
Sew a Needlepoint Tote with Anna Maria Horner

Chapter 1 - Sew a Needlepoint Tote

Overview

(upbeat music) - I'm Anna Maria Horner. I design textiles, sewing patterns and needlework patterns. In this class, I'm gonna show you how to take a finished needlepoint and turn it into a really cool and original tote bag. First I'll show you how to take your finished needlepoint whether it's one you did yourself or a thrifted piece, and prepare it and block it and get it ready for sewing. We'll use the piece itself as a guide to cut the rest of the pieces for the exterior tote and the lining of the bag. I'll walk you through the simple and straight forward construction of the bag which includes a box corner but an exterior one that provides a cute detail. And finally, I'll show you some cute details that you can add to your bag to make it very customized. This is a great project if you've collected some beautiful vintage needlepoints or you've finished some of your own and haven't thought of anything to do with them other than hang them on the wall. So if you're comfortable at the sewing machine but you've still been afraid to try putting needlepoint into one of your projects, this is the perfect opportunity to take away that fear and create a one of a kind piece. (upbeat music)

Materials

- The materials for this project all center around your found needlepoint, whether it's one that you finished or one that you thrifted. The shape and size of the needlepoint is gonna dictate the entire shape and size of the front of your tote bag. So you'll wanna look for something, that's somewhat similar to a tote that you already have or a shopping bag or a grocery bag. This one is a little bit wider, so it'll sort of resemble more of a shopper, and we'll also need some materials for the back and sides of the bag and lining. For the outer back, I decided to go with something solid, but textured that looked really pretty with the needlepoint. I need about a yard of that. I also like the weight of this linen for the bag. For the lining I just chose a simple cotton that is a pretty color, to sort of reference the colors that are in the needlepoint. A yard of each of these is gonna be enough for the straps and the outer bag. And if the weight of the materials is not quite what you want, you can always interface them first. I also have my basic cutting tools here, my rotary cutter as well as the cutting grid, and the cutting mat. I also have my basic sewing supplies, including scissors, some straight pins, and coordinating thread. And I made these cute little pompoms, that are gonna provide a really fun accessory and detail to the tote bag. In case you're needlepoint canvas is a little bit warped or not quite square, you may need to block it. I have here, this really sturdy blocking board, some sturdy t-pins, as well as a spray bottle filled with water to do that. You'll also wanna have a plush towel on-hand for your pressing steps, and finally, you'll need a sewing machine, an iron and an ironing surface.

Preparing Fabric

Blocking a "found" needlepoint

- I want to go over a few tips of preparing your needlepoint for sewing and that is mostly blocking. If you happen to get a needlepoint or have acquired one from a thrift store, that is a little skewed or not quite square. You'll want to do a blocking process. You can see this one here, that I'm going to

sew with today, it is already pretty square. In fact, it looks like it was framed at one point, so it probably was blocked before it was framed. But this one, is the one I'm going to demonstrate the blocking process. You can see how, sort of, warped, and the actual stitching process, itself, depending on the technique that was used to stitch it out can cause that warping, or it can happen over time and the process is pretty similar, almost exactly like blocking a sweater or a crocheted piece, if you are a knitter or a crocheter. The first thing that we're going to do is turn it face-side down on the blocking board. And I'm going to begin by just pinning the corner of the piece to the corner of the grid, here. I'm not looking for any specific measurement to stretch this to. My main goal for blocking is simply to square it up. So I'm going to place a pin, just on the inside of the last stitch line, not out here in the canvas, and these pins are nice and thick, and really sturdy, so it takes a little pushing to get them in. And then again, I'm not going to stretch too far in this direction, I'm just going to sort of, line up the edge of the work with the edge of the grid and place another pin. You can actually make your own blocking board with some plywood and some layers of batting, and a staple gun, but this one is pretty convenient with the grid on it already. So then I'm just going to square this edge up along the grid lines, as well. It looks like I've pin down here, just on the inside of this line by about a quarter inch, so I'm going to follow that all the way up and do the same here. I'm going to give it just a little bit of a tug. You'll also want to angle the t-pins in the outer direction, it's going to hold a lot better. Now you can see how, kind of, wonky and warped this is. So the next stretch is going to require a little bit of muscle. And these pieces, if they're really old, they can be pretty fragile, which is why sometimes the blocking process might have to happen, actually more than once. So I've pinned almost all the way up to this three line, so I'm going to attempt to stretch and pull this all the way up there. This one feels pretty sturdy. So now that I've got all the corners I'm going to go towards the middle of the piece, on each side, continually working the opposites. I've got this pin here so now I'm going to come across and stretch, this one. If the piece is particularly hard to stretch, you could actually submerge it in water and then roll out the excess water in a towel, or spray it first, before you begin stretching, but this one is letting me manipulate it so I think I'm going to save the spraying process until after it's all pinned down. So just continue working opposites, finding the midpoints between the pins that you already have in place. The number of pins that you put in, kind of depends on how warped the piece is to begin with, but honestly the more pins you put, the more straight and sort of sound the edges are going to be. You can see here, how much this is pulling on the fibers of the canvas and the wool. So I want to, kind of, help out that one pin that seems to be doing a lot of work, by putting some others close by and once we spray the water on it, it's actually over time, the several hours, afterwards, is going to have a tendency to shrink up even more, which is going to kind of cause these little scallop edges to happen, which is why the more pins you have, the straighter the edge. So just continue pinning around all edges, until it's already looking so square, I can't believe it. It's really pretty great I have this spray bottle filled with just room temperature water. I don't recommend hot and not necessarily cold, I think just lukewarm is totally fine, and the process is just misting evenly across the entire back of the piece. You actually want it really good and saturated, all the way through. You don't want it to just dry up on the surface, here, and wool has a tendency to let water sit right on the surface of it, so continuing to spray until it gets all the way through the fibers, is ideal. And that becomes evident that it's happening when you see the color of the fiber, kind of, darkening and changing. It's beginning to absorb the water all the way through. You can also sort of feel with your hand that it's getting through. Once it's good and saturated you can just set it aside and let it dry for several hours. In fact it's likely that it could take a couple of days until it's dry all the way

through. And once you remove the pins and let kind of, relax, on its own for awhile, you'll see whether or not the blocking process was completely successful. In some cases, if it's extremely warped it might have tendency to start shifting back to where it was, a little bit, then you can do this process again. There are lots of needlepoints out there that take a couple blocking rounds before they're totally square and ready to be included in your sewing.

Preparing needlepoint and fabric for construction

- We're gonna take a step now to go from thinking of this needlepoint as a canvas artwork to thinking of it as just material and basically fabric that's gonna get included into this bag. And the first part of that process is trimming out the unworked canvas that borders this pretty stitched out piece. Now, there are various levels of condition that your piece might be in. This one is a little bit rough, but still very usable for the tote bag. And I'm just gonna be trimming down that unworked canvas to about 1/2 inch away from the finished stitched edge. My stitched edge, however, is a little uneven. You can see that the stitcher kind of completed a line here, but then they bumped out here. And if I take my stitch line in the assembly of the bag on the inside by a little bit, that's gonna ensure that no bare canvas gets shown on the outside of the bag, and that's what we really wanna try to avoid. In some cases, if the canvas were in really good condition, you could actually stitch a new border all the way around to make sure that all edges get covered. But trapping some of these stitched edges into our sewing is really not gonna sacrifice the design of this. We're not gonna lose any vital information of this pretty picture by covering it up a little bit. So I'm just gonna slide my grid over the edge of the work here. And I'm gonna just make sure that this 1/2 inch line here falls into what I'm gonna call a safe zone inside the stitching. Okay, and then I'm gonna trim off this excess, really not very useful old canvas. So now I'm gonna turn the piece and my mat and do the same thing on the next edge. On the following edges, the goal isn't gonna be simply to kinda find a safe zone for that 1/2 inch mark. Additionally, if possible, you're gonna want to try and square it with the first cut edge. It honestly might not be completely possible to get a completely square piece, because when you're using a needlepoint, you're often working with something that isn't perfectly square, which is, again, a great reason to do the blocking step. This is pretty close, so I'm gonna go ahead and trim. You can continue squaring up each of the four edges now using the grid and getting as close to square on the total piece as you can. The final dimensions of your trimmed out needlepoint are gonna determine the exact size of your back piece. So you can take note of the size, width, and height and cut your back piece in that measurement. This one is just around 20 inches by 15 1/2 inches, so I'm gonna cut that from my backing now. Gonna trim off this little edge over here of selvage. All right, now I've got my back piece which I'm gonna set aside. Now I'm also gonna cut the side pieces for the front and back. So we'll need four total. So they will be three inches wide by 15 1/2 inches tall. And I'm gonna layer up the fabric to do it all in one cut. Let's see, just get the 15 1/2. Before we measure and cut the bottom piece that's gonna frame out this needlepoint, we're gonna sew the sides to each side of the needlepoint here all the way down using a 1/2 inch seam allowance, again making sure that that stitch line falls on the inside of the needlepoint so we don't have any raw canvas showing. So I'm gonna do that now. So I've got this side strip on here, right sides together, against the needlepoint, and I used a couple straight pins to keep things in place. I also prefer sewing with the needlepoint facing towards me instead of on the other side, just to ensure that my stitch line is falling on the inside of the stitched piece. But I am gonna use a 1/2 inch seam allowance here. And backstitch at the beginning and end. (machine sews) All right, before I continue, I just wanna make sure. Yep, I don't have any bare canvas

showing, and it's a really nice clean seam. And now I'm gonna do the exact same thing on the other side. (machine sews) Now that I have the sides sewn on either side of the needlepoint, I can use that total combined width to determine the length of the bottom piece, which is also a three inch strip. And I've already measured and cut that out now, and I'm gonna sew it all along the bottom with a 1/2 inch seam allowance. (machine sews) Once the bottom piece is sewn on, you can give it a nice pressing to make it really flat on the seams, but go ahead and let those seam allowances at the canvas remain flat so you're pressing all the seam allowances towards the outside. You can do the exact same three-step process, side, side, and bottom now with the back piece. So the front piece and the back piece, once they have their sides and bottom sewn on, are the exact same size, and that shares the same dimension with the lining pieces. So once you have two lining pieces cut out to those dimensions, you can move on to creating the straps and the final assembly of the tote.

Sewing Tote

Constructing lining and straps

- Our first step of assembly is to join the front of the bag to the back of the bag. And we'll do that with right sides together. I'm gonna use a half inch seam allowance. And I just have each of my corners in a few spots on the long edges pinned together. I'm gonna begin and end this U-shaped seam with a backstitch. As I approach this corner here, I'm gonna stop a half inch away from the bottom edge and pivot. I'm also gonna stop a half inch away from this far edge and pivot. Once you've sewn the front and back together, you can treat the lining two pieces exactly the same way with right side together, create a U-shaped seam down one side across the bottom and up the other side. However in that bottom seam, be sure and leave an opening of about five or six inches here and backstitch on either side of those seams so that it's secure when you're pulling the bag through at the end. It's really up to you how long or how thick your straps are. For this tote bag size, I decided that about two and a half inches cut width on the straps would be good. I'm actually gonna wait until it's kind of assembled to decide exactly how long I want them to be. So I would say right now, these are about 24 inches long. And that's gonna give me some room to trim off some length but I've got two outer pieces cut and two lining pieces cut. If you wanted your straps to be all out of the outer fabric, that's fine. But I thought it would be kind of cute to see that little ring of color on the inside of the strap. So I'm gonna sew each of them now with right sides together with a half inch seam allowance. Once you've sew one long edge together, you'll wanna press that seam open. And then the next step that I like to do with this type of strap is to fold it right on that open seam with wrong sides together. And then kind of do this dual process of folding in the underside by about a half inch and folding in the top side by about a half inch and pressing those creases together at the same time. So you're really sort of mimicking a seam on the other side by layering these two folded edges together. If you just wanna fold and crease one edge at a time, that's totally fine. But what this avoids is doing the whole seam down both sides and then pulling all the way through which can be kind of a pain and really wrinkle up your strap. If you want a nice sturdy strap, you can include a piece of inner facing right underneath this folding pair here. So just continue ironing those two creases together. Make sure they're sort of flush with one another. And smooth. And then we'll take it to the machine to top stitch which will also serve as the actual seam on this folded side. For top stitching, I like to use a little bit longer stitch and on this machine, I can adjust that by just pressing this plus mark here and three should do it. The first seam that I'm gonna create of top stitching is

gonna be a quarter inch away from the folded edge. So that's got it nice and stable but I'm gonna take one more to make it really sturdy and just a little bit decorative as well. The next one I'm gonna take almost right on the edge, as close as I can get consistently along side that edge. So we have this nice double line of top stitching here and even though we don't need it for construction sake on the other side, I'm gonna repeat it just to have this kind of pretty decorative edge. If you have some practice working with a twin needle, you could actually use that in place of two rows of stitching. You can go ahead and complete the other strap now by constructing it and top stitching it just the same way. Give them both a nice pressing and while you're pressing, you can press open the seams from your outer bag and your lining bag and then everything will be prepped and ready for final construction.

Assembling bag and creating outer box corners

- So, I have the inner bag, the outer bag and all my strap pieces pressed and ready to go for finally assembly, but what I want to do next is kind of figure out how long I want those straps to actually be, and this is pretty specific to the size bag that you have, the size piece the needlepoint is, and when I'm positioning a strap along the upper edge of the piece I like to sort of divide it visually in thirds, and place those straps in between those three parts. I think that that's a pretty visually pleasing way to design the bag. These to me are looking a little bit long so I'm gonna go ahead and trim a couple inches off, just with my scissors to make them the same length. Gonna trim off the salvage edge while I'm at it, too. I'm not gonna trim off too much, because I am gonna lose a half inch at the end of each strap, just within that upper seam allowance. So, what I'm gonna do to prepare the strap to be included in that top seam is just pin it in place, and this is the right side of the strap, so I'm pinning it down against the right side of the bag. I'm just doing this on the outer bag, keeping the lining set aside for now. If you actually wanna measure the width of the bag and divide it into thirds mathematically knock yourself out, I'm gonna do it using my eyeballs. And I'm gonna flip it over onto the other side, and now I can kinda use that pinned position of the strap on the other side to also pin the remaining strap on the back of the bag. Now you can just use a simple straight stitch on the machine to tack those in place before we include it in the top seam of the bag. I've already removed the extension table to expose the free arm of the machine to make it easier to tack these on now and it's also gonna make that top seam easier to complete. (whirring) I've got those straps tacked in place now. So, I'm just gonna fit the right side of the bag down inside the lining of the bag, which is gonna mean that their right sides are now together, and remember, our lining has an escape route on the bottom seam, so you will be able to get out of this. The only thing you wanna look out for is making sure the straps fall in down between the lining and the outer bag. And then just continue to work with the fabric, and manipulate it all the way around, keeping the side seams together with their allowances pressed open. And I'm gonna do that on the other side. And then just pin as many times around the top perimeter of the bag, possibly where the straps are to keep those nice and in place, but just pin to your comfort level before taking a half inch seam all the way around the top. (whirring) and I just finish with a backstitch. Okay now for the fun part. You can reach through that opening in the bottom lining, and carefully pull through the entire outer bag. I'm very impatient at this part always. Which is why it's a good idea to backstitch the opening. Oh my goodness, looking so, so pretty. I love it. Okay, now, before you return the lining all the way down into the bag, I like to sort of fold it up and align those creased edges, and just take a quick top stitch to close it. I'm doing the seam right on the very edge as close to that fold as I can. (whirring) Now, I'm gonna return that lining down inside the bag. Get it all situated, smoothed out. You can

take a nice pressing around the top keeping the seam between the outer bag and the lining at the very top edge of that fold. If you'd like to top stitch it, go right ahead and do so all the way around. Once you have it nice and pressed, and top stitched if you choose to, we're gonna work on that exterior box corner for a nice little detail. I'm working around the top edge here, pressing with the iron. And when I approach the part of the bag that includes the needlepoint, I wanna be sure actually that I've got a plush towel laid underneath, so that those inconsistent, sort of, nice bumpy stitches, don't get flattened out against your ironing surface, but rather they can kinda nestle down into the fibers of the towel, and not get crushed when you're pressing. I decided that I do wanna top stitch around the bag, but I think that I'm gonna avoid top stitching through the needlepoint at all. So I'm just gonna start at this side, and go all the way around and stop at the other side of the needlepoint, and again, do a little bit longer stitch for my top stitch. I'm gonna use a quarter inch seam allowance for the top folded edge, and mostly I'm top stitching just to keep the lining in place since this is such a large scale bag. (whirring) So, we're at the side seam of the bag over here, and I've got one hand on the inside. And I really wanna press the lining corner of the bag down inside the corner of the main bag to make sure they're really inline with one another before I go on to do this box corner. Typically you're doing a box corner on the inside of a bag, and trimming off the excess. I thought it might be interesting to make that box corner more visible by sewing the seam on the outside of the bag, and then just turning the corner up, kind of like grocery bag style. And the way that this bag is constructed allows you to see an exact line of where to perform that stitching, so we already have a seam line right there from the bottom framing of the bag. But, I'm still gonna go ahead and pin the layers together. And I've got this flattened out with the back here, you can see, so really what you're doing is you're aligning the whole side panel with the underside panel. And you can kinda feel with your fingers here where those seam allowances are, assuring that you have it in line. And then I'm gonna put another pin here. And then I'm just gonna stitch right in that seam, just about stitching in the ditch all the way across and backstitching on both ends. (whirring) Okay, so now you can stitch the other corner exactly the same way. Now that we've finished all the machine sewing. I've chosen to go ahead and tack up these corners with a hand sewing needle, because I'm gonna be adding in these cute little handmade pompoms. And you can machine tack it if you prefer, but I might as well make this all one step. So, I've got a needle double threaded here, and I'm gonna begin just by passing the needle through that outer corner. I'm gonna go ahead and give it a whip stitch, and wrap around real quick to secure it in place before I add it here. I don't have to be too picky or perfectly careful with how I'm gonna stitch this on, because it is mostly gonna get covered up by a pompom. So, I'm just sort of roughly whip stitch tacking it in place. I do wanna do probably three or four stitches though to make it nice and secure. Okay, I've got that pretty tight. I'm just gonna take it one more time. And you can see that I've used that side seam as a way of lining it up to make sure I've got the point in a good place. Okay, and just all with the same thread, I'm gonna go ahead and include my pompom by just passing the needle through the center of the pompom. And then I'm gonna go ahead and turn it back and through. And then the rest of this sewing is gonna be slightly blind by just passing up underneath the base of the pompom and up. Tightening, and then back down, and finding the needle on the underside again. I'm gonna do that one more time, and back down again, but this time, I'm gonna go all the way through to the inside of the bag, and pulling the needle and thread on the inside. I'm gonna open up the bag here, and I can feel that pompom through there. Tighten it up, and just do a couple whip stitches in place here before knotting and finishing. Okay, just gonna trim off that. And then I can repeat on the other side of the bag with another pompom. I absolutely love how this turned out. I

adore the idea of something so kind of nostalgic and found becoming a very useful and functional part of your day. And I've got this variation here that I created with another needlepoint that actually belonged to one of my aunts in Greece. And I'm guessing that she gifted it to my mom several years ago. And my mom might have been a little shy about hanging a gypsy on her wall. So, I thought that I'd kinda give that a kick in the pants by turning it into a tote and dragging it around with me. I also think that adding this fun little whimsical detail at the top, by turning pompoms into a tassel is really cool, it's a nice variation. And also I made these straps a little bit wider and included a pretty decorative stitch that's on my Janome sewing machine. But, I think that this is a fantastic way to make that first step from going to a finished needlepoint to a functioning bag.