Silk is unmatched for its natural beauty, depth and shine. Find out how to successfully embroider silk and create a charming silk tech case.
STRONG SILK

A common misconception about silk is that it requires special handling because it’s fragile and best suited for light and delicate dresses or lingerie. However, did you know that parachutes used to be made out of silk? That fact should help prompt us to ditch the descriptor of “fragile” right away. Silk isn’t just for special occasions; it’s a versatile fiber that lends itself to constructing garments, accessories and home-dec items to enjoy and use.

One clue to the strength of silk is that a standard size 75/11 universal needle will dull quickly when stitching silk seams. A size 70/10 sharp or microfiber needle produces better results because the sharper point is able to penetrate the silk surface more smoothly. The smaller needle size also creates smaller, tidier holes in the fabric. For machine embroidery on silk, a 75/11 embroidery needle works well, but for open embroidery design work, such as the flowers in the featured design, a microfiber needle is a better choice.

When preparing silk fabric for sewing, prewash the silk if you intend to frequently wash the finished project. If it’s a rich dyed silk, such as doupioni, set the dye color by using heat or a specialty silk wash. This eliminates extra dye and prevents dye transfer to other garments and fabric.

FABRIC & STABILIZER

• When choosing an embroidery design for silk, consider how the fabric will drape and flow in the finished project. For example, a pillow cover doesn’t hang and drape, so a design of any complexity works well.

• For projects that require the fabric to drape, choose simple designs with open areas, running stitches and little or no satin stitching. Satin stitching creates the most shine, but also pulls and stresses the fabric. With open-work designs, the stitches form and mold to the shape of the fabric, allowing it to drape and flow. Use these designs for skirts, dresses, shirts, scarves and curtains.

• Doupioni, shantung and 30mm charmeuse can support heavy-weight or complex designs. When hooping these fabrics for embroidery, use a medium (2.5-ounce) cut-away stabilizer in combination with light spray adhesive. If you prefer not to use cut-away stabilizer but still want to embroider a complex design, consider adding fusible tricot mesh interfacing to the fabric wrong side to add stability (see “Sources”). Hoop a piece of lightweight tear-away stabilizer with the interfaced fabric to add stability with less bulk.

• If the project allows, use batting as the stabilizer for embroidery on heavier silk. Batting helps the stitches create beautiful texture and dimension. Use a silk bonded batting blended with 10% polyester (see “Sources”). The polyester content prevents the batting fibers from bearding. Mawata, 100% cotton batting is a good choice for hand quilting and machine embroidery on silk.
silk batting isn’t recommended for machine embroidery.

- For lightweight silks, such as chiffon, 19mm charmeuse and habotai, use open, airy designs with a low stitch count.

- To stabilize lightweight or slippery silk for embroidery, treat the fabric with liquid water-soluble fabric stabilizer (see “Sources”). This eliminates the need for any additional stabilization, as long as the embroidery design isn’t too stitch intensive. This liquid stabilizer also doesn’t cause any interaction if the silk is dyed after embroidery. Follow the liquid stabilizer manufacturer’s instructions to treat the fabric. When drying the fabric, handle it carefully and keep it on-grain as much as possible. Don’t hang the fabric by its corners, as the silk will stretch and distort off-grain as it dries. Once dry, carefully press the fabric, which will have a paper-like feel.

Don’t use steam when pressing, as the moisture causes the stabilizer to stick to the iron and distort the fabric.

- When using water-soluble stabilizer, thoroughly rinse the finished project to remove all the residue, especially on more intricate designs. On more open designs, turn the stitched design over while still in the hoop, and run a damp sponge over the bobbin stitching. Unhoop the fabric, and then rinse away as much stabilizer as possible. Avoid using adhesive water-soluble stabilizer with silk, as it’s difficult to remove from the fabric. If you must use it for a project, rinse away the adhesive very gently to avoid distorting the fabric weave.

- Paper-release tear-away stabilizer is easy to remove if the design includes a running stitch that perforates it multiple times. However, water-soluble stabilizer is generally preferable as it’s easier to remove without distorting or tearing the fabric. Be careful when using tear-away stabilizer with spray adhesive, as the adhesive may stain the silk or react with the fabric finish. Test the adhesive and tear-away stabilizer on a silk scrap before using on a silk project.

THREAD

- As with any embroidery project, choose the thread type that works best for the fabric weight and texture, chosen project and design. Many embroidery thread types are compatible with silk fabric, including silk, cotton and metallic thread. It’s not imperative to use silk embroidery thread on silk fabric unless you want the finished project to be 100% silk. For example, for a soft, lightweight and beautiful embroidered 100% silk charmeuse baby quilt, use both silk batting and silk embroidery thread. When mixing fibers, such as cotton thread on silk fabric, keep in mind that different fibers wear, change and respond to washing at a different rate.

- When using silk thread, select a high-quality variety, such as Tire (see “Sources”). Tire silk thread has higher sheen and strength than quilter’s silk thread, which is strong enough to use for construction but has less luster. Many thread brands carry Tire silk thread in both 50- and 100-wt. varieties. Standard embroidery thread is 40-wt., so the Tire thread is thinner and lighter. A delicate running stitch design created with 100-wt. silk thread appears to float above the fabric canvas. Use matching silk thread in both the needle and bobbin, especially on projects where the right and wrong side will be visible, such as a lightweight scarf. For simple embroidery designs where the wrong side won’t be visible, it’s permissible to use a prewound bobbin in combination with silk thread in the needle.

The unit of measurement for the surface density of silk is the momme (mm). The weight in mommes equals the weight in pounds of a 45” x 100 yard piece of silk. The higher the mommes, the heavier and denser the fabric is.
The featured case is sized to fit a device measuring approximately 5½” x 8”. Follow the instructions under “Prepare” to adjust the dimensions for a different sized device.

2 coordinating 8½” x 17” silk doupioni rectangles (main & lining)
8” x 16½” rectangle of silk-blend batting (See “Sources.”)
5” square each of silk charmeuse & fusible web (appliqué)
Thread: 100-wt. silk embroidery & construction (See “Sources.”)
Stabilizer: liquid fabric & lightweight paper-backed tear-away (See “Sources.”)
2 elastic hair ties or 3”-long lengths of ¼”-wide grosgrain ribbon
Two ½”-diameter buttons
Mini iron
Press cloth
Removable fabric marker
Hand sewing needle
Open-work & appliqué embroidery design (approximately 4” x 6”; see “Design”)
Die-cutting machine (optional)
Starch alternative pressing spray (optional; see “Sources”)

From the charmeuse, cut out the butterfly appliqué (B). The butterfly has inner negative spaces, so it’s easier to precut it than to try to trim it in the hoop after embroidery. If you have a die-cutting machine, cut the butterfly (B) from the charmeuse. It’s easier to precut it than to try to trim it in the hoop after embroidery. If you have a die-cutting machine, cut the butterfly (B) from the charmeuse.
machine, load the appliqué cutting file onto the machine, and then follow the manufacturer’s instructions to cut out the butterfly. Or print out the cutting template, and then trace it in reverse onto the charmeuse wrong side. Carefully cut out the butterfly shape.

- Mark the embroidery design placement on the main-rectangle right side in the flap area, which is the lower third of the rectangle. Designate one rectangle short edge as the lower edge. Print out the design paper template, and then use it to mark the design center 3” above the rectangle lower edge (C). If you’re making a case for a device that’s a different size, audition the design on the flap area until satisfied with the placement.

- Center the batting on the main-rectangle wrong side. The batting will both stabilize the embroidery and provide padding to the case. To help the batting adhere to the fabric without using harsh spray adhesive, lightly spray the batting with starch alternative pressing spray before centering it on the fabric. This provides a small amount of moisture that prevents the layers from shifting.

**EMBROIDER**

- Hoop a piece of tear-away stabilizer, and then mark the hoop center on the stabilizer (D). With the main rectangle facing up, align the design center with the hoop center; secure the rectangle to the stabilizer using pins or painter’s tape. Make sure all pins and tape are clear of the stitching area.

- Load the butterfly design onto the machine. Thread the needle and bobbin with 100-wt. silk thread. Place the hoop onto the machine. Embroider the first step, which is a basting box that securely attaches the fabric, batting and stabilizer (E).

- Embroider the background flowers and appliqué placement stitches (F). Remove the hoop from the machine, but don’t remove the fabric from the hoop. Remove the fusible-web paper backing, and then carefully center the appliqué directly over the placement stitching (G). Using a mini iron and press cloth, fuse the appliqué.

- Re-place the hoop onto the machine, and then finish embroidering the design, securing the appliqué (H).

- Remove the hoop from the machine and the fabric from the hoop. Carefully clip the basting box thread, and then remove the basting. Gently remove all tear-away stabilizer.
CONSTRUCT

• Thread the machine with the desired construction thread in the needle and bobbin. Fold the main-rectangle upper edge ¼" toward the wrong side; press, and then topstitch. Repeat to fold and topstitch the lining rectangle upper edge.

• Align the main and inner rectangles with wrong sides together; pin along the upper edge. Place the rectangles on a flat work surface with the main rectangle facing up. Measure 6" from the topstitched edges; pin mark through all layers.

• Fold the upper fabric layer upward along the pin marks.

• Flip over the fabric layers. Fold the lower 2⁄3 of fabric upward along the pin marks (I).

• Pin the sides and upper raw edges. Slide the device into the pocket to ensure it fits snugly.

• Knot each hair tie (J). If using ribbon for the button loops, fold each length in half, ensuring the ribbon isn’t twisted. Sandwich the loop ends between the short raw edges 2" from each corner (K). If using ribbon, align the raw ends with the fabric raw edges.

• Stitch the sides and short edge using a ¼” seam allowance, or adjust the seam allowance as needed to fit the device.

• Clip the corners, and then turn the case right side out by unpinning and reaching through the flap opening. Poke out the corners (L).

• Turn the pocket right side out so it lies underneath the flap when closed. Slipstitch the flap opening closed (M).

• Fold the case closed; press. Mark the button locations on the pocket lower edge according to each loop placement. Hand stitch each button.

• Remove any remaining fabric marker and/or liquid stabilizer. §

DESIGN

Download the free butterfly design from cmemag.com/freebies until March 31, 2015. After the expiration date, the design will be available for purchase at sew-bubbles.com.

RESOURCE

Learn more about 100% silk mawata batting at wormspit.com/mawatas.htm.

SOURCES

Bosal carries woven fusible interfacing #332: bosalonline.com.


Superior Threads carries silk Tire, Kimono and Tiara thread, including 100-wt. dark blue Kimono thread: superiorthreads.com.

TIP

Use the background flowers in the featured design to embellish the case lining for an extra pretty touch.