
Embroidered Heirloom Napkins with Rebecca Ringquist

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

- Have you ever wanted to add more sentimentality to your dinner parties and family events? In today's workshop I'm gonna show you how to capture everyone's signatures and later record them using a back stitch on a collection of cloth napkins, creating an instant heirloom that'll last forever. (mid-tempo music)

Chapter 2 - Materials

Materials

- To make these heirloom napkins, you just need a few basic embroidery supplies. You'll need a hoop. You could use a wooden hoop or a metal hoop. There are also plastic hoops. I don't like those as much. You need some embroidery needles. These are just size five. You could use some that are a little smaller or a little bigger. Whatever needles you have already in your house will probably work. I like to use a little bit of beeswax, makes it easier to thread the needle. You could use a thimble, but I like to use these rubber paper sorters that you can get at the office supply store, makes it easier and faster to sew. You'll need some sharp scissors for cutting your thread. You'll need thread. I'm using flower thread, but you could also use just typical embroidery floss. And then to collect the signatures, we're using these gel pens that are made by Pilot, and they're a specific kind of gel pen that irons off with an iron. They're called FriXion with an X, and they're made, again, by Pilot, and you can buy them at the office supply store. They're not for sale at a fabric store. But office supply store will have them, and they come in a multipack with lots of different colors. Lastly, you'll need a set of cloth napkins. The set that I'm using is a set that came with these beautiful flowers already embroidered on them and this running stitch around the edge. So you might be able to find a beautiful set that's in mint condition at the antique store or a flea market or something like that. Make sure that they're cotton or linen. You don't want polyester for this technique. I don't think the pens will work nearly as well. It's nice to have something to keep your needles in, especially if you can pre-thread your needles. That'll save a lot of time. I like to keep my needles either in a pincushion or in a piece of 100% wool felt. Optional, you might like to have some tracing paper. That's a nice way to record signatures of people that aren't at your dinner party. For example, I have a card that my grandma sent me a while ago, and I'm using tracing paper to trace her name onto the napkins. And then lastly, you'll need an iron and an ironing board.

Chapter 3 - Make Napkins

Collect signatures

- Collecting signatures is the most fun part of this project, and it's so fun to see what everybody writes and how they write, and it'll be fun to watch how their signatures evolve over the years if you invite them back to your parties. If there is somebody that you want to include, but is not at your dinner party, you can trace their signature, and I'm gonna show you how to do that now. I have a card that my grandma and grandpa sent me a while ago, and I'm gonna trace that just using simple tracing paper. So, I'm gonna pull out a piece of this paper, lay my card down on a hard surface so I don't pick up the texture of this corduroy backing, and then I'm just gonna trace right over the top of it. I love tracing paper, and I especially love tracing someone else's handwriting. It feels like a

special connection that you can make by following along the marks that they made with their own hand, and you'll find that that is true later with embroidery as well. Make sure you're using a nice dark color. I'm using a dark Sharpie here, and try not to be influenced by the marks that your own hand would make, but really follow the lines that they put down. There we go. Now, I'm gonna take this over to a bright window and trace through the fabric the signature onto the napkin. So, just pick a nice, bright window, whatever is the brightest spot in your house, and tape the signature on tracing paper up to the window and then tape the napkin over the top. It's kind of hard to see now, but when I smash this down over the top of the tracing paper, I'll be able to see it. And I've traced it once already, so that's gonna help me see. Tracing on the window is a bit of an imperfect system, so once I've done it, I like to bring it back over to a work table away from the bright lights and just compare the signatures. So, as you can see here, the signature has deteriorated a little bit from the original handwriting of my grandma, but I'm just gonna kind of use maybe a different color and just go back in and alter any things that I want to change. Like the D was a little shorter in her handwriting, so I'm just gonna mark that with the blue, and I'll know to embroider that in that way. And the top of this G went across a little more like that in my grandpa's signature. So, just make any little alterations like that that you want. Change that loop a little. That looks better to me. A little closer to the original. Add a little flourish to that R. I love handwriting and especially older people's handwriting I think is so beautiful. It's something that isn't emphasized anymore, so it's fun to look at. Everyone else will sign the napkins on their own, everyone that's at your dinner party, and you can invite them to use whatever color they want or whatever style they want. If they've been to your dinner parties before, it'll be fun to see how their signature changes over the years, and if you have little kids at the party, you might invite them to make a drawing. If somebody makes a drawing or a signature that you don't like, you can always just iron it off. These pens iron off really easily, so, you know, if they sign once and say, "Oh, I hate my signature," then you can just ask them to sign it again, and you'll iron off the one that they didn't like. So, it's a very forgiving process. The writing part is super forgiving and extremely reversible.

Embroider signatures

- Embroidering everybody's signatures will take a lot less time than you think. I promise. And it'll go even faster if your needles are pre-threaded. I like to thread needles when I have a little bit of spare time and keep them in pin cushions like this so that they're ready to go. If you have them already threaded and then you have, you know, 20 minutes of time in an afternoon or after your dinner party if you can convince someone else to do the dishes, then it's so much easier to pick up and start embroidering. There's no hurdle to jump over of threading your needles. So, I'm gonna start with this first signature here that just got added. It's Ava's signature. Just set the rest of these aside and put this napkin in a hoop to get started. You put the part without the hardware underneath the napkin and center it on that signature that you want to work on. And then, this part, you just loosen up the nut and bolt, and smash that down over the top. For these signatures, I'm using flower thread. You could also use one or two strands of embroidery floss, and this is a good time to tell you that the napkins that I'm using are cotton. I would recommend using cotton or linen. Don't use any napkins that are polyester. I don't think the ink from the pens will work as well, and they're also not as nice. So, if you're spending all this time embroidering them, you want to make sure that they're something that's gonna last a long time and look really beautiful for years to come. The thread that I'm using is flower thread, which is a cotton thread meant for embroidery, and I've doubled it up, tying a knot at one end. I've tied a knot, one right on top of the other, two knots stacked up, and

then I've cut the thread really close to where the knot is so that, you don't want to have long ends hanging off the back because people are gonna see the back sides as they're eating and using the napkins. I like to use these finger protectors. I usually, sometimes I use two, but if I'm only using one, I just put it on my middle finger, and that helps to push the needle through. You need to strategize where you're gonna start with your needle because you don't wanna have any long threads hanging across the back. Somebody might sign with a lot of space between each letter in their name, and that's fine, but you'll probably then want to knot off each thread between letters. I wouldn't recommend having any threads that hang on the back more than a quarter of an inch 'cause somebody's finger might grab it and rip those threads out as they're eating, which would be so sad and create more work for you. So, this signature, all the letters are pretty close together, and I'm gonna strategize about where to start. So, you don't want to start in the middle and then have to go back and forth. I'm gonna start on one edge and go all the way to the other side. And I think for this, I'm gonna start at the bottom edge of this letter A, the capital letter A. I'm gonna use the backstitch for all these signatures, but you could use any number of stitches, and to learn how to do lots of other stitches, you can reference the original embroidery sampler workshop that's also here on Creativebug. So, I'm just coming up from underneath, and you want to make sure, give a little tug to make sure you're not all the way at the back of the fabric. And then, I'm gonna go forward again. I'm making these stitches extra small and nice 'cause I want them to one, last forever and look beautiful, but also, I want them to be nice and sturdy and secure. I also can tell that I've got a lot of nice, tiny little curves in this lowercase A, so I want to make sure the stitches are all about the same size whether it's a straight line or a curved line, so planning ahead, I'm just gonna make a lot of small stitches. So, I went down underneath. Now, I'm gonna skip ahead a spot. Go back to fill it in. And that's the first sequence of the backstitch. Now, I'm gonna start again at the very end right where I left off. And again, my finger, if you look at the back side, my finger is always right on the back of those last stitches, so I can feel that way, if you keep your hand there, you'll be able to feel if you get a weird tangle in the back or something. You can go back and take that out. You don't wanna have any strange knots on the back. I'm always a person who says it doesn't matter what the back side looks like. If you take my embroidery workshop, the sampler workshop, you'll notice that I talk a lot about the back being messy and that not really mattering, but in this case, you want the back side to look really beautiful because people are gonna see both sides, and you want it to stay neat and tidy. You might be thinking, "Well, I'm spending all this time embroidering. "What happens if somebody spills something "on one of these napkins?" And I think that somebody is gonna spill something on one of these napkins because they're napkins, and you're using them at get-togethers where people are gonna be eating and drinking. But if somebody spills something, you know, that's an opportunity to add something else to the napkin. So, you could add, you know, flowers or another kind of motif. You could ask a kid to make a drawing over the top of that area, or you could make a drawing over the top of the area, or people could sign their names. So, don't worry about it. These are napkins that are meant to be used, and they'll just get more character the more they're used and the more they're probably gonna get a little bit stained. It's okay. Don't be too precious about it. Now, I'm finishing up this capital letter A, and I know that the next letter I'm gonna do is over here, V, right? So, that would be kind of a long ways to carry the thread across, so I'm just gonna shimmy under this stitch with my needle to kind of anchor those threads, and then come up here. And I just put my needle in there to hold it. That's not where I'm actually gonna come up. So now, I'm gonna start at the top of this V, and I'm gonna make two little stitches for each side of the V, nice and small 'cause I know the stitches for that little A are gonna be small 'cause they're curved.

So, I'm gonna make the stitches on the V small also for continuity's sake. It's gonna look better that way. The V is ending pretty close to where the A is, so I'm just gonna start up again, and same thing as when we were starting the beginning, you want to figure out where you're gonna start for each letter. So, for this little letter A, I'm gonna come up right in the crook between the round part and its little tail. So, I'm gonna come up right there, and that way, I'll be able to loop around and do the whole thing in one pass without having a lot of back and forth. And especially on round things like A's and U's and O's, you want to make sure that your stitches are really tiny so that you have a round object and not an octagon-shaped object. That wouldn't look as good. This project was partially inspired by the tradition of signature quilts, which groups of people, particularly church groups, used to make. They'd have everyone sign a piece of fabric, and then the ladies of the church would sit around and embroider all the signatures to make a quilt that was completely covered in signatures that were often red. And then the quilts were auctioned off to raise money for a new building or some kind of fundraiser, and they're so beautiful. They're kind of a rare category of collectible quilts, and I thought it would be really fun to have your own family's collection of signatures or your own friends' signatures. You could make your own beautiful heirloom. And now, I'm gonna go down, and that's my last stitch. So, now I can flip the hoop all the way over to the other side to secure my stitches. Since this is something that's gonna be washed and used a lot, it's especially important that you bury your thread and bury your stitches. So, I'm gonna, my thread is all the way up on the back side, and I'm just gonna kind of shimmy under the nearest stitch, and I'm gonna do that again, going through from the same direction, and you can see that creates a loop. So, once the loop is, you know, about a centimeter or a half an inch, I'm gonna go through that loop and pull it tight. And I like to do that twice. So, now I'm gonna find another little spot where I can shimmy underneath, and then go through again. Pull it tight. And then, using your sharpest scissors, cut that thread off where you left off. Once you've finished up the embroidery, you can use the iron to take off any excess ink from the gel pen. So, my iron's already hot. There's a little bit of red creeping in there. I'm just gonna use the iron, and it irons right off. It's so amazing. These pens are awesome. There we go, and you can use the iron to flatten out the fabric, too. I'll do that later when I'm getting ready for the next party. I have some other napkins here to show you that already have a few signatures. This signature got a little too crazy, and we're gonna redo this. We actually already redid this signature on another napkin, so I'm gonna iron this one off so it's out of the way, and it'll also show you how these pens iron off so easily. So, I'll start on this side. Go to the other side, and it's gone. Amazing. I love it. I used flower thread for the signatures that I have been adding lately, but you could also use embroidery floss. I would use maybe one or two strands tied back together or three strands on their own for the thickness that I've achieved here, but these are your napkins, and obviously, you can make them any way you want. This signature, my friend Nancy's, was made with variegated thread to get this neat kind of mottled effect. If you have kids, you can invite them to make a drawing instead of a signature or in addition to a signature to add some more interest and flair to your napkins. I hope you'll try collecting signatures at your next party to create these embroidered heirloom napkins.