

# Mixing Threads

Four considerations for stellar results

BY BONNIE NIELSEN

**M**aking embroidered designs unique is a great way to stand apart from the competition. Take a potential local restaurant client for example, whose logo includes an image of a piece of silverware. Why not mix a silver metallic thread with a general purpose rayon or polyester embroidery thread for an eye- and business-catching design?

Also (re)consider the concept that all embroidery thread has to have luster or shine—industries such as landscape or construction may shy away from the lustrous look of rayon embroidery thread or the stable shine of polyester. Here, contemplate how mixing in a matte finish embroidery thread with the shiny could result in unique shading effects. Or, substitute the matte finish entirely for a crisp, subtle look.

While there are certainly necessary cautions to take in mixing threads so you don't dig up trouble, once factored into planning and pricing, they will most likely increase both business and margins. Here, we'll discuss four points to consider when using a combination of different thread types and weights in one design so you can do just that.

## DESIGN SIZE

The first aspect to consider is whether the thread will work for the size of the design. Thread weights become critical in this regard. The weight of the thread,

Just a small touch of 50 weight smooth metallic can be seen in the upper eyelids of the creature peering out of the jungle, which also mixes in lustrous rayon and matte finish Frosted Matte to create depth. Additionally, the background leaves are matte finish thread, stitched in a feathery way that allows some of the background fabric to show through, while the leaf in the center is a solid, 40-weight rayon. While the background fabric is used for most of the letters in the word, matte finish embroidery thread is used for the "G" for some artistic flair. (All images by Sarah Vopelius, courtesy of Madeira USA)

Born in the U.S., designer/digitizer **Bonnie Nielsen** works in the Freiburg, Germany, headquarters of embroidery thread manufacturer Madeira. She recently published her first book on digitizing, *Punch: Digitizing for Embroidery Design*, in which she provides a full account of the design process and creative techniques involved in digitizing award-winning embroidery. Nielsen has distinguished herself internationally with her embroidered art pieces and articles that appear in professional apparel and embroidery magazines.





Wool-blend thread mixed in with 12-weight rayon and a smooth metallic give the flowers and crest a hand-embroidered, individualized, almost one-of-a-kind appearance. The pink crest benefits from the combination of smooth, lustrous rayon; rough, wide-stitched wool-blend; and a shimmering 35-weight metallic used for the outline and fill in the center.

which loosely translates to its thickness, will lend itself well to some designs, and not so much to others. General purpose, everyday thread (typically rayon or polyester), is a 40 weight. Unless specified otherwise, all stock designs are digitized for this standard.

So, if, from our earlier example, the plan is to add some shine to the spoon in the restaurant's logo, or if the design calls for a lot of lettering in a small amount of space, adjustments to the file are necessary. Digitize—or alert your digitizer to prepare the file—accordingly.

In order to put a unique spin on any given logo/design, it's essential to analyze

the properties, starting with the thickness of the thread. Adding a twisted, 30 weight metallic to a restaurant logo may not be as effective or successful as choosing a smooth, 50 weight metallic. Conversely, adding the twisted 30 weight for shimmer and shine to a large, open design may be just the right effect—and the most successful use of that thread—for a different project.

Further, consider which part of the design will best benefit from the special effect, and what aspects of a design will best accommodate it in production. Often, it makes sense to mix threads in an integral part within a logo. But it can also be the

case where mixing up threads into a border or background fill will have your embroidery standing out from the crowd.

#### **FINISH**

Using shiny or matte thread provides an opportunity to create depth or shading to embroidery. You can combine matte finish with lustrous or shiny thread in order to achieve a sense of layering, for example. Matte finish embroidery thread is also ideal for use as "skin," when people or faces are involved in a design.

Matte finish embroidery thread is best for clients going for a more subtle or masculine look, as in tone-on-tone embroidery, or for

## MIXING THREADS



The leafy swirls in this mix of wool-blend and twisted metallic thread give an almost organic look with the choice of a “mélange” wool-blend. This design combines a 12-weight wool blend with a 30-weight twisted metallic, which requires a careful stitch selection. The wide satin stitch, longer running stitch and a variation of the blanket stitch are all ideal choices for these unique threads.

customers who shy away from shine. One leading matte finish embroidery thread on the market is particularly colorfast and designed to hold up to large amounts of UV rays from the sun, a good choice for patio cushions, boat covers, etc.

### TEXTURE

Mixing threads with smooth and rough textures give designs a hand-embroidered appearance. Some threads such as wool-blend and twisted metallic have a rough texture. These tend to be thicker threads and require some attention in terms of

stitch selection. In some cases (as shown in the example above), a wide satin stitch, longer running stitch and a variation of the blanket stitch are all ideal choices for these unique threads.

In addition to stitch type, needle size, tension and machine speed all must work to accommodate thicker threads. The thick wool-blend thread, with naturally-muted colors, requires a #100/16 needle. Concerning the tension setting on your embroidery machine, tighten down the top tension only. Any change to the bobbin tension will cause problems running the other threads

in the design. And, to be on the safe side, considering the naturally “hairy” texture of the wool-blend thread—it is a good idea to clean out the bobbin cases more often than with other threads.

When adding the twisted metallic thread to a design, use a #90/14 needle, due to the #30 weight of the thread. This iridescent, jewel tone thread requires that the thread tension on the machine be set slightly looser than for standard 40 weight threads. Here, as with the wool-blend, choose a stitch length appropriate for a thicker, rougher thread, and mix it into the design for effect.



A unique mix of 40-weight rayon, matte finish Frosted Matt, smooth metallic and Supertwist turn this stock design into a custom embroidery design. Here, we see that a thick, 12-weight version of twisted metallic combines with the wool-blend thread for a dramatic, abstract effect.

## COLOR

Whether to use a multi, ombré or solid color thread is often dictated by trends or the wishes of the customer, but the choices here are seemingly endless. Multi-color threads that change from one color to another as they are stitched is one thread choice that opens up a range of color.

Similar but more subtle are ombré threads that produce multiple shades of a single color. The range of choices is wide. Multi-colored or shaded looks are simple with all these variations of color available in rayon, polyester, wool-blends and metallics.

Working with these threads takes some experimenting, in order to learn what control you have—if any!—over how the colors or shades will fall. Mixing in multi-colors or ombrés typically works best in large areas of embroidery. Allow the random changes of the thread to enhance the design.

Here, it's important to note that suppliers are available to help. If mixing different thread types into an otherwise ordinary design stops you dead in your tracks, contact your embroidery thread supplier. They often have tips and tricks online or

in printed form to help build your courage. And many will provide a free sample with a free design in order to give unique threads a try before you commit to adding inventory.

## MIX IT UP

With business more competitive than ever, it's great to be able to offer customers more creativity in order to produce a unique look. Helping them to stand out in their field through the customized look that embroidery provides will have you standing out in yours. PW