

Types of Wigs – By Heather Fleming

Unfronted “Fashion” Wig



Actor Courtney Moors models an unfronted wig

This is an “unfronted” wig. It is synthetic hair (plastic polymers), made on a machine with strips of hair called “wefting”.

Looking at this wig, you can see why it is necessary for unfronted wigs to have their hairline hidden in some way, with bangs or hair pulled to the side.

The wig is also very thick, and the hair is very shiny and unnatural looking. A lack of believable part is also common on fashion wigs.

A machine made wig with a ventilated front



Actor Amy Baldwin in a production of “The Philadelphia Story” at The Barter Theatre

This wig is also machine made. The difference is that the front edge was removed, and a piece of fine mesh was sewn on with single hairs knotted into it one at a time.

This process, called ventilating, allows for a natural looking hairline. Because the hairs are knotted in singly, the overall density is less and the direction of the hairs mimic natural growth patterns.

This wig is human hair – note the better texture – it is less shiny and has a softer, prettier wave.



This wig is entirely hand-knotted. It was built to fit the head of the actor wearing it. Hand-knotting a wig allows the maximum control over the shape and style of the wig, and leads to the most natural results.

This wig is also human hair.

Actor Suzanne Friedline in a wig built for her for
In a production of "A Christmas Story" at Actors
Theatre of Louisville

Men's Wigs



Men's wigs are notoriously difficult to produce in a natural manner. The shorter a wig gets, the less room there is to hide the understructure and the more prone the wig hair is to sticking up and poking out.

This wig, for Jane Eyre, is fully hand knotted, but built on a different foundation than the one above. Hand knotting allows this wig to flow naturally and gives it just the right amount of believable fullness

Actor John Hedges in "Jane Eyre"
at the Barter Theatre

A Toupee



A fully knotted toupee for actor Bill McNulty. Doing a toupee for the 2009 production of Dracula at Actors Theatre



Actor Mike Ostroski

Hard Front Wigs

A machine made wig with a ventilated top. This option allowed for the use of the machine made wig's elastic, stretch back to hold the wig snugly against the actor's neck, but the ventilated top provided a much more natural look. While it is rare to use a machine made back and ventilated top for a man's wig, this is an example of a successful marriage of the two



Hard front wigs are used in historical periods in which men and women alike wore wigs. The wigs of these eras were not natural and did not fool the eye. They were often elaborate and powdered white. Because they were used more like hats than fake hair, they have a solid, hard edge on the front and no attempt was made to soften the hairline in any way. The Restoration (1660-1720) and Georgian (1740-1780) are two of the most recognizable eras in which wigs were commonly worn.

These wigs were worn in a production of "The Impresario".