



From cross stitch to Craft Arena

Poor needlework grades nearly stopped Denise Gannon from pursuing her passion for stitching. Luckily, she returned to her first love to spend time teaching others

We all remember teachers from our school days, who perhaps weren't as encouraging as others. For Denise Gannon from Essex, it was in needlework. After learning a variety of stitching methods from an inspirational instructor in junior school, her secondary school teacher wasn't as supportive. "One year I'd worked particularly hard, and didn't mind receiving an E for attainment as I knew my work wasn't wonderful", she remembers, "but I was somewhat put off when I also received an E for effort!"

Try, try again!

However, thanks to cross stitch party plan, Denise started stitching again in the 1980s. She joined the Basildon Stitching Club, and revisited

Denise's own straight stitch design here will soon be sold as a kit

Images supplied by Wendy Gannon



techniques she'd learned in junior school – namely, Hardanger. Fellow club members took notice and asked to learn how to do it, and Denise found that she really enjoyed teaching them the techniques.

Later, in the midst of starting a computer training and website design business, she managed to complete a City and Guilds skills course in Embroidery, Craft and Design. Denise achieved a full certificate in 2007, and hopes to start working toward her diploma in the subjects later this year.

"I've really enjoyed expanding my stitching and

design skills to include machine embroidery, canvaswork, stumpwork, goldwork, blackwork and many others," she says. However, the supplies needed for these were difficult to find outside of the internet. Denise considered opening a shop, but found it was too expensive. "For some reason, my husband wasn't willing to re-mortgage the family home!"

Craft Arena

Fortunately, Denise was able to open Craft Arena in 2007 at Barleylands Farm in Billericay, where she sells her favourite products and stitching basics. She has studio space, a gallery area and room to teach.

Denise holds workshops for all ages, and teaches a



"Arctic Seals" hangs in Denise's shop to show where it all began

variety of techniques from embroidery and stitching to metal embossing. "I love the beginners' workshops, when

to include more classes for children, and also wants to hold more exhibitions of other peoples' work in her own gallery.

Denise is also designing cross stitch and embroidery kits for children and adults. "I gain inspiration from many sources, but mostly from archaeology and history – two of my other passions. I love the imagery used in the ancient Persian, Egyptian and Greek civilisations. I like to include a lot of texture in my work, and incorporate hand embroidery with other techniques including machine embroidery and metal embossing", Denise explained.

Stitching satisfaction

"It all seems a long way from the simple cross stitch kits I started with", she said. "I now enjoy many forms of embroidery, but I always come back to cross stitch – it's very relaxing and satisfying. One of my favourite cross stitch pieces ("Arctic Seals") is in my studio as a reminder of how I started stitching, and to inspire others"

For more info about Craft Arena, visit www.craftarena.co.uk or call ☎ 01268 523 780.

someone who thought they couldn't stitch to save their life suddenly realises they can", she says. "I had a 75-year-old lady in who thought she would never stitch a French knot, and the shriek of delight when she managed one at her first attempt was great!" Denise hopes to extend her programme

Denise teaches workshops in metal embossing as well as stitching

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