

Repairing the Pansy Rug



This rug was a Pearl McGown design, hooked by Ruth King in 1956. It's a rare example of a 20th century rug that was signed and dated in the hooking, and the second of her family heirlooms I was fortunate to get to repair.

The rug had some typical wear and tear issues. It was hooked on burlap, which was pretty much all a hooker could get at the time. She used a popular method of hemming which involved folding the burlap edge under and tacking it in place before hooking, which meant when the hooking was done, there was no need to do a hem. Also, there is no hem showing on the back either, it's all covered by the hooking.

Unfortunately, that doesn't prevent the burlap from deteriorating on the edge, so we knew that had to be repaired. There were two pansies with visible holes in them, and as you can see, there's a stain in the lower left corner.

On closer inspection, the stain was stiff, possibly something sweet that got spilled, and when it soaked in, it kind of 'cemented' itself. Consequently, it cut off the air circulation, so underneath the stain, the burlap stayed wet for a while. And as we know, burlap rots when it gets wet, so there was a possibility that the burlap was degraded underneath.



Here you can see some of the issues to be addressed.

There's the typical unraveling along the edge (1), the hole next to the blue pansy (2), and a crack between the pink pansy and the leaf (3, indicated with a piece of paper.)

The first step was to unhook 1" of the border, to get to the damaged burlap. The plan was to sew in a patch and re-hook, binding the edge to prevent future damage. And to avoid an obvious color change with the background color, we decided on a light green border.

It was clear at that point that the stained corner had more underlying damage. The owner decided to have me rehook the stained area as well, using one large continuous patch, rather than small spot patches.

You might think that unhooking a rug would be easy, just get ahold of a strip and start pulling. But with fabric in the older rugs, there is often wear on the tops of the loops. Not visible when looking at the rug, but the result is that unhooking involves unpicking, one loop at a time!

And because the initials were in the stained area, they had to be rehooked, and moved up.



Here you can see the unhooked sections of the rug. When unhooking, you need to keep going until you come to solid burlap. I left as many of the pansies intact as possible, and unhooked around them.

I pinned the linen to the back of the rug and marked my patch with a Sharpie pen. Then I zig-zagged the pen mark on my sewing machine. I cut out the inside of the patch and hand-sewed the patch into the rug.



Here you can see the linen patch sewn in from the back (above) and from the front (below).





Usually I rehook with yarn, because I'm able to hide the repairs more easily, but with the subtle, subdued shades in this rug, my yarn looked too bright and shiny.

In the picture above, you can see the beige I dyed for the background (marked with a 1).

Then I cut out swatches of the other 9 wools for overdyeing. I lightly overdyeed swatches of the nine wools in a pink dyepot (shown left), a purple dyepot and a green dyepot, so I would have many shades to work with.

I didn't need to match her pansy colors exactly, since on close examination, it was clear that Ruth used a hit-or-miss technique, bringing in her leftover shades for hooking the pansies and leaves.



Above you can see the many shades I was able to create out of the original 9 wools. Now I had a palette of colors to choose from to copy Ruth's original hooking.

This is a handy way to keep track of colors. I cut out a piece of cotton fabric, (around 12"x30") and lay one bundle of strips on it. Then I cut another piece of the cotton (around 4"x40") and with safety pins, pin the top cotton down to the bottom cotton around the bundle of wool strips. I repeat for each bundle of wool strips, pinning the top cotton down to the bottom. Then I can roll the whole thing up and keep everything organized while I'm hooking.



Here you can see the finished rug.

I moved the initials up so they fit in the beige area. The 1" border is hooked with a light green yarn, which I used to bind the edge as well.

You can learn more about these techniques for rug repair in my book, *Save That Rug!*

Judy Taylor
www.littlehouserugs.com

