

# Mystery Needlepoint

BY JUNE RUSSELL-CHAMBERLIN

Everybody loves a mystery. So it's no surprise to Ruth Schmuff, owner of *Bedecked & Beadazzled Needleart Boutique* in Lutherville, Maryland, that the needlepoint mystery classes, in which participants know the canvas but not how it will be stitched, always draw a crowd.

"The class participants know I like sparkles, so there is going to be bling on the canvas," Ruth said. "They know I like to push the envelope, leave open canvas and mix the textures and threads."

Participants see the painted canvas design when they sign up for a class, and they know Ruth's style of needlepoint. She maintains the approximate color values, but the threads, stitches, techniques, beads, even fabric appliques that will adorn the canvas remain a mystery to students — and Ruth herself — until the class.

"I'm only stitching a week ahead of them," Ruth said. "Just today I placed the thread orders for next week."

At each class session Ruth reveals what she's done to the canvas in the intervening two weeks. She may have stitched the background or some element of the design. Students receive the complete stitch guide and all the supplies for that section of the canvas, and have two weeks before the next class to choose whether to finish their homework.

"Homework is optional. I tell them that if they don't do a part, it's going to make the next part harder. After class I put the 'Aha!' moments on my blog and mail the supplies out to students across the country," Ruth said. Students can sign up to follow the class at home, receiving the beginning stitch guide,

canvas and stretcher bars before the class and additional materials every two weeks. Class length varies, depending on the complexity of the design.

Upcoming classes are listed on the *Bedecked & Beadazzled* website, as are past mystery canvases. "People can do the mystery canvases after the class; they just know how the mystery ends!" Ruth laughed.

At the bottom of the site's home page is a link to <Stitcherie.com>, where mystery class participants can exchange questions and comments, post photos, find out about classes and more. "It's like a Yahoo group or Facebook for needlepointers," Ruth explained. "It allows people who can't be at the class to be part of the group."

Mystery classes make teaching more fun, Ruth said. After stitching a canvas, writing a stitch guide and preparing to teach it, she is eager to start the next project — not teach the last one.

Even with a mystery class, though, she has to select the canvas at least five months in advance. "While I'm working on the current one, I am wondering, 'What can I do to set this apart that no one else has thought of?' But I don't start stitching until literally two weeks before the class starts."

Stitching just ahead of the students means the stitch guide is written as she works the canvas, not months in advance. And when the project is done, Ruth's done, too.



Having stitching deadlines to meet every two weeks has taught her how much she needs discipline, she said. "Doing this focuses me, so I get things done more efficiently. I work well with deadlines, so making the needlepoint a deadline works well for me," Ruth said.

"I like setting the bar really high, to do things I haven't done before," she added. "I'm not just a basketweave person. That's fine once in a while, but I like trying different things."

Class participants can expect the unusual: pulled thread on canvas, bridal tulle layered on top of a canvas and then stitched through and ribbon work for added dimension. If you would like to join a mystery class but have never tried these techniques, don't worry, Ruth advised.

"We don't talk about beginner or intermediate level projects," she said. "We just say, 'Go do it; you'll be fine!' You take away those words and it eliminates the boundaries. We get so hung up on the labels, but if you just trust yourself, [then] you'll be fine."

To find out more about Mystery Needlepoint Classes, visit <[www.bedeckedandbeadazzled.com/classes.php](http://www.bedeckedandbeadazzled.com/classes.php)> or call (410) 296-0405. 

