

Finishing

In needlework lingo, “finishing” refers not just to the actual act of completing your project, but also to all the little tweaks and treatments you give it to make it look its best. It takes a little extra effort to finish a project properly, but trust me—it’s time and energy well spent.

Cleaning

All the effort you put in to stitching a project shouldn’t be diminished by grubby fingermarks or dirt smudges. It goes without saying that your hands should be as clean as possible when you’re embroidering—wash them often, and try not to pet the dog too much between stitches (though that’s hard, I know). The cleaner you can keep your work, the better.

If your finished piece looks a bit dingy by the time you’ve finished off that last thread, you may want to wash it gently before sewing it into its final form or framing it. Remember that you should only wash fabrics and threads that are washable to begin with—crewelwork is not a good candidate for soapy soakings, as the wool fibers can mat together, or “felt.” If you’re washing a piece embroidered with cotton floss on cotton fabric or linen, give it a swish in a clean basin filled with cool water and a bit of mild detergent. Never scrub, just swish, then rinse well. When rinsing, never wring. Roll the piece in a clean white towel to soak up excess water, and then lay flat to dry.

Pressing

If your piece needs pressing (and unless it was done on fairly heavy fabric it probably will), first lay a piece of white terry-cloth or a clean towel on your ironing board. The loops of this fluffy fabric will help keep your embroidered stitches from being crushed by the iron. Lay your embroidery face down, then use a clean

white press cloth (a piece of flannel works well) and press with a warm iron. If necessary, you can dampen the press cloth a bit to help eliminate any wrinkles in your embroidered piece.

Framing

If you’re going to frame your embroidery, roll your finished, pressed piece onto a cardboard tube (an old wrapping paper tube works great) and take it either to a professional frame shop or get brave and find a do-it-yourself shop in your neighborhood. I framed all of the pieces in this book myself and I have to say that, after putting all the work into designing and stitching each piece, it was very satisfying to do the final work of stretching and framing them on my own, as well.

A do-it-yourself frame shop will have lots of frames for you to select from—they’ll help you measure your piece, determine how much of a border you need, weigh the pros and cons of using glass, and order or build your custom frame for you. They’ll also cut a piece of foam core to the exact size needed to fit the frame, and show you how to stretch and pin the fabric evenly around it. Once the frame is ready, they’ll also show you how to insert the embroidery, cover the back of the frame, and attach a hanging device. Easy, cheaper than professional framing, and a lot of fun, if you are a detail-oriented person who enjoys embroidering in the first place, I think you’ll like doing this part yourself, as well. I did.

Resources

Books

The history of embroidery is rich, varied, and fascinating. Much of the tradition exists only in very old illustrations and delicate, deteriorating finished pieces, stitched by humble domestic artists whose names we’ll never know. Though contemporary designers are adding to the canon, some of my favorite inspirations come from hard-to-find, almost-forgotten sources. I hope these books provide you with a starting point from which to further explore both the history and the current trends in this beautiful craft.

Historical Designs and Alphabets

Bartholm, Lis.

Scandinavian Folk Designs.

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1988.

Chapman, Suzanne E.

Early American Design Motifs.

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1974.

Fisher, Eivor.

Swedish Embroidery: Anchor Embroidery Book #2.

London, United Kingdom: Clark and Co., 1953.

Geddes, Elisabeth, and Moyra McNeill.

Blackwork Embroidery.

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1976.

Grafton, Carol Belanger, Ed.

79 Decorative Alphabets for Designers and Craftspeople.

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1981.

— . *400 Floral Motifs for Designers, Needleworkers, and Craftspeople.*

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1986.

Luciow, Johanna.

Ukrainian Embroidery.

New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold, Co., 1979.

Nichols, Marion, Ed.

Designs and Patterns for Embroiderers and Craftspeople.

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1974.

Nielsen, Edith.

Scandinavian Embroidery: Past and Present.

New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1978.

Orban-Szontagh, Madeleine.

Traditional Floral Designs and Motifs for Artists and Craftspeople.

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1989.

Szalavary, Anne.

Hungarian Folk Designs.

Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 1980.

Van Den Beukel, Dorine, Ed.

4000 Monograms.

Amsterdam, The Netherlands: The Pepin Press, 1998.

General Techniques

Bayard Marie-Noëlle.

Embroidery: Techniques and Patterns.

New York: Sterling Publishing, 2007.

Dardik, Helen.

Embroidery for Little Miss Crafty: Projects and Patterns to Create and Embellish.

Osceola, WI: Walter Foster, 2009.

Elder, Karen. *Embroidery: Techniques, Projects, Patterns, Motifs.*

New York: Clarkson Potter, 1995.

Hart, Jenny.

Embroidered Effects: Projects and Patterns to Inspire Your Stitching.

San Francisco: Chronicle, 2009.