

A Mermaid's

Jennifer Rochester
creates simply folded
containers encrusted
with stitch

PHOTO BY ALAN BENNINGTON

For centuries, nomadic tribes have used folded squares of fabric to create soft containers. These folded squares can be stored

flat in the limited living space or opened out to hold various collections of items when they are on the move. The squares are often decorated with tribal

patterns and have few or no construction stitches to create the three-dimensional shapes. Studying embroideries from the Middle East, I found many simple folded structures that are derived from decorated squares of cloth. I decided to use some of these structures to create a series of encrusted calico containers.

The Mermaid's Chatelaine is made from small squares of encrusted calico that are folded in different ways to create... a slot for a belt so that it can hang from the waist, a pincushion, a thimble case, a scissors case and a self-closing needlecase.

Basic technique

The encrusting technique is worked on two layers of calico. Mount one piece of calico in an embroidery hoop (see Back to Basics page 48). Pull taut so that there are no wrinkles. Lay a second piece of calico onto this stretched piece, ensuring that the grains of the fabrics are aligned. To create a raised surface, items are trapped between this second piece of calico and the stretched piece. Items trapped between the two are stab-stitched in place with machine cotton thread to make an uneven raised surface.

Raising the surface

Add trapped items gradually, one at a time, securing each item as unobtrusively as possible with small stitches and cream cotton machine thread. Excess fabric around these items can be disguised with the surface and raised stitches.

- **Rings** can be made by trapping: bunion pads, ring-file reinforcements



Chatelaine

(heaped), cut paper straws, round beads, flat disc beads, washers (not metal, which may rust), curtain rings and plastic rings, slivers of plastic straw, narrow plastic tubing.

- **Circles** can be made by trapping: felt and Vilene shapes (single and layered), buttons (the holes can be useful for adding stitches later), bottle tops, blister packaging (from pills) stuffed so that it holds its shape, paper balls cut in half, large beads.

Sandwiching rings and circles

stitches such as seeding and french knots, some loosely worked and some overlapping each other.

Raised stitches

These stitches are worked on a framework of threads worked with a crewel needle. Once the basic foundation is laid, all further stitches do not enter the fabric but are worked on the surface. For ease they should be worked using a tapestry (blunt) needle. Wheel stitches, cup stitches and woven picots add different textures to the surface.

Cut out the squares for each container using metric (centimetre) graph paper. Fold as in the illustrations to make sure you understand how each container is formed and where the encrusting is to be worked. Make a square card template for each container and mark in the fold lines carefully.

The template is marked out in the centre of the reverse of the framed piece, with the edge of the square matching the grain, as a guide. Mark in all the construction lines.

Areas to be left *undecorated* are isolated by tacking through both layers, thus leaving the top fabric free to be manipulated and embellished above the marked area.

Embroidery stitches

Use a variety of threads in neutral shades: shiny, dull, twisted, smooth. 'Colonies' of similar stitch make the most interesting textures. Vary the size of the stitches and allow some stitches to overlap and integrate. Work with a sharp-pointed crewel needle for stitches that pierce the fabric. Work collections or colonies of

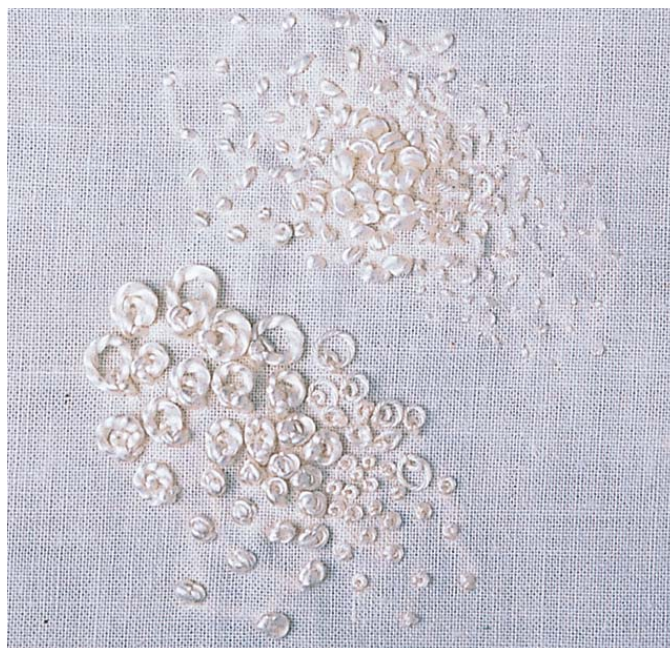
Insert small circular items, stitch around them and ease any excess fabric by scrunching and stabbing into place. Add the encrusting embroidery. When embroidering, make sure you keep *within* the marked boundary – keep checking on the reverse. Try to add interest to the places that will become the edges when the piece is



Top: Star stitches and a variety of wheel stitches build up the surface of the pebble

Below: Allow colonies of french knots and seeding stitches to merge

Above: Create a raised surface with a colony of trapped items



folded, by making the stitches loose and loopy, and making the picots at various angles.

Remove the completed work from the frame and trim

a little larger than the required size. Fray out the edges a little to reduce the cloth to the actual required size.

The Mermaid's Chatelaine

What you need

- 0.5 m calico (washed)
- 4.5 cm square of white felt
- 15 cm and 10 cm embroidery frames (round or square)
- Cream machine cotton for the trapping stitches
- Items to trap (washers, buttons, cut slivers of plastic straws, etc.)
- A collection of threads in neutral shades (cotton

pearl, coton à broder, crochet cotton, silk twist)

Equipment:

- Pins, needles, fabric scissors, tape measure
- Card – thin for pattern templates and thick for the pincushion lacing support
- Ruler, set-square, sharp hard pencil, paper scissors, metric graph paper

What you do

Belt slot

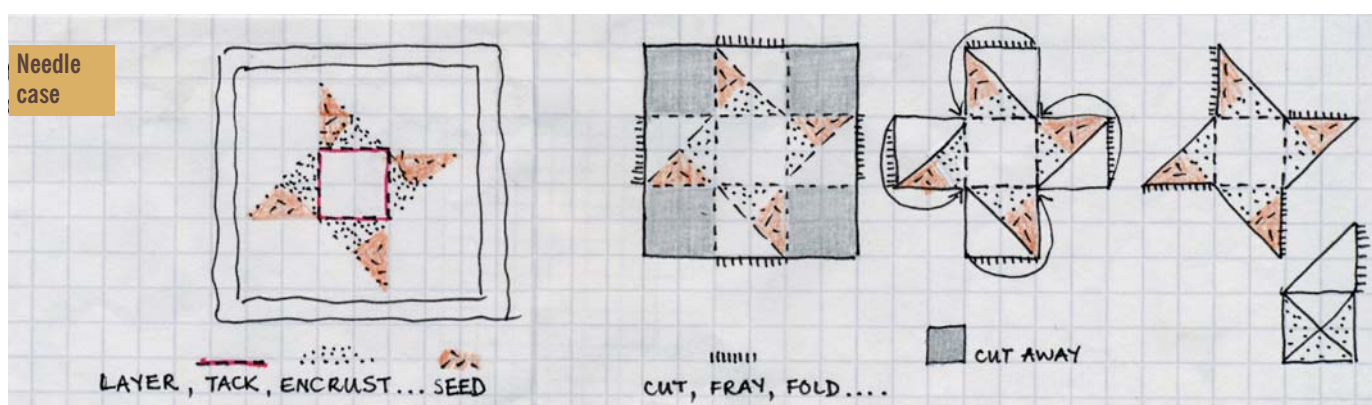
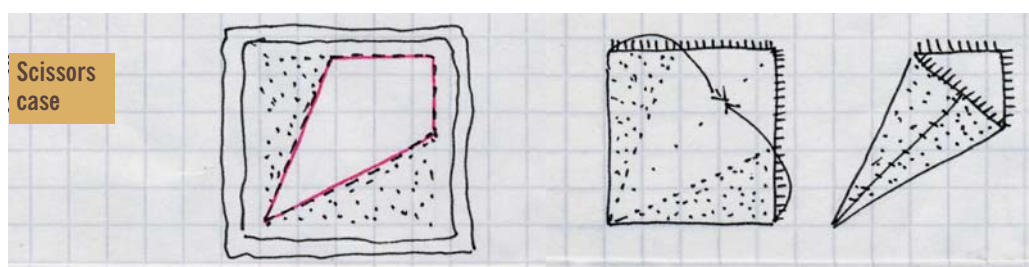
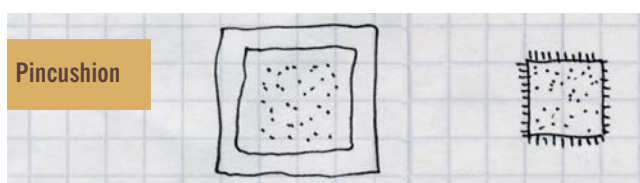
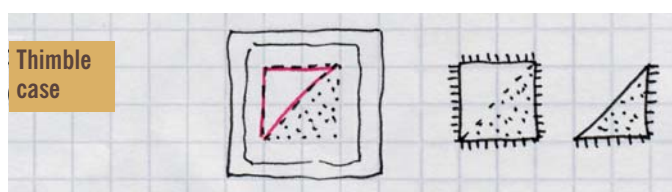
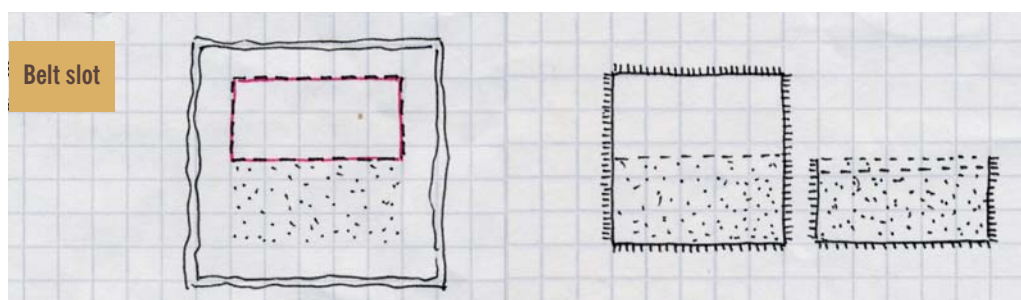
- 10 cm square template cut from thin card
 - 15 cm embroidery frame
 - A plastic drinking straw
- 1 Cut two pieces of calico, one 25 cm square (to fit into the 15 cm frame), the other slightly smaller.
 - 2 Mount the larger piece of fabric into the frame (see Back to Basics page 48). Place the 10 cm square template on the reverse of the framed fabric, aligning the edges of the template with the grain of the fabric. Using the hard pencil, draw around the template.
 - 3 Centre the smaller piece of fabric on top of the framed fabric, aligning the grains,

and pin in place. Tack around the half of the square that is to be left undecorated (see diagram).

- 4 In the area to be encrusted, trap a few small items between the two layers to raise the surface.
- 5 Embroider 'encrusting growth' on the raised area.
- 6 Remove from the frame. Cut out both layers together a little beyond the stitched and tacked area. Remove the tacking thread and fray the edges of the fabric.
- 7 Fold in half with the embroidery showing. To hold the bottom edges together, stitch a line of running stitches through all layers just below the embroidery.
- 8 Support the top edge by enclosing a plastic straw along the fold, holding it in place with a line of running stitches.

Pincushion

- 5 cm square template cut from thin card

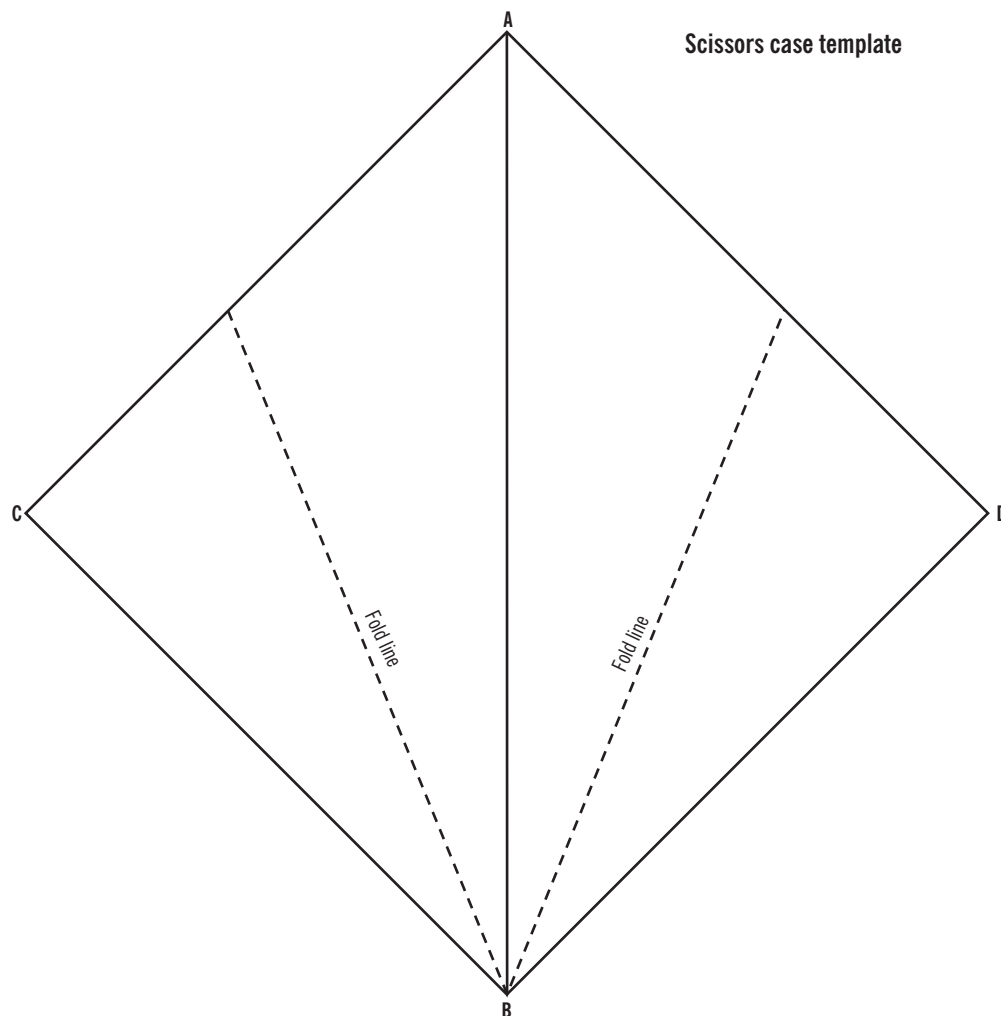


- Two 5 cm squares of thick card
 - 10 cm embroidery frame
- 1 Cut a piece of calico 20 cm square (to fit into the frame) and two 7 cm squares.
 - 2 Mount the larger piece of fabric into the frame (see Back to Basics page 48). Place the 5 cm square template on top of the framed fabric, aligning the edges of the template with the grain of the fabric. Using the hard pencil, draw around the template.
 - 3 Centre one of the 7 cm squares on top of the framed fabric, matching the grains. Pin in place along one edge. Trap and encrust within the marked area. Remove from the frame.
 - 4 Place the template onto the encrusted top layer and insert pins around it. Cut the *top layer only*, trimming beyond the worked area. Fray the edge back to the stitching to give a 5 cm square of cloth.
 - 5 Cut the backing fabric at least 1.5 cm larger all round. Stretch and lace (see Back to Basics page 48) over one 5 cm square piece of thick card.
 - 6 Stretch and lace the remaining 7 cm square of calico onto the second 5 cm square of thick card. Ladder-stitch (see page 48) the two together. To use as a pincushion, the pins are pushed into the space between the two layers of card.

Thimble case

- 5 cm square thin card template
 - 10 cm embroidery frame
- 1 Cut a piece of calico 20 cm square (to fit into the frame) and two 7 cm squares.
 - 2 Mount the larger piece of fabric into the frame (see Back to Basics page 48). Place the 5 cm square template on the reverse of the framed fabric, aligning

- the edges of the template with the grain of the fabric. Using the hard pencil, draw around the template.
- 3 Centre one of the 7 cm squares on top of the framed fabric, matching the grains. Tack around two sides of the marked area and along the diagonal, to isolate the undecorated area (see diagram).
 - 4 Trap and encrust above the marked triangle.
 - 5 Cut *both layers together* a little larger than the square marked with the template. Cut a third piece of calico to this size and fray all edges.
 - 6 Fold both the encrusted piece and the single third piece in half along the diagonal. Pin together along the shorter sides, then join with a line of running stitches just below the embroidery, stitching through all of the layers. To make the thimble space, oversee part of the way along each side the opening.



Scissors case template

Scissors case

- 9 cm square thin card template
 - 15 cm embroidery frame
- 1 Cut a 25 cm square of calico to fit the frame, and one 10 cm square.
 - 2 Mount the larger piece of fabric into the frame (see Back to Basics page 48). Place the 10 cm square template on the reverse of the framed fabric, aligning the edges of the template with the grain of the fabric. Using the hard pencil, draw around the template.
 - 3 Cut a 9 cm square of paper and draw a diagonal line A–B. Fold corners C and D to the diagonal line, creasing along the fold line so that it will hold its shape; this will give a kite shape. Pin the paper shape to the top layer of fabric (see diagram) and tack around the edge of the paper. Remove the paper.
 - 4 Trap and encrust as shown (see diagram). Cut both layers together a little larger than the square

marked with the template. Fray the edges A–C and A–D.

- 5 Fold corners C and D to the diagonal line so that the encrusted edges meet. Ladder-stitch the embroidered edges together, hiding the raw edges inside the pocket. Fray out the point.

Needlecase

- 5 cm square thin card template
 - 15 cm square thin card template
 - 15 cm embroidery frame
 - 4.5 cm felt square
- 1 Cut two pieces of calico each 25 cm square.
 - 2 Mount one piece of fabric into the frame. Centre the 5 cm square template on the reverse of the framed fabric, aligning the edges of the template with the grain of the fabric. Using the hard pencil, draw around the template.
 - 3 Place the 5 cm template against each side of the drawn square and draw



- around it to give a square on each of the sides (see diagram).
- Position the felt square on top of the marked centre square, pinning it in place from the reverse. Lay the second piece of calico on top, sandwiching the felt between the layers. Back-stitch around the edge of the inner square, stitching through both layers to hold the felt in place, and remove the pins.
 - Mark the encrusting areas (see diagram). Trap and

encrust and work seeding stitches where indicated.

- Remove from the frame and cut out, cutting both layers together. Fray out the edges as shown.
- Fold the unstitched triangles to the reverse to hide the back of the encrusting. Secure with running stitch along both edges. Working around the square, fold in three flaps, tucking the fourth under the first to close the container.

To finish

Link the five items. A knotted thread (as shown) may be used, or any handmade cord, fine braid or ribbon is equally suitable.

Suggestions

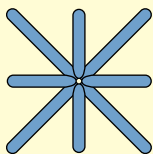
- These basic folding ideas work well with larger squares and also with any embroidery technique to make simple containers.
- If you are using a fine fabric that frays too easily then use a stabiliser such as iron-on Vilene.

Stitches used

Embroidery stitches

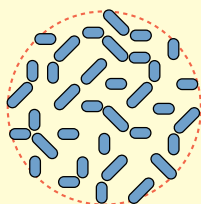
Star stitch

This is based on an eyelet stitch, which is usually worked over a square of an even number of fabric threads, as shown. To make a star stitch, the straight stitches are worked more freely and with legs of uneven length.



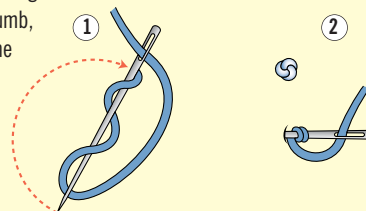
Seeding

This filling stitch is made up of small straight stitches placed at random over the surface.



French knots

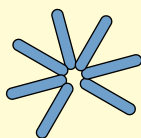
Bring the thread out at the required position, hold the thread down where it emerges with the left thumb and encircle the thread twice with the needle (see Fig.1). Still holding the thread firmly with your thumb, twist the needle back to the starting point and insert it close to where the thread first emerged (not in the exact place or it will simply pull back through). Pull the needle through to the back, leaving a small knot on the surface, as shown.



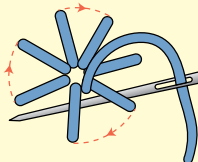
Raised stitches

Wheels

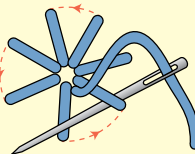
All of these stitches begin with a number of straight stitches radiating from a central point. The straight stitches, which should be of equal length, can be worked on the flat fabric or over a large bead.



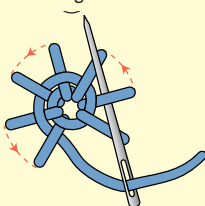
Back stitch wheel: Work clockwise and pick up each spoke, as shown. This can be worked over any number of spokes.



Stem stitch wheel: Work anti clockwise and pick up each spoke, as shown. This can be worked over any number of spokes.

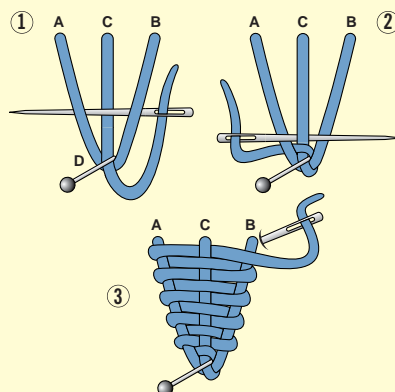


Woven wheel: Begin with an uneven number of spokes in the star. Work around the wheel weaving under and over the spokes as shown.



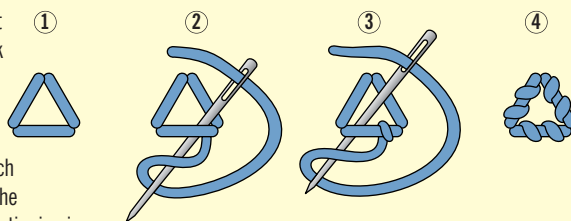
Woven picot

This detached flap makes a leaf-like structure. Bring the needle and thread to the surface at A. Insert a pin at D (about 1 cm from A) and make a stitch, taking the thread around the pin and inserting the needle at B. Bring the needle through again at C and take the thread around the pin. Weave the thread through this foundation, as shown in Figs 1 and 2 until the shape is filled (Fig.3). Remove the pin to leave the end free. Leaves can be short and squat or long and thin. Try all the variations.



Cup stitch

Work a foundation of three straight stitches to create a triangle. Work two twisted buttonhole stitches on each of the base stitches, as shown. To build the stitch higher, continue around, working one stitch into each of the spaces between the stitches of the previous round. Continuing in this way until the resulting tube is the height you require. To open the structure out add extra stitches into some of the spaces. To close up the



structure make the stitches in alternate spaces. Make collections of various stages of this stitch with different textures of thread.