



"When I was deep in burnout, I was gifted a box with "Don't let the weeds grow around your dreams" on the lid. That struck a chord and is the reason I became a designer."



An interview with...

Faby Reilly

Faby Reilly's career has evolved from school teacher to stitch tutor as she shares with *CrossStitcher* how to explain cross stitch to absolute beginners

Interview by **Julian Odessa**

School teacher turned designer Faby Reilly sat down with us to talk all about mystery SALs, the life-changing joy of needlework, and the pleasure she gets from inspiring and teaching stitchers of all skill levels...

What is it about needlework that fires you up?

It's that needlework designs are going to be stitched by others. Stitching helped me out of a nasty burnout: it helped channel my thoughts and brought a sense of achievement at a time when even sitting up was a struggle. I think of that when I design and know I'm paying it forward to those who find solace in stitching.

Did you study design or are you self-taught?

I'm definitely self-taught. I'm a teacher by trade and before I became a



designer, I taught French for almost 10 years. Designing actually happened by accident.

Your patterns blend approachability with intricacy in a lovely way – how did you develop this style?

I'd describe my style as 'stylish and elegant', but maybe that's wishful

thinking more than anything! I love Art Nouveau and Shabby Chic styles, and there's influence of both within my own intricately French and wistfully British style.

I didn't purposefully develop this style – it just happened. The intricacy comes out of that need to lose myself in something beautiful that makes you forget (even just for a few seconds) anything unpleasant. The approachability is motivated by wanting to make my designs as accessible as possible. I believe anyone can stitch if they trust they can. The only way to develop confidence is to explain the process in a straightforward manner. That's the teacher in me, I guess.

Where do you get your inspiration?

I absolutely love flowers – they're delicate, intricate, and perfectly imperfect. I also love incorporating



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animals. I'm a great fan of nature in general; I could spend days gardening or walking the countryside.

Do you have a style or product that you prefer designing?

I prefer 3D products! I like designs to be useful objects once finished. They make fabulous gifts that are treasured as they are used. My favourite shape is the stitching wallet, which houses items needed to stitch on the go: a scissor sheath, a needle sheet to tidy away needles, and a pocket to hold a needle threader for example.

You have so many tutorials on your website – do you enjoy the teaching side of cross stitch as much as the design process?

Absolutely! Before I started designing, I purchased a kit because the stitched model on the front displayed a stitch I'd never come across and I wanted to know how it was done. Imagine my dismay when I opened the kit and found no instructions and the stitch in question was simply charted as backstitch. That disappointment fuels my eagerness to provide as many tutorials as possible. Teaching stitching is more than teaching a skill

– it's teaching how to have hours of enjoyment, how to grow fond of challenges, and how to believe in yourself. When I get feedback from stitchers saying they're intimidated but, with my instructions, they're keen to try my designs, I'm in heaven! I'm always so proud of 'my' stitchers!

You run Stitch-A-Longs every year – tell us about your current SAL...

SALs are mammoths to design and produce, but they're so rewarding. I run a Facebook group where people can show their progress and ask questions. Mine are mystery SALs: I give out the shape of the product, its name, and the colour scheme. The rest is revealed as it progresses, saving the best part for the end! The current SAL is a stitching wallet called 'Nerida'. The colours are tone on tone currently, but things will brighten up! This SAL focuses on learning to use variegated threads and there is a rather stunning stitch to come. My neighbour who took a peep at the stitched model was left speechless, which is a first!

How are your days spent?

There is no such thing as a typical day. I'm a graphic designer, creating and

charting. Once I've model stitched designs, I'm the photographer, staging products. I wear the publishing hat to produce PDF patterns with detailed instructions in two languages (English and French). Then comes the webmaster hat, publishing patterns online, fixing website issues, adding new features and improving existing ones. The accounting hat sees me processing sales and keeping track of the financial aspect of my business. There is never a dull day!

The only hat I wear every day is my customer service hat – it's always a pleasure to help stitchers out.

What is coming up next for you – new pieces, exhibitions, artistic world domination?

Artistic world domination! Not quite yet! I am however working on a project to create hybrid classes, teaching new stitches and techniques through a combination of photo and video tutorials, with a selection of patterns to put these skills into practice.

www.FabyReilly.com
www.etsy.com/shop/FabyReilly