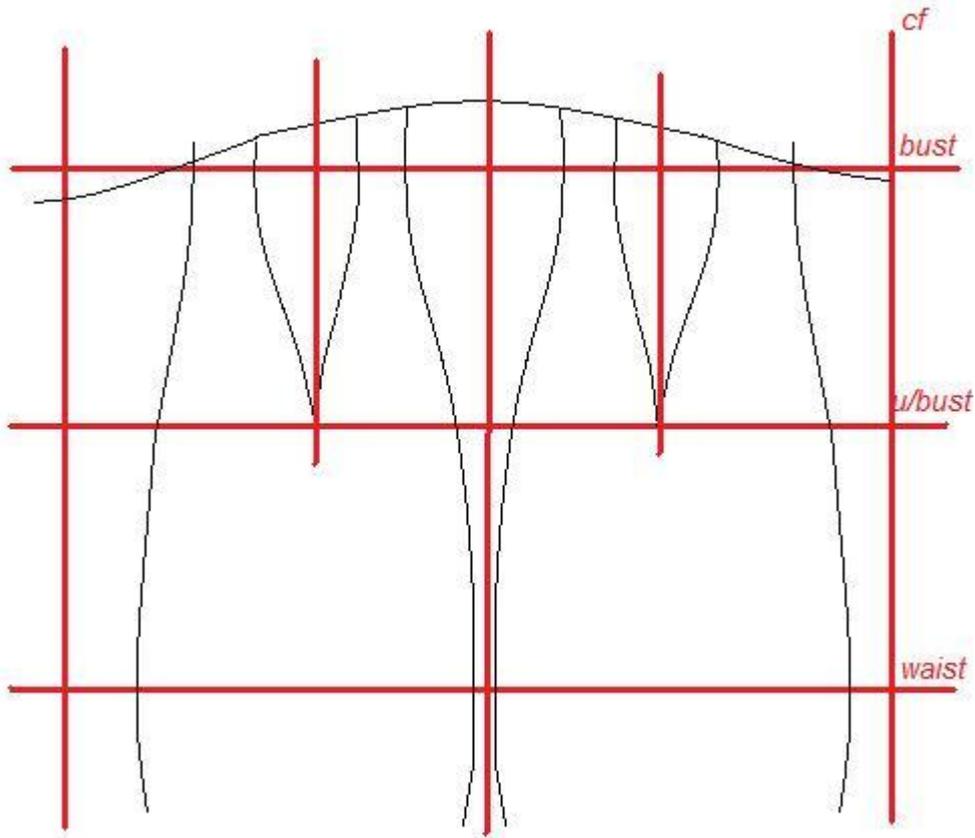
**THE CORSETMAKING REVOLUTION:
THE NEXT STEP**

[www.FOUNDATIONSRevealed.com](http://wwwFOUNDATIONSRevealed.com)

by Cathy Hay



BONUS CHAPTER



How long should they be? Well, their length will be dictated by the distance from the fullest part of the bust (the bust line on your pattern), over the breast to the underbust. Obviously, at underbust level the need for the extra width given by the gusset is no longer required, so the gusset ends there. (Alternatively, make them longer to make the curve from bust to waist smoother – experiment!)

Measure down from the bust line to find this length, and use a central anchor line from which to find the width of the gusset either side.

Notice on the original pattern that bust gussets are not always symmetrical – they may curve more on one side than the other. Again, working with the mock-up will finalise the fit.

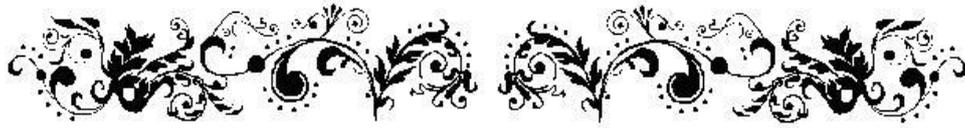
If you are drafting a pattern for a very large busted lady and your pattern pieces are forming very pronounced curves from waist to bust, consider “robbing Peter to pay Paul”, as described in the main instructions – why not take the excess and *make* a gusset or two? Then your seams will become a lot smoother in shape, the corset will

**THE CORSETMAKING REVOLUTION:
THE NEXT STEP**

[www.FOUNDATIONSREVEALED.com](http://wwwFOUNDATIONSREVEALED.com)

by Cathy Hay

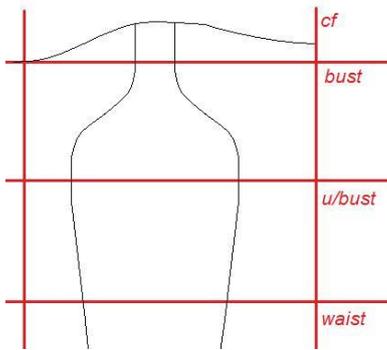
3



BONUS CHAPTER

be easier to construct, and the curve of the bust will be more smoothly accommodated by multiple slightly curved seams.

Here is the first corset I made, some years ago, for my partner Demi. As you can see, I only used two (very badly) curved seams, which looked a lot like the diagram below, over her very generous bust. Can you see how a couple of gussets and an extra piece, as in the diagram on the previous page, would have spread the curve and improved the fit?

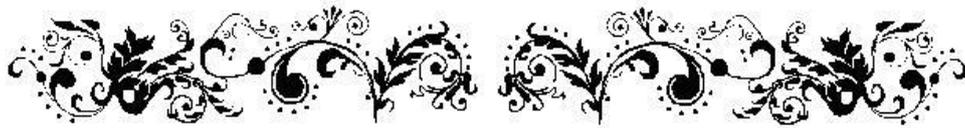


Hip gores

Like bust gussets, hip gores form extra shaped pieces, covering parts of the hip area only, helping to create shape in a figure with prominent hip spring (a large difference between waist and hip). But how to draft them?

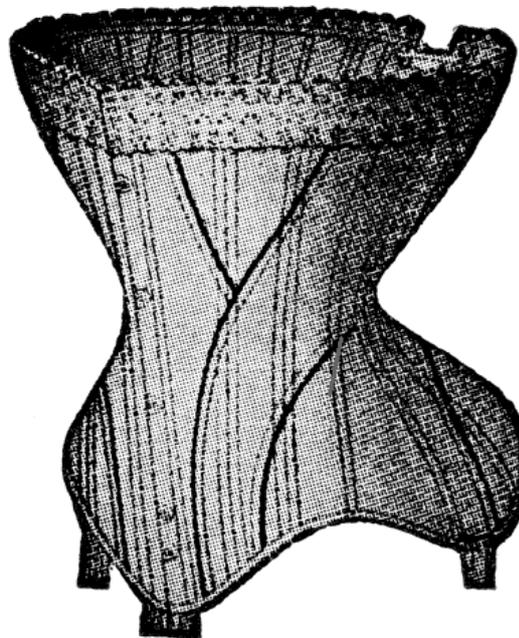
Variety precludes me from being able to provide a single method to cover them all, but briefly, consider trying the following:

1 – Some hip gussets look exactly the same as bust gussets, being inserted within or between the corset pieces to improve the shape. These can be treated just the same as upside-down bust gussets.

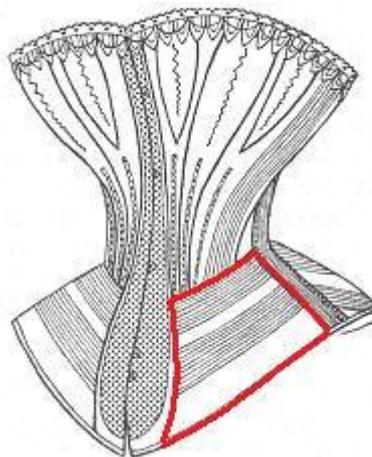
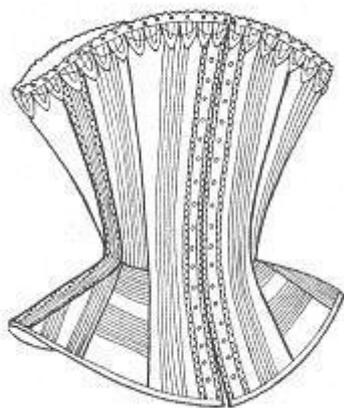


BONUS CHAPTER

2 – Some pieces cover the whole hip area, as in this Edwardian shape (right). These can be drafted in much the same way as bust gussets above, treating them as a piece that simply diminishes to 0% width at the waist. You'll need to play with the shape to develop one that fits well, but don't be afraid to wait for the mock-up stage to get it just right.

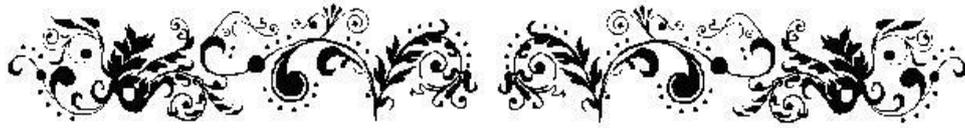


3 – Some hip pieces form large, geometrically shaped corded sections, stretching across large swathes of the hip area (below).



This style, for example, seen in *Corsets and Crinolines*, has a large corded section across the front hip, as well as corded sections at the back hip.

As a first-timer trying to reproduce this section, I would try tackling this shape by drafting the corset as if it were a more “normal” shape, with pieces that extend from bust through to hip.



BONUS CHAPTER

At mock-up stage, I would mark out the section as I have done on the drawing, then take another piece of fabric and “drape” it over the top, smoothing and pinning over this section, and then replacing this section with the new piece before fitting again.

Since the new piece is a single flat piece of fabric, it will fit into the gap differently than the original pieces did – you may find that it needs some tweaking. But doing it this way will allow you to compare the two methods and assess why such a section was designed this way. Cording the piece as in the original will allow you to ascertain why a piece was made this way and what advantage it gives, and suggest conclusions for what types of figure would be benefitted by this approach.

Other variations

Bust gussets, corded sections and hip gores make many historical patterns complex and interesting for the experienced maker. Edwardian shapes require S-shaped slivers that seem to defy all logic, and at the other end of the spectrum, pre-Regency stays were made in only a few blocky, geometrical pieces that seem to bear little relation to real bodies.

In theory, the method given in the [New Corset Pattern Drafting Masterclass](#) should work for them all, with adaptations. I invite both intrepid and experienced corsetmakers to “have a go” at adapting the drafting method to more complex styles, with a view to perhaps developing further instalments of this Masterclass in future.

Best wishes to you, and may all your creative dreams come true!

CATHY HAY

Nottingham, UK
September 2009

**THE CORSETMAKING REVOLUTION:
THE NEXT STEP**

wwwFOUNDATIONSREVEALED.com

by Cathy Hay

6