
Hand-Stitched Needle Case with Heidi Parkes

Chapter 1 - Hand-Stitched Needle Case

Overview

(bright upbeat music) - I first made this hand-stitched needle case as a gift for my students. I liked it so much that I kept one for myself and used it. Then I liked it so much, I made another dozen to give to my friends. I'm Heidi Parkes. I live in Milwaukee, Wisconsin and I love sewing things by hand. It's the perfect introduction to the skills that you'll need to make a quilt. My three favorite knots, the quilter's knot, tailor's knot and slip knot are the knots I use in all of my work. We're also using my three favorite stitches, the whip stitch, the ladder stitch and the running stitch. While making this hand-stitched needle case, you'll learn some foundational sewing skills. You'll create something lovely and useful and it only takes 20 minutes to whip up. (bright upbeat music continues)

Materials

- Our hand-stitched needle case only needs a few supplies. You'll need a snap of any size, a small embroidery hoop, precut a piece of fabric that's six inches by eight inches. I happen to use some woven cotton, and a four inch by six inch piece of felt. I used my rotary cutter to cut these, but you could also use a scissors. You'll need a small scrap of fabric, some thread, I prefer DMC Pearl Cotton size eight, clips, a pushing thimble, a pulling thimble, scissors, and needles. I like the Milliners Needles from Dritz. I usually use the size seven.

AppliquÃ© front cover

- We'll begin by using the whip stitch to applique a small patch on the front of our needle case. I like to do this so that I remember what's inside the needle case. These also make beautiful gifts for my friends. I can pop them in an envelope and send them away with a thank you note, and it feels special, decorative and personal if there's a little stitching on the outside. We'll begin by cutting our thread. And I like to use my body to measure the thread. I'll take thread from the middle of my neck, to my hand. To thread the needle I like to hold the thread between my index and my thumb, so that it looks like a small speck of dust with very little thread exposed. I look through the eye of my milliners needle and slide it in place. This can be a little bit tricky, but for me it's worth it because the thin eye of the needle is very easy to slide through the fabric. And especially when we're sewing through this felt, it can be a little thick. I'll tie a quilter's knot. I'll start by finding the place where I want the knot to be at the end of my long tail. That spot I'll use to make a plus sign with my needle. It's a bit of a thread sandwich. This exposed tail is the amount of tail that you'll have after your knot. So I like to keep it pretty short. Then from the long side, I'll wrap three times towards the tip of the needle. I pinch this coil and I send my needle in the direction that needles love to go, pulling it through the coil, and then pulling all of the thread through my fingers. It lands as a knot that's very similar to a french knot. To prepare for my applique I'll place the hoop on my background fabric. I wanna be careful about placement because if the applique is on the edge, this part will get folded over twice to create the edge or the binding. And I don't want my design to disappear into that edge. I'll find the midline. And then just to the side of the midline is where I'll do the applique. I've got a very tiny hoop that will work great for this. I'll put my thimbles on and then I'll use my fingers to finger turn the applique. Even though this is a rectangular scrap I'm gonna make an oval shape. I'll send my needle up through the back so that the knot is hidden and then I can begin to do the whip

stitch. For the whip stitch I go into the background fabric and then up through the applique. A whip stitch is a lot like a spiral bound notebook. The whip stitch spirals around the edge of the applique. As I approach the corner, I'll tuck it under doing a couple tucks so that I get a nice rounded corner creating an oval shape ultimately. Sometimes I find it easier to do the whip stitch if I am coming out the background fabric rather than coming out the applique. I'll do a single stitch here going in and out my background fabric. This way I get to decide exactly where I go into the applique as I stitch around. When doing the whip stitch I want to find the exact opposite spot so that my stitch looks like the rays of the sun. It's also possible to have the diagonal on the front and that looks real pretty too. But usually I try to be consistent using one or the other. If I flip to the back you can see how the stitches look diagonal on the back. As I end one stitch and begin the next. Approaching this corner I'll turn around again. Especially if you're new to the whip stitch this can be a fun place to experiment, to try something out. It's purely decorative. So if you want to add a running stitch, you can. You can also do your whip stitch very close together or very far apart. It's a nice place to be playful. As I approach the end, I like to use my fingers on both sides to tuck the end of that shape in keeps me from getting something too triangular. Although a triangular shape would also be pretty. There are no rules here. I'll continue doing my whip stitch. And once I've gone all the way around, I'll use the tailor's knot on the back to tie it off. I like the tailors knot because it doesn't nip into the fabric at all. It's a very smooth finish. To make my tailor's knot I create a loop of thread above the place where my thread came out. I send my needle around and underneath that loop. I'll pull it through and keeping a lot of thread in my left hand, I'll pull taut so that this intersection of three lines is snug against my fabric. What I don't want is an intersection of four lines floating above the fabric. I'll press my thumb down to hold it in place and then gently slide through. I like to use two tailor's knots to create a secure knot here. I'll snip it off and I'm ready to add my felt.

Attach felt and add a snap

- I've already tied a new knot on the same thread, and now we'll begin to sew our fabric to our felt. This is the pretty exterior of my needle case, so I want to have that part facing the table. I'll place my felt in the center. And then I want to begin folding the edge over on either of the short edges. I like to start with the short edge because that's where I'll end with my second side of my snap. I'll use a Wonderclip to hold the edge in place. And to hide my knot, I'll come up through the very center at the two-inch mark underneath the fold, and I'll tuck the tail under. Using my thimbles., I'm gonna begin with the running stitch. The running stitch involves connecting the eye of my needle to the end of my thimble, holding the needle in place, and pressing up and down through all of the layers. I'll push through with my needle and I'll use this gripper to help me pull it to the other side. As I approach the corner, I'll do the running stitch right up to the edge. At the corner, I want to make a special fold as though I'm reading a book and dog earing the corner of the book so I remember the page. I'll fold that corner up at a 45 degree angle. From here, I'll fold the edge of the fabric to meet the edge of the felt, and then I'll fold up and over. I'll begin with my clip near the corner so that it doesn't go anywhere on me, and I'll add my second clip at the opposite corner. Sometimes I need to do a little fiddling here, and other times it lands perfectly. In this instance, you can see my corner ends just a little bit too deep into the border. I can nudge and fold that with my finger till it matches up evenly as a mitered corner. Fabric is very soft and forgiving, and it's enough to simply nudge it like that. I'll come up with my needle at the edge, the interior edge of my mitered corner. Here, I'm going to use the ladder stitch. A simple way to do the ladder stitch is to go in and out on one side of my seam. Now I'll go in and out on the other side of the seam. Notice that I went in exactly opposite

the place where my thread came out. I keep alternating from side to side until I get to the tip of the corner. Here, I pierced through a little bit too low. So I'll draw my needle back and get it to come out exactly on the corner. From the corner, I'll cheat my needle all the way through to the next place I wanna continue the binding. Cheating your needle means that it's hidden in the guts of the thing that you're making so you can't see the needle on the outside and you can't see the needle here on the inside of the corner. I'll push it all the way through, make sure the corner is laying flat enough, and then I'll do the running stitch along this bottom edge. You'll notice that when I do the running stitch, I use my non-dominant hand to move the fabric up and down. And I use my dominant hand, my right hand, to hold the needle in place. Once I have about half my stitches stacked up, I'll push through with my thimble and pull through to the other side. I need to stretch everything out to ungather the stitches. This corner is the same, but I'm gonna show you a different, faster way to do the ladder stitch. Again, I dog ear my corner, fold the fabric into the edge, and fold up and over. I'll clip next to the corner. And I'll put this next clip exactly in the middle. It's a subtle reminder to me to not forget to put the snap in place. This corner landed perfectly, so I don't need to nudge or adjust anything. I'll come up at the beginning of the interior of my mitered corner. To make the ladder stitch, I'll go in and out the opposite side of the seam. And now as I do my ladder stitch, I'll get two pulls of the needle in one. What I mean by that is I'm gonna go in the top fold. I'll go immediately down to the bottom, and then up next to that crease. It doesn't make so much difference right here, but if you're doing a larger applique with the ladder stitch, it's a big time saver. I'll cheat my needle through to the inside. I'll do the running stitch to the midline. I like to fold the felt just to make sure I'm at the actual middle. For my snaps, I'll use one of these medium sized snaps. And I just use my fingernail to pop it off. This bottom piece is very easy to see the part that sticks out and looks like a snap. Sometimes the top piece, you could get confused and accidentally sew it down in the wrong direction. So I like to stitch that top piece of the snap first so I don't get discombobulated. I'll hold it in place with my finger and I'll bring the needle through one of these holes in the snap, and I'll stab all the way to the back. The stab stitch is simply going straight through, piercing from the front to the back. I'll stab stitch now to the other side. And I like to go through the snap three times for each hole. I'm sure there's a sneaky way to avoid having your stitches show here on the exterior, but I find them to be one of the most charming and cute details of this hand-sewn needle case and I like to leave them there. It can be a little tricky to get through the hole in the snap when you first start, but if you're persistent looking for that hole, you'll find it. Now I'm gonna move from this hole to the other one. I'm going to cheat my needle so that I'm coming out right outside in front of the hole in the snap here. I'll stab through to the exterior and continue all the way around to the snap. You can use any thread color and fabric color combination that you'd like. I think I'm especially attracted to the combination of red and pink as an adult, because as a child in the 80s, it was the only color combination that my mother forbid me to wear. I made this fabric with avocados. I used the pits and peels of the avocado to dye some white cotton muslin that I got at Jo-Ann Fabrics. This time as I cheat my needle, it just happened to be easy to come out the back of the needle case rather than the front, and it doesn't make any difference. So I'm just gonna continue here, doing my stab stitch and coming out the hole in my snap. Finally, I'll cheat my needle from the last hole in the snap to set myself up to do a little more running stitch. I'm getting low on thread. So before I get to my corner, I'm gonna add more thread. I'll take the needle off and I'll use the eye side of the needle to slide the thread through and out, so that's in the guts of my binding. Once more, I'll take thread from my hand to the middle of my neck. I'll thread my needle. And here at the end of my thread, I want to create a slipknot. A slipknot is something that you might be familiar with from crochet. I'll hold the

tail between my thumb and my index finger, make a loop, and temporarily nip onto that loop with my thumb. I reach through the top hole that I've made, grab the long side of my thread, and I'll pull that loop opposite both tails as I let go of that little loop that my thumb nipped onto. As the knot closes, I'll make sure that I have a relatively short tail on my thread. A slipknot can slip and slide open and closed. So I will glide it over my tail and slide it closed. It could still slide off at this point, but I like it because it holds things secure. I also don't have to do a tiny fingery knot with my tailor's knot. Instead, I'm able to secure it with the same kind of knot that I use when I tie my shoelaces. I'll do two of that knot. You could also call it a square knot. Because I pulled my thread out from the binding, I'm gonna send it back through to recreate the stitch that I was in the middle of. I'll put these little tails underneath the binding so that they are hidden and tucked away, and I'll continue my running stitch to the corner. I'll do this corner, the edge, another corner, and we'll meet back as I do the second half of my snap. (gentle music) (gentle music continues) (gentle music continues) I finished the corner and I'm gonna start stitching towards the snap. As I prepare to add the second side of my snap, I always like to check that things are lined up properly. I want my needle case to open and close neatly like a book. And if it snaps closed like this, it just isn't quite as special as I want it to be. I want it to close neatly, book style. To do that, I want to look at where the snap is naturally going to match in the hole on the other side. Then I can use my hand or my fingernail to hold it exactly there. Also, this snap on the same way that I did before, going in and out of the holes. This side of the snap I think is a little bit easier to make my way in and out of. It lays more flush to the fabric. Once I get two of the holes sewn through, it won't wiggle around at all, and then I don't need to hold the snap in place anymore. As I toggle from one hole to the next, I keep cheating my needle through. I don't leave those longer stitches exposed on the back because I don't want them to snag against anything. It would be almost a quarter of an inch from one hole to the other hole. Once in a while, I need to feel around for the hole. Eventually I get it. Now that I've finished attaching the snap, the only work that I have left to do is tying my knot. I can also check here. It looks a little bit on the outside like I'm missing one stitch in my running stitch, so I can go in and make that last stitch too. I'll cheat my needle over to that area, go into the back, make that last stitch that it needs to look right. And here I'm pivoting my needle at an angle. I want to open up the edge here so that I'm coming out as deep as I can in between the binding and my felt. I'll check again that the side looks right. It does. Now I'll tie my tailor's knot. Same as always I'll tie two tailor's knots in a row. Now I like to use the eye side of my needle. So I'll match the sharp side of the needle to my thimble, hold the thread taut, and I'll send the eye side of the needle through that last stitch so that my knot will be able to glide to the interior of the binding, pop through and be invisible. If I press my finger against the eye of the needle and wiggle a little bit, it can go out without breaking the warp or the weft of the fabric. I'll grab it. You see the knots there? A gentle tug, and it's through to the interior. I'll hold it a little bit taut so that once I snip off my thread, I can wiggle the fabric and that tail will recede into the interior as well. Now my case is ready for some needles.

Variations and examples

- I've made lots of these, and I'm excited to show you some variations. This is my brand new needle case, and it's probably destined to hold needles but I also have found it very useful for holding pins, safety pins, and some of my stranger long needles. The problem I've run into is that it can be hard to tell the difference about the contents. These safety pins hanging out the edge are a good clue. But I made some new ones with exotic fabrics, and I think that's the way of the future for my needle cases. These variations include some extra stitching. I used the running stitch going multiple

directions on this one. And I also did a tiny bit of weaving. Here, I used the technique that I shared in my hand embroidered label class to make a label for my needle case. I imagine it would also be cute to write the word needles and the word pins on a future variation like this. If I were sending it as a particularly special, meaningful gift to a friend, I might choose a quote or a poem that we both loved and embroider that on the exterior to give to them. This is a case that I made from a piece of vintage patchwork. It was a pinwheel quilt pattern. I didn't applique or add anything special to the outside. I just stitched around to the edge. Then I had a lot of scraps from it, and I used those scraps to assemble together one more needle case. A special difference between them is the thread color. This black stands out a lot, and this gold color fades into the background. I also used two different colors of felt, gray and yellow. Because this one was made with scraps, I was a little bit shy on my six inches by eight inches scale, and I just tucked things in a little bit tighter. This is also a wonderful project for using pretty fabrics that feel too special to cut up and make anything else with. This is done with polyester. These are cotton. I love that good luck wish of crossed fingers. And this is a mystery fabric. Maybe a silk-polyester blend. These are made with exactly the same technique that I use to bind a quilt. If you take a peek at this recent daily practice quilt that I made, the front binding looks the same as the inside of the needle case, and the backing of the quilt looks the same as the exterior of the needle case. Instead of using a piece of felt, you wanna measure the backing fabric to be a little bit larger than your quilt top. I always like to cut the batting a little bigger than what I need and the backing about three inches larger than the edge of the quilt. That way, if things shift while I'm quilting, I'll still have enough fabric left. Once I've done all of the quilting, I'll trim away the batting and I'll trim down the backing fabric to the same one inch border that I use on the needle case. It can be very fun to choose an exotic print for the backing because those little nips of color add a special detail. This is a great low stakes way to practice your skills before you bind your first quilt or before you try out this technique. These three knots and three stitches are the top tools that I have in my skillset when I sit down to do hand work.