

## A HEAD FOR HATS



**Linda Barker, 49, lives in London with her husband Chris and their 18-year-old daughter Jessica.**

"There's something special about a hat. When you put one on, you instantly feel different. I don't wear a lot of them, but when I do, I always feel fantastic.

I've made clothes for as long as I can remember, but nothing could have prepared me for the graft that goes into making a hat. I was taught by Prudence, a hat designer for Vivienne Westwood and Gucci. Her tiny London studio was full of previous creations and there were shelves full of wooden hat blocks of all shapes and sizes.

The hat took a full day to make. We were copying a large, floppy felt hat that Prudence had seen in a magazine, and I chose a vibrant peacock blue

material to make it in. The hat was made of two parts – the crown and the brim; we pinned the fabric around two different wooden blocks as a foundation for each. We started with the brim, marking an exact circle out of the felt with tacking stitch before cutting it. We spent the rest of the morning bent over a boiling kettle, using the steam to loosen the fabric so we could stretch it over the wooden block and secure it in place with pins, until it set solid. We did the same for the crown, this time using a block that matched the shape and size of my head.

It was very precise and hot work, and I was surprised at how much physical exertion it took to pull the fabric and push in the pins. In the afternoon, we removed the brim from its block and steamed it into a looser shape before attaching

**"I was amazed at the hard work that goes into making a hat"**

Linda Barker

**VERDICT** "I found it inspiring and would like to try again, but I'd take more time. Working with Prudence has given me a real insight into this time-honoured craft. Hats aren't just a stylish way to finish off an outfit, they are works of art in their own right."

it to the crown, using invisible stitching. I used ribbon to hide the seam and rubbed the edges of the brim with a pair of scissors to soften them. The hat fitted perfectly and I was thrilled with how it looked. I couldn't wait to show it off, so I wore it to a garden party that weekend – and was quite the centre of attention." **Linda learnt how to make her hat at [prudencemillinery.com](http://prudencemillinery.com). A 12-hour hat-making course costs £240.**