



Blackwork Journey Blog

January 2016



*Inspiration from Japan!
New ideas for 2016*



Readers and Facebook groups!

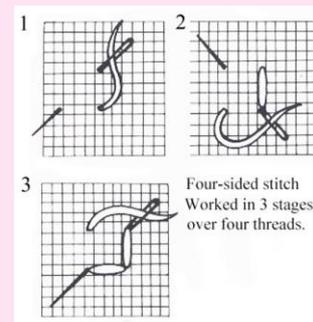
Happy New Year to all my readers and may I wish you all a peaceful and creative 2016!

2015 was certainly a busy and successful year for Blackwork Journey with a month in Japan and Hong Kong and day schools and talks the length and breadth of the UK. 2016 is likely to follow a similar pattern as we are travelling to Madeira in Portugal this month and Southern India in November and as always, I will be looking for inspiration and designs that I can share with you.

Travelling to Japan was always going to be an adventure and doing some 'homework' in advance made the whole experience even more enjoyable, as I was able to understand the background and history to much of what I saw much better.



You may remember that last month, I posted a small 'sashiko style' design which I had worked as a sample. However, whilst in Japan I learned that the stitches I had used were not 100% accurate because true sashiko stitches do not touch each other, but nevertheless it was fun to do!



Four-sided stitch was used to outline the embroidered areas and to define the border.

Not wanting to waste a sample, I developed it a little further, added some more designs and pattern darning and turned it into a small work bag or clutch.

Fine, washable Terylene wadding was included between the embroidery and the lining to add more thickness.

Adding a chain just inside the top of the bag enables it to hang over the shoulder and a small Japanese style button turns it into a very versatile clutch.



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Another practical way of using your embroidery is to turn it into work bags or totes and this is what CH0338 Simple Stitches was used to create.

Taking the blue sample and expanding it further, the pattern has been used to create a lined workbag, 14 x 14 inches.

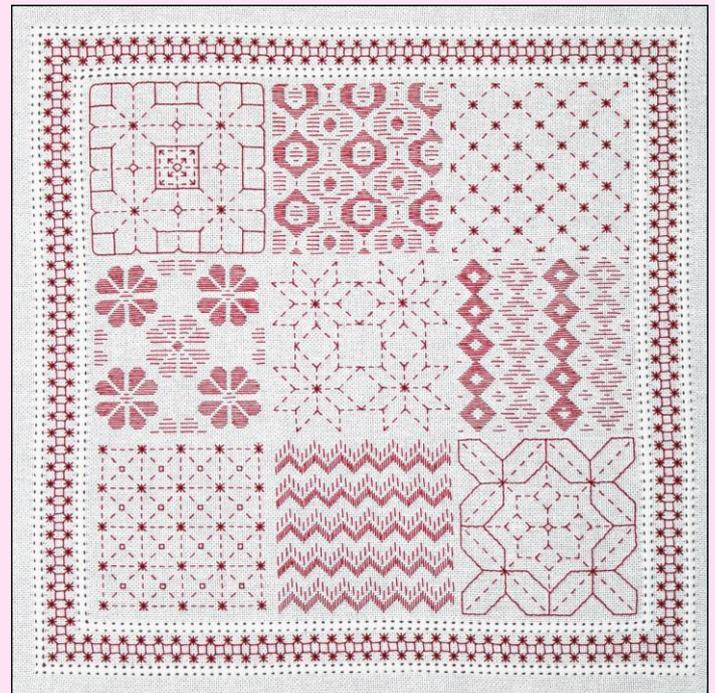
The material used was Zweigart 25 count Lugana and the thread was Cotton P rle No.12. Crochet cotton No.20 or two strands of floss could also be used.

This is a good size for carrying projects and equipment, not too small or too large and is washable, lightweight and easy to fold and pack away.

CH0338 Simple Stitches

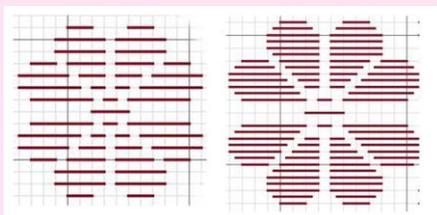
Four different techniques have been used in this project:

Sashiko style embroidery, Pattern Darning, Blackwork and Pulled Thread Work using four-sided stitch.



The four-sided stitch was worked in white Cotton P rle No.12 and pulled very tight to create an attractive border to frame the blackwork border.

I found that when working the pattern, it was easier to insert alternate straight stitches first and then add the second row where the pattern required. This created light and dark areas which are very effective



Pattern darning flowers

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Visit to a Japanese embroidery teacher in Kyoto

During my visit to Japan, I went to Kyoto where I arranged to meet Nakamura, an embroideress who works and teaches the art of silk embroidery at her



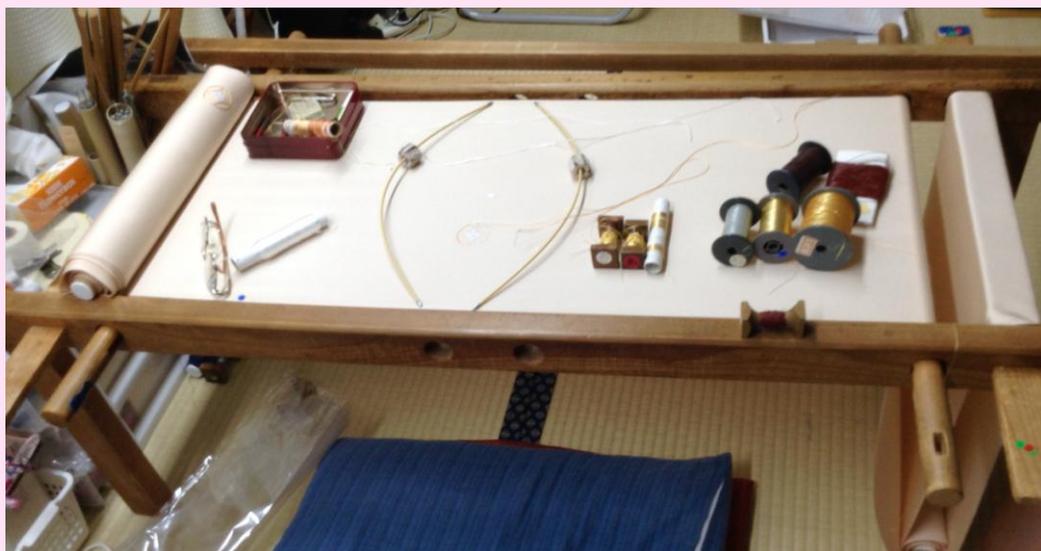
home. I do not speak Japanese and she did not speak English, but the language of embroidery needed few words!



It takes years of practice to perfect the techniques of Japanese embroidery working with the finest quality silk and metallic threads and almost always on a silk background. It was a privilege to see Nakamura's work and that of her students. She uses a tekobari tool for laying the parallel threads in place. This tool is handmade of soft steel which creates a slight friction between the needle and the thread allowing the thread to be placed accurately into place.

Tekobari laying tool and fine needles for the silk threads.

Nakamura was working on an 'obi' which is the band of fabric worn over a kimono. These vary in design from the very simple to the highly decorated and the hand embroidered ones are very expensive. Unlike our work frames, Nakamura sat on cushions on the floor with her feet tucked under the frame. The length of the obi can vary from 11 to 14 feet, so the fabric is rolled tightly at each end and the material is moved along when each motif is completed.



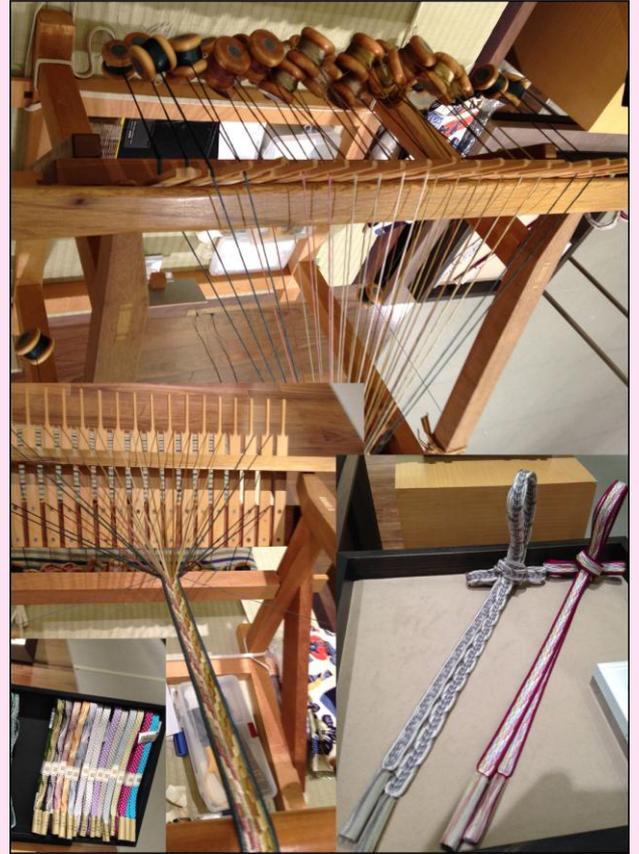
Japanese wooden embroidery frame

The threads she was using were expensive gold metallic threads, cream, gold and brown silks and an unusual lacquered red thread which was being laid and couched and of course, I purchased a selection of silks to add to my collection.

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Nakamura, my Japanese embroideress



Obijime frame for making decorative cords for obi

During the course of my travels I did see the frame used for making the obijime, the strings used to hold the obi in position.

The frame reminded me of the much simpler Japanese Kumi Himo plastic frames I have seen in the UK. Kumihimo is the traditional Japanese technique of braiding strands of silk to create intricately coloured cords. Samurai once used kumihimo as laces for their armour and I saw some examples of this technique. There are kits and books available if you want to try making your own braids in the traditional manner.



Lacing on Samurai armour

There are many inexpensive, small kits available to try out braid making and the results can be very impressive!



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Japanese Costume

Japanese costume has a long and complicated history, but I was encouraged to see the traditional kimono being worn across the country.

Kimonos are T-shaped, straight-lined robes worn so that the hem falls to the ankle, with attached collars and long, wide sleeves. Kimonos are wrapped around the body, always with the left side over the right (except when dressing the dead for burial) and secured by a sash called an obi, which is tied at the back. Kimonos are generally worn with traditional footwear, especially zōri or geta and split-toe socks tabi.

Today, kimonos are most often worn by women and on special occasions. Traditionally, unmarried women wore a style of kimono called furisode, with almost floor-length sleeves, on special occasions. A few older women and even fewer men still wear the kimono on a daily basis. Men wear the kimono most often at weddings, tea ceremonies and other very special or very formal occasions.

A woman's obi is worn in a fancy musubi knot. There are ten ways to tie an obi, and different knots are suited to different occasions and different kimono. The obi is held in place by an obijime, a string about 5 ft long. It is tied around the obi and through the knot and holds the obi in place.



Examples of modern kimonos from a fashion show in Kyoto demonstrate that the traditional dress is still available though often made in less expensive materials and by machine embroidery.



Machine embroidered modern obis and kimonos are still worn by adults and children on special occasions



It was very interesting to see a bride and her groom in Tokyo, dressed in the traditional costume for their wedding and to watch the guests in their mixture of kimono and western dress. The children were dressed in matching miniature outfits.

The white coat was heavily quilted and held in place by a white obi and objime. After the initial ceremony at the Miji Shrine, the white headpiece was removed and red flowers inserted in her hair before moving on to the next part of the ceremony.



Young women in Kyoto taking the afternoon air!

Next month I will examine some of the crafts I saw on my travels.



Pandora's Box Block 3

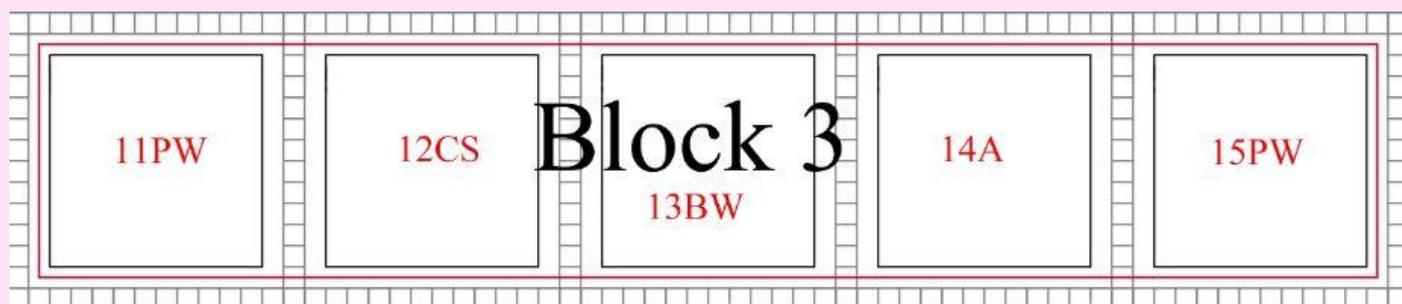
Chart and Instructions can be found in the Freebies section of Blackwork Journey.

Evenweave and Aida Patterns 11 - 15

Set within a border of four-sided stitch

Locate Block 3 Patterns 11 - 15 on the Master Chart.

Note: The patterns follow diagonally across the chart, so some blocks will have more than one block of the same technique. (See Master chart) The two charts are NOT identical.



Grid Size: 32W x 136H

Design Size: 2 inches x 9.57 28 x 134 stitches

Stitches Used:

Back stitch, one strand

Cross stitch, two strands

Detached Eyelet, Cotton P rle or two strands of floss

Anchor 1325 Iris - variegated, three skeins

Anchor 1325 - is represented by DMC-333 Lavender on the chart.

DMC Cotton P rle No.12, white, one ball

DMC Cotton P rle No.12 - is represented by DMC-666 Christmas red on the chart.

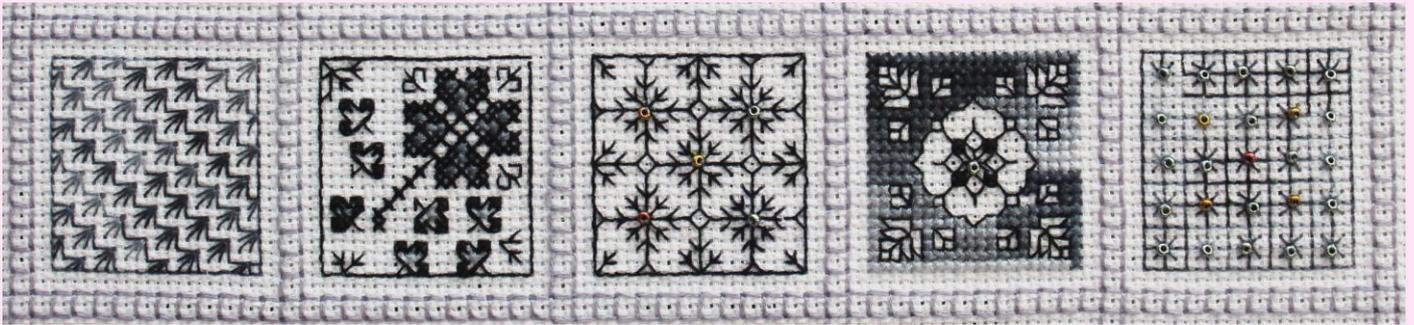
The fabric and pulled thread stitch variations have led to several patterns being placed in different parts of the chart. Please follow the chart you have selected for the fabric.

Pattern No.11 are 15 are worked as pulled thread stitches on the evenweave but different embroidery stitches are used on the Aida. The stitches are very simple to work, but look very different on the two fabrics.

Follow the instructions in Freebies for the other patterns.



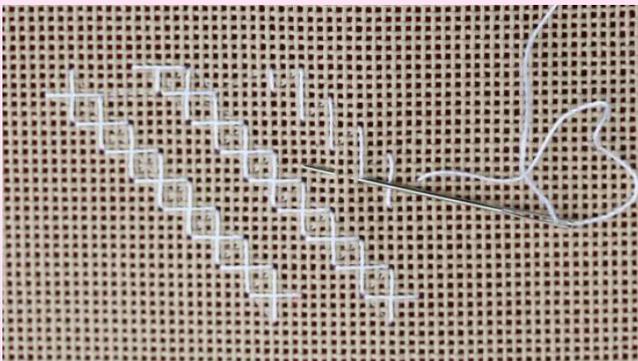
Block 3 Evenweave



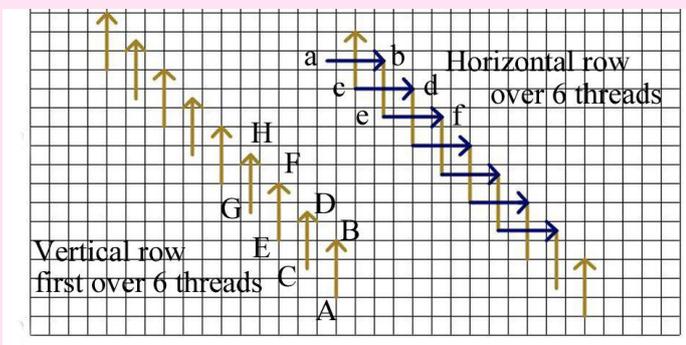
Block 3 Aida

The four-sided stitch framework has been used to create squares and rectangles. The pattern blocks are inserted into the pulled thread framework.

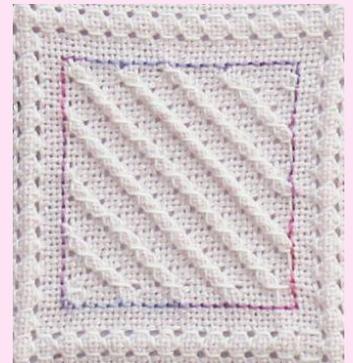
Block 3 Evenweave Pattern 11 Diagonal raised band - pulled thread



1. Insert the diagonal raised band working from right to left over 6 threads. Work the vertical row first followed by the horizontal row (blue). Pull the stitches tightly to create the holes.
2. There are six threads between each diagonal row. Repeat each row until the whole area has been completed.
3. Work a back stitch border round the diagonal raised band.



Diagonal raised band –
Stitch construction of
Row 1

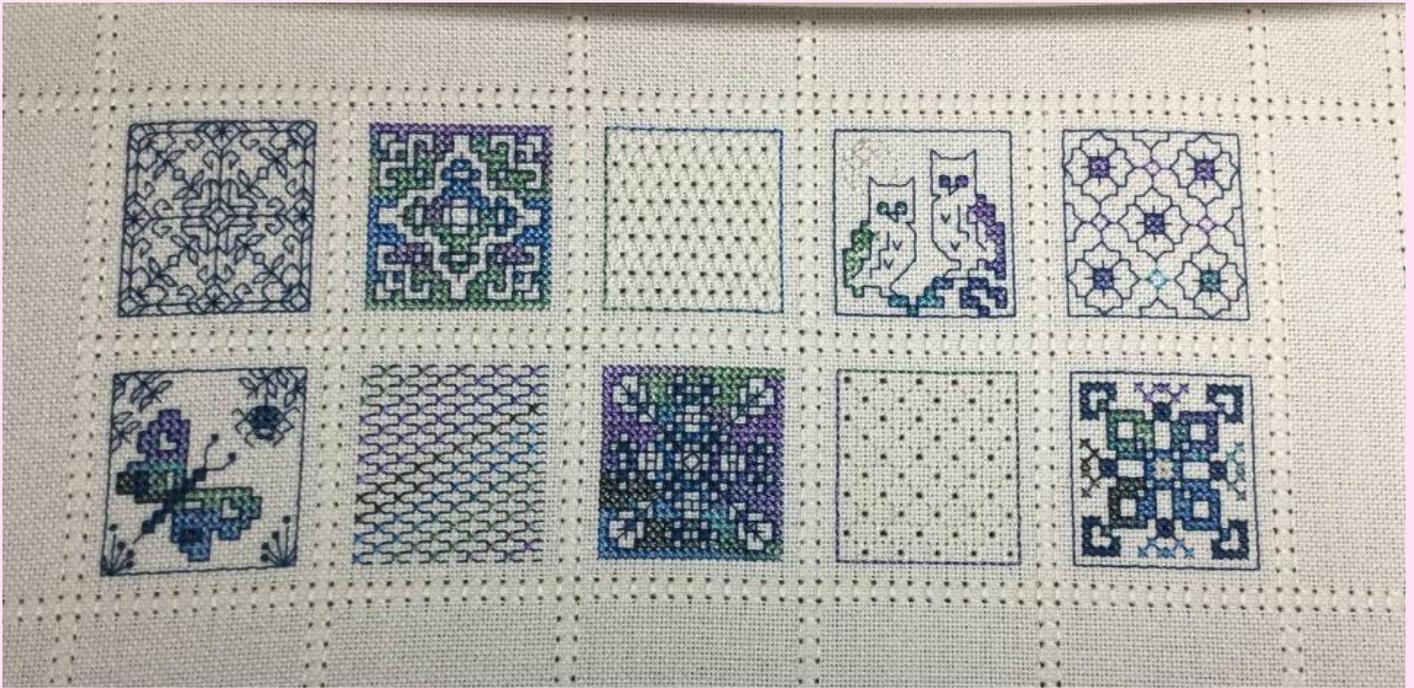


Pattern15. Four-sided stitch, pulled thread work

1. Four-sided stitch consists of 3 straight stitches to form the end, the middle and the top of the 'square'. Work from right to left over 4 threads. Always put the needle in at one corner and come out at the opposite one. Follow diagrams 1-3
2. Pull tight to create the holes. The rows of four-sided stitch are worked backwards and forwards until the space is filled.

There are some wonderful pieces of work being posted in the Facebook group for Pandora's Box <https://www.facebook.com/groups/425352680984872>

Michele is just one of many who have completed the first two blocks and is doing it again in a different colour scheme. It is so interesting to see how many different variations in threads and materials that are being used to create the same design.



Michele and Simone's colour schemes for 'Pandora's Box'

Talented Readers

I am fortunate that so many readers over the years have stitched my designs and sent me photographs of their work, but I have never seen CH0053 Wandering Star worked on cherry red before. I enjoyed this so much I thought I would share it with you. The chart that goes with CH0053 Wandering Star is CH0334 Shooting Star. Thank you Michele! Diane has also created a beautiful cushion from the free pulled thread designs from one of the Facebook groups! Thank you Diane!



Group Membership

If you are interested in joining a group and sharing your ideas and information, there are three Facebook groups set up within Blackwork Journey. There are many benefits from being able to share ideas, especially if, for whatever reason, you are unable to join a needlework group. I aim to support and help the members in a way it is not possible to do within the site and now have over 2,000 active members.

Sharing your ideas with other people is very positive and can often help you to think in a different direction, so if you are interested in joining the contacts are listed below

www.facebook.com/groups/235322809973322/

This is an example of how the Facebook members can help each other. I had a request for help from Carol in one of the Facebook groups which I think applies to many ladies within all three groups so I wrote an open letter to members of all three groups

“One of the reasons why I set up the Facebook groups was to answer queries and to provide help and support where possible. I have been teaching adults for over 36 years and members of the groups often have problems which together we can usually address.

Firstly, if you have a physical problem which means that sitting over a stand creates problems, then I suggest you try a ring or very small frame over which you have complete control.

'Save the Stitches' and all my large pieces were worked totally in an 8 inch plastic ring because that is what I am comfortable working with. I cannot sit over a frame for long periods and as long as you take the ring off at the end of each session it will not mark your work. You get used to the extra fabric and it keeps you warm in winter!!!!

A small ring is easier to get your hands round rather than larger one and the extra material just sits in your lap! If you use a wooden ring, bind it with bias binding (white) to stop it slipping. You may find an 8 inch quilting hoop easier still to handle because it is deeper and gives you more to hold on to. If your frame has a screw, use a small screwdriver to tighten it. My plastic ring has no screws, but keeps the fabric 'drum tight.'

A cushion on your knee and an armchair with arms will help you to be comfortable. Sit well back into your chair and if necessary, put your feet up on a small stool. If you are not comfortable you will not stitch well or easily, so sort out your sitting position first, however make your own rules on this one! Also make certain that you have good lighting over your work or you will tend to stoop over your stitching. Bring your stitching up to you, not you down to your stitching!

Modern fabrics are very forgiving and will stand up to adding and removing frames unless it is linen which is a little more difficult. I did press 'Save the Stitches' but Lugana is a very forgiving fabric anyway and creases very little and stands up to a lot of handling at day schools and talks etc.

The metallic threads that you are using (Petite Treasure braid, DMC and Anchor) will stand up to a lot so don't worry about the hoop causing problems with them. You are only using them in small areas on a project like this. I use the same threads all the time. Add any beads after the embroidery is finished.

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Let's get it stitched and then we will sort out the ironing and how you are going to use it. Everyone is different and finds their own way round problems. Please add your ideas on this one if you have found something that works well for you. Others might have just the same problem!

I cannot solve all the problems that people have, but members within the groups often have some very helpful ideas and I very much appreciate their input.



CH0338 Simple Stitches

Just in time for 2016 – hot off the needle!

Make a new Japanese style workbag to celebrate the New Year using four different techniques – pulled thread work, sashiko style stitching, pattern darning and blackwork and a Japanese style fabric button for decoration.

Bag size: 12.50 wide x 14.50 high
This bag is large enough to carry project, frame and charts.

I hope you have enjoyed the first Blog of 2016. Please keep sending your e-mails and photographs to me at Blackwork Journey, along with your ideas and comments. It is always a great pleasure for me to read them.

Happy stitching!

Liz