



Arranged Perfectly

by Bobbi Bullard

I like to think of all machine embroiderers as fiber artists. We use our clothing as canvases and our embroidery designs as paints. As such, the placement of our embroidery designs is important for the success of every project. When I embark on a project, I ask myself, should I place a shower of flowers down the front of my shirt or a line of flamingos across the shoulders? Design placement makes the difference between a masterpiece and a 'wadder'.

Options and More Options

The good thing about using the embroidery machine as your creative toolbox is the almost unlimited possibilities. The bad thing about creating with the embroidery machine is the almost unlimited possibilities. Where do you start?

The Process

Contrary to popular belief, pictures of finished projects don't pop into my head. I have a specific process for planning my pieces; a process which anyone can use.

Choosing the Pattern

Unlike most wearable art artists I choose my patterns by what looks good on me. I find that I can fit embroidery on almost any piece of clothing. The only criteria is to have a limited number of design lines; the beauty will be created with the embroidery. The black jacket is the Maia Jacket from LaFred and the brown wrap is the Déjà Vu from Sewing Workshop. You can choose almost any pattern and make it better with embroidery.

Choosing the Design

To limit your variables, I suggest you choose a simple, single color design for your first embroidery-embellished project. You will only have to coordinate one thread color with your fabric. As you get

comfortable with embroidery and textile design you can choose more elaborate designs like these from my Brilliants design set. You can even use the free design shown here. Simply log onto www.bullarddesigns.com/brilliants/halves.htm

Whether single or multicolored, select simple abstract designs. Remember, the idea is to make a beautiful piece where all of the parts work together and compliment the wearer. A common mistake is to choose a design that is so beautiful that it eclipses the garment and the person wearing it. I feel that the finished piece needs to be flattering to the wearer as well as beautiful on a hanger.

Design Placement

The most important part of my process is figuring out where to place the designs for the best possible effect. Begin by sketching out five copies of a line drawing of the finished piece.



Don't worry if your drawings aren't perfect. They can be really crude and still serve the purpose. No one else will see the drawings. You will use these to figure out design placement. Take the first of the line drawings and begin doodling spots across the piece.



When you are happy with the results go to the second line drawing. Doodle again, going in a different direction. If your



doodles were random on the first piece, doodle in straight lines.



On the third line drawing, draw again. This time add lines that can translate into decorative machine stitches.



Doodle designs between these lines. On the fourth line drawing, experiment with different colors for piecing. Go to the fifth and try one more time.

Look over your drawings and choose the best.

I am strict about the five drawing rule. I find that if I start with a single drawing I will usually settle for my first doodling attempt. My experience is that if I begin with five drawings that I'll take the time to doodle on all five and usually one of the latter attempts will outshine the first.

Placement Possibilities

Some of the millions of possibilities for design placement are:

- Random placement over the entire piece
- Evenly placed in columns
- Evenly arranged in rows
- Placed evenly both horizontally and vertically
- Designs running in a meandering curved line
- Designs running in multiple meandering curved lines
- Symmetrical placement on both fronts
- Vertical lines of designs on the left side, horizontal lines on the right

Embroidery

Almost every person who sees my clothes asks me when I do my embroidery. Do I sew the clothing first? Do I embroider the fabric before placing the pattern? The answer is simple. I lay out my pattern on the fabric. With chalk or an air erasable marker I draw around the edges of the pattern. Then I can embroider close to the edges of the fabric. If, by some chance,

my embroidery isn't in the exact place I can adjust the pattern a little to get the exact placement I wish. If I'm using a water-soluble stabilizer I wash the fabric. Then I place the pattern back on the fabric again and cut.

Stabilizers

I find that the correct stabilizer increases the likelihood of a successful project. The stabilizer needs to be substantial enough for the design, yet pliable enough to not interfere with the hand of the fabric. If your fabric is washable like the brown silk shown here, choose a water soluble stabilizer. For a wool which will be dry cleaned, I use a soft yet stable cut-away like No-Show or Polymesh.

And Sew On and Sew On

After you've finished the embroidery, line the pattern up with the embroidery and cut out the pattern. Complete your garment.

Just Do It

If you're a machine embroiderer you, too, are an artist. All you have to do is try. Follow the steps above and make your own wearable art piece. Just do it! Use your embroidery machine as the ultimate wearable art tool.

