

EXCLUSIVE: MEET OUR 10 RISING STARS OF DESIGN p22

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Common Thread

The centuries-old art of crewel embroidery is as rich in history as it is in texture

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PETER KRUMHARDT

Crewelwork, an ancient type of embroidery using wool yarn on linen, really came into its own in early-17th-century England. Queen Elizabeth I, an accomplished embroiderer, encouraged guilds and noblewomen to pursue the craft about the same time the introduction of the steel needle made the work easier. The subsequent reign of King James I saw increased trade with India, introducing Brits to painted cottons with exotic flora and fauna motifs perfect for crewelwork. These designs became curtains, wall panels, and bed coverings, adding color and warmth (literally) to cold, drafty homes.

Today, crewelwork is done with a variety of yarn types and fabrics, but the most passionate embroiderers love to explore its roots. "People come from all over the world to study crewelwork," says Phillipa Turnbull, a specialist in historical crewelwork who leads tours and workshops in England and Scotland (crewelwork.com). Turnbull, who was commissioned to re-create the Queen Mother's bedspread at Glamis Castle, credits crewel's staying power to its rich history. "It has that 'I just inherited it' look. You just can't knock a classic." ▶

Larsen's "Tennessee" fabric is a bold and modern take on crewelwork (cowtan.com). Custom pillows by Chelsea Workroom (chelseaworkroom.com).



"Giverny Crewel"
clarencehouse.com



"Grenadines"
pierrefrey.com



"Melrose"
leejofa.com



"Bukhara Crewel"
clarencehouse.com



"Flowers of Jamakhana"
brunswick.com



"Tobago"
osborneandlittle.com

Our Designers Say...

"Giverny Crewel" by Clarence House

The delicate pattern of this crewel belongs in a revitalized stone house nestled in the English countryside. I would use this on throw pillows to invigorate a basket-weave linen sofa. For a more modern take, I could envision using it for a circular ottoman in front of a sleek banquette to give this traditional fabric an updated twist.

—Birgit Klein,
Beverly Hills/London

"Grenadines" by Pierre Frey

I love the 3-dimensionality of crewels! The handmade quality always makes it a classic, and with this fun, colorful Pierre Frey fabric, it can be the perfect accent pillow or window treatment to add a cool, young, modern vibe to almost any aesthetic.

—Robin Baron,
New York City

Mulberry Home's "Melrose" by Lee Jofa

Crewelwork has such incredible dimension and texture. A little bit goes a long way—I'd use this particular fabric on a club chair or headboard. Or, if you're so bold, you can go for it full-stop. I have seen crewelwork used throughout an entire room quite successfully.

—Trip Haenisch,
Los Angeles

"Bukhara Crewel" by Clarence House

I'm a sucker for anything embroidered, and when it's done in vibrant colors and a great pattern I'm wondering how I can work it into a project now. On a large pouf? As a great upholstered bench? Maybe I could use a leftover piece as a shawl.

—Karen Vidal,
Los Angeles

"Flowers of Jamakhana" by Brunswick & Fils

This fabric would look heavenly upholstered on the walls and as a table skirt on a round table in an entry foyer. What a welcoming way to enter your home! This pattern is a classic, but the fresh colors make it feel brand-new.

—Sara Gilbane,
New York City

"Tobago" by Osborne & Little

What better way to replicate the heyday of exclusive tented camps than to revel under the strong pink and reddish orange of this fantastic fabric. Perfectly draped and joyously weighty, this enigmatic pattern, like coral itself, will stand the test of time.

—Antonino Buzzetta,
New York City