

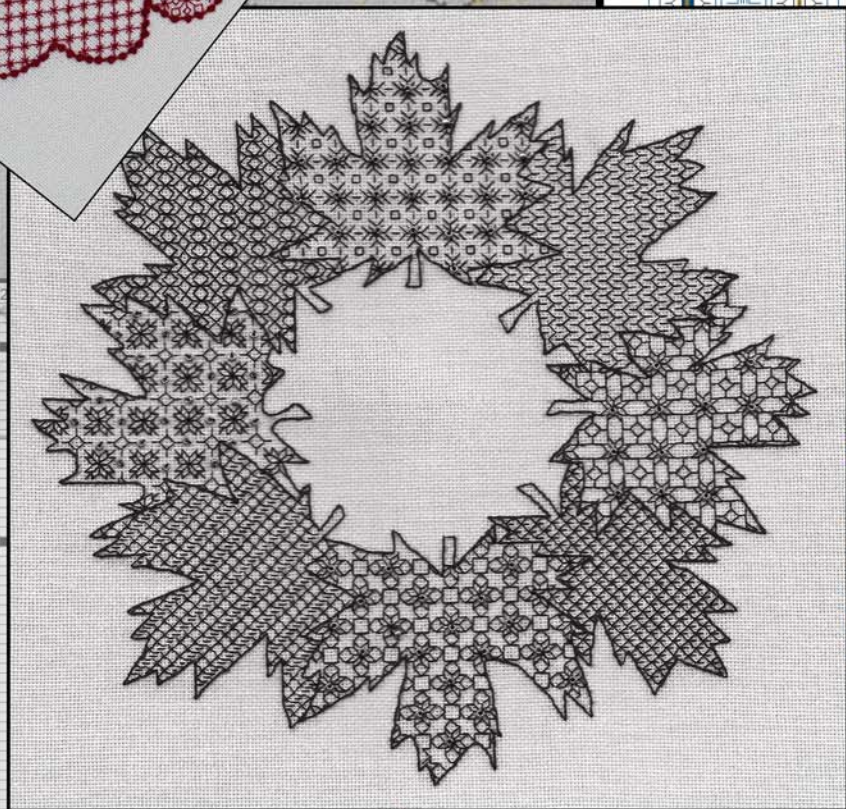
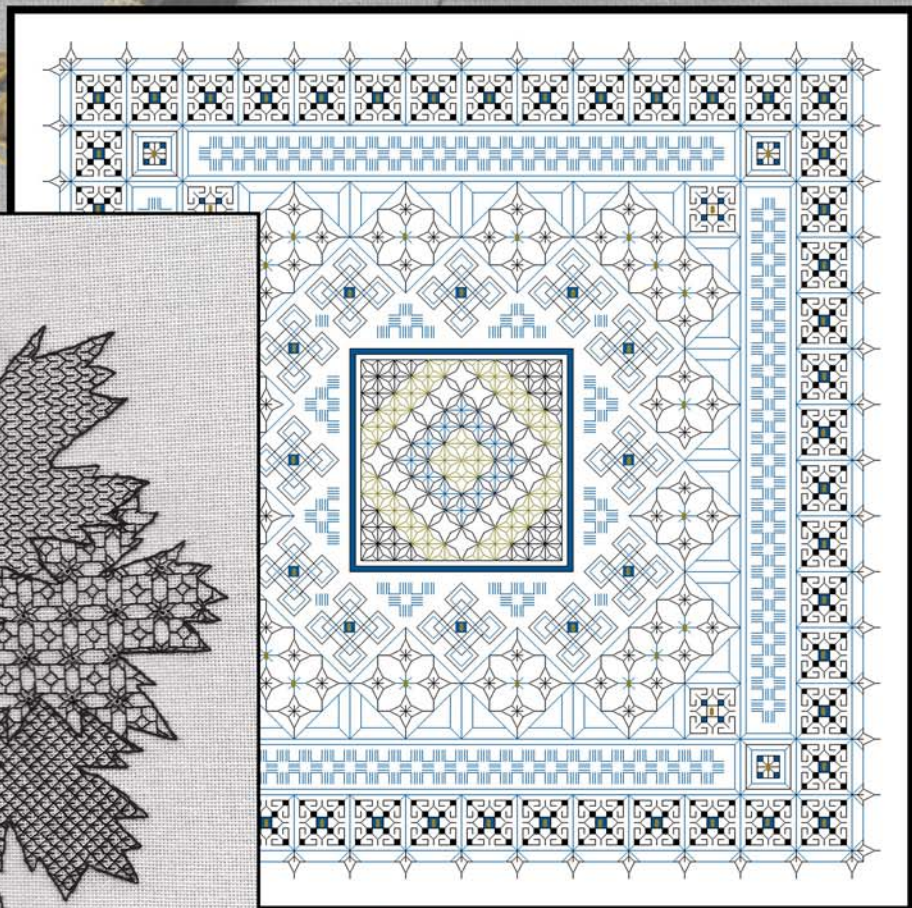


Blackwork Journey

Techniques

TQ0014

Introduction to Blackwork



The Working Environment by Liz Almond

“An Introduction to Blackwork”

Elizabeth Almond of Blackwork Journey

Blackwork is a counted thread embroidery technique in which repetitive patterns are used to fill design areas. It has been popular since 1400 and was mentioned in Chaucer's "Canterbury Tales." It contains Arabic and Spanish elements and was influenced by Catherine of Aragon who married Henry VIII of England. It was used for shirts, cuffs, ruffs and sleeves and whilst the traditional choice was usually black thread on white linen, modern blackwork often uses a variety of colours and threads from metallic threads to pearl cottons and beads for texture and interest.

Blackwork embroidery designs tend to fall into two main areas:

- a) Block designs where geometric patterns form the shapes
- b) Free style designs in which geometric patterns fill a drawn outline.

The filling stitches or diaper patterns have three elements within them, namely light, medium and dark which create the balance within the design. The closer the stitches, the heavier the design becomes.

Materials

Traditionally, blackwork is worked on a linen or cotton fabric. 28 count evenweave i.e. 28 holes to the inch. Whilst Aida blockweave 14 or 16 count is often easier to count, 22 count hardanger may also be used,. The more holes per inch the smaller the design will be.

However, as a general rule, a fabric where it is easy to see the holes is best, along with a needle large enough to thread and threads which reflect the weight of the fabric. If working on a white fabric is difficult, antique white, ecru or cream can make suitable alternatives.



Materials suitable for blackwork embroidery

Modern blackwork may be worked on pastel or hand dyed fabrics using variegated or hand dyed threads although these will not be colourfast.

Threads

Six stranded DMC, Anchor or Madeira floss are the most common choices, using one or more strands as required.

Threads can range from fine sewing cotton, flower threads, P rle No 5 or 8, Cotton   broder No 16 to soft cotton, which is thick and soft. By experimenting with different threads and combinations it is possible to see which thread is most suitable. Different colour threads can be used in place of black, such as garnet, emerald green, royal blue and dark brown.

Needles

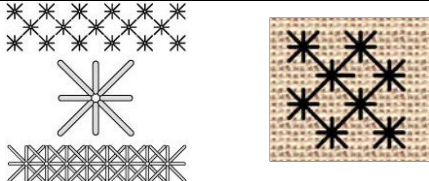
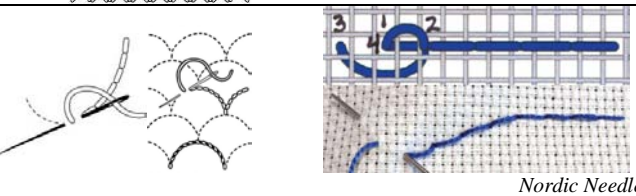
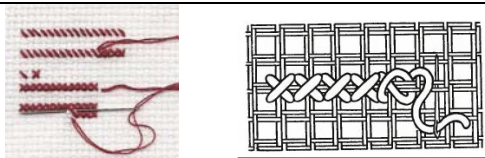
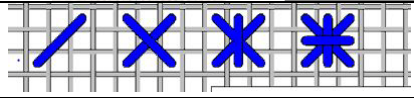
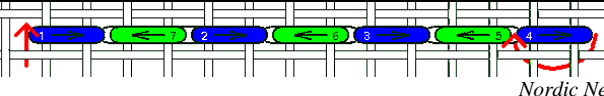
Stitches are worked over an exact number of threads, usually two threads over two, without piercing the fabric and tapestry needles with blunt points sizes 24 and 26 are particularly suitable.

If working a freestyle outline, it may be necessary to pierce the fabric threads, in which case a sharp pointed crewel needle size 22 is needed if the shape is to be followed accurately.

Whilst not essential, a small frame or ring will help to maintain the correct fabric tension and create neater stitches.

Stitches

The basic stitches used are:

Algerian eye stitch	
Back stitch and back stitch, whipped	 <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Nordic Needle</i></p>
Cross stitch	
Double cross stitch or Smyrna stitch	 <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Nordic Needle</i></p>
Double running or Holbein stitch*	 <p style="text-align: right;"><i>Nordic Needle</i></p>

*(This was commonly used in Tudor times and consists of a row of running stitches worked from right to left and then a second row worked back and filling the spaces. This stitch is identical on both sides and would only be used where both sides of the fabric were revealed)

Stitches for outlining free style shapes:

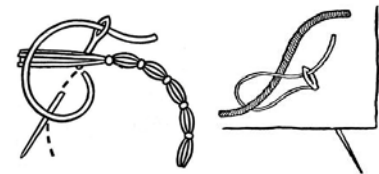
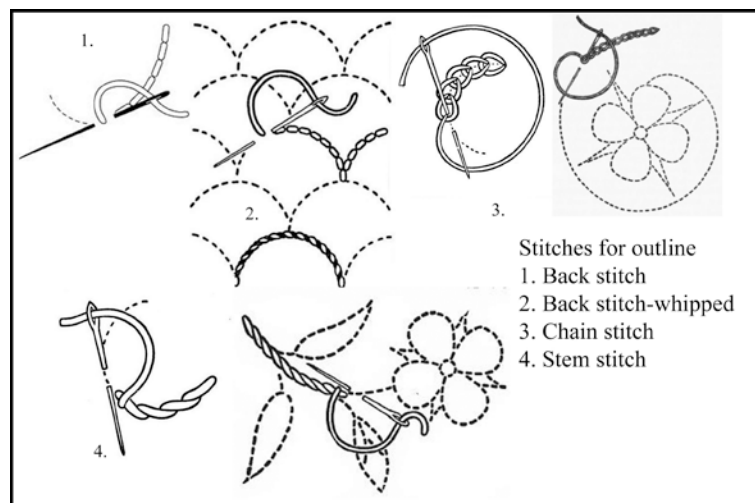
Back stitch

Back stitch whipped

Chain stitch

Stem stitch

Couching, using one or more threads



5. Couching

Stitching Methods

Block design:

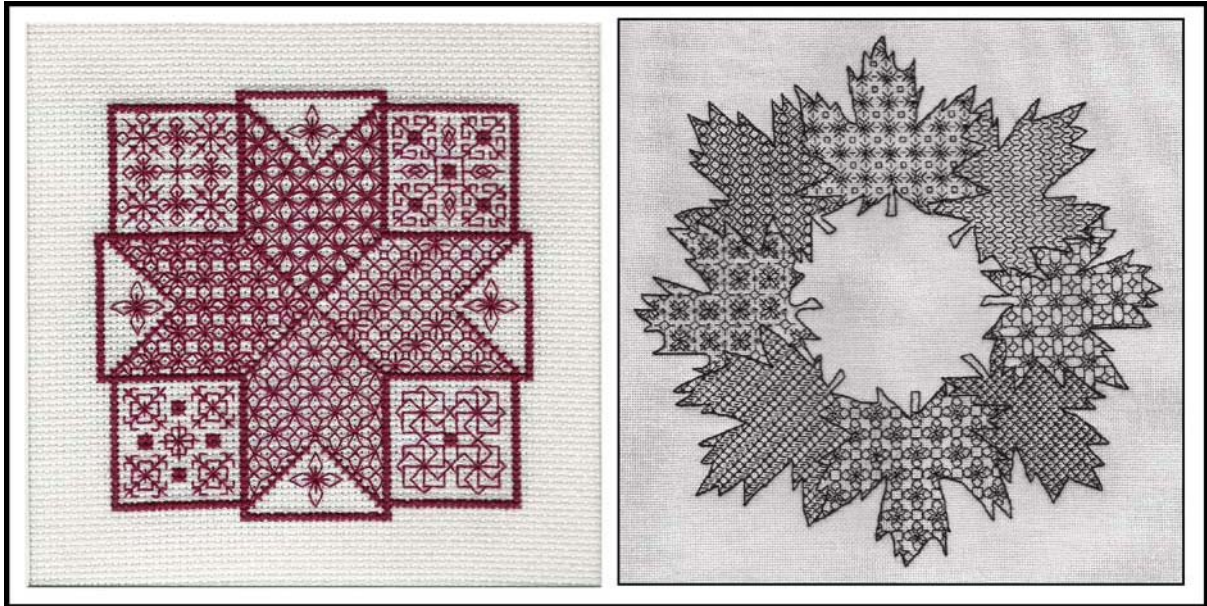
a) Start by finding and marking the centre of the fabric with a line of tacking stitches in a pale thread.

b) Start from the centre of the design working outwards using the required number of threads and the tapestry needle. One strand is usually used for the filler or diaper patterns and two strands for the cross stitch.

c) Study the pattern carefully and count the threads. Once the pattern begins to develop it is simple to spot and correct mistakes. Most of the patterns are geometric and regular.

d) Wherever possible, add any metallic threads after working the blackwork. Metallic thread frays easily and needs to be worked in short lengths. DMC Light Effects can be divided. Two strands are usually enough.

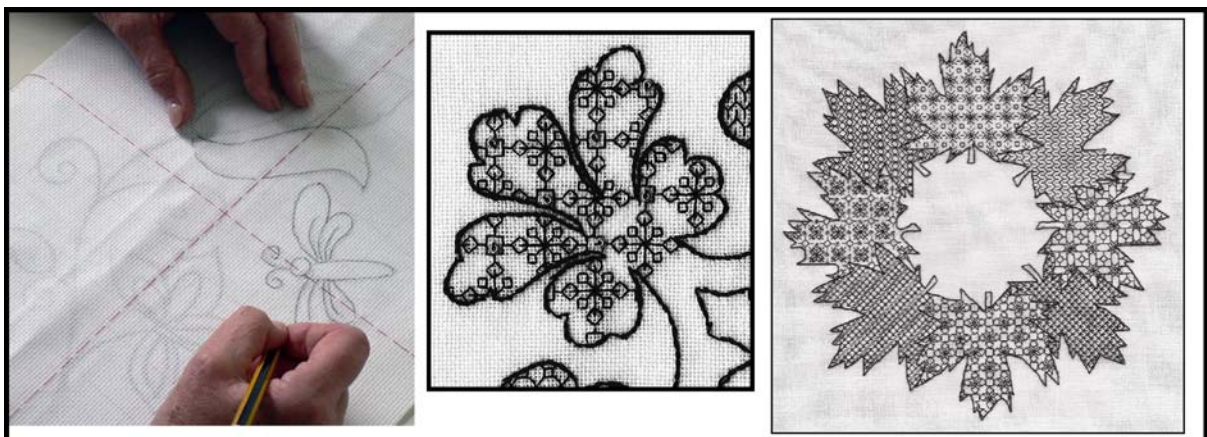
- e) Add beads or any other embellishments after the main embroidery has been completed.
- f) Check carefully that all ends have been stitched in and trimmed.
- g) Place the finished work face down on a soft towel and press lightly from the back. If necessary, use spray starch sparingly.



CH0168 Star Time, Block style and CH0310 Maple Leaf Wreath, Free style

Free style design:

- a) Mark the centre of the fabric with tacking



Work in progress – drawing, outlining, planning diaper patterns

- b) Draw the design outline on the fabric lightly using an HB pencil, or a water soluble pen.
- c) Start by working the outline using either stem stitch, back stitch, whipped chain stitch or couching. This defines the areas to be filled. Experiment with the different outlines stitches.

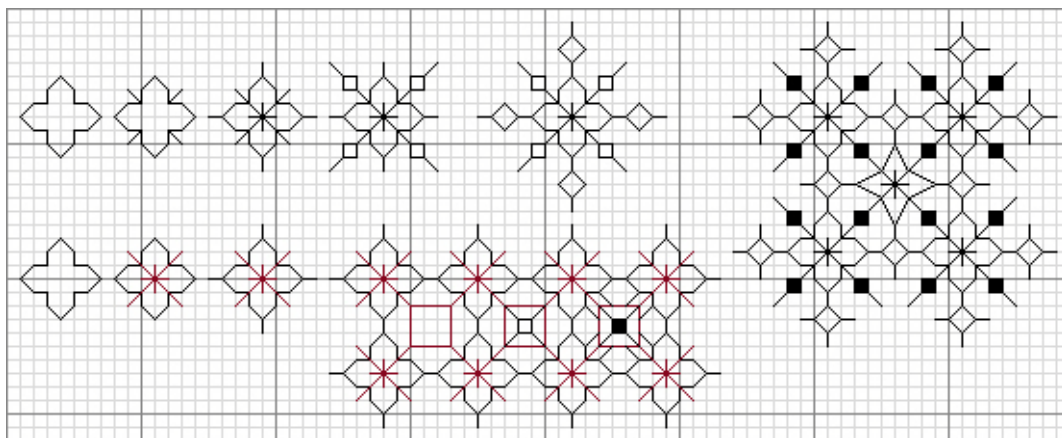
Each one creates a different depth and type of outlining. Adjust the number and type of threads to create the desired outcome.

d) Work out in advance where the heavy and light patterns will be placed. Avoid dense areas of pattern together as they can 'unbalance' the design. Remember that careful planning at this stage will save unpicking later.

e) Stitch from the centre of each shape to be filled, outwards working towards the edges filling in additional stitches as required

f) Follow the final stages as listed above.

Blackwork patterns are easy to create by adding or removing stitches. Follow the example below to see how a pattern can be built up from just a few stitches to a complex design.



Pattern development in blackwork

The next stage is to create your own designs!

I hope you enjoy exploring this fascinating traditional technique as much as I have enjoyed creating designs with a modern twist for the 21st century.

If you have any queries please contact:
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