

The Aztec Stitch

Presented by Denise Beusen

Gateway Chapter ANG May 2005 program

Background information

- Unique to colonial Mexican samplers
- Traditionally done on linen ground
- An openwork technique
 - ¼ of the ground threads are removed.
 - Each "unit" consists of two absent plus six remaining canvas threads.
 - Pattern is formed by needlewoven pairs of threads ("bars") and the traveling threads that connect one woven bar to the next.
 - Because ground threads are removed, requires stabilization around perimeter of area.
- Suitable for a border or a block in a sampler, but not for a curvilinear design area
- Instructions below are for diagonal stripes; other pattern variations are often seen in historical samplers.

Supply list

3 ½" square piece of 14-count mono canvas with threads cut
#20 tapestry needle
1 yd #3 pearl cotton, any color

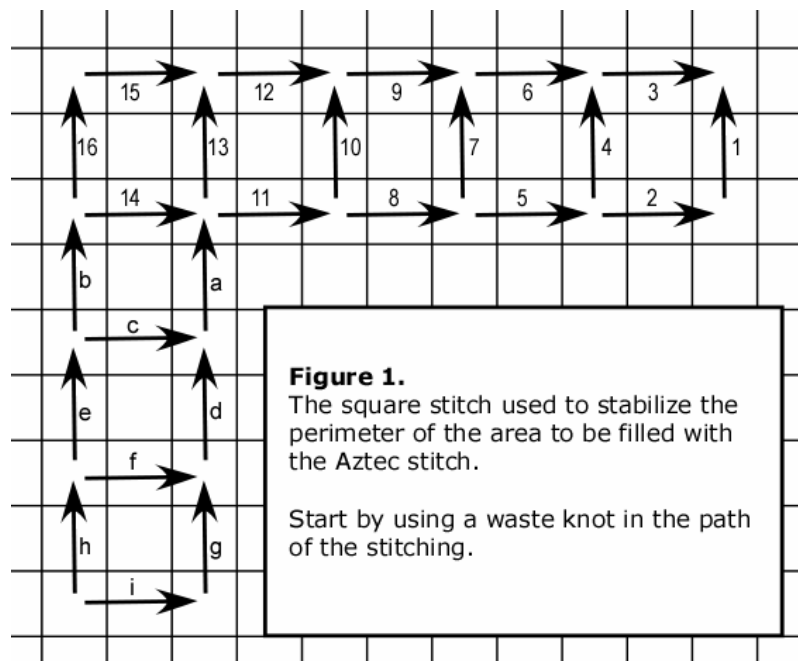
Instructions

Step One – Stabilizing the perimeter of the openwork area

The four-sided square stitch (Figure 1) is used to outline the area to be filled. To save time, we will not be doing this step.

Follow the stitch sequence shown, pulling the canvas threads together with each stitch. This bundles the canvas threads together in pairs.

Work from right to left. The numbering is illustrative; the number of four-sided stitches along each side of your stitched sample will differ from the diagram.



When you reach the upper left hand corner, rotate your piece 90 degrees and continue the lettered stitch sequence. Continue around the perimeter of the area, turning when needed, until it is entirely surrounded by square stitches.

Step Two – Filling in the outlined area

Once the area to be filled is outlined by square stitches, pairs of threads are cut and removed from the canvas. In Figure 2, these cut threads are shown as short canvas threads. Notice the pattern: 2 threads cut, 6 threads left, 2 threads cut, etc. Both vertical and horizontal threads are cut in the same pattern.

To save time, the threads have already been cut in your sample canvas. You'll need to remove them. Figure 2 shows the same number of threads as the working area of your canvas sample.

Thread your needle with the entire length of thread supplied. Anchor the thread with a waste knot or take an "L" stitch in the margin below the asterisk. (Normally, threads would be secured in the pulled squares that surround the area, but these are not present in your sample.)

Bring the thread to the top of the canvas at the asterisk.

Start by wrapping together the pair of threads on the lower left as shown. Each bar is wrapped four times.

The rules for wrapping are:

- On vertical bars always bring the thread from left to right over the top of the fabric
- On horizontal woven bars always bring the thread from bottom to top over the top of the fabric.
- "Stack" the wraps – don't let them overlap – in order to cover the canvas threads

Work from the lower left corner to upper right corner, following the black arrows and wraps.

When you've finished one journey and reached the upper right hand corner, rotate both the diagram and your canvas 180 degrees

and follow the red arrows/wraps to change direction. The blue arrows and wraps represent the third journey. It's important to rotate your canvas after each journey, in order for the rules for wrapping to yield the right result.

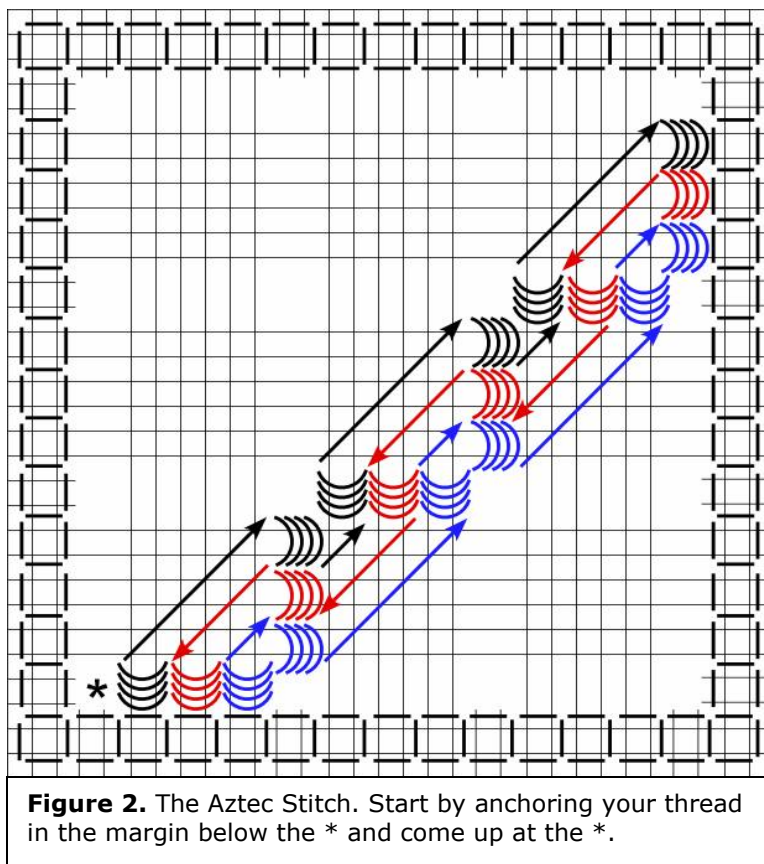


Figure 2. The Aztec Stitch. Start by anchoring your thread in the margin below the * and come up at the *.

Bibliography

"Common Threads: A Showcase of Samplers" Museum of Fine Arts, Boston,

<http://www.mfa.org/exhibitions/samplers/commonthreads.html>

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A sincere thank you to Caela Conn Tyler for helpful suggestions in preparing this presentation.

Denise Beusen has served the St. Louis Gateway Chapter of ANG as Newsletter Editor, Program Director, and President. In 2002, she chaired the ANG Workshop by Mail program, and in 2003-2004 served as the ANG Director for Educational Services. She is a contributor to the 2002 ANG Chapter Handbook, and her designs were selected for the 2003 and 2005 ANG Chapter Project Books. Your comments and questions are welcomed at denise@beusen.net.