



Blackwork Journey Inspirations

Madeira Embroidery



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MADEIRA EMBROIDERY

Madeira is an island located in the Atlantic Ocean west and slightly south of Portugal. The capital of Madeira is Funchal on the main island's south coast and it was to Funchal, the capital that I travelled to explore the history of Madeira embroidery and find some modern examples of this traditional form of whitework embroidery.

The hand embroidery of Madeira is generally recognised as being the finest of its kind available in the world. Over the last 150 years, Madeira has collected expertise from the fast disappearing regional centres of hand embroidery across Europe and moulded these various styles into a distinctive form of handwork recognised throughout the world.



The Development of Madeira Embroidery

The story began in the 1860's when a wine shipper's daughter, Elizabeth Phelps turned the rural pastime of simple embroidery into a cottage industry using her skills to motivate, organise and sell the work of the embroiders to Victorian England. In the 1860's it was estimated that there were 70,000 women embroiderers (bordadeiras) in Madeira working on linen, silk, organdy and cotton to create table linen, clothing, bedding and handkerchiefs. Today there are about 30 companies producing handmade embroideries employing around 4,500 embroiderers.

During the 19th century the main exports were to England and Germany. In the 20th century Madeiran Embroidery was exported to many parts of the world. Italy, the United States, South America and Australia became important markets. France, Singapore, Holland, Brazil and other countries also contributed to the trading expansion and reputation of Madeira Embroidery. Currently the largest export markets are the U.S.A., Italy and England.

Some of the most important Madeira embroidery companies were formed after the Great War of 1914 – 1918. Many have closed over the last few years but some of them still exist today and I was fortunate to spend some time with the Bortal Embroidery Company which is one of the oldest manufacturer and exporter. I visited their shop and in their factory and followed the production through the different stages from the embroideress to the final certification.

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Tiled panel on a wall in Funchai showing embroiderers outside their home

The story of the Bortal Embroidery Company, Past and Present

The factories such as Bortal were located in and around Funchai, but the actual embroidery was carried out in the home. The factories usually supply the materials to the embroiderers, then when the embroidery is returned to them, they complete final phase, sale and export all over the world. This is still the case and I followed the process through the factory and shop. Little has changed over the years in the actual design and production of the embroidery

Designing Madeira Embroidery

The characteristics that give the designs used in Madeira Embroidery their unique identity are the gracefully flowing movement, the composition of natural motifs where the abstract and imaginary flowers, as well as geometrical figures, provide graciousness and refinement in the embroidered items. No two pieces are alike as the needlewoman places her own identity on each piece. The style is unique and each company has a library of designs dating back many years which can be used as reference and redrawn as necessary.



The old patterns were drawn on brown waxed paper by hand and then perforated to allow the ink to pass through onto the fabric.

I longed to investigate the rolls of design piled on the shelves and to explore the past and asked our guide how the designs were produced today.



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Hand drawing in the traditional manner

I had expected to see modern technology in use with the designs being drawn on a computer and printed off ready to transfer onto fabric instead I saw tradition in its purest sense with the designer drawing the design in pencil on waxed paper. Once the design had been completed to her satisfaction the wax paper was perforated along the lines which outline the drawing.

I purchased some of these wax perforated designs and the holes are very tiny!



Traditional tools used for transferring the design onto the fabric

Transferring the drawing onto the fabric:

The method has not changed much over the years. Here, a sponge soaked in a special blue ink is rubbed onto the paper, marking the areas that are to be embroidered on the fabric, by penetrating through the small perforations in the paper, thereby transferring the drawing onto the fabric.

Once tracing has been done, the fabric is prepared and sent to the embroiderer who lives in the surrounding area. Each embroideress specialises, for example, table linen or garments, and the work will take many hours!

After the embroiderer has finished her work, the items return to the factory which in most cases is situated in Funchai, where her work will be checked, trimmed washed and ironed. Only after all these operations have been carried out will the embroidery be ready to be certified.

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Organised chaos!
From the tracing to the laundering and ironing, all the activities are carried out within the one room in an old house in Funchai

Past to present!
Embroiderers from the past preparing the embroidery within the factory, and the modern seamstress working with her sewing machine in a corner of the workroom.



There is still a tradition within Bortal of passing the skills from one generation to another and one of the women ironing the embroideries was a fourth generation employee and was very proud of her background.

When the embroidery comes back into the factory it is laundered first in a chemical mixture to remove the blue ink and then hand laundered before moving on to the ironing tables.



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From laundry and flat iron to steam iron, these labour intensive processes have not changed over the generations!



Cutting the holes requires a steady hand and a good eye!



Once the embroidery has been ironed the cutwork is done and the embroidery checked carefully before a final pressing and packing for distribution worldwide.

In Madeira, embroidery is not intended only to enrich and beautify the fabric but is a means of personalizing an item in linen, silk or batiste, turning it into a work of art which will be passed on from generation to generation. In 1988 Bordal embroidered baby linen for the Duchess of York in England, joining a long line of distinguished customers, but in recent times the designs have been updated to appeal to a new generation and ensure the survival of this beautiful embroidery into the future.



Certification Seal

A guarantee stamp is attached to every piece in order to ensure the quality and authenticity of the items produced on the island of Madeira.

Madeira Embroidery Stitches

The embroidery is worked in the hand and no frame is used during the process. There are a number of stitches used in this style of embroidery and whilst I am familiar with many of the stitches, but not all of them, I have included a brief definition of each stitch based on the description given by the <http://www.bordadomadeira.pt/madeira-embroidery-stitches>

Explore the photo galleries of; <http://www.bordadomadeira.pt/photo-galleries/>

Their definitions differ in some respects from my understanding of the stitches but enjoy the photographs of Bordal's embroidery designs:

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1. DrawnThread
2. Ana
3. Ladder Stitch
4. Outline
5. Atraz
6. Padded Satin
7. Closed Blanket- and Scalloped Blanket Buttonhole
8. Satin Stitch
9. Whipped Running Stitch
10. Pin Stitch/ French Stitch
11. Open Leaf and Satin Leaf
12. Rondels
13. Open Eyelet and Satin Circle
14. Long and Short
15. Broderie Anglaise With Bars
16. Seed Stitch
17. Richelieu/ Cutwork With Bars
18. Shadow Work

DMC Floche is widely used for this embroidery. It is a twisted thread made from the finest long fibre cotton, mercerized to create a beautiful finish. This thread is especially suited for fine embroidery. DMC Floche is comprised of 4 non-divisible strands in size 16 thread, each strand equals 2 strands of DMC Floss. During the manufacturing process, the cotton is combed, singed by flames and mercerized creating its beautiful finish. The end result does not knot, kink or fluff and is soft and gentle to the touch. DMC Floche is 100% colourfast and available in 87 solid colours on a 150 yard long skein, 10 grams. Made in France.



1. Drawn Thread

Threads are withdrawn from the fabric both vertically and horizontally.

The embroidery is worked over the threads that remain within the enclosed area.



2. Ana

This stitch is obtained by extracting the threads from the cloth and stitching inside the drawn thread areas.



3. Outline

This is a simple stitch that shares the same hole in which the previous stitch ends.



4. Atraz

This is the backside of the Outline Stitch.



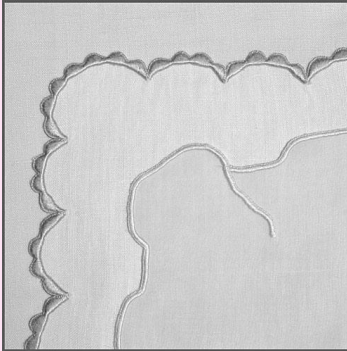
Tablecloth worked with lines of ana

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6. Padded Satin

This stitch is built up over rows of running stitch and then closely worked with satin stitch over the base layers.



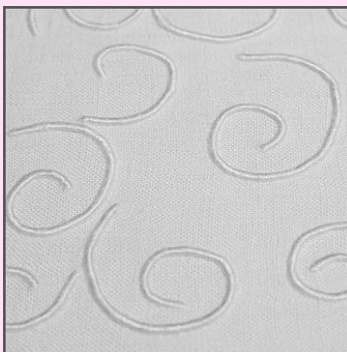
7. Closed Blanket- and Scalloped Blanket Buttonhole

This stitch is not raised since it is not warped. The filling is closely embroidered and consists of long stitches placed at an angle.



8. Satin Stitch

This stitch is not raised since it is not warped. The filling is densely embroidered and consists of long stitches placed at an angle.



9. Whipped Running Stitch

This stitch is used frequently as outlines and spirals. It is embroidered with small dense stitches to create a corded effect. It is also used in the holes, in Broderie Anglaise, with Bars Stitch and in other types of stitches.



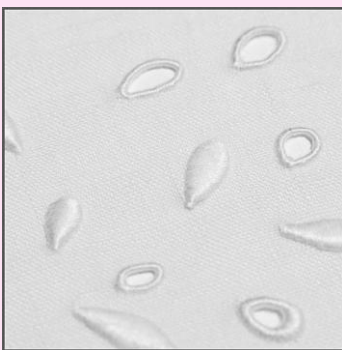
10. Pin Stitch

This stitch always requires more than one piece of cloth. One of them is used for the bottom and the other works as appliqué. The fabrics are sheer and this is one of the most delicate forms of embroidery.

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Pin stitch is used for the appliqué edging and the leaves. It is delicate and very attractive, worked on sheer fabric.



11. Open Leaves and Satin Leaves

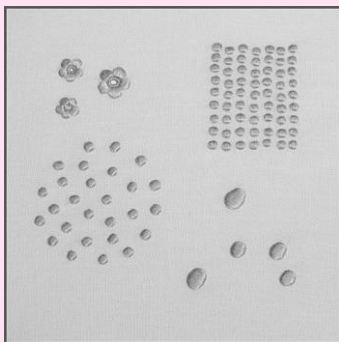
This stitch can be divided into Open Leaves and Satin Leaves.

Open Leaves: The outline is finished up with thread.

Satin Leaves: They are warped and covered.



12. Rondels

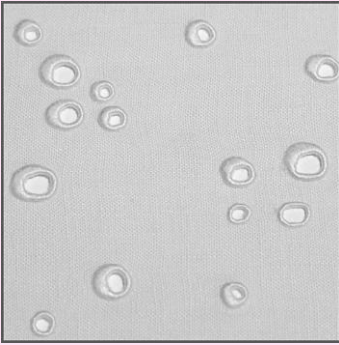


The Rondel stitches can be in a row, have a crowning ornament or be basted.



Rondels and eyelets decorate this beautiful baby dress and shoes Clothing by Bortal

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13. Eyelets

This stitch can be divided into Greek Open Hole or in Open Hole. The Greek Open Hole has half of its circle filled with baste. The Open Hole has the edge of its hole covered. It is trimmed and finished up with Whipped Running Stitch.

14. Long and short stitch



15. Broderie Anglaise With Bars

This stitch is made by the whipped running stitch and has the same effect as the Cutwork With Bars Stitch. It is used in less heavily embroidered cloths.

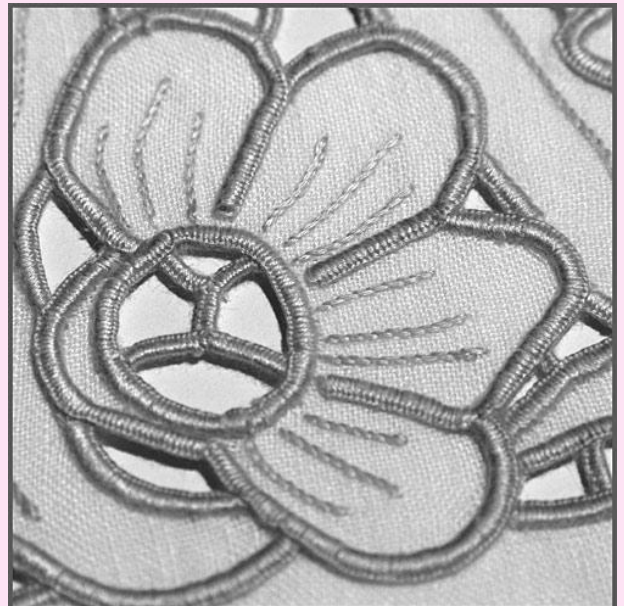
16. Seed Stitch

This stitch is used for shading. These are well distributed stitches with very regular size. An example may be seen in the mat below.



17. Richelieu

Buttonhole edges, cutwork and bars



Detail from a small Richelieu mat with seeding, padded satin stitch leaves and buttonholed bars.

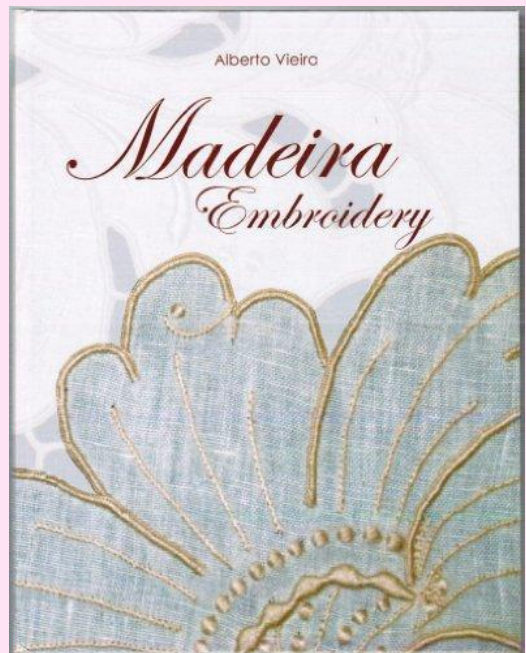
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18. Shadow Work

This stitch is appliqué on the reverse with running knots in the shape of an X, producing the shade on the right side and the “Atraz” Stitch on the edges.

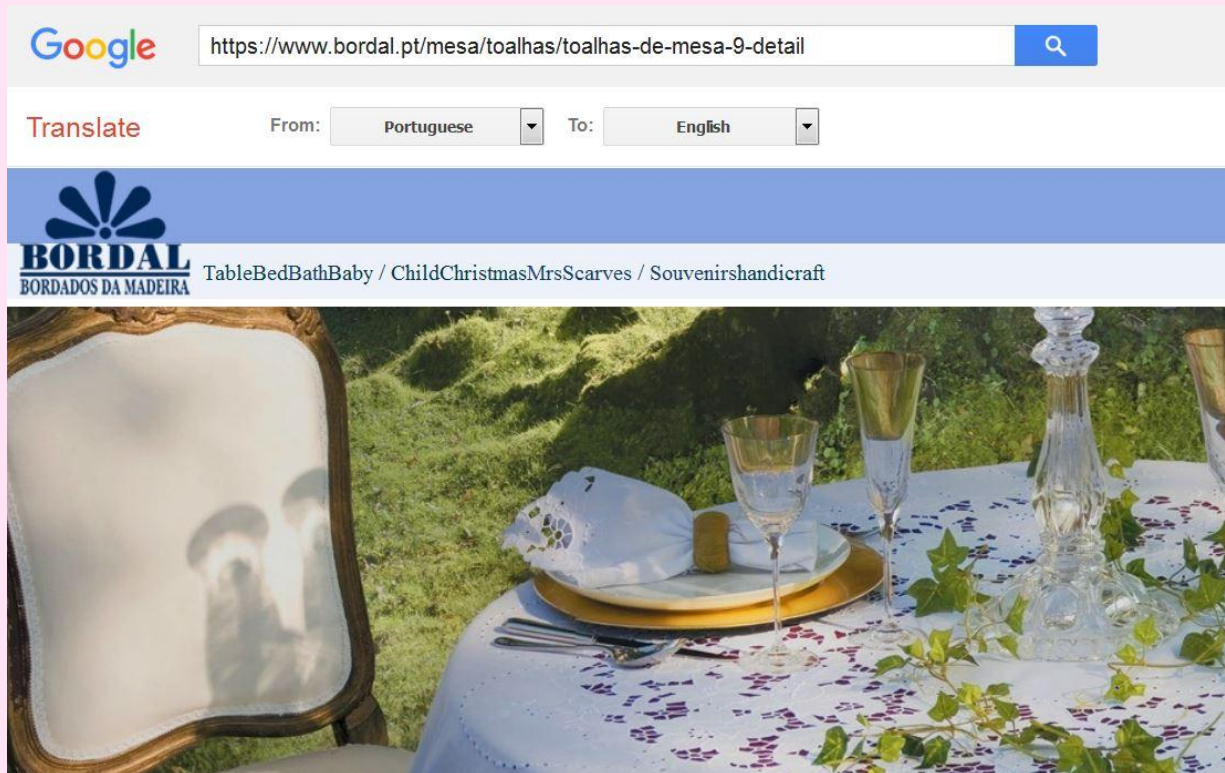


Exquisite shadow work embroidery



For further information I recommend the following book:
'Madeira Embroidery' Alberto Vieira
Publisher: Bordal-Bordados da Madeira, 2007
ISBN 10: 9899545007 ISBN 13: 9789899545007

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Explore the website using Google Translate to see exquisite hand embroidery



BORDAL-BORDADOS DA MADEIRA LDA.
Address: Rua Dr. Fernão de Ornelas, Funchal - Madeira,
Portugal

<https://www.bordal.pt/mesa>

*Explore the website using 'Google Translate' to see
Bordal's exquisite hand embroidery!*

I hope you enjoy this glimpse into the world of Bordal.
I would like to thank the staff for sharing their time and
information so freely with me.

Happy stitching,

Liz