



Blackwork Journey

Techniques

TQ0011

Fabrics for Embroidery



The Working Environment by Liz Almond

Fabrics for Embroidery

In previous articles I have examined a number of different items of equipment and techniques, but when it comes to choosing which fabric to use it can be difficult, even for the most experienced embroiderer.

Understanding the nature and construction of different fabrics will help you to identify the ones you most enjoy working with, but until you reach that stage I suggest you keep an open mind and experiment with different fabrics.

Start by considering any physical limitations you may have, especially your eyesight as not all the fabrics recommended for embroidery are easy to use and whilst lights and lenses will eliminate some of the problems, dark fabrics or ones with a high thread count may prove frustrating. If you are new to counted thread techniques, I suggest you use a fabric where you can see the threads clearly!

The technique you intend to use can often determine the most suitable fabric to use, for example, hardanger, requires specialist 22 count fabric. The weight of the fabric is also important. Mountmellick embroidery, which uses heavy cotton threads, requires a firm, close woven fabric to support the weight of the embroidery and if the embroidery has buttons, ribbons or beads added, the fabric must be able to support the embellishments without causing distortion.

To avoid distortion, the size of the thread and needle you propose to use needs to be in proportion to the weight of the fabric and pass through the fabric smoothly, without rubbing or damaging either the thread or the fabric.

If the embroidery is free style, rather than a counted thread technique such as cross stitch, consider the appearance of the material and the points mentioned above. (See Fig.1)

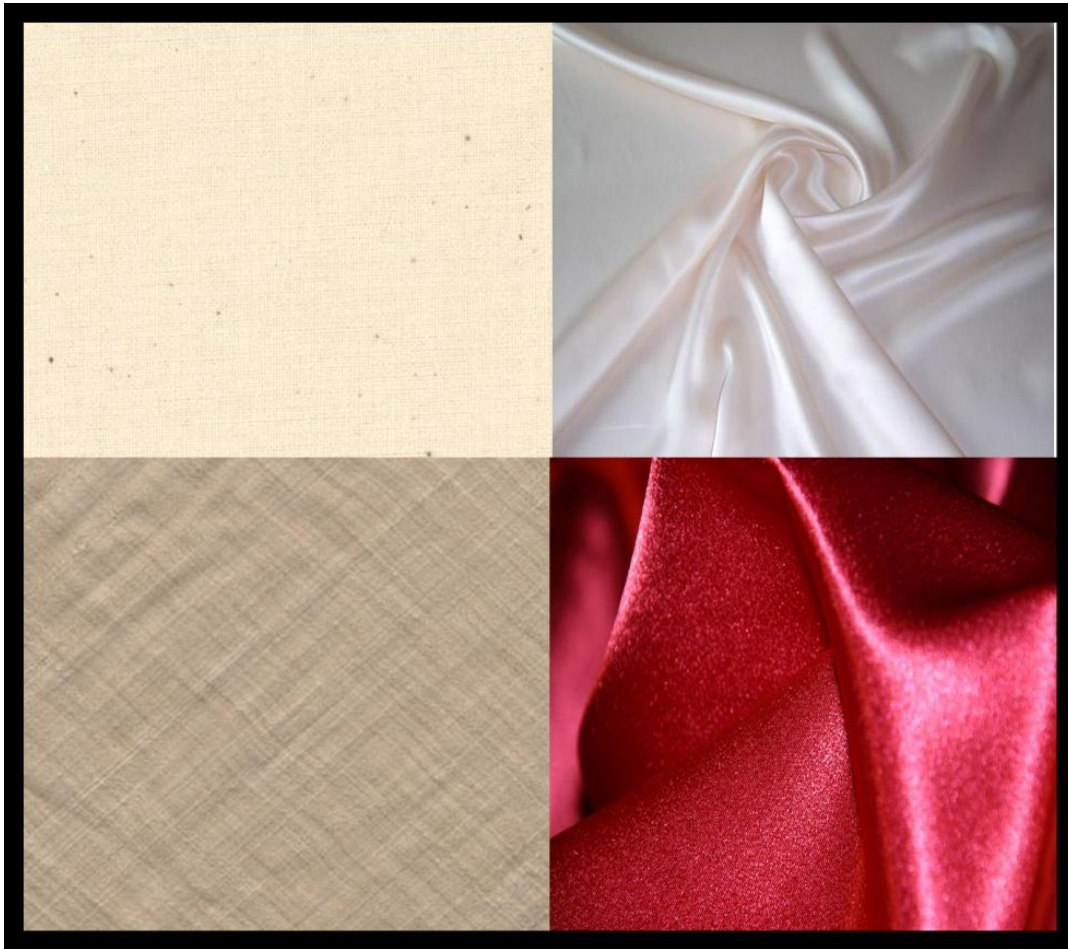


Fig.1 Calico and linen contrast with silk and satin dupion. These fabrics are all suitable for free style embroidery

Calico, linen and cotton have matt, somewhat dull surfaces which can offset complex and detailed free style embroidery, whereas shiny fabrics such as silk, satin and satin dupion create a different visual impact and are available in a wide range of vibrant colours.

Counted Thread Fabrics

The thread count of a fabric is the number of threads per inch. If the fabric is evenweave, the count will be the same both horizontally and vertically.

Counted thread techniques require fabrics which can be counted easily. These fall onto two groups, Aida block weave and evenweave, both of which have different qualities.

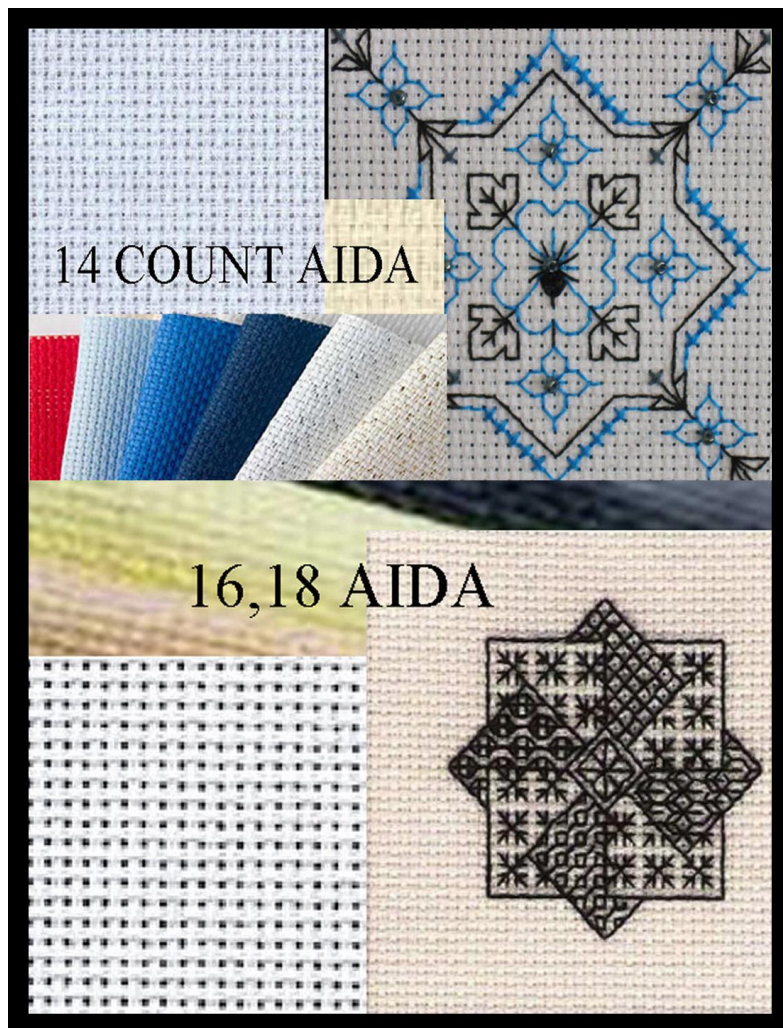


Fig.2 Aida block weave for counted thread techniques

Aida block weave

Aida is woven in blocks with the stitches worked in every hole. It is available in a variety of counts i.e. holes to the inch. The most common are 11, 14, 16 and 18. The higher the thread count, the smaller the design. A wide range of widths and colours are available made of a mixture of cotton, linen or synthetic material. 22 count hardanger can also be classed as a block weave and used very successfully for blackwork.

Beginners may find it easier to start by using 14 Count Aida.



DMC Fabrics

14 Count Aida
14 Count Aida - Impression
14 Count Aida - Iridescent
14 Count Aida - Marble
28 Count DMC Linen
32 Count DMC Linen
DMC Pre-Packaged Fabrics
DMC Soluble Canvas
DMC Magic Guide Aida

Zweigart Aida

6 Count Binca
8 Count Aida
11 Count Aida
14 Count Aida
14 Count Aida - Jeans
14 Count Aida - Lurex
14 Count Aida - Natural
14 Count Aida - Rustico
14 Count Aida - Vintage
14 Count Aida - Yorkshire
14 Count Linen Aida
16 Count Aida
16 Count Aida - Rustico
18 Count Aida
18 Count Aida - Vintage
20 Count Aida
22 Count Hardanger

Fig 3 Aida block weave fabrics



Fig.4 Evenweaves and linen

Evenweaves and linen

This fabric has the same number of threads, horizontally and vertically and is available in a range of widths, stitch counts and colours. The most popular is 28 holes per inch. Stitches are usually worked into every other hole, (two threads over two) producing the same finished design size as 14 count Aida.

It may be made of pure linen, linen and cotton mixes or pure cotton, for example, Zweigart 28 count Quaker Cloth is 55% linen and 45% cotton. The linen/cotton combination has very even threads which are much easier to count than 100% linen.

Working half or quarter stitches is much easier on evenweave and many charts specify which type of fabric is most suitable for use.

Other familiar names are 18 Count Davosa, 20 Count Lugana, 25 and 27 Count Linda. Finer fabrics are also available.

	
<p>Zweigart Cotton Evenweave</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 18 Count Davosa 20 Count Bellana 20 Count Bellana Couture 20 Count Bellana Lurex 22 Count Fine Ariosa 22 Count Oslo 25 Count Colmar 25 Count Colmar Cushions 25 Count Lugana 25 Count Lugana - Vintage 27 Count Linda 28 Count Annabelle 28 Count Brittney 28 Count Brittney - Lurex 28 Count Jazlyn 32 Count Murano 	<p>Zweigart Linen Evenweave</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 20 Count Cork Linen 25 Count Dublin Linen 28 Count Cashel Linen 28 Count Cashel - Lurex 28 Count Cashel - Vintage 28 Count Quaker Cloth 30 count Linen Band 32 Count Belfast Linen 32 Count Belfast - Dots 32 Count Belfast - Lurex 32 Count Belfast - Vintage 35 Count Floba Superfine 36 Count Edinburgh Linen 36 Count Edinburgh Vintage 40 Count Newcastle Linen 55 Count Kingston Linen
	
<p>Permin Linen</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> 28 count Permin Linen 32 count Permin Linen Permin - Nora Corbett 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Afghans 13 count Vinyl Aida 14 count Bright Ideas™ Fiddler's Cloth

Fig.5 Evenweave fabrics

Whether you use an evenweave fabric or Aida block weave is personal choice. Stitching on evenweave can be more stressful and requires careful counting, but the end results can be very satisfying!

However, I recommend using a recognised brand where possible. I have listed some of the more easily obtainable fabrics. However, you can research the Internet to learn more about individual fabrics.

Fabric Calculator

Calculating the correct size of fabric required, especially if you use a different count of fabric other than the one recommended, cannot be left to guesswork, so before you make any decisions regarding size, consult a simple calculator.

A fabric calculator will allow you to key in any combination of material, stitches, border etc. and determine the correct size of fabric required for the project.

Home > About This Site

Aida Calculator

How big is the design? 60 stitches wide by 70 stitches high
 How much extra fabric on each side? 2 inches
 What count is the Aida? 14 squares per inch

Calculate Size Clear Form

The fabric should be 9 inches wide by 9 inches high
 (Rounded up to the nearest inch)

Linen/Evenweave Calculator

How big is the design? 60 stitches wide by 70 stitches high
 How much extra fabric on each side? 2 inches
 What count is the linen? 28 threads per inch
 How many threads will each X cover? 2 threads

Calculate Size Clear Form

The fabric should be 9 inches wide by 9 inches high
 (Rounded up to the nearest inch)

Aida Metric Calculator

How big is the design? stitches wide by stitches high
 How much extra fabric on each side? centimeters
 What count is the Aida? squares per inch centimeter

Calculate Size Clear Form

The fabric should be centimeters wide by centimeters high.
 (Rounded up to the nearest centimeter)

Linen/Evenweave Metric Calculator

How big is the design? stitches wide by stitches high
 How much extra fabric on each side? centimeters
 What count is the linen? threads per inch centimeter
 How many threads will each X cover? 2 threads

Calculate Size Clear Form

The fabric should be centimeters wide by centimeters high.
 (Rounded up to the nearest centimeter)

Home > About This Site

Copyright © 1994-2005 Kathleen Dyer
 All Rights Reserved.
 Last modified: Sun, Mar 20, 2005

Fig.6 Fabric calculator used to determine fabric size for the design shown in Fig. 7

(Fabric Calculator designed by Kathleen Dyer)



Fig.7 Diamond wedding card worked on 28 count evenweave, 60w x 70h stitches

14 count Aida = 28 count evenweave

Design area: 60 stitches wide x 70 stitches high. Using 14 count Aida leave 2" extra fabric on each side Size of material 9 x 9 inches.

Design area of 60w x 70h stitches worked on 28 Count evenweave, leaving 2" extra fabric on each side as a border, would require a piece of material 9 x 9"

Whether it is Aida or evenweave, you would **still need a piece of material the same size.**

16 count Aida = 32 count evenweave

18 count Aida = 36 count evenweave

The **HIGHER** the fabric count the smaller the design area will be.

If you want to use a smaller border you would allow less fabric as a margin. In reverse if you wanted a larger border you would allow more material.

Always remember to leave enough material for framing up the project, not just the actual design area. It is better to cut more material than not enough!

I hope this helps. However, if you ever have any queries about how much material to use, look on the Internet to find a Fabric Calculator or go to “Blackwork Journey “ and use the Calculator provided.

<http://www.blackworkjourney.co.uk>

Fabric preparation

Fabric preparation is important. Bind or hem, over lock or masking tape the material edges to prevent fraying. For small areas such as cut lengths of ribbon, braids and appliqué which are prone fraying, I use “Fray Check”. There are several versions available but always read the instructions before using.



Fig.8 Preparing edges with fray check, masking tape, tacking and pulled thread work

Stitch from the centre of the design and work outwards to position embroidery correctly on the fabric. If working on black fabric place a white piece of material on your lap to enhance the holes.

When buying fabric for any embroidery, select carefully and choose reputable makes where possible.

If you use a material of an uncertain origin, I suggest you first check for colour fastness, texture, weight and quality of the weave to see whether the threads are the same count in both directions. Whilst loose weave fabrics may be ideal for thicker threads, they may distort. As a rule of thumb, heavier fabrics such as velvet require more substantial threads. Work a test sample before embarking on a major project to resolve any potential problems.

If you are in doubt about the number of threads per inch, use a special fabric ruler to count the number of threads per inch. If this is used in conjunction with a magnifying lens, an accurate count can be made of any evenweave fabric.

Even a slight difference in thread count will affect the size of the finished design, so it is essential that the count is accurate.



Fig.9 Checking thread count with fabric ruler

By experimenting, I have identified a number of favourite fabrics I enjoy working with. I hope this article has clarified some of the differences between fabrics and how to identify which ones are most suited to your needs.

Next month, I will be looking at some of the threads and beads available, how to test, store and use them successfully.

Happy stitching!

Liz

(If you have any questions go to our new column "CSI" Investigations and we will do our best to help you.)