

About making character dolls and doll costumes

Vincent and Catherine dolls can be adapted from jointed dolls found second hand in thrift stores. These are inexpensive and fairly easily obtained.

Dolls

The image shown illustrates some of the many different sizes of mass market dolls which can be used (many made by the same manufacturer) and the varying joints and movements. Turn joints allow a complete 360 degree rotation and allow more or less lateral angle positioning (as in a hip joint). Slot bend joints allow movement along one axis only. A swivel joint allows an appendage to turn 360 degrees, but allows no lateral movement.

Basic joints for action dolls are: ball neck turn; ball shoulders turn; ball waist turn; ball turn hip joints; elbow and knee slot bend; wrist turn and slot bend, ankle slot bend. Unless otherwise stated, all dolls in the image below have these basic joints.

Dolls shown range in height from 4 1/2 inches tall (miniature action hero) to 12 inches (Ken-type martial arts).



Dolls. (l-r) Ken-type martial arts (extra swivel joint at upper arm), regular Ken (no elbow, wrist, knee or ankle joints), G.I Joe 1998, N'Sync puppet (feet and hands swivel, but do not bend, no waist swivel), wrestling character (full movement ball joint at hip which allows doll to sit cross-legged), wrestling bimbo (rare female), small action hero (full ball joint at hips, extra bend joint across fingers and toes), miniature action hero (shoulder joint turns only – no lateral movement).

Regular Ken or Barbie type dolls, without joints at elbows, knees, wrists or ankles, are not recommended. Without these joints, the doll clothing is much more difficult to make (requiring extra large openings) and dressing them is very difficult, since limbs have very limited movement. Barbie dolls, with their inhuman-like proportions, are too tall to represent a Catherine alongside a Ken – the largest of the traditional, mass market dolls.

Heads

All dolls should have a solid or semi-solid heavy plastic head, so that they can be carved and the character head formed over it with acrylic clay. Squeezable soft rubber heads cannot be used because they distort, cannot be shaped, and clay will not adhere. Older manufacture dolls are best. A head could be made from scratch by forming acrylic clay over a round wooden bead (the bead opening is needed to fit a peg into the doll neck opening). Some kinds of plastic, such as brittle/hard types, will also not accept acrylic clay. Clay will also not adhere to ceramic heads. Since acrylic clay has to be baked at 275F, very thin plastic heads are not recommended.

Hair

Hair for any doll is added after the acrylic clay head is baked. Wool makes the best hair, and if separated into strands and steamed, is very soft and natural-looking. Small teenaged or baby soft-bodied Ty dolls, also found easily in thrift stores, have hair in colours that can be used for Vincent and Catherine heads. The hair is sewn onto a soft scalp piece. The scalp can be separated from the rest of the head and additional hair moved from areas where it is not needed. Alternatively, Ty doll hair can be removed from the doll scalp and woven into a matrix, such as the fine plastic netting used to hold the three pack garlics sold in supermarkets. This can then be hot-glued onto the doll head.

Costumes

Dolls costumes must be custom-made to fit the doll used. Even among G I Joe-type dolls there are differences in length of leg, neck, shoulders, feet and musculature. The same is true for Ken-type action dolls.

Costume Fabrics

Because male action dolls have musculature in the legs and arms, it is best to use stretchy fabrics. Fabrics should be very fine weave so that costumes are closer to scale. Old socks tops make excellent Vincent pants and sweaters. The upper finished edge of the sock becomes the waistband for either pants or sweater.

Leather was a major part of the B&B costumes. Any leather used should be thin. Gloves, hats, purses and fashion jackets all have suitable leather. These can be found in thrift stores. Leather should be very supple. Costume pieces should be whip-stitched together, as in the original costumes. A leather needle threaded with heavy cotton button or linen thread works well

Crocheted or Knitted Dolls

There are several Amigurumi doll (crochet/knit) patterns online. The size of the finished doll body will depend on what size hook/needle and weight of yarn you use. If a very small steel crochet hook and sock yarn is used, the result will be a tiny (4" tall) doll body.

Examples of all these dolls made by Angie into Vincent, Catherine, and tunnel people, can be seen in the Treasure Chambers Museum – Statues and Dolls category.