

MAAFS Judging School
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Smocking

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SMOCKING

Smocking is an embroidery technique that is probably thousands of years old, but only received its name in the 1700s in England. The technique was, at that time, used to gather a full work shirt at the bodice and the sleeves—hence the garment was called a “smock.”

Workmen needed fullness to move their arms and body, yet not inhibit their work. Mostly worn by agricultural laborers, trades men, and shepherds it gradually became the utility garment much like an apron of today.

Smocks were made at home. The gathering or embroidery techniques varied from area to area within a country. Sometimes the designs denoted the trade of the wearer.

The industrial revolution changed this drastically. Blousy, full garments were a danger around machinery, so they were abandoned by the general working class.

In the 19th century smocks were revived by artists, to cover their clothing, and ladies adapted them in a modified form with fancy embroidery. Later babies clothing, silk under garments for ladies, and even afternoon dresses appeared with smocking. Ladies magazines had instructions in smocking and patterns for garments with smocking all done by hand.

There are many types of smocking known throughout the world. The Italians have “shirring” worked from the back of the fabric, the Romanians have a patterned design using tubes that resemble reeds, and other countries stress picture formation over gathered threads, again all done by hand.

Today, basically we see three types of smocking entered in our state and county fairs:

1. English Smocking
 - a. Geometric Smocking
 - b. Picture Smocking
2. American Smocking
 - a. Counterchange
 - b. Mock Smocking
 - c. Direct Smocking
3. Canadian Smocking
(North American Smocking)
 - a. Lattice Smocking
 - b. Fabric Manipulation
 - c. Reverse Smocking

English Smocking

English Smocking basically consists of pleated fabric and a fiber (usually a floss) for embellishment stitches. Pleats are created in two ways:

- Using a machine with multiple needles (usually hand cranked)
- A set of dots printed or pressed on the fabric. These are used as a gathering guide to create hand pleats.

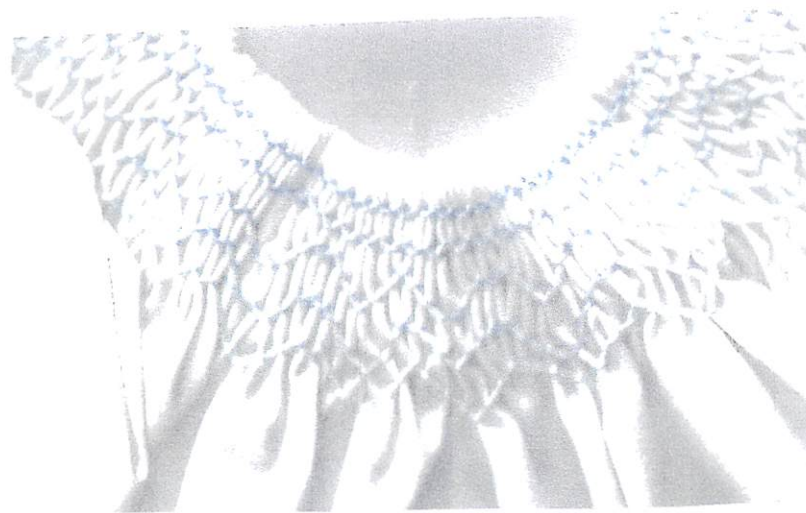
Pleats used in English smocking look like small tubes, vertically equi-distant across a piece of fabric, with a thread running through the tubes. (No matter how long or large the area of fabric is, these pleats should be equi-distant) The threads running through the pleats are guide threads. They are removed after the smocking is completed. If they must be kept in place, they should not be seen when viewing the item.

A holding or stabilizing row of these pleating threads is often kept at the top and the bottoms in ornaments in order to maintain a shape. (These should not be visible)

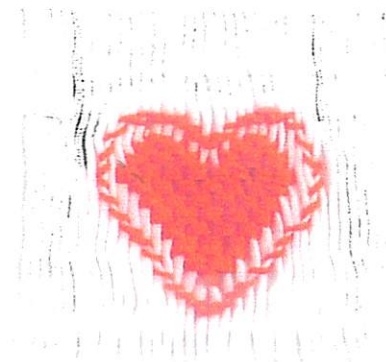
Soft fabrics such as fine batiste (nelona), charmeuse (silk), lawn, or the like, will not keep firm pleats, so are more difficult to work with.

Firm fabrics such as broadcloth, linen, corduroy and the like will keep firmer pleats and are often easier to embellish.

Original geometric design for WeeCare gown for SAGA program



Picture smocking for SAGA Chapter program



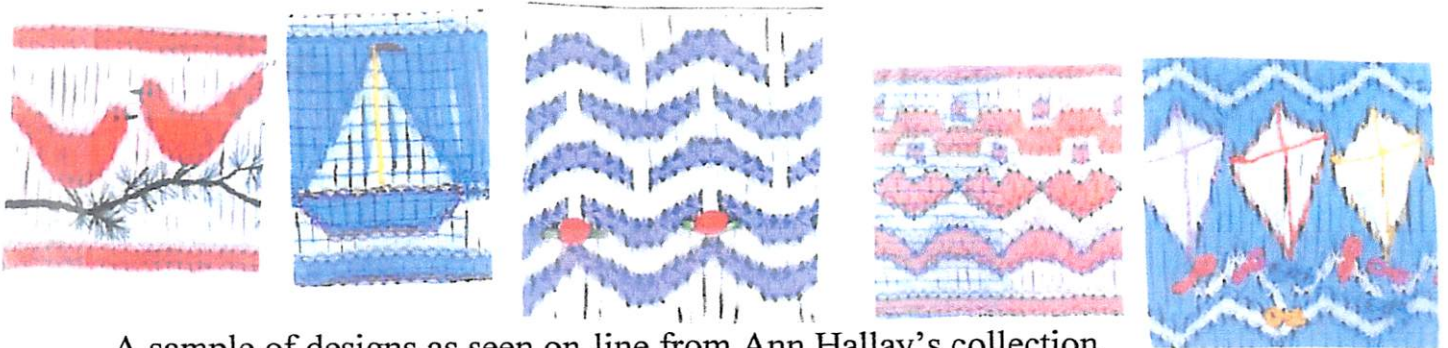
Counterchange Smocking

American Smocking, better known as Counterchange became popular in the Civil War era, but today has been popularized by a young woman in Arizona, Anne Hallay.

This smocking is done on a gingham, striped, or a gridded fabric. Basically 5/8" striped fabric is made into squares and a honeycomb or van dyke stitch is used to bring the sections together having the illusion of a solid fabric.

No pleating is used for this type of smocking. For many years McCall's Patterns carried the plates (designs) for children's dresses. They are no longer published, but the individual plates are available from fine fabric shops and on the internet. This type of smocking is becoming increasingly popular with teenagers. You do all the work on the front of the fabric.

Washing out any grid-work that has been drawn is very important. The grid-work should not be seen after the garment or item has been washed.

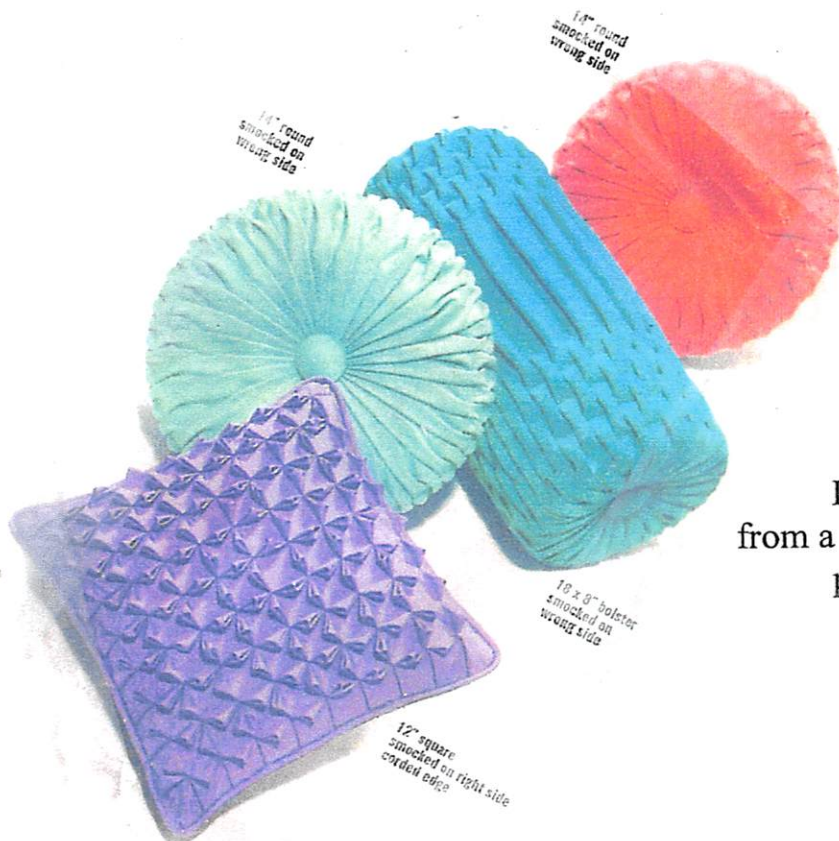


A sample of designs as seen on-line from Ann Hallay's collection

Canadian Smocking

Canadian Smocking, which recently has also been called **North** American Smocking, also known as lattice smocking, is usually worked on the wrong (back) side of the fabric. It creates a texture on the front side of the fabric. (There are a few variations where the pattern of stitches is worked on the front—one of these is called flower smocking.)

Again, as with counterchange, no pleating is used. A grid that is drawn or designed on the back of the fabric is used to create the design on the front. The grid marks should not be seen on the front. This type of smocking is not usually pressed or ironed. The texture would be flattened, destroying the intent of a 3-dimensional look.



Picture
from a Simplicity Pattern
printed in the 1940's

Judging Guidelines for English Smocking Geometric and Picture Smocking

The following are the guidelines that have been put forth for evaluating or judging smocked garments. These are from the Smocking Arts Guild of America (SAGA) Standards and are also used in similar form by The Embroiderers Guild of America (EGA).

- The fabric used in the garment or item should have been cut on grain
- Pleating threads are parallel to the cross grain
- Fabric is not damaged by the needles or the pleating machine
- There are no folds, bubbles, or splits (Y) pleats
- Any temporary marking have been completely removed
- Smocking is appropriately centered in the garment
- There is no visible break in the smocking pattern on the front side where the threads have been stopped and restarted
- Stitches catch only the appropriate pleats

- Stitch tension appears consistent for all stitches ; tension is neither too tight that pleats are pinched nor too loose so that thread sags
- Stitch depth is consistent
- Threads within stitches are laid smoothly, neither worn not frayed
- Threads, from any back smocking, are not visible on the front of the work

If the work is not covered with a lining or otherwise obscured look at the back of the item and observe the following

- Starting and ending knots are small, neat, secure, and not visible on the front
- Threads carried on the back do not distort the stitching or inhibiting the stretch of the smocking
- Threads tails or threads carried on the back do not shadow through to the front

Judging Smocking

When judging smocking---a sampler, ornament, garment, or other basic apparel---there are six basic criteria for judging the smocking stitches.

Execution

This is the arch of the stitch, the entry of the needle (thus the thread slant), and the fabric that should or should not be showing between stitches.

Tension

The length and the width consistency are important. Pleats should not be pinched, but will be held firmly together. There should be a vertical alignment of pleats, without a bulky look of stitches. When working with multi-strands of floss, all strands are to be pulled with the same tension.

Stitch Depth

Consistent depth is important. The entry and exit level of the thread should be the same level.

Thread Alignment

Threads should lie side-by-side with no twisting. This makes the stitches appear uniform with no pointed edges.

Spacing

The pleating threads are the usual guidelines. Although these lines have been removed, there should be careful alignment according to the plate (pattern) being used.

Stitch Appearance

Like stitches should be the same in size, shape, and appearance. Cables are rectangular, loops should be open, and stop/starting stitches should not be visible on the front.