



cover story

By a thread: Needle arts make strong decor



Artistry in motion: Shay Pendray works on embroidery.

Shimmering: This dragon (below) by Pendray is an example of "couching," a type of needlework.



home are framed behind museum-quality Lucite, an acrylic glaze that protects it from ultraviolet rays.

Among the works is a rectangular sample piece for an obi, made of silk in one direction and 24-karat gold in the other. Another piece has a design made up of "forbidden knots," each knot as tiny as the head of a pin. The flowers in another framed arrangement represent the seasons — cherry blossoms for spring, maple leaves for fall and chrysanthemums for summer.

Different shading is accomplished in pieces by the use of flat and twisted (by hand) silk threads.

By MARY KLEMIC
At Home Editor

The art forms with which Shay Pendray decorates her Bloomfield Hills condo are centuries old, familiar to everyone — and possibly surprising. They are embroidery and other needle arts. And these lustrous works of thread and fabric can be dynamic, elegant decor, as Pendray shows.

"I wear it, I do it, I live with it," said Pendray, who hosted "The Embroidery Studio" on public TV for the last six years and has operated Needle Arts Inc. in Dearborn for 25 years.

She will lecture on Japanese embroidery in Southfield in September. In February, filming will begin for her new public TV show, "Shay's Needle Arts Shop."

Attendees of the American Needlepoint Guild Inc. national seminar, taking place in Detroit in October, will tour Pendray's condo. The guild is based in Memphis.

Pendray, who recently received the Tribute to Excellency in Needlework (TEN) Award from the Zanesville, Ohio-based National Needlework Association, encourages the use of needlework as art work, to be shown in any room.

Everything goes together — styles and colors of the needlework can be different from those of the furnishings — she says.

"Stitch something that's beautiful. Don't stitch it to match the colors in your living room. Think of it as a work of art."

The delicately colored walls of Pendray's residence make beautiful backdrops for displaying needle arts. The collection features works by Pendray herself and others she acquired, among them are pieces by granddaughter Courtney and fiber artist Wilkie Smith. Viewing the pieces is like traveling around the world and through time.

On display

Many of the pieces in Pendray's home are framed behind museum-quality Lucite, an acrylic glaze that protects it from ultraviolet rays.



Fine feathered: A little bird in a piece of double-sided embroidery is on glorious display on a table top.

Standing near one wall in the living room is a six-by-eight-foot Chinese screen consisting of 12 panels, each featuring a double-sided work of embroidery encased in glass. The screen is the only one in the United States.

On tables, in their own stands, are single panels of double-sided embroidery. Boxes on one table bear border patterns used in embroidery.

On a headless mannequin near one corner of the room is a kimono-like coat, made for Pendray by artist Judy Bishop. A square of the embroidery by Pendray is included in the design.

The dining room table is topped by a runner of Bali weaving, on which rests a glass bowl containing an assortment of Japanese temari balls. The balls bear colorful designs of thread, some of them resembling the decorated Ukrainian eggs of pysanky.

On a wall is a landscape of ribbon embroidery on a needlework background. The frame was painted extending the design of the work.

A bench holds a welcoming cluster of pillows covered in needlepoint. This is one of the family's traditions related to the art. Pendray and her mother and daughter each made one of the pillows; someday her granddaughter will add another to the collection.

Across from the bench, a quilt with a pattern in pastels fills a large wall.

A buckskin blouse adorned with strings of turquoise beads is displayed in a room. American Indian bead work is another form of the art, Pendray said.

Attraction

Pendray works in a studio in the basement and in a light-filled alcove off the living room. Almost everyone in the family stitches.

Another family tradition is making Christmas stockings with illustrations by Pendray. Her deep green stocking for Courtney bears an image of the youngster with Santa Claus.

The needle arts hold many attractions. This is the only art handed down through the generations; books on the subject didn't appear until 150 years ago, Pendray said. Textiles are used as a tool for language and dating other types of objects. The art is challenging yet a good way to relieve stress. It can be done anywhere at any time.

"It's fun. Just plain fun."

The needle arts are more vibrant than their image may suggest. They are done by almost any age.

"(Most stitchers are) 25 to 45 years old, very successful women... It's something she can touch, she can feel she can do."

"Kids are doing it."

Someone enjoys needle arts or sewing in 51 percent of U.S. households, the Hobby Industry Association said.

Background

Pendray was introduced to needlepoint at age 10 and has kept at it ever since. It became a hobby, and she taught classes out of her home. The classes led to her Needle Arts Inc. The store specializes in needlepoint, threads, frames, stands and Japanese embroidery.

Pendray was instrumental in introducing the art of Japanese embroidery in the United States. She has studied it for more than 15 years, including traveling to Japan to study with a master stitcher.

She is the author of "Stitching Towards Perfection" and "Shay Pendray's Needlecraft Projects," and has taught in every state in the country.

"The Embroidery Show" ran on more than 200 stations around the country and is rerun in many cities.

Pendray's new show, which will start in about a year, will be educational, featuring a project, history and a fiber artist on every program. Twenty-six programs (two series) will be filmed in February.

Courtney, now 7, made appearances on the previous show since she was 2-1/2. She and brother Connor, 4, will visit "Shay's Needle Arts Shop" occasionally.

The TEN award is made annually to recognize outstanding contributions in the field of needle arts. Recipients have set new standards in quality, creativity and achievement.

On the cover

On screen: Delicate work marks each panel of the Chinese screen in Shay Pendray's home. Staff photo by Dan Dean.