

How-To...

Make Profit with Patches

BY FRED LEBOW

Patches are a convenient way to put decorative embroidery on items that can be tricky to embroidery directly. Plus, they can cover up goofs or an unwanted direct-embroidered image, allowing a shirt or other item that still has good use in it to be recycled.

Lyn Christian, a home-based embroiderer in Lexington, Ky., knows that patches can offer even more. She can charge between \$7 and \$57 for a single patch, depending on if it has an appliqué background or fill stitching and on what type of artwork is involved. “If you fill a patch with stitches, you have to charge way more for it than if you had used appliqué,” she says.

Her companies, A Design by Lyn and A Sense of Wonder, rely on a single-head embroidery machine, as well as four home embroidery single-needle heads, to create custom patches for disparate customers—from schools to motorcycle groups.

“I did a patch for state of Louisiana House of Representatives,” she notes. “They wanted it for leather briefcases they were giving away as gifts. I’ve also done them to be sewn on the bottom of a blanket as a retirement gift.” Finished patches can be sewn or glued to an item thus eliminating the need to hoop and embroider directly.

Christian’s customers bring her a wide variety of designs they want digitized for patches. She explains that she can digitize just about any design, as long as the details aren’t too small. “I tell them anything they can draw with a crayon, I can digitize,” she says.

Key ingredients

With the proper stabilizer, patches are relatively simple to make. Christian uses satin, tackle twill and “plain old quilting cotton” for the body of her patches. “Tackle twill

makes a really nice patch material,” she says. Terry Hanson, Terradon Embroidery, Brooklyn Park, Minn. agrees, noting, “Tackle twill is smooth and stable and just the right weight for patches.”

Since Christian is usually making quantities of 25 or fewer, she generally cuts her own patches, which works well in her case. “I cut them out using scissors,” she says. “Once the patch is finished in the hoop, you know exactly where to cut.”

For higher quantities, however, a shop may want to consider a cutter. It is important to get a cutter designed to cut heavy fabrics, not simply vinyl; there’s a difference in the power of the unit and the type of blade needed.

Christian then usually backs her patch material with a stabilizing layer. “I use tearaway rather than cutaway, but it’s a matter of personal preference,” she explains. “I sometimes use a crinoline for added sturdiness.”

At this point, Christian has up to three layers for her patch—appliqué fabric, tearaway, and Crinoline. These layers go into a hoop, although Christian says this step varies depending on how the patch is being made. Sometimes she hoops the tearaway, which makes a marking line on it, and adds the fabric on top and trims it back. “Then I add the rest of the design and the outside trim,” she explains. “I take it off and heat seal the back of it. At that point, you can use your markers to take care of any white that maybe left or whatever. This makes a really nice patch.”

Another option is to hoop everything and heat seal them after cutting extremely close to the edges—again, using markers will ensure that a minimum of white peeks out. “There’s always going to be a couple of white threads peeking out though,” she says.

The outline stitch usually goes down first—not a *satin* stitch but a *lining* to keep everything in place. “It’s tricky during digitizing because you

have to decide what’s going to push and pull which way,” she says. “That knowledge comes from experience.”

Hanson’s approach is to stitch the center of the patch first and the outline last. “This eliminates any distortion of the outline.”

The final step is to apply an adhesive heat-seal film to the back. This keeps it in position when it’s being sewn down. “You can purchase heat-sealing material

that works great on the back of the patch,” Christian reports. “It’s applied to a finished patch and seals down larger satin stitches on the

back so they are not going anywhere. That makes your patch really sturdy.” She cuts a shape that’s as close as possible to the patch, and heat seals it with an iron and a Teflon sheet. “With the heat seal, you don’t need to do a merrow edge. You pull back the carrier sheet, and your patch is ready to go.”

Hanson has a slightly different technique. “I use a fusible appliqué stabilizer that is heat sealed to the back of the twill to create patches,” she says. She leaves the paper backing on the sticky side and hoops a layer or two of water-soluble tearaway with the twill. “Then, I stitch the outline of the patch onto the twill and trim away the excess close to the stitching and



This is an example of an appliqué patch sewn on a black background. Lyn Christian, A Design By Lyn, Lexington, Ky., created it for state of Louisiana House of Representatives. It was used to decorate leather briefcases used as gifts. (Photo courtesy of A Design by Lyn)



Patches are a great way to recycle shirts with unwanted logos. (Photos courtesy of A Design by Lyn)

Patches are ideal for any item that is difficult to hoop. You can create a stand-alone piece that can be sewn or glued to a wide range of items. (Photo courtesy of A Design by Lyn)



One option when making a patch is to cut extremely close to the edge and then heat seal it using a special film. Markers can be used to ensure a minimum of white peeks out. (Photo courtesy of A Design by Lyn)

tear away the paper backing on the outside of the stitching from the back. This leaves the twill patch shape with the paper backing on the back side and only the water-soluble tearaway on the outside of the patch shape.

"I stitch the tack down and the satin stitch border, remove it from the hoop and trim the water-soluble tearaway close to the satin stitches. I use a damp cloth to dissolve any remaining stabilizer around the edges. This leaves a clean satin edge with no need for markers to cover up any backing remnants. The fusible appliqué backing prevents any unraveling of the edges."

Patch particulars

Christian usually uses a satin stitch for a border, sometimes adding a second, decorative row, depending on the desired look. "You could add a second satin stitch, which makes it really pretty," she says. "You could do a wider satin stitch and a narrower one that just overlaps it, giving you really clean, finished look."

For all-stitch patches, Christian uses a 4-oz. tearaway along with a second, 2.5-oz. tearaway. "I get more stability that way," she says. "I do the same thing for an all-stitch background: I stitch out everything using just the tearaway, and I put a piece of white muslin cotton over the top and hoop all of that together."

Hanson likes to use a water-soluble tearaway. "I hoop two layers of stabilizer and then stitch the design. I trim the water-soluble tearaway close to the outer satin stitches then use a damp cloth or soak the patch in water to remove any excess."

Christian says her customers buy patches for all kinds of substrates, including shoes and tote bags emblazoned with a logo that they want to hide. "Your husband may have 15 golf shirts and you can't embroider over the logo," she says. "A patch is a great way to 'recycle' the shirts, especially if you use appliqué-style patches with fabric in the background."

"Adding a patch is a good rescue for those embroidery mishaps that sometimes occur. Covering the mistake with a patch allows you create a new look for a shirt that might have ended up in the garbage," agrees Hanson.



There are a variety of different stabilizer recipes that can be used to create patches. Terry Hanson, Terradon Embroidery, likes to use a water-soluble tearaway, hooping two layers of stabilizer and then stitching the design. (Photo courtesy of Terry Hanson, Terradon Embroidery)

Patches also are ideal for decorating a wide range of tote bags. (Photo courtesy of Terry Hanson, Terradon Em-



When the patch sewing is completed, excess stabilizer will easily tear away. Hanson, recommends trimming the water-soluble tearaway close to the outer satin stitches, then using a damp cloth or soaking the patch in water to remove any excess. (Photo courtesy of Terry Hanson, Terradon Embroidery)



Reprinted from *Printwear Magazine*
September 2009
©2009 National Business Media, Inc.
All rights reserved
Please visit the
[Printwear Magazine](#) web site.



To eliminate distortion of the outline, Hanson suggests stitching the center of the patch first and the outline last. (Photo courtesy of Terry Hanson, Terradon Embroidery)