

Needlepoint Pro

Double your needlepoint options by converting cross-stitch charts to needlepoint.

You're jealous of cross-stitchers, aren't you? You can tell me. Since I'm a needlepoint fanatic myself, I understand completely. We needlepointers have many beautiful designs available to us: hand-painted canvases by a hundred different artists and even numerous charted designs. The variety is nothing, however, when compared to the number of charted designs published for counted cross-stitch.

Have you ever fallen in love with a counted cross-stitch pattern and tried to work it in needlepoint? If you have, but have been disappointed by the results, these guidelines will help make your next try a success. If you haven't attempted working from a cross-stitch chart yet, you are missing a great opportunity, and it is time to give it a try.

Why don't needlepointers routinely use charted cross-stitch designs on canvas? First of all, many cross-stitch patterns are extremely detailed with many color changes, making the needlepointer's favorite basketweave stitch almost impossible to work. Secondly, needlepointers are often disappointed to find that their canvas is showing through the stitches when working from a chart. Thirdly, cross-stitch designs often rely heavily on partial stitches. Have you ever tried to work half a basketweave stitch?

When choosing a cross-stitch design to adapt to needlepoint, the stitcher must carefully evaluate the chart. Check to see what size fabric is used, how many colors are incorporated in the design, how many half or quarter stitches are used, and how intricate the color changes are. Once those things are noted, it is up to the stitcher to decide how important this particular design is. I would never discourage anyone from attempting a project that has stolen his or her heart, but I would caution that some designs are going to demand a lot of extra time and patience.

Some designs easily lend themselves to adaptation. They are generally charted on a size fabric similar to the most common sizes of needlepoint canvas: 12-, 14-, or 18-mesh, have large blocks of color, and depend almost exclusively on full stitches. Designs of this type are a great place for a needlepointer who is new to charted work to begin.

Even with a fairly straightforward chart, however, some changes should be made to see the best results. First of all, your canvas choice is very important. Since you don't want to end up with glaring specks of white canvas showing through all your stitches, you must make some decisions. Are you going to work on a neutral colored canvas, rather than the normal white? If so, Bargello canvas is a good choice. This 13-mesh canvas is ecru in color, so it won't be as offensive peeking through your stitching as white canvas would be. On the other hand, if you are willing to do a bit more work, you may choose to tint areas of the canvas, whether white or ecru, with diluted acrylic paint. You may, for instance, paint a sky area a soft blue, a field in green, and a house red.

Blocking out areas with acrylic paint is also helpful when it comes to stitch choice. If you are accustomed to working in basketweave stitch on painted canvases, you may find the basketweave stitch very difficult to work from a chart. Of course, the simpler the shapes the easier they will be to work. If you block out the major shapes on the canvas with paint your basketweave pattern will be much easier to follow.

When working from an intricate chart, or if you choose not to paint the canvas, consider using half cross-stitches rather than basketweave stitches. Since they are worked in horizontal rows, rather than the diagonal rows of the basketweave stitch, half cross-stitches are much easier to work from a chart. One of the greatest problems with the half cross-stitch method is that it does not cover canvas as well as basketweave. You can overcome this problem in several ways. Once again, this is where tinting at least the largest areas of colors is very helpful. You may also find it useful to work on a higher mesh canvas. Your stitches will cover much better on 14- or 18-mesh canvas than on 12- or 13-mesh. Additionally you may need to add one or more plies of fiber to attain the best coverage from your stitches.

The final major problem needlepointers run into when trying to work from cross-stitch charts is determining what to do with those pesky half and quarter stitches so loved by cross-stitch designers. They are not, however, any problem at all. There is a type of needlepoint canvas called Penelope or duo canvas. It comes in the same mesh counts as mono needlepoint canvas, but there are two threads, instead of one, which are normally covered by each stitch. These pairs of canvas threads can be separated to use individually. When they are separated, they allow the needlepointer to create half and quarter stitches, just as cross-stitchers can do on their fabrics. The added benefit of working on duo canvas is that stitches cover the canvas more easily, another way to defeat the dreaded "peek through" of canvas when working needlepoint on blank canvas.

Are you still jealous? I didn't think so. Start checking out those cross-stitch charts with a more educated eye and you just might find your next needlepoint project!