

# A Punto Antico Biscornu Pincushion *to* Stitch

JEANINE ROBERTSON

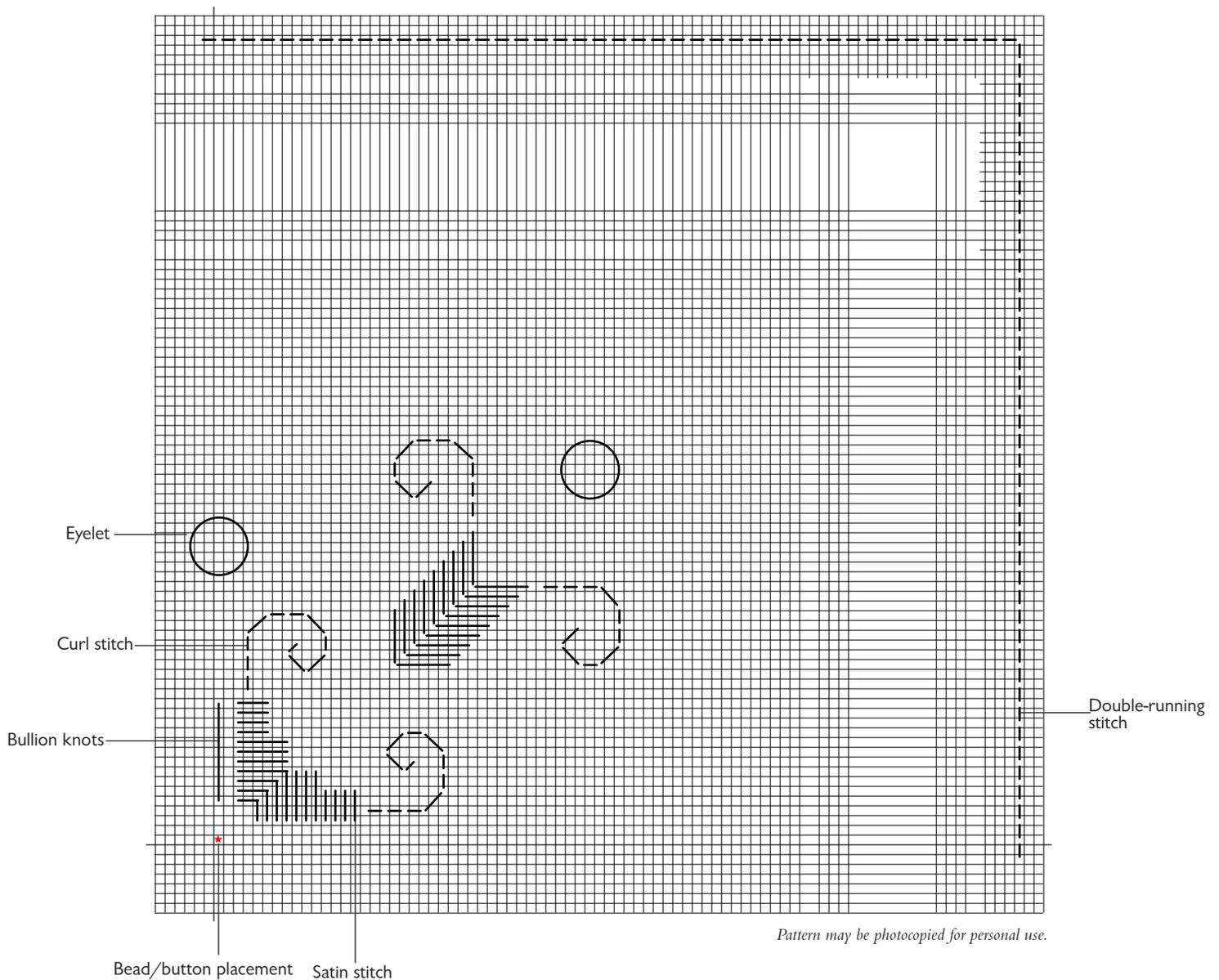


*Punto Antico* (antique stitch), a type of Italian drawn-thread work, is thought to have its origins in the Levant. The geometric shapes are said to be inspired by the Arab influence that dominated the island of Sicily for centuries. Numerous traces of this embroidery style are found throughout Italy depicted in paintings and portraits dating back to the fourteenth century. Today, *Punto Antico* is used in embroideries all over the Italian peninsula.

Jeanine Robertson's *Punto Antico biscornu* pincushions.  
Photograph by Joe Coca.

The term “Punto Antico,” used to describe a particular style of embroidery that incorporates many characteristic stitches and geometrical designs, does not seem to have been used until the early twentieth century. Punto Antico embroidery is composed of *Punto Piatto* (satin stitch), *Punto Vapore* (bullion knots), *Pallino Traforato* (eyelets), *Punto Riccio* (curl stitch), *Punto Cordoncino* (cording stitch), *Punto Quadro* (four-sided stitch), and *Punto Gigliuccio* (peahole hemstitch), plus an array of needlelace filling stitches.

I incorporated the Punto Antico stitches in this *biscornu* (a French word that denotes an irregular shape) pincushion project. Interestingly, Punto Antico may be stitched either as a counted-thread technique or freestyle; here, the counted-thread technique is used. Punto Antico traditionally is worked in tone-on-tone coloration, although it’s fun to use the colored textiles and fibers we have today. The choice is up to you, but tone on tone is a great start as mistakes are hidden more easily.



*Pattern may be photocopied for personal use.*

## MATERIALS

Zweigart Belfast, 32-count 100% linen fabric, 2 pieces 9 x 9 inches (22.9 x 22.9 cm) in the color of your choice

Presencia Finca Perle Cotton, 100% Egyptian cotton thread, size 8, 10 g (77 yd)/ball, and size 12, 10 g (116 yd)/ball, 1 ball of each in the color(s) of your choice

John James Needles, tapestry size 26, embroidery size 9, and milliner's size 7

Sewing thread, 1 spool, color slightly darker than linen

Awl

Embroidery scissors with small sharp points

Stuffing, lamb's wool

Mill Hill Pony Beads size 8/0 (3 mm), or small buttons, 2

*Materials are available at needlework stores or from mail-order or online resources.*

Finished size: 4½ x 4½ x 1¾ inches (11.4 x 11.4 x 4.4 cm)

Design area: 164 x 164 stitches

## INSTRUCTIONS

*Notes:* The small model shown in the photograph was stitched on Newcastle 40-count linen; the instructions here are for 32-count fabric. Work in the order outlined below. Use the embroidery needle for eyelets and cording stitch on corner hemstitching, the milliner's needle for bullion knots, and the tapestry needle for all other stitching. Refer to the pattern, stitch diagrams, and the information on each stitch listed below.

Machine- or hand-finish the edges of the linen. Using the sewing thread, baste lines indicating the horizontal and vertical centers of each piece of fabric. Using the size 8 pearl cotton, work the satin-stitch areas; at the end of each section of satin stitch continue on with the curl stitch. Using the awl and size 8 pearl cotton, work the eyelets and then the bullion knots. Prepare the withdrawn thread channels for hemstitching. Using the size 12 pearl cotton, finish the two outer sides of each corner of the withdrawn thread channel with the cording stitch. Using the size 12 pearl cotton, work the outer rows of four-sided stitches around the entire piece. Using the size 12 pearl cotton, work the cording stitch over the exposed threads for each of the corners. Using the size 12 pearl cotton, work the peahole hemstitching. Using the size 12 pearl cotton, sew a double-running stitch around the entire design. Repeat the above steps for the remaining fabric piece. Wash and iron each piece with right sides down on a terry-cloth towel so that the stitching remains raised. Assemble by overcasting the two pieces together, stuff, and close. Attach beads or buttons.

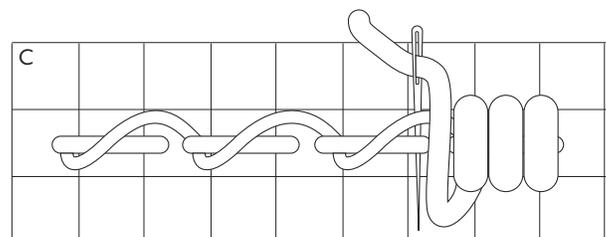
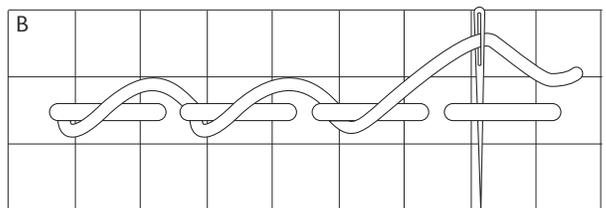
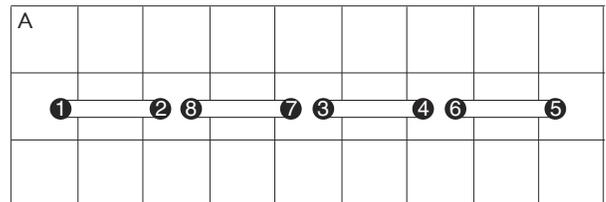
### Satin Stitch (Punto Piatto)

Work from left to right. Make sure not to pull too tightly so that the stitches sit in plump rows, never overlapping.

### Curl Stitch (Punto Riccio)

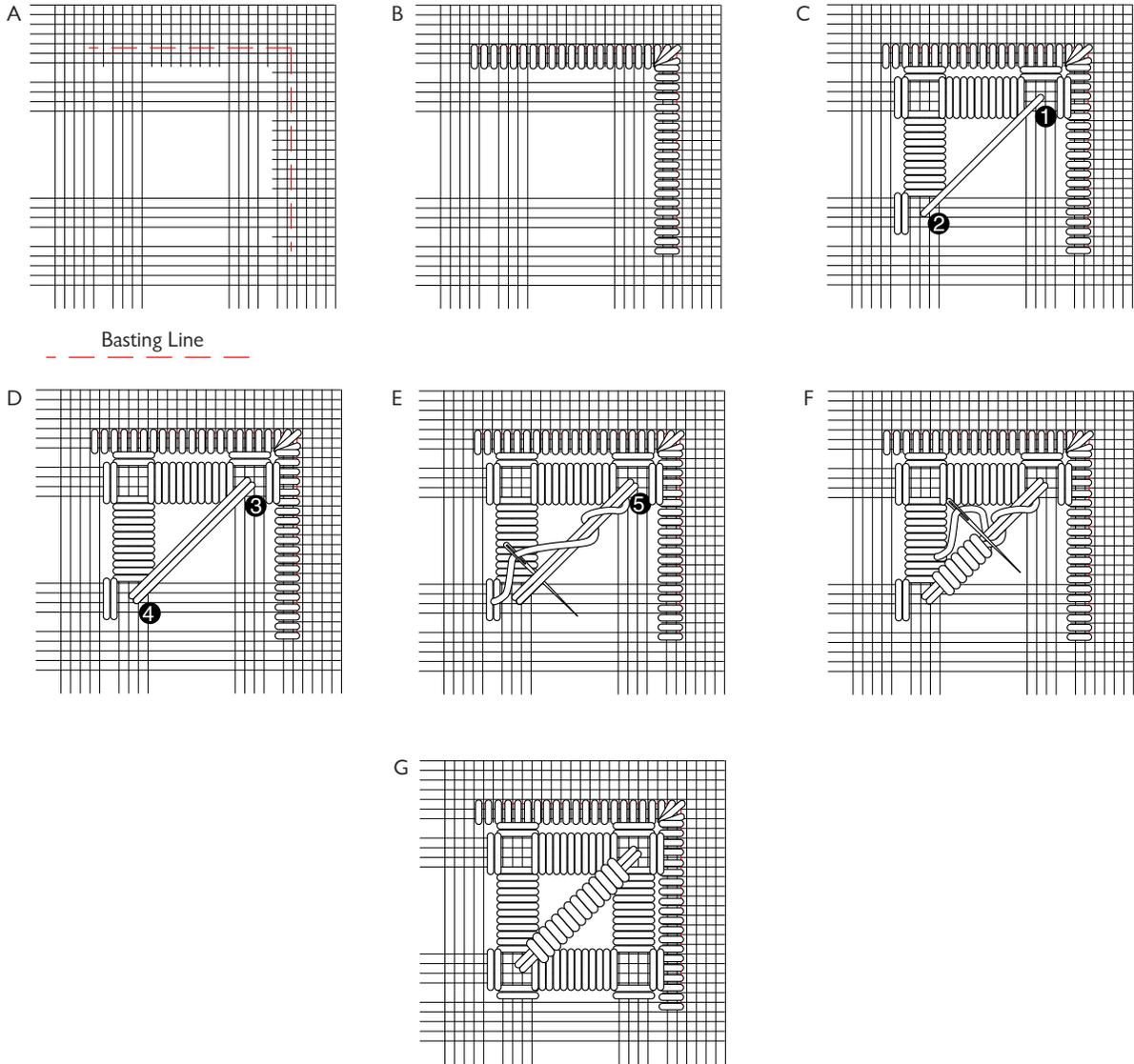
Work from left to right. *Note:* The curl stitch is very rough on pearl cotton thread. Cut thread lengths no longer than 18 inches (45.7 cm). Use a new thread length for each satin stitch/curl stitch group. (If you have to unpick your work, do not reuse the thread as it becomes dull, untwisted, and “pilly.”)

At the end of each section of satin stitches is a curl stitch. Start by working a double-running stitch line. Upon completion, you should find yourself back at the starting point. Exit with the needle where you made your first running stitch without catching any ground fabric and always travelling in the same direction, slide your needle under the first running stitch with the tip of the needle pointing toward what will be the outside of the curl. Repeat this for the next stitches, pulling gently to smooth out your line. Always pull in the direction you are heading and keep the thread low and close to the fabric to pull the double-running stitches into a smooth continuous line. When you reach the last running stitch, slide the needle under as before and then return to slide under it again to start the cording stitch on the journey back to the starting point (never entering the ground fabric).

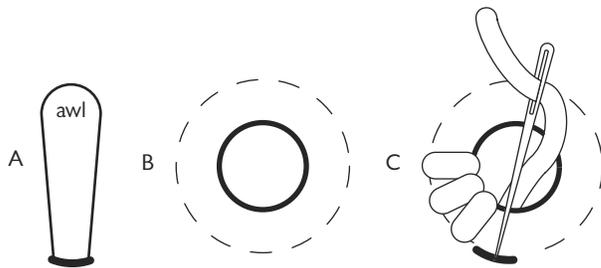


### Cording Stitch (Punto Cordoncino)

Next, start the cording stitch that is worked over the top of the line and heading back to the original starting point. The cording stitches should be made with the needle perpendicular to the overcast line, and the stitches should lie side by side without overlapping. Be careful not to pull too tightly; stitch 2 or 3 wraps over each running stitch. Gently tug around curves to make sure the line stays smooth. You can use your fingernail to guide the cording stitches. When you arrive back at the original starting point with the last cording stitch, enter the ground fabric and secure the thread end under the satin stitches. *Note:* This stitch is worth trying out on a doodle cloth first as it can be a bit tricky; when executed properly, it creates a lovely “coil” that sits on top of the fabric. By always pointing your needle to the outside of the curl, you can manipulate the curve shape with a simple gentle tug of the thread; in addition, the tightest parts of the curl will open a little as you execute them. Be careful to never enter the ground fabric, nor pull too tightly.

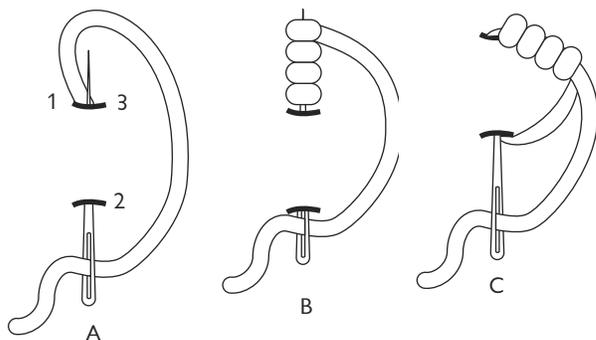


### Eyelets (Pallino Traforato)



Following the pattern for placement, count out to the center of each eyelet and insert the awl, never piercing threads of the ground fabric, only opening a hole. Using a waste knot, baste around the enlarged hole to guide you (the model was stitched over 3 ground threads) and then stitch the eyelet over the basting thread, pulling evenly on each stitch to open the hole. Clip the waste knot and secure the starting and ending threads in the back of the previously worked stitches.

### Bullion Knots (Punto Vapore)



Following the diagram, stitch the bullions knots, wrapping each 13 times.

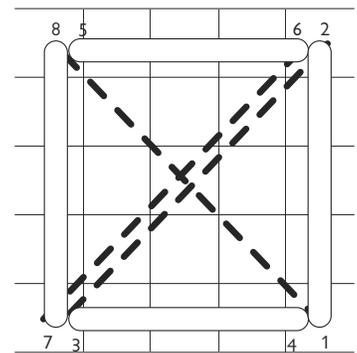
### Prepare Withdrawn Thread Area

Work on the back of the fabric. Following the pattern and from the top of the highest curl stitch, count up 19 ground fabric threads and about 2 inches (5 cm) in from where it will intersect with the adjoining side, cut the 20th ground fabric thread. Count up 4 ground fabric threads toward the edge of the fabric and cut 8 ground fabric threads. Count up 4 ground fabric threads and cut 1 ground fabric thread. With the tapestry needle, gently lift out the cut threads toward the intersection with the adjoining side. Lift out the remaining threads in the other direction and trim them, leaving a 2-inch (5.1-cm) length away from the intersection with the adjoining side. Repeat this withdrawal of ground threads for all four sides of the design. At the corners, about 2½-inch (6-cm) thread lengths remain of the cut ground threads (the extra ½

inch [1.3 cm] results from the depth of the withdrawn thread channel of the adjoining side). Fold them over on the edge of the hole and fingernail press to create a clean edge. With the embroidery needle, use size 12 pearl cotton to baste the cut thread ends to the ground fabric; turn the work over to now embroider on the front side and then continue at the end of the basted line to work the cording stitch over the top of the basting. (As you become more proficient, you will not need to baste; you can just hold the thread ends down. For the first few times, however, it helps tremendously not to have to keep checking the back to make sure the thread ends aren't getting tangled with the embroidery thread or folding over on themselves). On the right side of the fabric, work the cording stitch along the two outer edges of the corner, taking care to make even, straight stitches side by side in every ground fabric hole; go over at least 2 ground threads. Don't pull too tightly as you will want to slide the thread end under the stitches to end off the working thread. Check the back to ensure all the thread ends are secured. If not, thread the 2½-inch (6.4-cm) ends into a needle and run them under the cording stitches to secure them. Using the scissors, trim the thread ends close to the bottom of the cording stitches. The other corner threads will be wrapped with cording stitches after the first row of four-sided stitches is completed.

### Four-Sided Stitch (Punto Quadro)

Proceeding from right to left on the front side of the fabric, work the four-sided stitch over 4 ground fabric threads on the upper edge of the channel. Pull gently when making this stitch to open up the fabric. Try to always pull with equal



force and in the same direction so that the stitches will appear even. There are 30 four-sided stitches per side in this design. At the end of the first row, start with a new thread length and work the cording stitch over the exposed ground fabric threads of the corner. Cross over on the back or under the stitches whenever necessary. Make the stitches relaxed and even but don't pull too tightly. Wrap twice around the short legs (going under the stitches on the back to travel to the other parts that need wrapping) and 12 times over the longer bars. When reaching the extreme outer corner junction, you will need to create a base over which to make your cording stitches to form the diagonal bar. Exit from the back in the center of the

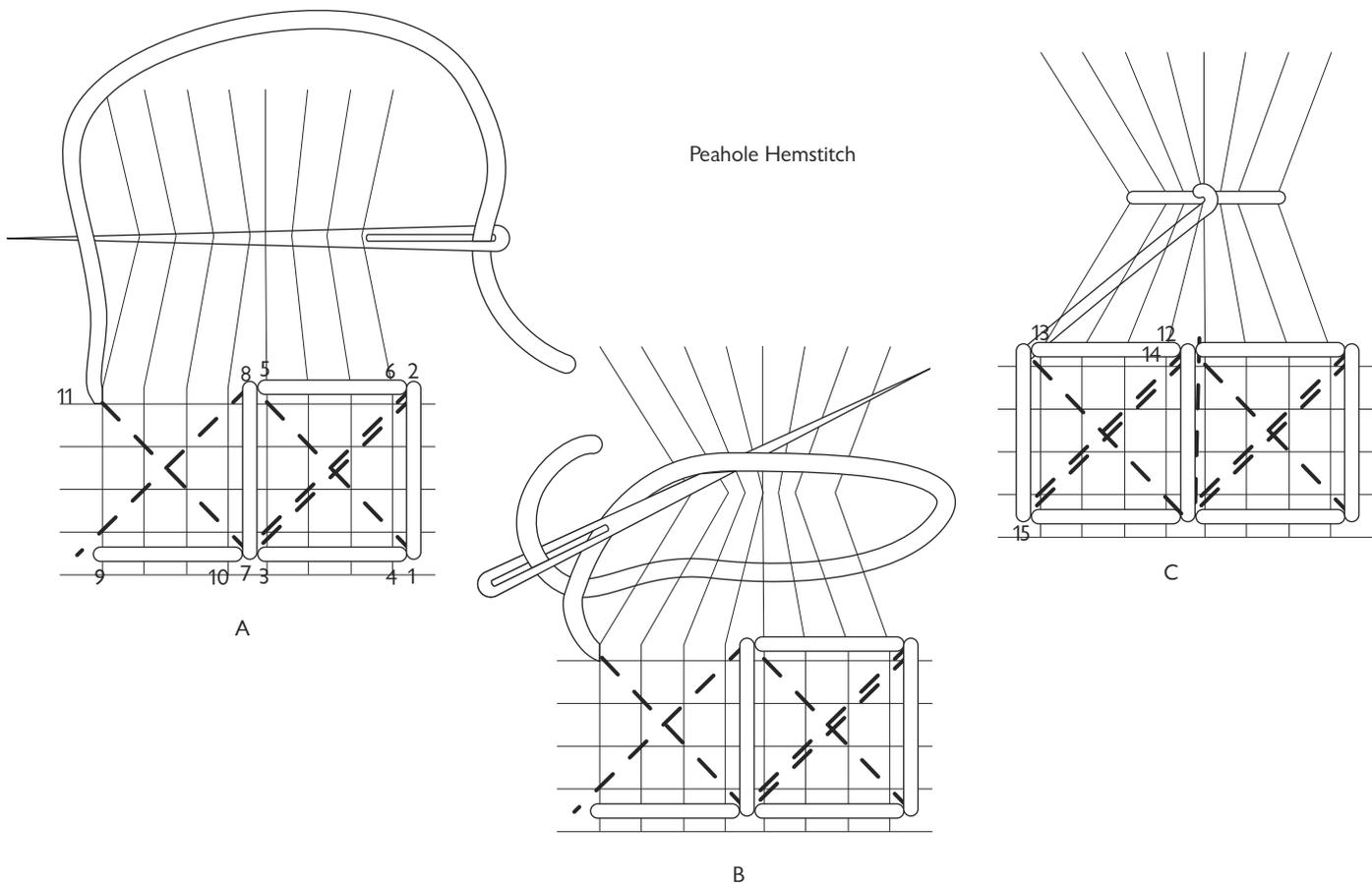
tiny fabric square and enter in the center of the tiny fabric square in the opposite corner, return to the original corner and enter the middle of this tiny fabric center again from the top side. Exit in the middle of the large empty hole beside the diagonal bar and wrap the bar loosely twice, heading for the opposite corner and again entering the middle of the tiny fabric square from the top side. Exit in the middle of the large empty hole beside the diagonal bar and work 15 cording stitches over the top of the diagonal bar. You should now be heading back to your original starting point for the diagonal bar. The cording stitches should be relaxed to match the ones done over the other exposed threads. At the end, enter the middle of the tiny fabric square from the top side and continue wrapping the other exposed threads. Once the corner is completed, continue to work the next section of four-sided stitches, the next corner, and so on until the entire square is complete. *Notes:* Too many cording stitches over a bar will result in a “wavy” bar and too few will result in a “saggy” bar. Basically, you are just trying to replace the threads you have withdrawn, so the number of wraps you need will not be many more than the number of threads you have withdrawn. There is the temptation to pull tightly, but this results in more stitches needed to cover the bar

and then, if for some reason you need to end a thread or pass over to another part, you’ll never get your needle under the tight stitches.

### Peahole Hemstitch (Punto Gigliuccio)

Stitch from right to left on the right side of the fabric. Work the peahole hemstitch over the bottom edge of the channel. This stitch uses the four-sided stitch to create “bundles” matching the top row of four-sided stitches and then knots two bundles together. Making sure to line up these four-sided stitches with those at the top of the channel, work a normal four-sided stitch. For the second four-sided stitch, come up at 11, wrap the needle around and then behind your thread and the 2 bundles of 4 threads. Immediately insert the needle into the circle that you have created and pull up, using your left-hand thumbnail to position the knot slightly above the vertical center of the open channel area. Pull tightly. Take the needle down at 12 and out at 13, in again at 14 and out at 15 thus creating the missing leg of this four-sided stitch. The first leg of the next four-sided stitch will also be the last leg of the previous one. Continue in this manner to the end of the channel. Make sure all of the knots are at the same height. There should be 15 bundles on each side.

Peahole Hemstitch



### Double-Running-Stitch Border

Count over 4 ground threads from the top of the hemstitching (the last withdrawn single thread) and work a double-running-stitch border over 2 ground threads around the entire design. Start at a corner; there will be 82 stitches on each side.

### Assembly

Count 6 threads out from the double-running-stitch line and cut away the excess fabric on both pieces. Fold this seam along the double-running-stitch line toward the back of the fabric. Place a straight pin at the center of the double-running-stitch line on all four sides of each piece. Line up one corner of one piece to the middle of one side of the other piece. Knot the thread and at the corner insert the needle from the back of the fabric. Whipstitch the two sides together going under the double-running stitches, taking

care not to catch the ground fabric and to align the stitches. When you get to the next corner, make sure it lines up with the pin on the other piece, compensating if necessary. There will be 41 double-running stitches sewn together for each side. The square now becomes an octagon. Stitch around all sides, leaving the last side open to insert the stuffing. Stuff, using the scissors or awl to push the stuffing into the corners. Finish stitching the last side closed. Attach beads or buttons in the center, pulling the thread tightly to create a depression. Secure thread, leaving thread end inside the biscornu. If desired, weave a ribbon through the hemstitching to add contrast or more decoration.

*ABOUT THE DESIGNER. Jeanine Robertson lives near Vancouver, Canada, with her mother and daughter. She has been researching Italian needlework for over seven years and belongs to several needlework guilds. She translates and writes for the Italian needlework website [www.tuttoricamo.com](http://www.tuttoricamo.com).*