

# A Chapter Challenge:

## Design, Stitch, And Finish A Picture Frame

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Stitchers are generous people - to a point. We all like to *think* about stitching gifts for friends and relatives, but when push comes to shove, our investment in time and money usually forces us to apply a stringent filter to determine who does and who doesn't receive a gift of our hand.

During my tenure as Gateway Chapter program director, one request I heard over and over was for small, relatively inexpensive projects that members could finish on their own. Out of that request grew an idea for a program to design, stitch, and finish a small picture frame – the sort of hand-crafted item that one could give away and not be devastated if it migrated directly from the gift box to the charity barrel.

This two-part program was taught over two months. The first meeting was the design of the frame. In the following weeks, members stitched their designs and then brought them to the second meeting, where they were guided step-by-step in finishing the frame. The process they used is presented in this article so that you, too, can satisfy your magnanimous stitching instincts in a worry-free fashion.

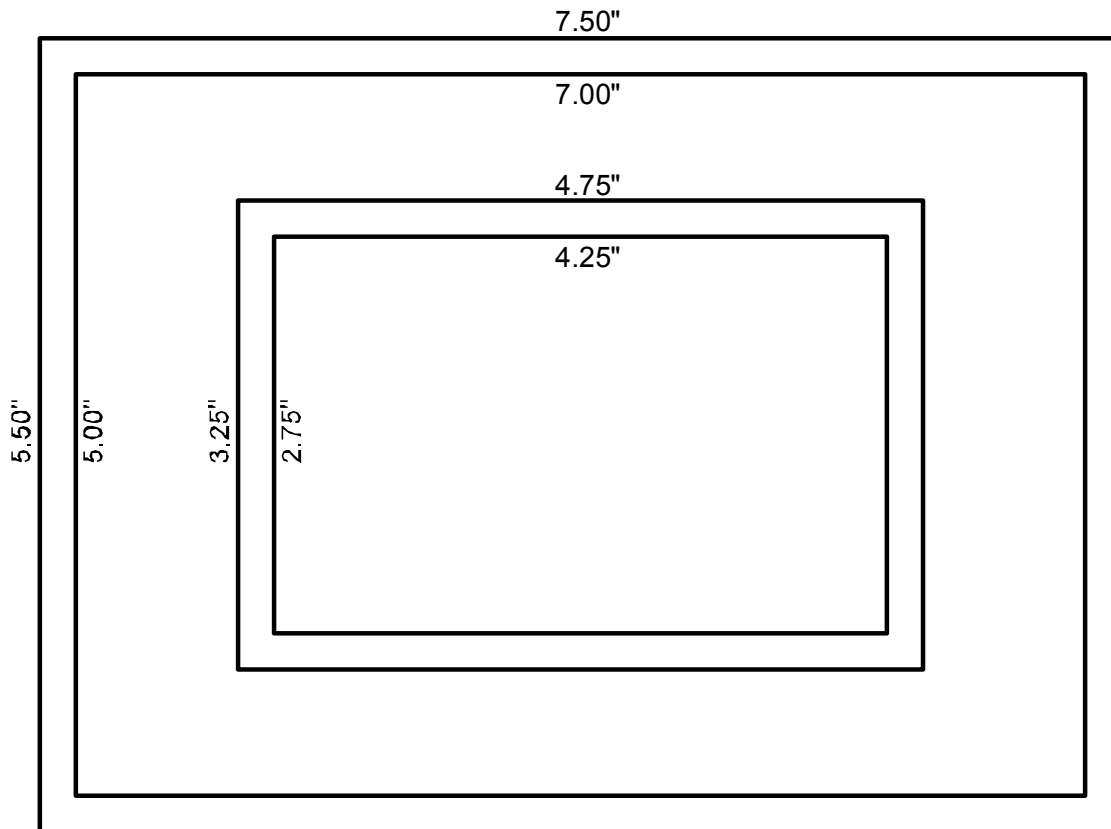
### **Designing the picture frame**

For the first meeting, members were asked to bring their stitch books, and numerous design books were also made available. Each participant was supplied with a template for a stitched frame with outside dimensions of 5" x 7", and an opening for a 3 1/2" x 5" photo. Using the template, members created a border design and/or a stitch pattern that would fit the template, and then picked threads from their stash to customize the design. A Project Log ([www.beusen.net/ProjectLog.pdf](http://www.beusen.net/ProjectLog.pdf)) on which they could record their stitch and thread selections was provided along with the template.

The frame template (Figure 1) consisted of four rectangles. The outermost and innermost rectangles define the area that must be stitched in order to have enough design to wrap around the edges of the frame. The two inner rectangles are the actual size of the frame.

An 8" x 10" piece of #18 mono canvas of any color is required. Position the canvas over the frame template and trace it onto the canvas. If the design has exposed canvas, it may be better to baste the lines onto the canvas so they can be removed once the stitching has been completed. If you have design elements that must show on the front of the frame (and not on the edge), keep them between the inner rectangles.

## Design, Stitch, and Finish a Picture Frame



**Figure 1.** Frame template, shown at 75% size. Enlarge by 33% to use.

Among the considerations you may want to weigh in your design:

- Is the frame intended for a particular picture? If so, a theme or colors in the photo could be echoed in the frame design.
- Make sure the design motif fits within the frame boundaries and is not truncated to create an odd effect. For the template shown, the borders are narrow – 7/8" on two sides and 1 1/8" on the other sides – which limits the design options.
- Select stitches that are easy to compensate, or better yet, fit within the template so that they don't need any compensation.
- The corners of the photo opening will have to be clipped during finishing. If a large stitch is positioned there, the cut ends of the thread will not behave well as the canvas is turned under. The solution is to stitch the area between the two innermost rectangles in basketweave, which means that any decorative stitches must end at the 4.75" x 3.25" rectangle.

In our case, there was a strong impetus to select a pattern or design that was easy to stitch, since we needed to complete the stitching in time to finish the project at the next meeting. During the next month all of us stitched our designs and I visited local art and fabric stores to assemble the necessary supplies for finishing.

## **Finishing the picture frame**

At the second meeting, members brought their stitched designs and learned how to finish the picture frame. Even members who couldn't complete the stitching on their design were able to learn this technique – they simply worked with a blank piece of canvas.

The finishing supplies that need to be assembled in advance are:

- 1 Cut-out mat board: 5" by 7" with a 3.25" x 4.75" area cut out in the middle.
- Scissors for cutting canvas
- 1 Backing mat board; 4.75" x 6.75"
- 1 Easel back for a 5" x 7" picture frame
- Lamé for lining the stitched canvas
- Wonder-Under<sup>®</sup> fusible adhesive
- Fusible interfacing
- Pellon<sup>®</sup> fleece padding
- Double-stick tape
- Sewing machine and thread
- Ironing board and iron
- Craft glue
- Cordonnet or crochet thread
- Marker
- Usual stitching supplies

Here is the step-by-step process we used to finish the frames:

1. Remove the stitched canvas from its stretcher bars.
2. Trim the outside edge of the canvas to leave a border of bare canvas 12 threads wide on all four sides.
3. *Do this step only if you have exposed canvas in your design.* Cut a rectangle of lamé and a piece of "Wonder-Under<sup>®</sup>" about the same size as the original template. Wonder-Under is a fusible web with a paper backing used to fuse fabric to another fabric or surface. Following the directions supplied with the product, use an iron to secure the lame to the back of your stitching.
4. Cut a piece of fusible interfacing that covers the blank center portion of your canvas and about 6 rows of stitching in from the center opening. Follow the instructions supplied with the interface and use an iron to fuse the interfacing to the **BACK** of your stitched piece. If you've already fused lame to the piece, you'll be fusing the interfacing to the lame. There's no need to fuse interfacing to the entire stitched area, since its purpose is to provide stability for the inside corners that will be clipped later.
5. Starting at one of the inside corners, just at the first hole in which there is stitching, count diagonally in four threads toward the outside corner. Use a marker to mark this position on the interfacing. Do the same thing for all three of the other inside corners.
6. Use a sewing machine to stitch a stabilizing "V" at each inside corner. The point of the "V" should be at or very close to the mark made in step 5. You will be cutting into the corners, and this stitching will keep the decorative stitches and the canvas in shape.
7. Using the cut-out mat board, trace three patterns on the Pellon padding and cut them out. Keep the inside & outside corners square. The padding needs to match the shape of the cut-out board, without large areas of overhang.

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8. Using double-stick tape, secure the first layer of padding to the cut out board. Use more of the tape to secure the second and third layers on top of the first.
9. Fold the stitched canvas three or four threads in from the stitched perimeter and finger press to make an edge. You will need to hold the cut-out board up to your piece to see which thread count – 3 or 4 – works best for your canvas. The fold will be in the stitched area, not outside it. Miter the outside corners, maintaining the turn-under of three or four threads in the stitched area.
10. Locate the center of the canvas, in the middle of the unstitched area. Make an incision at the center along the long dimension, about an inch long. Extend this cut as needed until you can turn the scissors to cut exactly on the diagonal toward each corner.
11. Using a very sharp scissors with a sharp point, cut into the machine-stitched "V". Cut all the way to, but not into the point of the V.
12. Fold and press the inside "flaps" of the frame in as in number 9, three or four threads in from the edge of the stitching.
13. Trim the inside flaps so that the bare canvas border is only 12 threads wide (as in number 2).
14. Place the padded cut-out board into the back of your stitched canvas, with the padded side against the back side of the stitching.
15. Position the cut-out board so that it is centered in your work, and tuck it into the mitered corners. Pull the cut and folded edges of the center though to the back. Carefully inspect the design to ensure that the stitched area is centered over the cut-out piece and that all of the corners – both inside and outside – will be sharp.
16. Trim away a square of blank canvas under each of the mitered corners to remove bulk, leaving the top folds intact.
17. Cut approximately 2 yards of crochet thread and thread into a tapestry needle. Starting at one mitered corner, anchor the thread firmly and lace the adjoining folded edges together. Pull the stitches snug so that the canvas is stretched securely over the board. Run your stitches right up to the decorative stitching at the corner. This will ensure a good-looking crisp corner.
18. Moving away from the corner, begin to lace together the inside and outside edges of the canvas. Put the outside flap over the inside flap, stick your needle into the inside flap and bring it out through the outside flap beyond the overlap region. Your stitches should be separated by about 4 threads.
19. When you get to the corner, your stitches should be closer together to secure the cut inside corner.
20. Keep lacing the inner and outer canvas edges together, all around the frame. Once the lacing is complete, secure your thread. If you are unhappy with the way your corners turn out, remember that decorative cord and a bit of glue can hide many evils.
21. On the backing board, trace a line around three sides that is 3/8" from the outside edge. The side you don't draw on will be the one that your photo will slide in from.

22. Apply glue to the perimeter of the backing board along the three sides you marked. Make sure not to get glue beyond your drawn lines, or the pocket will be too small for your photo. Press the backing board to the back of the covered cut-out board. Put the frame on a padded ironing board face down with a heavy book on it and let dry.
23. Glue the easel back to the backing board.

### **The finished product**

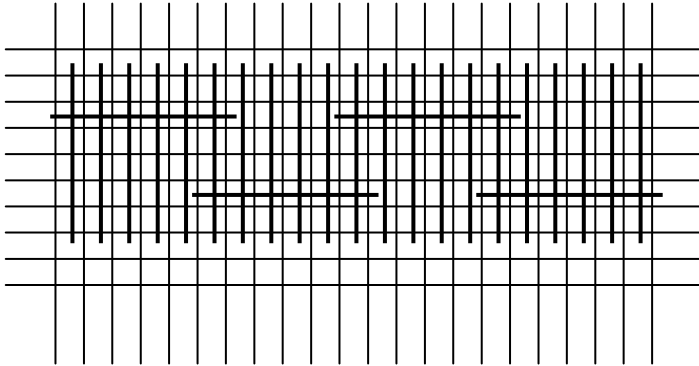
Four of the frames stitched by members are shown below: Mary Carol Kluesner's, Pat Giarraffa's, Margaret Nedeau's, and mine.



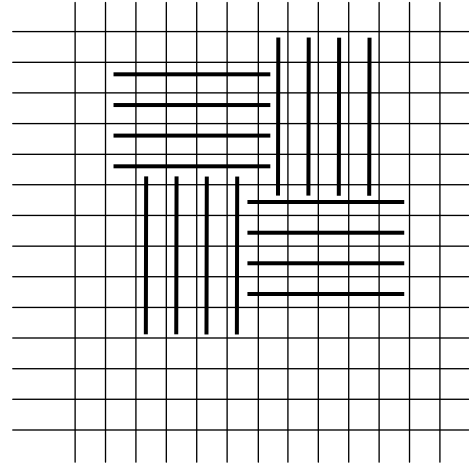
**Figure 2.**  
*(Top)* Frame stitched by Mary Carol Kluesner.  
*(Bottom)* Frame stitched by Pat Giarraffa.

A picture of long-standing and newly-made friends inspired Mary Carol to create her frame (Figure 2). She chose Needle Necessities French overdyed wool, a thread with which she hadn't worked much, and used a couched stitch (Figure 3) to fill the frame area. The warm colors surrounding the photo enhance Mary Carol's recollection of a memorable Russian vacation each time she looks at it in her dining room.

Pat's frame (Figure 2) holds a photo of a sunset at Cape Cod sent by a stitching friend. She decided to use a basket filling stitch (Figure 4) done in a #5 pearl cotton that coordinates with colors in the photo. The stitches fit into the template without compensation, making it simple to stitch. The frame and photo now reside in her sewing room, where they brighten her workdays as she constructs clothing for clients.



**Figure 3.** Couched stitch.

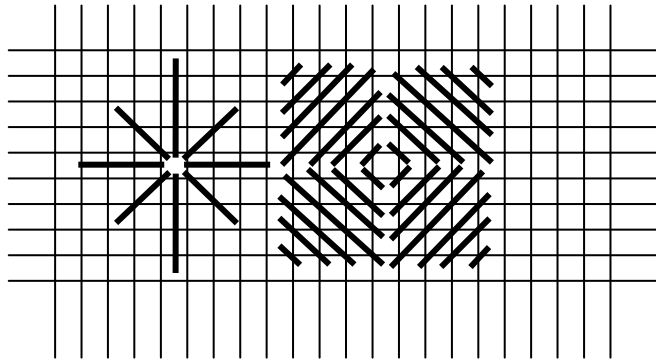


**Figure 4.** Basket filling stitch.

Peggy designed her frame (Figure 5) to hold a picture of her mother's family taken in the 1930's. She selected a stitch pattern from "Pageant of Pattern" – a combination of a Giant Reversed Scotch and Eyelet (Figure 6) – and worked it using 4 strands of ecru DMC cotton floss. The ecru color complements the sepia tones of the photo, as does the gold lame under the canvas. It now resides in her brother's home as a poignant reminder of loved ones that have since passed.



**Figure 5.** Frame stitched by Peggy Nedeau.

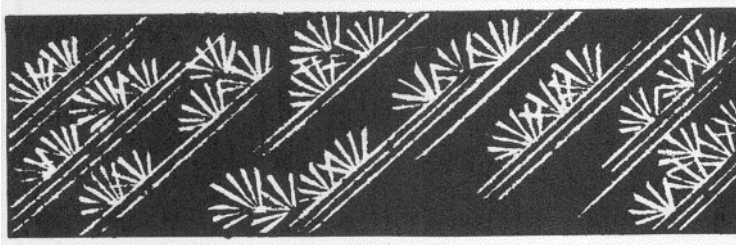


**Figure 6.** Eyelet and giant reversed Scotch stitch.

My frame (Figure 7) wasn't designed for a particular photo. Instead, I wanted experience in translating a graphic image to a stitched medium. Using Kreinik braids, I worked free-style to reproduce a Japanese border design on canvas (Figure 8). The diagonal lines were done in #16 braid couched with #4 braid, and the fern-like motifs were worked with #8 braid in ray stitches. All braids were of the same color, with a black canvas and silver lame lining. After the frame was completed, I found a vacation photo showing my husband and me amidst the greenery of Glacier Park. Positioned next to the computer monitor in my office, it grants me a few seconds of escape at times when it's most needed.



**Figure 7.** Frame stitched by Denise Beusen.



**Figure 8.** Japanese border.

Here's the beauty of what you've learned:

You now have the knowledge to make an inexpensive, personal gift for anyone. You can go into any frame or craft shop and look for easel backs in a standard size. Once you decide on the frame size and the size of the photo it will hold, you can then determine how wide your frame borders will be. Knowing this, you can ask the shop to cut you two pieces of board – one the finished frame size with the center cut out and the border widths to your specification, the other a solid board, but 1/4" shorter in each dimension. Next, pull out your canvas, add 1/4 inch to the inside and outside dimensions of your frame, create a design to fit the space, and begin stitching.

### **References**

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*About the author: Denise has served on the Board of the St. Louis Gateway Chapter 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 the 2003 and 2005 ANG Chapter Project Books. She welcomes your comments and questions at [denise@beusen.net](mailto:denise@beusen.net).*