

Pulled Stitches Boxtop

A One-Half Day Workshop

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Proficiency Level

Intermediate and above

This small sampler is an introduction to the lacelike world of pulled stitches on canvas. The design size is 3.5" x 3.5", which makes it suitable for a small dark oak box by Sudberry with a 3 1/4" x 3 1/4" opening. This piece stitches up quickly and you can easily finish it yourself, making it an ideal gift for family or friends.

There are four pulled stitch types in this project, each from a different stitch family. In addition, a decorative stitch is used for the center diamond, and each of the stitch areas is outlined by a wrapped chain stitch.

Table of Contents

Supplies	2
Preparing the canvas.....	3
Drawing the design on the canvas.....	3
Pointers for pulled stitches	4
<i>Selecting a thread</i>	4
<i>Selecting pulled stitches</i>	4
<i>While stitching</i>	4
Diagram conventions.....	4
Stitch 1: Diamond Square Eyelet	5
Stitch 2: Honeycomb Filling.....	6
Stitch 3: Single Faggot Filling	7
Stitch 4: Step Stitch Filling.....	8
Stitch 5: Mistake Pinwheel	9
Stitch 6: Wrapped Chain Stitch	9
Finishing	10
Additional resources.....	10

Supplies

- 8" x 8" Zweigart dusty rose Congressa cloth
- #4 pencil (softer leads are not suitable)
- 2 pair 8" stretcher bars
- #12 DMC Pearl cotton, color 818
- #8 Kreinik Braid, color 013
- Tapestry needles - #24 and #26
- Thread conditioner or beeswax
- Usual stitching supplies
- *Optional:* Sudberry Dark Oak Box with a 3 ¼" x 3 ¼" opening

Preparing the canvas

Congressa is a soft Congress cloth made by Zweigart with less sizing than regular Congress cloth. Both are 100% cotton, 24-count mono canvas. Because of the sizing, which stiffens the fabric, it is more difficult to execute pulled stitches on regular Congress cloth.

Congressa may need to be special ordered by your local shop owner or ordered from one of the large mail-order suppliers on the world wide web.

Tape the edges of the Congressa and mark one taped edge as "TOP".

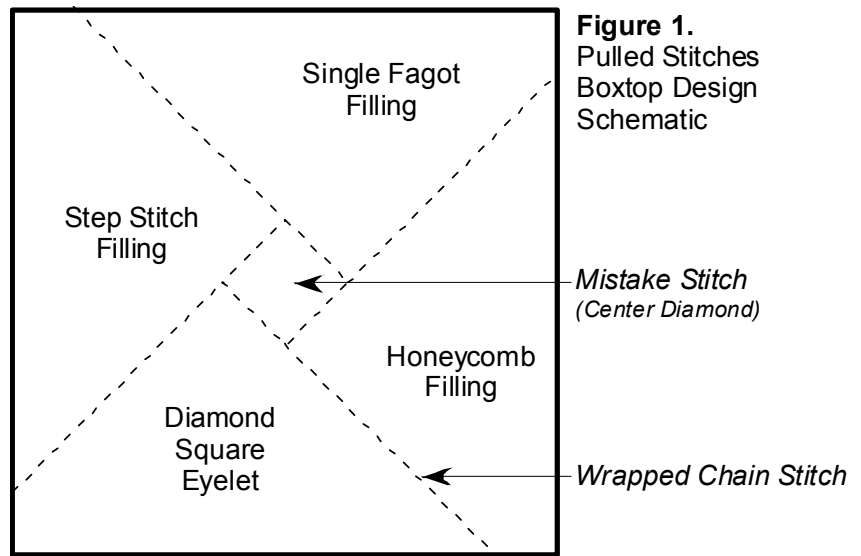


Figure 1.
Pulled Stitches
Boxtop Design
Schematic

*Mistake Stitch
(Center Diamond)*

Wrapped Chain Stitch

Drawing the design on the canvas

Marking the center diamond

- Locate the center hole of the canvas but do not mark it.
- From the center hole, count up 9 threads and mark this hole with the #4 pencil. If you use a softer lead, it will flake and discolor the canvas and your threads.
- Do the same to the right and left of the center hole, and below the center hole.
- These four marks (each 9 threads from the center hole) are the points of a center diamond 18 threads wide and 18 threads high.

Marking the perimeter of the design area

From each corner of the diamond, measure 1 1/2" toward the outer edge. Place a small vertical mark in the trench between canvas threads at this point; it doesn't need to be long and should be parallel to the edge of the canvas. These small marks define the perimeter of the area to be stitched for a 3 1/4" x 3 1/4" box. If you want to stitch a larger area, place your perimeter marks accordingly.

Starting at the left point of the diamond, count 8 threads diagonally to the lower left. Mark this hole. Use this hole and the left-most point of the diamond as guides to draw a straight line on the true diagonal of the canvas that extends from the top point of the diamond to the perimeter (see Figure 1 for guidance about how the line should look). Do the same thing from the other three points of the diamond.

Your canvas should now have a design drawn on it that looks like that in Figure 1. Mount your canvas on the stretcher bars with tacks or staples. Make sure it is stretched tightly and that the "TOP" marking is visible.

*You will start stitching with the **TOP** away from you.*

Pointers for pulled stitches

Some of the published recommendations for pulled work arise from work on grounds of finer mesh with less sizing. When the pointers below differ from comments by other authors, it is because they're relevant to pulled work done on canvas.

Selecting a thread

- Thickness of thread should match thickness of canvas elements or be finer
- Best done with a single strand (not multiple plies)
- The thread and ground colors should match; you want to see the holes, not the threads connecting them. Colored threads pull the eye to the stitches, not the holes. If you want to add color to the piece, use regular decorative stitches, not pulled ones.
- Use strong thread with little texture for the pulled stitches – it's best if it's not hairy or high luster. You can use textured threads for embellishment, over stitching, or outlining on the same piece.
- Suitable threads for pulled work include pearl cotton, crochet cotton, quilting thread, or Rainbow Linen.

Selecting pulled stitches

The visual variable that you control through pulled stitch selection is value. The open areas create darker value, so a stitch that has more and bigger holes will appear darker.

The choice of the stitch size depends on the size and shape it will fill, the mesh of the ground fabric, and the laciness desired (more threads pulled together will result in larger holes). All of the pulled stitches in this project are done over 4 threads, for simplicity and also because this is a size that fits well in the areas to be stitched. All of the stitches can be modified to work over more or fewer threads if you wish to use them in another project.

While stitching

- Always work on a frame to maintain the shape of the project. With a small project, a stand may not be necessary.
- If you're working on Congress cloth, use stitching lengths no more than 24".
- For pulled stitches, run your thread through beeswax or conditioner to keep it from knotting. It also helps the thread grip the canvas better, making for a tighter pulled effect.
- Use an away waste knot, positioned so you won't have starting threads showing through existing or future holes. Take a couple of tuck stitches next to the knot to secure it. This keeps tension on the starting stitch so you can pull it.
- When you pull the stitches, pull on the thread, NOT the needle.
- Pull slowly and evenly; don't tug!
- The amount of tension determines the size of openings.
- Pull tightly enough to bring canvas threads together, but not to bunch them.
- After bringing the thread up through the canvas, make a single, even pull toward the point where the thread will go down.
- After taking the thread down through the canvas, make a single, even pull toward the point where the thread will come up.

Diagram conventions

- The grid lines in the following graphs represent threads *and not holes* of the canvas.
- When stitch paths are numbered, *the needle comes up from the back of the canvas at odd numbers (1,3,5, etc.) and goes down into the canvas at even numbers (2,4,6, etc.)*.
- Dotted lines represent threads that carry across the back side of the canvas.
- The diagrams do not show the entire area to be filled. The "turn-arounds" at the end of rows are illustrative only. The rows of stitches shown are shorter than they will be on your piece.

Stitch 1: Diamond Square Eyelet

Figure 2. Eyelet Stitch, numbered for a descending row.

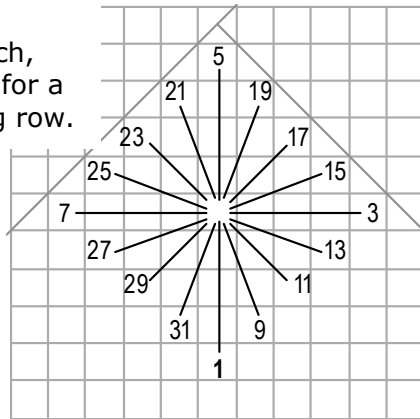


Figure 3. Descending row of eyelet stitches.

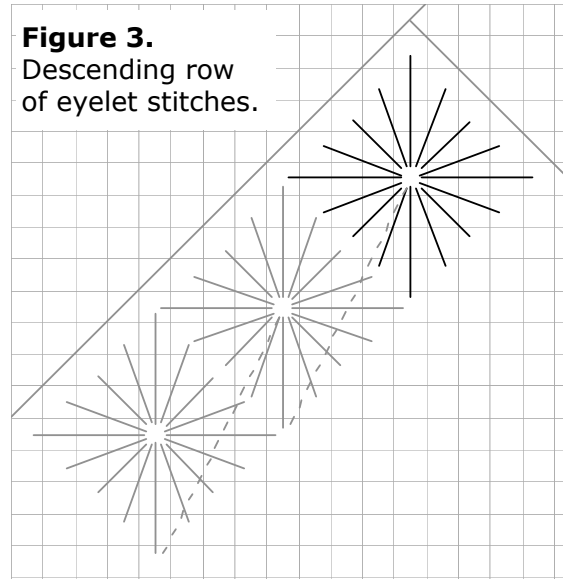
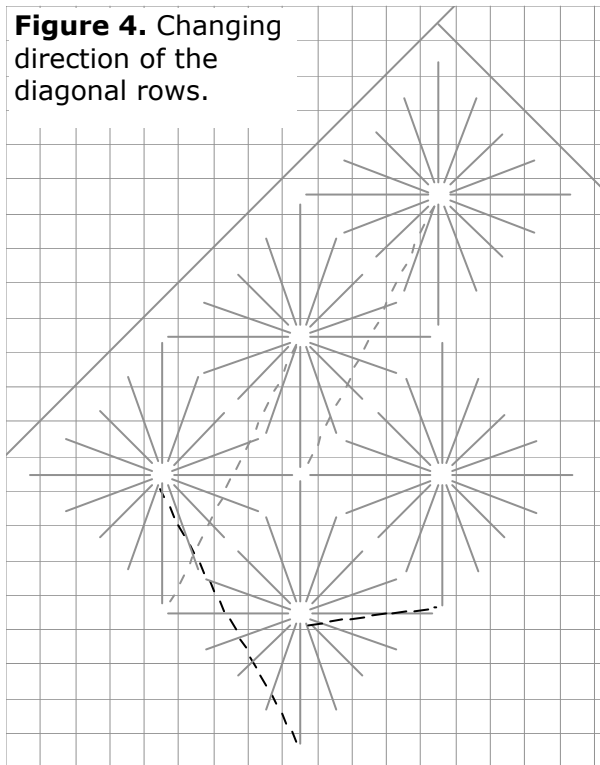


Figure 2 shows the placement of the first eyelet stitch relative to the central diamond motif. The gray lines represent the top of the triangular shape to be filled (see Figure 1), and the point where they meet in the diagram is the left point of the diamond. Use an away waste knot above and to the left of "1", and come up "1". This hole is 9 threads below the left corner hole of the center diamond.

Figure 4. Changing direction of the diagonal rows.



Use a laying tool or a large needle to enlarge the central hole for each stitch, and then place stitches around the hole. Always come up from the outside and go down into the center hole. As shown in Figure 2, it is easiest to get a nice pulled effect by working the four cardinal points first, and then filling in the remaining stitches. There are no even numbers in Figure 2, because all stitches into the canvas go into the center hole.

Once the first eyelet is completed, move to the second eyelet as shown in Figure 3 by carrying the thread across the back of the canvas and coming up at the bottom of the next eyelet (note the dashed lines). This starts you on a diagonal row of eyelets descending to the lower left. The eyelet stitch should be worked in diagonal rows. *In descending rows*, work each unit in counter clockwise fashion as shown in Figure 2, starting at the bottom of the eyelet. When you reach the perimeter of the design area, start an adjacent ascending row that moves to the upper right as shown in Figure 4. *In ascending rows*, start at the bottom of the eyelet but work each unit in

clockwise fashion. This ensures that your traveling threads will not be visible through the holes.

Continue working the diagonal rows of eyelet stitch to fill the area, changing the direction in which the eyelet is worked as appropriate. To move on to the next section, rotate the canvas 90° clockwise so that the TOP is on your right.

Stitch 2: Honeycomb Filling

According to Carolyn Ambuter's book, *The Open Canvas*, the honeycomb filling belongs to the family of wave fillings. This family is characterized by threads that move up and down on one face of the work, with only horizontal connecting threads showing on the other side. Wave fillings are worked so that alternate rows travel in opposite directions. In most wave fillings, each row is a mirror image of the preceding row.

As shown in Figure 5, the honeycomb filling consists of a horizontal backstitch alternating with a vertical satin stitch. Note that the backstitches from one path share holes with the backstitches of the previous path. In the stitched sample, only the horizontal stitches were pulled. If you wish, you can experiment to create an alternative effect by pulling both the horizontal and the vertical elements.

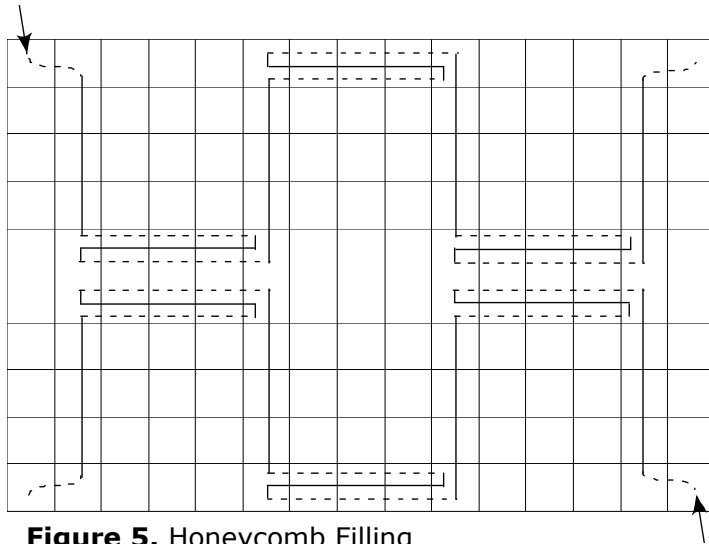


Figure 5. Honeycomb Filling

Figure 6 shows how this stitch is started and compensated within the area it covers. The thin gray lines outline the triangular area to be filled; the point at the top is the left corner hole of the central diamond. Use an away knot to the upper left and come up at "1". This may seem like an odd starting point, but it correctly starts the pattern for optimal positioning within the space to be filled.

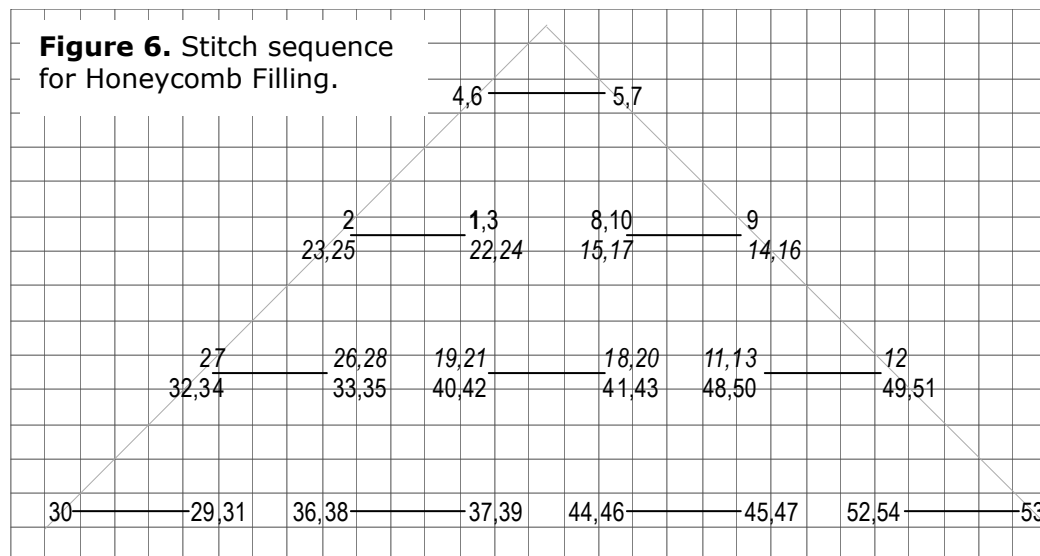


Figure 6. Stitch sequence for Honeycomb Filling.

In Figure 6, stitch paths that move from left to right are in regular type face; paths that move from right to left are italicized. From this diagram you can see how to move from one path down to the next, and continue to fill the area. Take a minute to

read the diagram and compare it to Figure 5. Remember to come up at odd numbers; and go down at even numbers. For clarity, only the pulled horizontal stitches are drawn. Note the transition from one path to the next at each side; use this same sequence when changing paths in later rows.

Before moving on to the next section, rotate your canvas 90° so TOP is at the bottom closest to you.

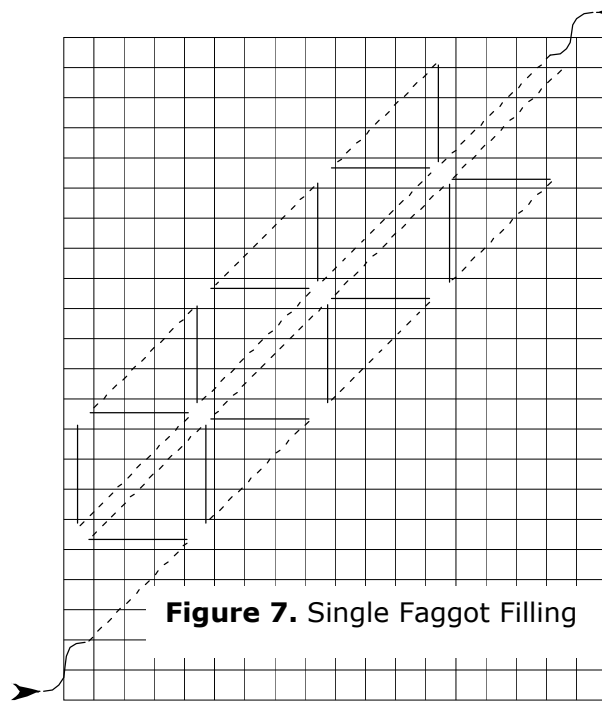


Figure 7. Single Faggot Filling

Stitch 3: Single Faggot Filling

Faggot stitches travel in diagonal paths that resemble stairsteps (Figure 7). The diagonal stitch is always on the backside; horizontal and vertical stitches are always on the front of the canvas.

With the exception of the starting point and stitches on the edge of the area, each hole is shared at least two times. *Every* stitch element is pulled – horizontal, vertical, and diagonal.

Figure 8 shows how to start and place the first row of stitches relative to the boundaries of the triangular area to be filled. The gray diagonal lines outline the space to be filled. Use a secure away knot to the upper left and come up at "1". Follow the sequence of numbers, noting that the horizontal stitches return to share a hole with a previous vertical stitch.

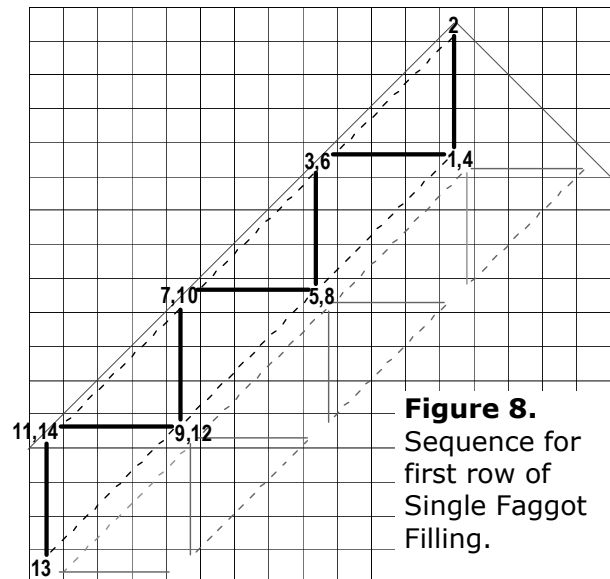


Figure 8. Sequence for first row of Single Faggot Filling.

The grayed stitches in Figure 8 represent the second row, which is diagrammed in detail in Figure 9.

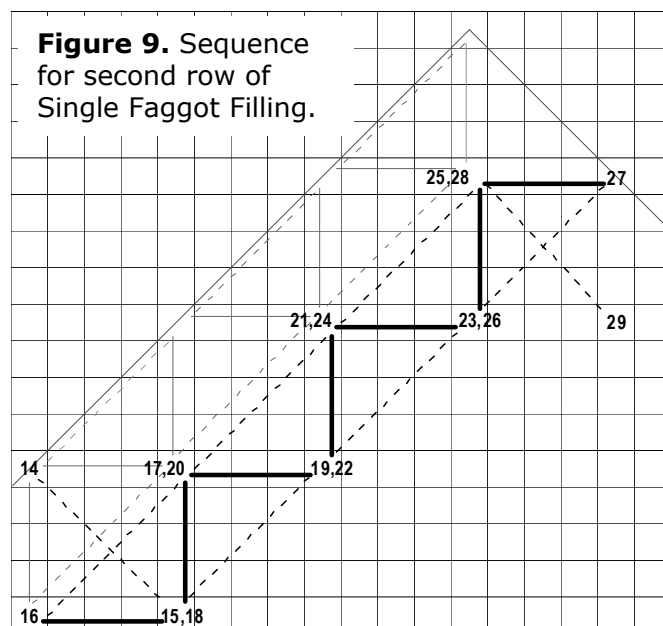


Figure 9. Sequence for second row of Single Faggot Filling.

In Figure 9, "14" is the same as "14" in the previous figure. This diagram shows how to turn the thread around at the end of each diagonal path. NOTE: this diagram does not show the entire length of the diagonal path you'll stitch.

Once the ascending row is complete at "28", the thread can be carried across the back to come up at "29" and the next descending row started as previously.

Once this area is complete, rotate your canvas so "TOP" is on your left.

Stitch 4: Step Stitch Filling

The Step Stitch (Figure 10) is a satin stitch variation in which blocks of 5 satin stitches alternate horizontally and vertically to form step-like rows.

Figure 11 shows the placement of initial stitches in the area to be stitched. The traveling threads on the back of the canvas have been deleted for clarity. Rows are worked diagonally.

This stitch may require a compensating stitch when switching from descending to ascending rows (51-52 in Figure 11). The purpose of this stitch is to ensure that the thread is traveling in a direction that will allow the preceding or subsequent stitch to be pulled. In this case, if the thread were taken directly from 50 to 53, stitch 50 could not be pulled because the thread would be traveling in the same direction as the stitch. The compensating stitch needs to be just outside the design area, but not far out.

Before moving on to the next section, rotate your canvas 90° so TOP is away from you.

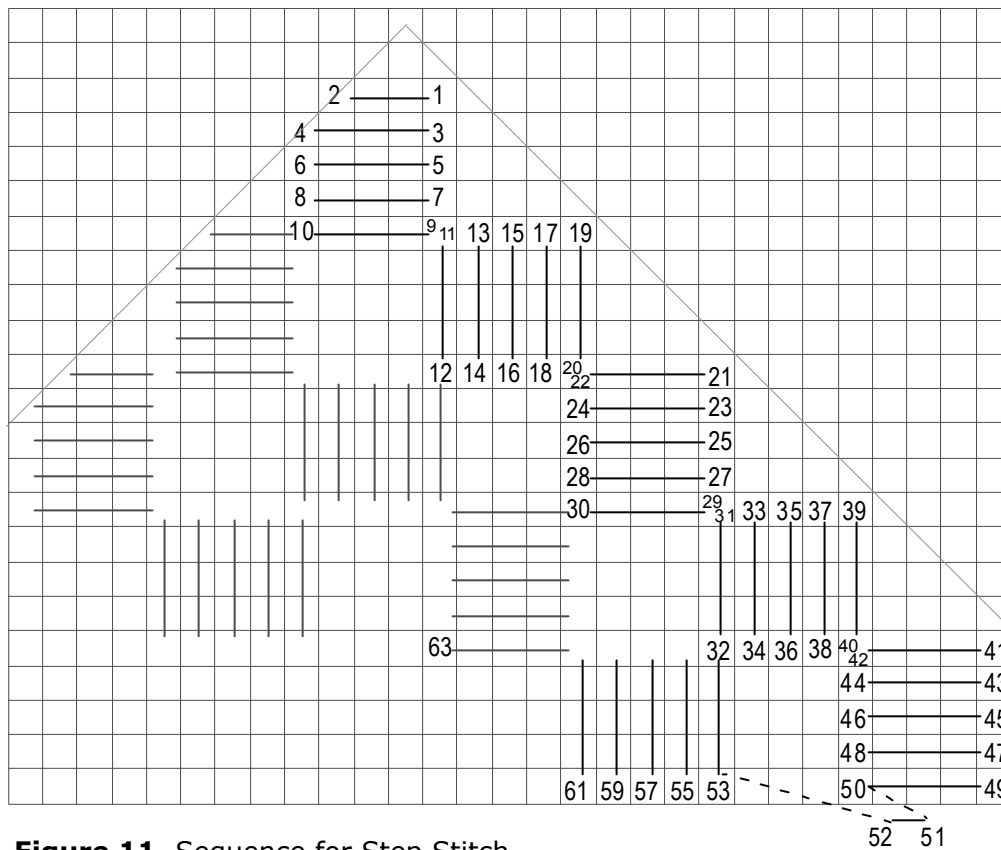
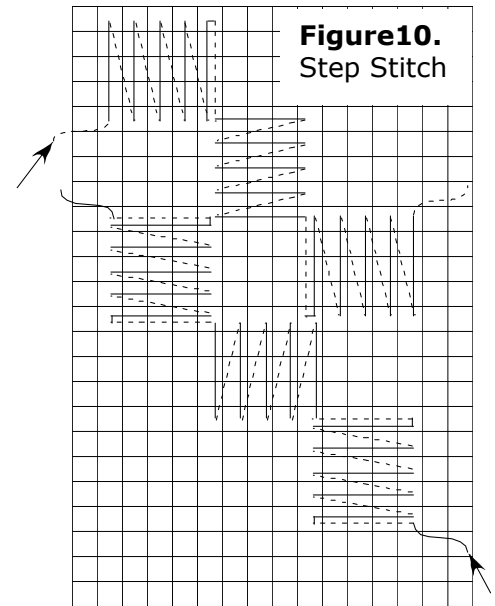
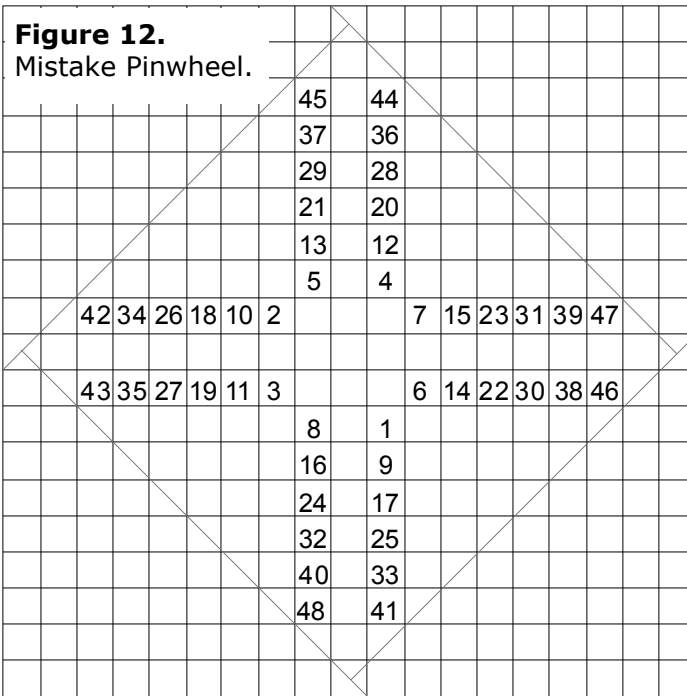


Figure 11. Sequence for Step Stitch.

Stitch 5: Mistake Pinwheel



This is not a pulled stitch, so use the tension you would normally use for decorative stitches. Cut a 20" length of the Kreinik braid. You do not need to wax or condition this thread.

Review Figure 12 before starting this stitch. The gray diagonal lines represent the diamond drawn on your canvas.

- Place an away knot in the hole above and between "45" and "44".
- Bring the needle up at 1, down at 2, and up at 3. Continue the sequence of stitches as numbered.

As you work this stitch, your starting away knot will be secured. This stitch is worked clockwise; if you lose your direction, reorient yourself by noting where TOP is.

Stitch 6: Wrapped Chain Stitch

The Wrapped Chain Stitch divides the stitched areas, and is worked as four "arms" emanating from the points of the center diamond (Figure 13). It is worked in two steps.

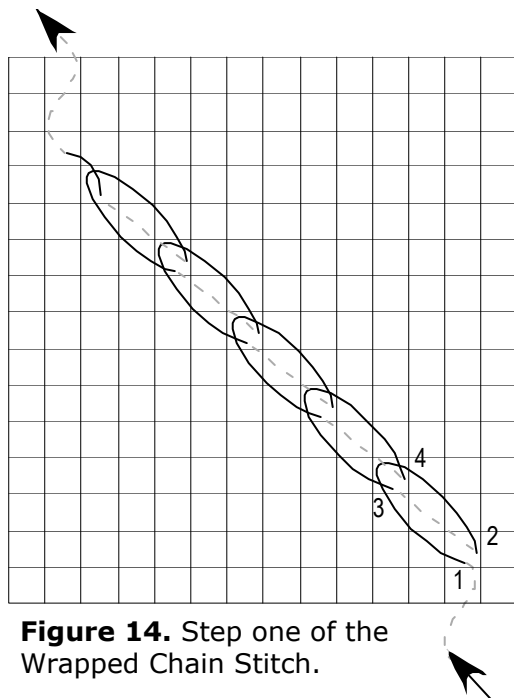


Figure 14. Step one of the Wrapped Chain Stitch.

Step one:

See Figure 14. Start with a 24" length of Pearl cotton, and bring the needle up at "1", which is the hole at the right point of the diamond.

Put the needle back down into the same hole ("2") while holding a loop of thread on top of the canvas. Count up two diagonal threads to the left and bring the needle up again through the loop on top of the canvas ("3"). Pull the thread to tighten the loop on the top of the canvas. The loop should not be so loose it's sloppy, but it shouldn't be so tight that you can't see a loop.

Continue along the straight diagonal line that separates the stitched areas, working each stitch over two threads. When you reach the design perimeter, put the needle back through the canvas to secure the final loop, and bury your thread end in the stitches on the back.

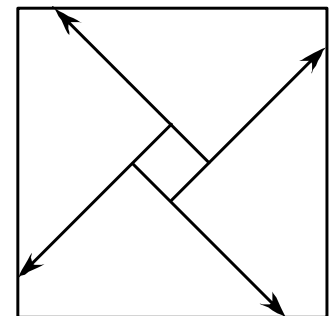


Figure 13. The "arms" of the wrapped chain stitch and the direction in which they're worked.

Rotate the canvas and repeat this process to complete the other arms shown in Figure 13.

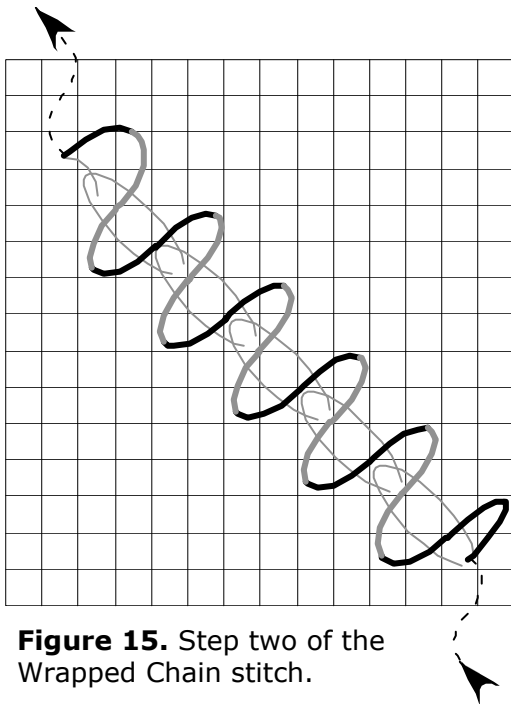


Figure 15. Step two of the Wrapped Chain stitch.

Step two:

Using a 20" length of the Kreinik braid, wrap the metallic around the existing chain stitches. *The braid wrapping is entirely above the canvas except at the starting and ending points.* The diagram at left shows how to wrap the chain stitch. The existing chain stitch is shown as narrow gray lines. The wrap is shown as a thicker line. The darker areas of the thick line are above the chain and the lighter areas below the chain.

To start, use an away waste knot and bring the braid up in the same starting hole as the chain stitch, to one side of it. Bring the braid around the top of the first chain stitch and then take it under the same stitch. Continue going over and under each chain stitch to create a "barber pole" wrap. Sink the end of the wrapped braid in the last stitch of the chain, and secure the starting and ending threads on the back.

Finishing

This piece will be most striking if you place a piece of lame under it that coordinates with the Kreinik Braid.

Additional resources

Carolyn Ambuter's *The Open Canvas*. The classic text on openwork. The stitch families in this project are identified in this book. It's out of print, but can be found through used book dealers or in libraries.

Jean Hilton's Needlepoint Stitches. 1988, self-published. This is the source for the Mistake Pinwheel.