

Houdini Socks— *Ancient architecture via a new pathway*

by Cat Bordhi

The inserted heel sock is probably the oldest and simplest of all sock architectures. For centuries, individuals have knit a tube with a toe at one end, then snipped a stitch and unraveled sideways to open a space to knit the missing heel. Elizabeth Zimmermann called it an “afterthought heel,” and today’s popular short-row heel actually produces the same architecture via a different sequence, with the heel knit in place rather than added later.

The Houdini socks offer another approach to this ancient architecture. Houdini socks begin with a sock footprint – a foot-shaped tube closed on both ends – with no apparent way in, and no leg. Fortunately, you don’t have to be Houdini to understand what happens next.

2 Houdini mercurial colorband socks

finished size:

woman's small (medium, large)
midfoot 7 (8 1/4, 9 1/2)" / 18 (21, 24)
cm; length is customized

yarns:

Blue Moon Fiber Arts Socks That
Rock® mediumweight, 380 yds, 5.5 oz.
Shown in main color (MC) Tanzanite,
contrast color (CC) Farmhouse; 380
yds MC; about 15 yds CC

needles:

Size 2 US (3.0 mm), or any size you
need to obtain correct gauge: may
use dpn's, a pair of 24" circulars, or
one 40" circular. Important: Rnd 3 of
Mercurial Colorbands must be worked
on a needle with a well-tapered,
pointed tip; an Addi Lace needle
is ideal. I recommend using these
needles for the entire sock.

gauge:

30 sts and 40 rnds = 4" / 10 cm in
stockinette st in the rnd

Houdini Sock Basics:

- Begin by making a "footprint." Starting at one end, knit a toe, continue up the foot, then work a toe in reverse.
- The toe in reverse begins when the foot is long enough that adding another toe (in reverse) produces total foot length.
- To avoid gaps and misbehaving stitches at the corners of the opening, the unraveling stops 2 stitches before the ends of each pick-up needle. The yarn remains in these stitches and keeps these stress points very even and secure.
- The start of round for the leg begins at center back, to avoid compromising the corners with an extra woven in end.
- A standard toe / heel can be rotated a quarter-circle and still fit just as well. This comes in handy with handpaints, because you can position the pooling colors as you like (under the foot, or centered on top, for instance). Once you've chosen the top of your sock, proceed to picking up leg stitches.

Sock is worked entirely in MC except for Rnd 2 of Mercurial Colorbands.

Instructions for Judy's Magic Cast-On, the brainchild of Judy Becker, can be found at knitty.com or on Youtube.com (type Bordhi into the search box and scroll to her tutorial on the cast-on).

CAST ON:

Work the cast on with 2 dpns, 2 circs, or both ends of 1 long circ. Using Judy's Magic Cast-On (or another invisible cast-on, such as the figure-8), cast 9 (11, 13) sts alternately onto each of 2 parallel needles — 18 (22, 26) sts total. One needle is instep; other is sole. (If using 1 long circ, keep instep on 1 cable section and sole on other section.)

Knit 1 round. If using dpns, move instep to 2 dpns and sole to 2 dpns. It is essential to always know which sts are instep and which are sole; if you want to shift sts from dpn to dpn you must mark sole/instep intersections with markers.

Increase rounds:

Rnd 1: (instep) Kfb, k until 2 instep sts rem, kfb, k1, (sole) kfb, k until 2 sole sts rem, kfb, k1. (4 sts inc)

Rnd 2: Knit.

Repeat increase Rnds 1 and 2 until st total is 46 (54, 62). Measure and record length of toe (from cast-on to needles). Measure and record desired foot length. Subtract toe length from foot length and record.

Knit even until length equals final recorded measurement. The heel you are about to work is the same size as the toe and will complete the "footprint."

Decrease rounds:

Rnd 1: (instep) K1, ssk, k until 3 instep sts rem, k2tog, k1, (sole) k1, ssk, k until 3 sole sts rem, k2tog, k1. (4 sts dec)

Rnd 2: Knit.

Repeat decrease Rnds 1 and 2 until st total is 18 (22, 26).

Close the end:

Method 1: Kitchener the 2 sets of 9 (11, 13) sts together and weave in end.

Method 2: Place each set of 9 (11, 13) sts on a holder or string. After leg is done, turn sock inside out and join using a 3-needle bind-off.

LEG OPENING:

Note: When picking up sts, pick up right leg of each st; this insures they will be mounted conventionally when you begin knitting. Decide which end of footprint is heel (starting toe and closing toe are not identical — you have a choice). Lay sock flat as shown in figure 1.

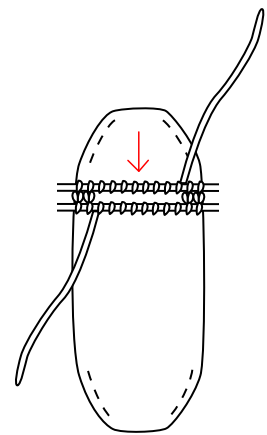


figure 1

Slide a needle (dpn or circ) through a row of 23 (27, 31) sts located 5 rows before row that began heel shaping. Moving towards the heel, skip 1 row and slide dpn or circ (if using 1 long circ, its other end) through next row of 23 (27, 31) sts. Snip center strand of skipped row. Unravel toward each side, stopping before pulling yarn from last 2 sts on needles (see figure 1). Tuck unraveled ends inside sock; you will weave them in when sock is done.

Beginning of rnd is at center back (place marker if using circular needles). Rearrange picked up sts as follows so you can begin knitting here (see red arrow in figure 1). If using dpns, divide each set of 23 (27, 31) sts on 2 dpns, and begin at center back. If using 2 circulars or 1 long circular, slide half of back 23 (27, 31) sts onto other tip so both tips emerge at center back; begin knitting here. Knit even for about 1" / 2.5 cm. After working first few rnds you may want to rearrange sts on needle(s) so sock is in profile as shown in figure 2.



ANSWER THIS RIDDLE:

*What is done last but comes first,
and changes everything?*

Mercurial Colorbands

by Cat Bordhi

Imagine a 1-stitch, 3-row pattern that can produce many unique narrow colorbands. The first 2 rows are merely knit, with the 3rd row alone exerting uncanny power to reorient the knit rows in beautiful ways. And the 3rd row appears before the knit rows as well as after them. At left is a sampler of 7 possibilities using 3 colors. Red is limited to row 1, blue to row 2, and gold to row 3. If the colors move, the variations multiply. Experiment with handpaints for lovely surprises (see this issue's Houdini Mercurial Colorband Socks on page 2.). Note: Be sure to knit with relaxed tension in row 2, and use a needle with a long, tapered tip and fine point, like Addi Turbo Lace Needles. Otherwise row 3 is hard to manage. Row 2 may also be worked with a slightly lighter weight yarn if desired.



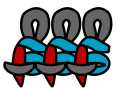
Row 1 is red, row 2 is blue, and row 3 is gold.



Row 1 is black, row 2 is blue, and row 3 is gold.



Row 1 is red, row 2 is black, and row 3 is gold.



Row 1 is red, row 2 is blue, and row 3 is black.



Row 3 is worked last, but appears first and last! Rows 1 and 2 are black.



Row 2 is blue. Both sides of the blue stitches slant to the left between row 1's black dots. Rows 1 and 3 are black.



Row 1 is red, which produces dots. Rows 2 and 3 are black.



Row 3 is worked as follows: With yarn in front, slip next stitch purlwise, lift bar between stitches from back, slip both stitches purlwise onto left needle (tip to tip), and purl the 2 slipped strands together.

SOME TIPS:

If you'd like the top edge of row 3 (gold in sample on page 1) to be more visible, purl the row that follows. This pulls the gold loops into purl bumps which correspond to the gold purl bumps that frame the bottom edge of the color band.

The colorbands do stretch horizontally more than stockinette, so you must compensate for this if it matters in your design. In the Houdini Mercurial Colorband Socks I used a feather & fan-like stitch in between the bands which let them climb and fall, thus using a longer path than an even circumference. Another solution could be to decrease about 10% of the stitches before the colorband, then increase 10% after.



If you'd like to visualize what to expect with different color placements before knitting, here are a dozen models to print out and color in as you wish.