How To Embroider a French Knot with Rebecca Ringquist

Chapter 1 - How To Embroider a French Knot

How to embroider a French knot

- Hi, I am Rebecca Ringquist. I live in Portland, Oregon in a little log cabin. I'm an artist, and I'm also the owner and the designer of Drop Cloth Embroidery Samplers. There's so much to learn in the world of embroidery. This technique is gonna help you along the way. The French knot is one of those stitches that sometimes can really make people feel like they wanna pull their hair out because they get tangled, they get knotted, but not in the good French knot way, and they can be kind of a headache. But I've got lots of tips and tricks to make them effortless for you. The first tip I have is to use a milliners needle, which has a straight shank. It doesn't have a bulge in the shank where the eye is. Let's look at two needles, just as an example. This is a tapestry needle that has a huge eye, and this is a milliners needle also sometimes called a straw needle. And the eye of the needle is the same width as the shank of the rest of the needle. And that's great because with the French knot, you're gonna be wrapping your threads around your needle and then pulling your needle through all those threads. So if there's a big bulge in the needle, it makes it really, really difficult for the needle to come through all those wraps. So that's my first hot tip, which is to use a milliners needle. And if you don't have a milliners needle, pick the needle in your needle collection that has the smallest eye. It makes it a little more challenging to thread the needle, but it makes it infinitely easier to do the French knots. The next thing to know is to have a knot at the back of your thread, at the end of your thread. And you're gonna wanna make sure that that knot is all the way on the back of the fabric before you start to do your knot. Let me show you what I mean. So I'm pulling this needle through the fabric, and then I just give it a little tug to make sure that the knot is all the way at the back. For me, the easiest way to do the French knot is to make sure that the hoop that you're using is flat on the table. And for that matter, it's important to use a hoop. So the reason is, is because the hoop holds the fabric nice and tight, and that way you can use both of your hands to manipulate both the thread and the needle. So if you're not using a hoop, you have to manage the fabric with your hands and manage the tension with your hands, and it's much more difficult. So the hoop on the fabric, and then the hoop on the table so that both of your hands are free to manipulate the thread and the needle is perfect. The way that I like to do the French knot is I hold the thread out at a 45 degree angle with my left hand. So I'm holding the thread out at a 45 degree angle with my left hand. There's this loose thread out here that doesn't have any tension on it. This little bit of thread here between the fabric and my thumb and my pointer finger is about an inch and a half. And it's got tension on it. I'm not pulling really hard on it, it's just nice, even tension. So there's no slack. And now with my right hand, I've got my needle, and I'm gonna wrap that thread. That's under tension three times. Now you can see there are three wraps on my needle. Gonna take the pointer finger on my right hand and just touch those wrapped threads. So now they're not going anywhere, right? They're stuck between the needle and my pointer finger. And I'm gonna lower the needle down, not in the same hole as I came out in, but right next to it, just like micro little bit between where I came out and where I'm going back down. And now I can let go with my pointer finger, and I'm gonna use my left hand to pull those threads down to meet the fabric like this. And I want to look at it before I commit. So right now, that looks like a perfect French knot. And so all I have left to do is to pull the needle through. And this loop that's remaining out here is gonna hold that coil of threads into place and create a perfect French knot. Push the needle through, and then

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pull it through the rest of the way. And this little loop is gonna hold it all in place like that. So let's do another one together. I come up like this. I'm gonna hold the thread out to the side at a 45 degree angle. And then with my needle, I'm gonna wrap it three times. You can see that I brought my needle from the backside to wrap it. You can also bring your needle from the front side. It doesn't matter. Now I'm gonna lower the needle down. These threads that are on here, I'm gonna pull them down to meet the fabric. Let's say you pull them down to the fabric and you don't like the way it looks. It looks messy for some reason. You can just pull the needle out. You're not committed to anything until you pull the needle through your fabric. So 1, 2, 3. Push the needle in, pull it down. See, this is messy. I don't like the way that looks. It's a little bit messy, so I'm gonna undo it. And I haven't committed to anything. Sometimes people ask if they can do more than three loops, so let's try a whole bunch and see how it works. It gets a little messy in my opinion. There's another stitch called the bullion knot, which is a little neater and tidier, and see how this, it has a lot of wraps on it, and now it's kind of unwieldy. It's flopping over. Better to do the bullion stitch, in my opinion. If you want a bigger French knot, use a thicker thread. 1, 2, 3. Another mistake that a lot of people make is pulling too hard. This fabric is pretty tightly woven, and I've got four layers of fabric. So the French knot wasn't pulling through. However, if you're using a lightweight fabric like a linen that has a looser weave, it can be really easy to pull the French knot through on on accident, and that's really frustrating. So my advice is, one, if you're using a really lightweight linen, it might be helpful to use an interfacing so that that doesn't happen. Two, you just need to really be conscious of the tension that you're creating with both your hoop and your needle and thread. So when you're pulling the thread through the French knot hold it in place, pull it through slowly and gently. Don't pull it through aggressively and quickly. That should help to not have the French knot come flying through. These have all been three wraps, except for this one was about eight. And now I'm gonna just do two and show you a little bit of a difference that's still very similar in size to the three wraps. There's a two wrapped French knot. I'm gonna try to show you what happens if you go down in the same spot where your thread came up. So I'm gonna wrap it just twice. There's the whole, it popped right out, and now there's a knot on the back of my fabric. But if we're gentle and we do it gently, one, two, it won't do that. Just gently pull it through. You don't need to tug it like your life depends on it. Just pull it through gently. The last thing that I wanted to say about French knots is sometimes people ask, do I need to knot the thread on the back of my fabric since I've just created a knot on the front? And the answer is, absolutely. So you've created a decorative knot in the front, but here's the one I just created. I haven't tied off my thread on the back, but look, I can pull it out like this, and it starts to get sad and saggy. So if you are at an antique shop, and you're looking at embroidery, oftentimes the French knots are kind of hanging off the cloth. And that's because they weren't tied off and because they've been around for a long time. So I always like to tie off the French knots on the back. This is the spot where things got weird with the French knot that I pulled all the way through. But I'm gonna go weave my stitches back through until I get to a spot where I can make a good knot. And this intersection's a good spot. So I went under from this direction, I'm gonna come back and go through from that same direction again to make a loop. And then I'm gonna go through that loop. And I like to do that twice, tie it off twice to make sure it's extra secure, and then I can trim it. And those knots will now be very secure. I think French knots are really versatile, and you can use them for something as simple as dotting an I, but you could also use them to create a beautiful field of texture. Like imagine a head of broccoli all covered in French knots or a field of moss. It's such a fun stitch.

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