



Blackwork Journey

Techniques

TQ0005

Notebook to Project



The Working Environment by Liz Almond

Techniques

From notebook to project - a personal voyage of discovery!

By Liz Almond of Blackwork Journey

Finding inspiration for a design should not normally be a problem, as examples of beautiful architecture and landscapes are all around us, along with a wealth of books, museums, galleries and exhibitions and the closer you look, the easier it is to identify potential projects. However, in order to turn the germ of an idea from fantasy into the reality of a stitched project all that is needed is a simple strategy and a little imagination.

I use five tools and four rules, or guidelines to help me achieve my design objectives and try to follow them with every project I undertake as they help me to keep focused.

The five tools are a:-

- *Notebook*, preferably spiral bound, so the pages can be folded back completely
- *Digital camera*, to record anything that captures my imagination
- *Clip folder with plastic sleeves* for sorting cuttings and information into groups which can be easily re-arranged.
- *Large box file* to contain oddments, from scraps of material and threads, to magazine and newspaper items which I want to keep and possibly use in the future
- *Computer* for recording and collating photographs, research and design charts.

By using these tools, either individually or collectively, I organise my research and produce a plan for the next design project.

The four rules are;

- *Think and record*

My notebook is the starting point where I explore and develop my ideas. As it is easy to forget what you have seen, it is useful to record an image. Digital cameras are probably the best means to achieve this, but if you do not have a camera to hand, or are not photographically minded, record your ideas in your notebook by sketching and writing notes, but always remember to name the location or site, as it is very easy to forget the exact name of the place you have visited.



Tools of the Trade - good pencils, a camera and a notebook!

Fig.1 Use good pencils and always carry a notebook!



Fig.2 Pages from a notebook used as an inspiration for future projects

Collating and organising ideas should become second nature. For example, I have a collection of photographs of unusual doors and ironwork and I have assembled these in a file on my computer called "Doors, knobs and knockers" and also kept details in the box file for reference.



Fig.3 Doors from the Topkapi Palace and the New Mosque, Istanbul

The styles range from intricate inlays to simple wooden structures. Each image has the potential to become an embroidery project, for example, I examined the inlay from a door in the Topkapi Palace in Istanbul and a tile from the wall of the Alhambra in Spain and having studied their geometry, created an Islamic blackwork design called “Star Challenge”.



Fig.4 Inlay from a door in the Topkapi Palace, Istanbul and a tile from the Alhambra, Spain led to “Star Challenge” – an Islamic blackwork design

- *Plan and research*

Using your notebook and photographs, start to think about what you want to create. Is it a small project, or a long term venture? What techniques most appeal and which threads and materials do you consider most suitable to achieve your objectives?

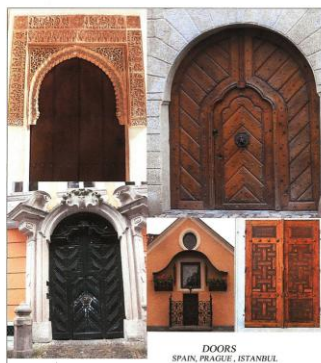
Having formulated your idea, you then have to establish how you can turn this into reality, so careful planning and research is necessary at this stage if you are to save time and wasted effort later.

If this is a new way of working for you, I suggest you start with a simple project with which you feel comfortable – a rule that applies to any project however complex, in any technique.

Embroidery Research Sheet – Wooden Doors and Knockers

Initial Idea – embroidery of a wooden door possibly using blackwork, cross stitch or patchwork.

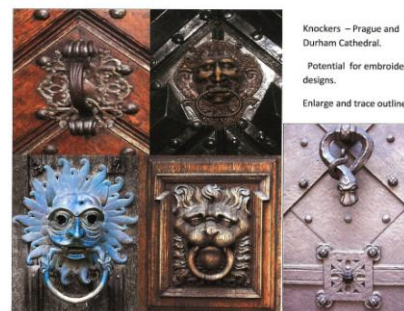
Suitable doors found in various countries from the Middle East to Eastern Europe were narrowed down to five potential projects.



DOORS
SPAIN, PRAGUE, ISTANBUL

	Doors and arches from Cathedral, Prague	
	Photo taken from Charles Bridge, Prague – good balance. Potential project? Door, window, balcony	
	New Mosque, Istanbul – one of a series of identical doors.	

	Alhambra, Spain – very ornate frame Islamic design, geometric. Does the frame dominate the door? Metal studs are the only decoration. Would it be more suitable to select a section of the frame rather than the door?	Future project – designs selected from the frame round the door worked in blackwork techniques
	Heavy green door from a street in Prague with ornamental knocker. Good shape, heavy colour, central feature is the knocker. Concentrate on the knocker for a separate design.	Future project – the knocker, not the door. Trace outline onto canvas and work using wool.



Knockers – Prague and Durham Cathedral.
Potential for embroidery designs.
Enlarge and trace outline.

Fig.5 Design sheets for door and knocker projects from the clip folder

Apart from identifying ideas from your own personal observations and experiences, they can also be found by visiting museums and galleries. Likewise, it can be useful to explore the Internet, especially some of the more obscure sites, which often contain some remarkable treasures. It is also worthwhile studying books by other needlewomen, or some of the many magazines that are available. The Embroiderers' Guild in the UK, the Embroiderers' Guild of America and the Embroiderers' Association of Canada are valuable sources of inspiration and if you want to research "historical" embroidery, the Textiles Gallery of the Victoria and Albert Museum in London is especially informative and by entering the subject you are interested into their web site, several pages of information can be accessed. Numerous museums and galleries worldwide can be explored in this manner.

Investigate other needlework sites on the Internet. Many have very good stitch and technique videos which are free to view and informative and could help you to expand your repertoire. If you

are interested in developing or enhancing specific techniques, just type in suitable words into your search engine, such as “blackwork” and you will find illustrations, information, recommendations and dedicated sites such as my own “Blackwork Journey” which are helpful for both the novice and experienced embroiderer.

- *Using your clip folder.*

The clip folder is more practical than the notebook from this point on as it can be used to save relevant samples, notes, instructions, types of threads, fabrics, stitches and variations. Stick any photographs, colour charts and pieces of information onto sheets of plain paper and place them into the file. They can then be repositioned, laid out, amended or used for reference. If you are working from a drawing or a photograph, make duplicates so that you can physically make notes on them about potential materials, colour schemes and techniques.

<u>Embroidery Research Sheet</u>	
<u>Choice of techniques:-</u>	<u>Design Source:</u> Where? What?
<u>Technique 1.</u>	<u>Technique 2</u>
Fabric: Count: Type: Colour: Fabric size: Needle:	
<u>Threads and Chart:</u>	
<u>Stitches:</u>	
<u>Sample 1</u>	<u>Sample 2</u>
<u>Method:</u>	
<u>Review:</u>	
<u>Name:</u>	<u>Date:</u>

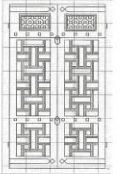
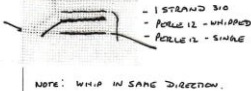

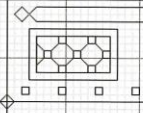
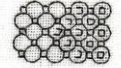

Fig.6 Embroidery sheet template from clip folder

It is here that you ask yourself, are the materials you have saved suitable for what you have in mind? Will the stitches work on the fabric you have chosen? If necessary, try out new stitches and keep a small sample in the file. Are there threads you have not used before? How will they look when they are worked? Are the threads colourfast? Do you want to use a coloured fabric or dye your own? Will the project need beads and what size will look right? Have you allowed sufficient material to mount the work in a frame? Is the material suitable for your eyesight?

Note how many strands you are using and the floss colour. Transfer a small portion of your design onto your material to check that you can see the drawn lines clearly and then add this sample to your file for future reference.

Write down details of all the threads, beads etc. Stick some beads into the file, note the make and code number. Whilst you may remember what you used, it lessens the chance of a mistake especially if there is a gap between designing the project and actually working it!

Embroidery Research Sheet 3 – Wooden Door Project – Stages of Development

Choice of two techniques for project:-	Blackwork Cross stitch
Technique 1. Blackwork	
Fabric: Count: 28 count Type: evenweave – Colour: white, worked over two threads per stitch Fabric size: 7 x 9 inches Needle: Tapestry needle No.24	
Threads and Chart: 	DMC stranded cotton 310 black or 3371 dark brown, one skein or Cotton perle No. 12, 310 Black, one ball  <p>- 1 STRAND 310 - PERLE 12 - WHIPPED - PERLE 12 - SINGLE</p> <p>NOTE: WHIP IN SAME DIRECTION.</p>
Stitches: Back stitch	
Sample 1 Whipped back stitch in perle and floss with geometric inset	
Sample 2 Work over 2 STRANDS: 	
Method: 	Start from the centre of the chart working outwards over two threads. Outline of door - back stitch, whipped to give corded effect – 2 strands floss, perle worked from ball Door panels - back stitch, single strand, including geometric panes

Review: Very simple design - worked well. Consider adding shading to door frame.	
Name: Liz Almond	Date: 13-1-2011


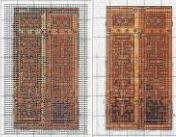

Wooden Door Project	Technique 2. Cross Stitch
Fabric: Count: 14 Type: Aida Colour: cream/yellow space dyed Fabric size: 7 x 9 inches Needle: Tapestry needle No.24	
Threads and Chart: 	DMC 310 Black Etra 188 Pewter - vy lt 301 Mahogany - med 422 Hazel nut brown - lt 452 Shell grey - med 632 Desert sand - all vy dk 642 Bridge grey - dk 782 Pearl grey - vy lt 779 Cocoa - dk 976 Golden brown - med 3024 Brown grey - vy lt 3084 Desert sand 3772 Desert sand - vy dk 3782 Mocha brown - lt One skein of each Possibly reduce number of threads?
Stitches: cross Stitch, back stitch	Use Perle 12 for outline.
Sample 1 Cross stitch on Aida using TWO strands for the cross stitch and ONE strand for the back stitch.	
Sample 2 Method:	Start from the centre of the chart working outwards. Work cross stitch first and then outline with the back stitch
Review:	
Name: Liz Almond	Date: 13-1-2011

Fig.7 Design sheets for New Mosque door project

I have included some pages I used to create a design from the New Mosque, Istanbul showing the stages of development, which you may find useful and provide a template that can be used to help record your information. The research pages were made by using a table in Word.

By creating a working reference file, the next stage will be much more enjoyable as problems can be identified and you have a source of information that will be useful for other projects in the future.

Know what is in your collection of materials, thread and beads. You probably have just the right items to hand which were bought and forgotten long ago. This is a good opportunity to reassess your collection and de-clutter!

- Action

Having consolidated your thoughts, have a final check that you have all the materials you will need. Chart, draw or transfer the pattern and begin stitching your masterpiece. Refer all the time to your file and journal. They are there to help!

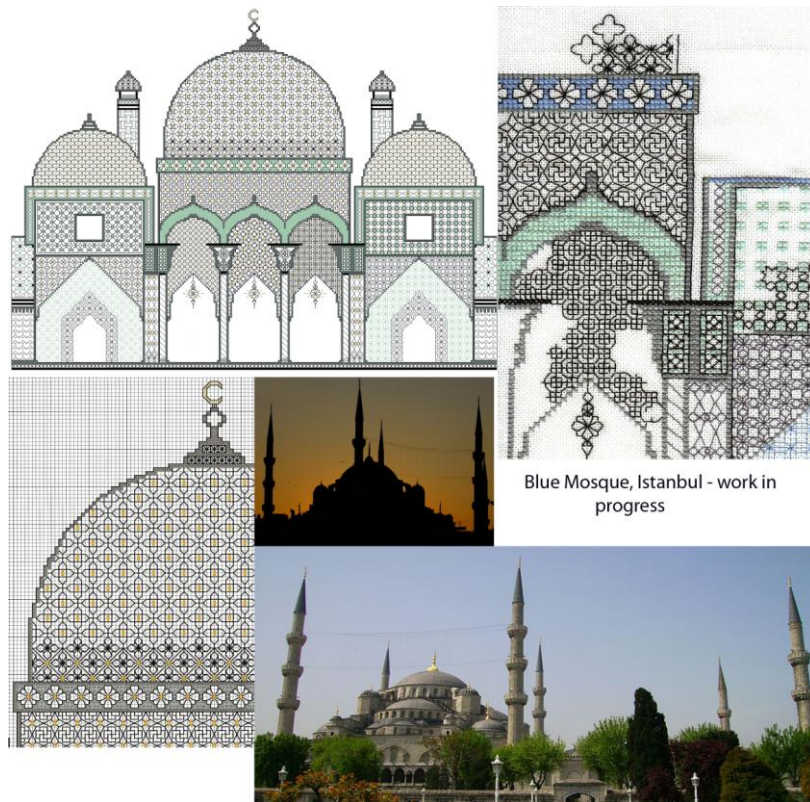


Fig.8 Work in progress for domes and arches project

Taking photographs of the work in progress can also be helpful as a reminder of how the work progressed and for future reference. I always take photographs of partly completed work, especially if I have designed a new border or an interesting pattern. Studying the worked piece is visually more informative than a diagram and can often trigger new avenues to explore. It is worth remembering that embroidery can be scanned very successfully and saved on the computer as a jpg, or printed out and filed for reference.

Try to keep an open mind about the work you are doing and you will find new ideas developing. As you begin to work through your project you may alter your approach, change the hues, stitches, enhance or even simplify the design.

It is not always easy to break away from an established pattern of working, but it can be immensely rewarding and remember that the results will be unique. Do not expect everything to go to plan, but follow your instincts. If it feels right, then try it out. You make your own guidelines and rules and use them in your own way. This is the fun of taking an idea and seeing through from beginning to end!

Name and date your work for future generations to admire, even if it is only a label on the back of the frame! It is your creation from the first thought to the finished work, so be proud of the end result.

- *Review*

With your work complete, check back over the whole process and review what you have done. Be critical and ask yourself which aspects worked and why they were successful. Where did you consider the embroidery could have been improved? What would you have changed? Was the research that you did before you started stitching worthwhile, or did you need to plan more thoroughly?

You will generate more ideas and gain confidence by looking back at what you have done and the next project should be more straightforward as a result.

- *Finally, the box file*



Fig.9 Box file and notebooks

Everything I collect which might come in useful later is placed initially in the box file for sorting or discarding at a later stage. The items range from a biscuit wrapper from Holland with an interesting silhouette, to letter shapes and print styles cut from a newspaper, interesting faces, photographs, snippets from travel brochures and anything else that has caught my eye.

Some of these items have been in my box for 20 years, but they are there for one reason only – they made an impact then and may prove a source of inspiration later! The file will never be empty and I will never fulfil all my dreams, but being organised will certainly ensure that I always have something in store for the future.

I hope you find these guidelines helpful. Whilst they work for me, I recognise that everyone will have their own thoughts on the subject and develop their own solutions, however, these guidelines have certainly saved me hours of unnecessary work and from making numerous mistakes.

Good luck and happy stitching

Liz Almond

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