



Our tutor provided beautifully crafted buttons, piles of colourful thread and her own unique sample book



My fellow classmates get stitching, with help from tutor Susi!

A closer look at...

Crafty workshops

Ever fancied the look of a craft workshop or class, but wondered what it's like? Cross stitcher and crafter Jenny Fox-Proverbs tried her first class and discovered that there's more to it than just learning a new skill...

Discovering and learning a new crafty skill is something I've always been happy to do, be it from a magazine, book, or Youtube. Friends or colleagues can show me the ropes, then trial and error usually leads to acceptable results (or in the case of knitting, a small tantrum and a ball of yarn donated to a more 'gifted' friend!). But over the past few years, workshops have become more popular than ever, with venues such as London's The Make Lounge running a variety of popular and exciting classes in everything from cupcake-decorating to knicker-making! So I decided that the time had come to try one myself.

As this would be my first ever workshop, I signed up to a craft that I'm vaguely familiar with - embroidery - at my local craft shop, The Makery, in Bath. As an avid cross stitcher I have all the tools and materials for embroidery.

I've even unwittingly used the odd embroidery stitch before, namely backstitch and French knots. So embroidery felt like a natural progression - not too different from my beloved little crosses, but with more of a 'freestyle' slant that would challenge my current stitching style.

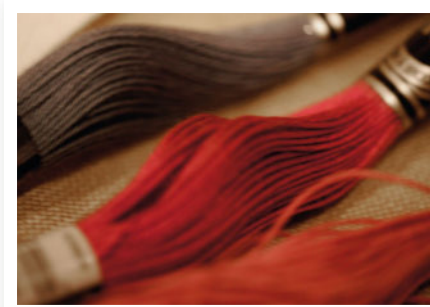
Where and when?

The one-off workshop I signed up for ran for three hours on a weekday evening, which suited my schedule. I knew that it was a small class - just three students, and the tutor. This was important to me as it meant I'd get plenty of support in a relaxed atmosphere.

Easy does it

I'd thought we'd thread our needles and start stitching right away, but first we had a cup of tea and a natter around the big, cosy workbench - perfect! Our tutor, Susi Bancroft, introduced herself and

explained a bit about her crafting background. Although she now works as a talented textile artist, Susi used to be a school teacher and headmistress, and it wasn't long before her mix of creative and teaching skills came to the fore. I soon discovered that the other girls (boys, where are you?!) were also first-time embroiderers, although they'd also done a little sewing in the past. Susi began by talking us through the basic tools and materials. I thought I knew all there is to know about using





Inspiration was all around - even in the 'open' sign from The Makery door (top left)



Who ever said cotton reels were only for storing cotton?

a hoop, but I discovered a different, more effective way to 'hoop up' my fabric! We also looked at the different threads used for embroidery, and how their fibres all lie in one direction along the length of the thread. Knowing which way it lies makes it easier to thread your needle - cunning! It was enormous fun looking through the huge pile of coloured threads with my classmates - we identified our favourite shades and textures, and were soon ready to take the plunge.

Getting started

Needles threaded (chenille needles - large head to take several strands of thread, sharp point to pierce the woven cotton - another 'wow' moment for me!) and we were all ready to go. This was where the small, relaxed workshop environment really came into itself. Learning the different stitches was a shared challenge. Just like starting to ride a bike, Susi got each of us started by guiding us with as much hands-on help

as necessary until she could let go and we 'pedalled off' under our own steam!

Try, try again

The beauty of crafting is that everyone goes at their own pace, picking up techniques in their own way. Sometimes I got the hang of something quickly and was thrilled to be stitching on ahead of the others. But just as quickly I stumbled on other stitches - doh! It took several tries before I could do a French knot without sticking out my tongue with concentration... We were all able to help and encourage one another and we soon felt a real sense of group achievement - something I hadn't been expecting to happen so quickly. It also wasn't long before I noticed how cleverly Susi had been guiding us. Where I hit a snag and would usually have given up on my own, we were being encouraged to persevere until each stitch 'clicked'. A good teacher knows from experience how far to 'push' without ever seeming pushy - smart! ➤



10 REASONS TO TRY A WORKSHOP

- Meet like-minded crafters
- Learn from professionals
- Try new techniques
- Receive tailored tuition
- Share tips and ideas
- Craft in creative surroundings
- Access the latest materials
- Take away ideas and inspiration
- Gain confidence
- Have fun!

FIND A CLASS NEAR YOU

THERE are lots of fantastic classes out there - you just have to know where to look. Ask at your local craft shop, check out the local college and ask around. You can also hit the internet. These are just a fraction of the wonderful workshops out there now.

www.ruthsinger.com
www.schooloffrock.com
www.themakelounge.com
www.sewmesomething.co.uk
www.makedomend.com
www.madebymecrafts.co.uk
www.rowantreeworkshops.co.uk



Our tutor kept us stoked up on tea and biscuits – well, you have to keep your strength up, don't you?



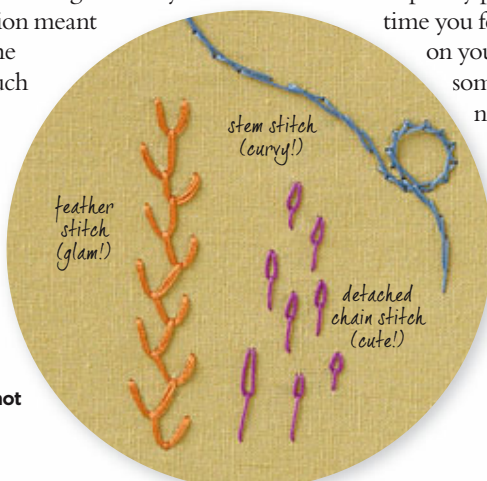
Evidence of our hard work – we were all so proud of every last stitch!

The hands-on teaching also meant that my 'bad habits' were identified. Susi showed us techniques for smoother and faster stitching. She also called me out on my habit of resting the very sharp needle in my mouth pointed end first – apparently the mark of a cross stitcher used to a blunt needle!

Relax and enjoy

Once we'd got the hang of the stitches, we started looking at other aspects of our unique take on the technique, such as colour choices and the shapes that were starting to take form. We were all naturally drawn to the colours that we love in everyday life, and a general chat about this led to Susi explaining the basics of the colour wheel. We talked about complimentary and harmonious colour theory, and how it related to our own choices. I took in so much more from this 'casual chat' than I have from any books. The relaxed surroundings and easy flow of information meant that I absorbed the information in such a way that I applied it to the following day's outfit! It was also a chance to find out more about our tutor

Some of my favourite stitches from the evening – not bad for a beginner!



and her own crafty background. This was a unique opportunity to ask a professional about how they got started, where their ideas and inspiration come from, and get professional hints and tips that you would otherwise never find out.

Home time

When our time was up, the sense of achievement was huge. The opportunity to learn in a workshop environment meant we'd gained so much more than even the best book or video can communicate. As well as learning about techniques and materials, I gained confidence and enthusiasm for a subject that only a few hours previously I'd known very little about. The experience of learning with others made a huge impression on me – so different to squinting at a book or clicking a mouse. Craft workshops have a feel-good factor that's completely priceless, so next

time you feel like brushing up on your skills or learning something completely new, don't be afraid to sign up and give it a whirl. Take a look at some of the handy tips on these pages to get started. I promise you it will be well worth it!

WHAT'S THE COST?

YOU'LL have to pay for most workshops. They can cost anything from £5 to £150 and over.

- The cost always depends on how long the workshop lasts (an hour, a day, a week?), who's teaching, and the tools, materials and other resources provided.
- Check beforehand what's included in the price, what you need to bring with you, and what you'll be taking away.
- Don't forget that much of the cost pays for your teacher's time and expertise. A good teacher is worth their weight in gold, so it's worth finding out more about their background and qualifications before deciding to take the plunge.

To find out more about The Makery, visit www.themakeryonline.co.uk Susi Bancroft and other talented needlecrafters can be found at brunelbroderers.blogspot.com