



By Geri Finio

About the Project: Custom Roman Shades

Beth Kelleher, interior designer and owner of Moorestown, NJ-based A Different Color, had a challenge: Her client wanted a unique, custom window treatment to match the theme of family-heirloom furniture, which Kelleher had refinished and reupholstered with updated fabrics. Kelleher found inspiration in a photograph of a hand-embroidered shade from the Van Gestel Clé home located in Malines, Belgium, and featured in Stephanie Hoppen's *The New Curtain Book*.

The client was drawn to the hand-embroidered shade in Hoppen's book, so Kelleher suggested adding an embroidered Roman shade to draperies she had already designed. One challenge was keeping within the budget, since a hand-embroidered shade would be cost-prohibitive. That's when Dana Schroll, owner of Moorestown, NJ-based Dana Schroll Interiors, suggested that she and Kelleher work with me, a skilled custom machine and hand embroiderer.

Custom window treatments present unexpected challenges such as assembly/construction details and, in this project, embroidery layout. We needed to ensure that the embroidery design remained the focal point whether the shade was up or down, so we had to really focus on proper design size and layout. For an embroiderer to be a true partner in a higher-end design project such as this, understanding fabric hand, weight, density, thread, seam allowances and more are all required skills to ensure a beautiful outcome.



The Team

Interior

Designer: Beth Kelleher, owner, Moorestown, NJ-based A Different Color

Embroidery

Artist: Geri Finio, owner, Moorestown, NJ-based Studio 187

Sewing Professional:

Dana Schroll, owner, Moorestown, NJ-based Dana Schroll Interiors



Photography: Tom Sheckels, Sheckels Creations Photography

Required Skillsets

- Interior design
- Embroidery digitizing/editing
- Machine embroidery
- Sewing/assembly
- Installation

Step 1:

We team up. I've known Schroll for more than 16 years, and she's worked with Kelleher for many years doing window treatments/installation, upholstery and home accessories. When Kelleher brought Schroll on board for this particular project, she recommended that they include me, a skilled embroiderer, to execute the digitizing and stitchery portion of this project. We each bring a specific talent to this project: Kelleher's talent is interior design; she can put together a room from start to finish with creative flair. Schroll can sew with detail and precision like no one else. And, I've blended my hand embroidery and computer skills to produce machine embroidery with a distinct, refined look.

Tip: I recommend all machine embroiderers learn basic hand-stitching techniques and familiarize themselves with the different cultural styles and types of embroidery stitches. This will improve your embroidery craftsmanship – and allow you to take on higher-end projects with ease.

For example, with experience in hand embroidery, understanding digitizing becomes inherent. You'll learn and understand pathing, stitch direction, tension, fabric reaction and needle use with the exercise of hand embroidery. The moment you manually start stitching with needle and thread, you're digitizing and embroidering. If you're new to digitizing, you'll learn about programming needs, and then you can learn a digitizing program. When I watch a sewout of a design, I immediately recognize the skill of the digitizer by how the sewout is pathed; I can see the foundation stitching (or underlay) and how it was programmed, and the overall use of density.

Step 2:

We select the design. A stock design called Mexican Tole Art from Great Notions

(www.greatnotions.com) was perfect for the effect we wanted to achieve, since the elements in the design picked up on some of the natural motifs in the client's area rug. We decided to tweak the design and select a color palette specific to the room.

Step 3:

We select the colors. Since the original stock design was programmed for seven colors, we were able to choose a larger palette; we wanted the colors to be a gradient from one to the next. We referred to our inspiration photograph of the Van Gestel Clé home, and also to the existing colors in the client's room. We started with a monochromatic palette of yellows and golds for the main design area, and then Kelleher introduced copper, green and red as accent colors – these accents became the treatment's primary focal element. We actually laid the spools of thread directly on the drapery fabric

to assist us in our color-compatibility decision.

Step 4:

We plot the design. Here's the basic process: Before programming your design for window shades, measure the width of your design area, or sew field. Next, measure your embroidery design dimensions carefully, keeping in mind the seam allowances that you'll add later. Working with pencil and paper, use these variables to design your layout. It helps to print out the design and lay the printouts on fabric before embroidery to get a good visual.

Because of our project's large window size (71 inches wide by 81 inches long), we wanted to manipulate the layout, filling empty space for added simplicity and flow. The design presented me with some sewing restrictions and scaling obstacles, based on the fabric width (54 inches wide). For example, when the shade was folded,

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The Pricing Question

I price my higher-end work based on the stitch count of the test and final sewouts, plus an hourly fee for consultation and editing the design. Kelleher bills hourly for working out the design of the treatment, including fabric selection, layout and color design, along with any meetings incurred with Schroll and me throughout the process. The client was supplied a bill that included the cost of the embroidery, the work room and fabrication costs, and the billed hours from Kelleher.

we wanted the embroidery to remain front and center. We also wanted each element of the design to look visually balanced, so I had to edit the design file by deleting some small elements and repositioning the center crosshatch for each hooping. We played with different colors until we hit on the right combination.

Then, I further tweaked the design elements in the embroidery file (and machine settings) to accommodate the density, underlay, fabric and thread we had chosen. Always select the stabilizer and needles that best support your stitch count and layout, so the hand of your fabric doesn't change dramatically in the final sewout. I prefer Costwold Industries' No-Show Mesh stabilizer in peach because it doesn't show through. I used Isacord and ARC 40wt polyester with an 11 BP uni-

versal needle. Also, I adjust my tension completely by touch – this is where knowing how thread reacts to different fabrics is very helpful. I rarely use the same settings as a default for every project – it's all determined individually based on visual and hand results during a test sewout. ("Hand" is a term used to describe the drape or feel of fabric. With embroidery, I like to keep the hand of fabric intact as much as possible.)

Tip: Keep in mind the future laundering and use of your product. Our drapes are dry-clean only, so all the materials we selected were compatible to that process.

Step 5:

We prepare the fabric for stabilization and embroidery. We discussed assembly and the sewing process, as well as the finished piece's visual appeal. Since the overall width of this Roman shade was wider than the 54-inch fabric width, we decided to create two horizontal seams that could be concealed under the panel when they were rolled up, enabling the design to run across one width of fabric. We also had to raise the design's center point to accommodate the bottom hem that we added later. Using a paper template, we marked the center point for each hooping. Then we visually reviewed the layout by printing out templates of the design and pinning them to the fabric. We re-pinned, replaced, rear-

ranged and mirrored the designs until we were pleased with the look.

Step 6:

We do a test sewout. In any project, always do a test sewout before the final run. With embroidery, there's no room for error – in this case, our shades had many yards rolled and covered on the table while the embroidery was running. That's a lot of fabric to be responsible for, so we test-sewed by wrapping the extra yardage in a waste fabric to avoid spoilage.

Tip: A test run of any embroidery design helps you confirm that the colors work well with the fabric, and that the thread weight, needle type, density and tension setting are all appropriate for that project. This is the time to tweak any tension or machine settings, thread colors, layout and backing choice. For us, it also served as a final guide to look at the visual balance of the embroidery design and the window.

Step 7:

We install the shades. We constructed the shade in three pieces, using Hanes Interlining; we also used Bella Note blackout lining so the sun wouldn't outshine the embroidery. Plus, we decided to have Schroll sew the take-up rings higher than usual, 12 inches up from the hem with 6-inch vertical ring spacing, allowing the embroidery to be front and center when the shade is pulled up. Schroll sewed the vertical seams behind the panels to hide them and create the sewing field for the embroidery in the center piece. Then, I embroidered the design's center piece, locating it 8 inches from the bottom of the fabric edge to allow enough room for a 1½-inch double hem. We added the side sections after the embroidery sewed, completing the width to 71 inches. The embroidery filled the full 54 inches of the shade in the center.

GERI FINIO, owner of Moorestown, NJ-based Studio 187, is a lifelong hand-embroiderer and sewing enthusiast. Contact: geri@studio187.net



Customer Review

"We were so excited when we saw the breadth of color and intricate detail of the custom embroidery. It's the room's conversation piece."