



Bilateral Stitching

The bilateral nature of knitting is important so how can you incorporate two handed techniques into stitching. Sally Radcliffe investigates...

Since Betsan has highlighted the possible benefits of the bilateral nature of knitting, I've been thinking more about developing my two handed stitching techniques and have put together an article which I hope will help you do the same.

I am a big fan of doing my cross stitching using both hands in a bilateral, rhythmic way. Sometimes I will begin using two hands but often I mix my bilateral technique with the more traditional one-handed way which gets me into the rhythm of stitching. A lot depends on how up-tight or stressed I am when I first pick up my needle and thread as to how I begin my session.

I have found that stitching in the very early morning (5am onwards) when the cat has sneaked in onto the bed and the house – and the world – is so quiet that the calming effect is most evident. It is then that I love to stitch bilaterally, and really get into the flow of the movements. In this state of mind, early in the morning, I've

also found it very easy to reverse a stitch without having to really look at it – the needle just goes back into the same hole seemingly without being guided there.

Adapting techniques

You can adapt these techniques into your cross stitching, embroidery, tapestry, sewing or quilting sessions.

I always use a hoop, except for when I am stitching very small motifs held in the hand. If you're using plastic canvas it is possible to stitch bilaterally by resting the edge of the canvas against the table edge. I was able to create a Christmas ornament in this way, working bilaterally for most of it.

I almost always sit at a table so I can rest my hoop against the table. This then allows me to work with my right hand underneath guiding the needle to the hole, and my left hand on top to collect the needle to send it back down. I find it takes a few minutes to get my left hand into the rhythm of

stitching and especially getting it into the 'hole' and not through a thread either side – as I am inclined to do at times. Very frustrating that.

My favourite place for stitching is out on the front balcony sitting at the little outdoor table and arm chair. Both are just the right height for me to work comfortably – sometimes for several hours at a time and always two handed for maximum relaxation.

Frame it

Of course if you have a craft stand and frames then two handed stitching is a breeze. Sit where you are most comfortable, position the stand and frame in the right place and at the correct height and away you go. It takes a bit of getting used to a stand and frame but once you've practised a while, you'll wonder how you ever coped without.

Hand quilting is often done using larger hoops and again I always work two handed for quilting – not very neatly at the

back at times but it is so much easier than trying to get around the bulk of the material each time you want to put the needle in for another stitch. When I am stitching a larger quilt, I usually toss it up on the table then manoeuvre my left hand underneath to guide the needle back up. Alternatively I gather a few folds of material to make it easier for my right hand to put the quilting stitches in.

When working on smaller projects, such as wall hangings for example, use a hoop in exactly the same as you would with cross stitching. Place your right hand underneath pushing the needle up to where the next stitch will be while the left is guiding and pushing the needle back down through the layers of fabric.

All bilateral stitching is very calming – more so than using

just one hand and once into the rhythm of bilateral stitching, it is almost soporific in effect, and the mind can wander off on its own track. This can happen more easily in quilting but it has happened to me whilst cross stitching too, especially when I'm stitching an area which only has one or two colours where there isn't a lot of detailed counting required. Why not give it a go?

To Summarise

- **Find a quiet spot**
- **Ensure the lighting is good**
- **Use an embroidery hoop or frame**
- **Practise using two hands to perfect the technique**
- **Practise on an area of stitching that only uses one or two colours**
- **Get a rhythm of movement going between your hands**
- **Let your mind flow into the rhythm of the movements**