

Selwedge

DESIGNER EDGE



SARAH K. BENNING

Sarah K. Benning splits her time between a sunny Spanish island and the USA, which makes having a garden pretty difficult. Instead, she creates embroidered indoor gardens, the inspiration for which came from upstate New York's bleak winters. "It was very difficult to keep a thriving indoor garden under those conditions, so in the depths of winter I began stitching the plants I wished I had ... I very quickly fell in love with the challenge of translating the complex and varied shapes, colours and textures of plants into embroidery," she says. And when in Menorca, Spain ... "Wild cacti and palms naturally grow all over the place. It's basically heaven on Earth and has only enhanced my focus on greenery in my work."

Her hand-stitched illustrations feature an abundance of plants overflowing from pots that are positioned on or around mid-century design and with hints of Turkish, Moroccan and Navajo textiles, all contained within embroidery hoops. They look like circular windows that invite viewers to take a peek into rooms of yesteryear. And there's no dirty digging – all Sarah needs are wooden hoops (ranging from three to 12in in diameter), cotton and linen fabrics and DMC stranded embroidery threads (including about 25 different shades of green!). Sarah tends to focus on designs of tropical-foliage varieties, and she especially loves Monstera plants, as well as the pattern



possibilities offered in the spikes and prickles of desert species. And sometimes a plant from her own imagination makes an appearance in her work.

Drawing up the designs is Sarah's favourite stage of the process. "I keep various sketchbooks, ranging from carefully composed 'finished' drawings to half-scribbled thumbnails of quick ideas." But actually stitching and detailing is also rewarding. "That's when the work finds its personality and transforms into a work of art," she says.

Sarah looks forward to the day when she can 'put down roots' with real plants. In the meantime, the embroidery gives her a nature fix and nourishes her creativity. She plans to start teaching workshops and creating more embroidery patterns while continuing to develop her own work. "When I have a needle in my hand, I feel good. I think embroidery, because of its slow and repetitive process, is very meditative, and I never seem to get tired of doing it (though sometimes my wrists do hurt!)."

For more, visit Sarah K. Benning Contemporary Embroidery website (sarahkbenning.com), where you'll find her gallery of stitched artworks. For Sarah's embroidery patterns, head to her Etsy shop (www.sarahkbenning.etsy.com).

— Janai Velez

