

Backing and hanging a shaped tapestry.

By Margaret Jones MFA

Backing shaped tapestries can be daunting but it is really very simple. This is my usual way of doing it, there are other options.

My shaped tapestries are generally round, but this method can be used for any tapestry where the shape is curved.

I usually find it is best to block the tapestry first. This makes the edges firmer somehow and the tapestry is flatter which is helpful when trying to sew on the backing.

The usual binding is obviously not going to work on a curve, so the simple answer is to cut a piece of fabric the same size as the tapestry and sew it onto the back of the tapestry.

I use felt for the backing mainly because it doesn't need hemming. Felt is quite amazing stuff, apart from the fact it cuts to a clean edge and doesn't fray it is very resistant to wear so it protects the back edges of the tapestry and it is resistant to damp and chemicals and even fire.

So, the question is, acrylic or wool felt. I use acrylic for several reasons:

- It is stable and is unlikely to shrink over time. If using wool felt I would wash it to ensure no shrinkage at a later date.
- It is cheaper.
- I have this idea that an acrylic backing would also deter moth. Nothing will stop moth if they are determined but I work in the principle every little helps.

Felt comes in many thicknesses. The stuff you make soft toys and costumes out of is too thin and won't provide any support. I use felt at around 3mm thick.

I lay the felt out on a big table with the tapestry face up on top. Taking a piece of chalk, I draw carefully around the tapestry onto the felt. Then I remove the tapestry and cut out the shape just inside the chalk line. I have just cut out around the edge of the tapestry in the past but am always a bit wary of getting scissors too near a tapestry that took months to weave.

If I buy the felt especially I will get a colour to tone with the tapestry but otherwise I use whatever colour I have – which is often black.

Having cut out the felt you now have your basic shape and you now need to stitch it onto



weaversbazaar

the back of the tapestry, the usual stitch you use for stitching tape to the back of a tapestry is perfect – a hemming stitch for example.

While you are stitching the backing on I would recommend you do it flat on a table, obviously the backing needs to be flat to the tapestry. To keep the two fabrics together I sometimes pin them together at intervals with very long fine and sharp pins. You could do it with big tacking stitches but sometimes the stitch will pull out a bit of the weft, so you need to be careful.

You may need to trim a tiny bit off the backing slightly as you go. This is a scissor close to tapestry alert. Please be careful. I sometimes have areas where the backing has to be adjusted so it may not come right to the edge of the tapestry if I have got carried away with the snipping.

Once you have stitched the backing on lay it out with the tapestry facing up to check that the tapestry and the backing are the same size. If the backing is too big you will be able to see it peeking round the edge of your tapestry, if it is too small the tapestry will curl and bubble slightly at the edges. If this happens you need to decide whether to start again, redoing the bits that look wrong or just live with it if it isn't too bad.

Trying to roll a tapestry with this backing on is almost impossible, either the tapestry or the backing will cockle, and you may end up with creases in the tapestry when you take it out to hang. To stop this, I cut a hole in the middle of the backing. The may still be some creasing, but it ends up in the felt not the tapestry.

Cutting the hole before stitching gives you a very wobbly sort of doughnut shape and it is hard to make it fit the tapestry.

I usually leave an edge of felt about 4-6 inches around the edges of the tapestry. Wider than the usual tape I would use on a straight tapestry. This is the back of one of my tapestries (see Figure 1 right).

Obviously, you can't leave it like this hanging around on the back of the tapestry, the bottom half can get all sorts of dust and bits stuck in it so I stitch the bottom half of the inside edge with a herringbone stitch.

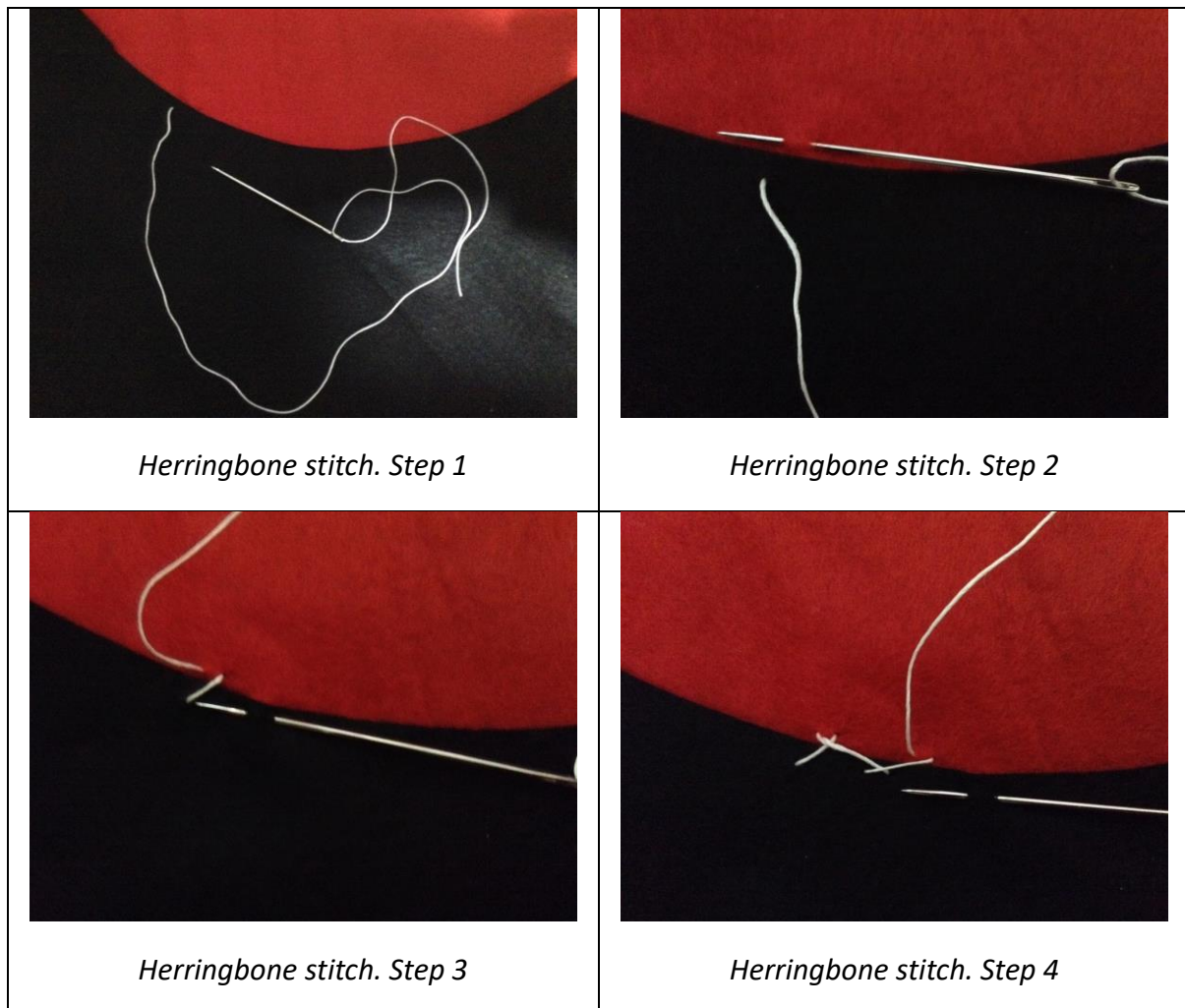


Figure 1

weaversbazaar

Example of how to do herringbone stitch is shown below in case you are not familiar with it.

This stitch has some movement in it so the backing can move a bit.



To hang the tapestry, I cut a piece of mount board or similarly heavy card to the shape of the top of the tapestry. I don't use foam board as I find it bends too easily.

Then at the top of the tapestry I wiggle the piece of mount board inside the pocket, so it sits snugly between the tapestry and the backing and is firm against the top of the tapestry.

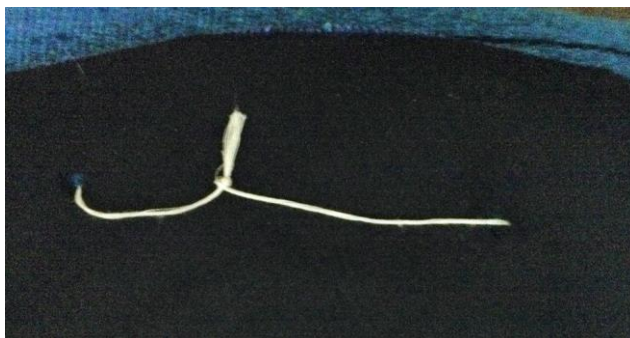


Figure 2

In order to hang the circular tapestry, I cut two small holes in the felt and the board about 6 inches apart and 1 to 2 inches down from the top. Then I thread hanging wire, old warp thread or heavy duty waxed thread through the holes to make a thread/wire for hanging, as in this picture (see Figure 2 left).

weaversbazaar

This thread/wire needs to be low enough and tight enough that any hooks on a hanging system will not show above the tapestry but high enough that the top of the tapestry doesn't flop forward.

This may take a bit of trial and error in a tapestry that has a lot of curves along the top.

You may need more than two holes, you may need two holes at each apex.

For instance, as in Figure 3 right.

Assuming the red area is the tapestry then the white dots are the approximate place for the holes for hanging.

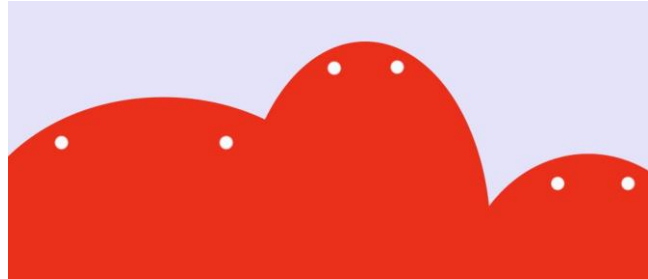


Figure 3

Good luck in backing your tapestry - if you have any queries please email me at mfi@btinternet.com.

Margaret Jones is a tapestry weaver living in West Sussex, England who has exhibited internationally. She has received a number of awards including Cordis Showcase Tapestry Prize-winner (2016), American Tapestry Alliance Bursary (2015), Valerie Power Award, Edward James Foundation Bursary, and a Qest Scholarship (2014). Margaret has also curated exhibitions (see www.heallreaf.com) and will undertake commissions and teach workshops to the customer's specification.