

Chapter 6

TECHNIQUES FOR JAPANESE METAL

General:

Due to its brilliant, highly-reflective surface, Japanese metal is a favorite in metal thread embroidery. Its eye-catching nature requires preciseness, for every poorly-positioned stitch placed over it is quite noticeable. Its fragile nature means that it must be handled with care and accuracy. But the splendid effects this metal can create make it worth the patience and practice required.

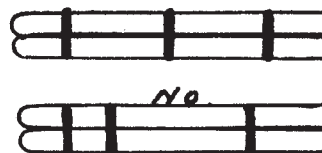
Japanese metal is usually attached in double strand, this being necessary when solidly filling a shape. A double strand allows for a tighter fit from row to row because the thickness of the couching thread is not so apt to separate the rows, this being almost unavoidable when single strands are used. The best use for a single strand is when a fine line of metal is desired for outlining a shape or for random lines.

Unless purchased in skeins or on reels, Japanese metal should be wrapped onto a felt roll in double strand. Take care, when wrapping two strands together, that the twist of the metal is going in the same direction for both strands. This metal is easier with which to work when it is handled in a continuous length, rather than precut into the required length for a row.

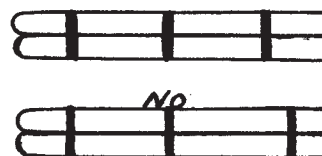
Attaching the Metal:

Too fragile to be sewn in and out of the fabrics, Japanese metal is laid upon the surface of the fabrics and held in position with right angle stitches, this technique referred to as couching. The couching stitches, worked in a

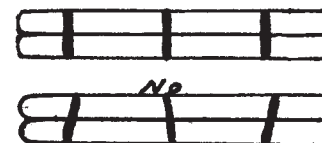
single ply of either silk filo-floss or waxed silk sewing thread, are to be spaced either 1/8" or 3/16" apart—select one measurement and use it consistently. If the stitches are placed too far apart, the metal will not be held securely enough and the lines can become "wobbly". If the stitches are placed too close together, too much of the metal will be obscured, defeating the purpose for using it under most circumstances.



The couching stitches must be spaced the same distance apart from each other. It is suggested that a small ruler be used to judge stitch spacing until your eyes are trained to do so automatically.



All couching stitches must be placed at a right angle to the metal, regardless of the angle of the design line which the metal is following.



The length of the couching stitches must be the exact width of the strand (or double strand) of metal. If the stitches are too long, the metal will slide easily back and forth. If the stitches are too short, the metal will be pinched. The latter becomes a particular concern when large sizes of Japanese metal are used, for they are quite soft and, therefore, are easily pinched.



The direction in which the couching is executed on a row is important—the couching stitches should work over the metal so that they fall with the metal's twist, not against it.



The first, and then the last, couching stitch on a row should be at least 1/8" away from the spot where the metal is to be plunged. You can always add an extra stitch if needed after the metal has been plunged. However, if a stitch is too close to the plunging location, the chenille needle can break the couching thread as it is breaking through the fabrics, producing a situation which can be tedious to correct.

Sometimes the twist of the Japanese metal will loosen, thereby exposing the thread core. Continuing couching and, after two or three stitches in the loosened area, then roll the strand between 2 fingers until the

twist is tightened. Hold the strand in this position until several more stitches have been executed.

To Begin and End the Metal:

Refer to pp. 28-29 for specific instructions on plunging the Japanese metal. Be precise in selecting the location where the metal is to be plunged because you cannot plunge the tail a second time—pulling the tail out damages it, this being noticeable on the front of the work when the tail is replunged. Use the proper size chenille needle and slightly overtwist the metal before pulling it through the fabrics. Put one finger down on the couched row before plunging the tail, particularly if you have a short row, and do not allow your fingers to become tangled up with any other tails of metal on the back of the work. Plunge only one strand at a time. Do not plunge 2 side-by-side strands in the same hole in the fabrics.

To Begin a New Strand of Metal in the Middle of a Row:

It is strongly advised that you plan ahead to allow sufficient yardage of the Japanese metal so you do not run out in the middle of a row. The "joining" of two strands of metal is always noticeable because it causes an unattractive interruption in the flow of the metal.

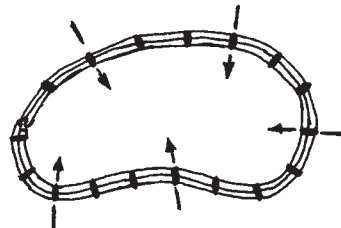
When this joining is unavoidable, end one strand with a 1" tail and add a new strand, also leaving a 1" tail. The tails are to be plunged so that they touch at the "joint".



When you are couching a double strand it is important that you end and begin the strands at different locations to make the break in the metal less obvious.

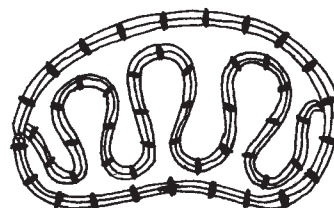
Outlining a Shape:

When you are either outlining a previously-filled area or are defining a shape, work the couching stitches from the outside edge, completing them toward the inside of the shape.

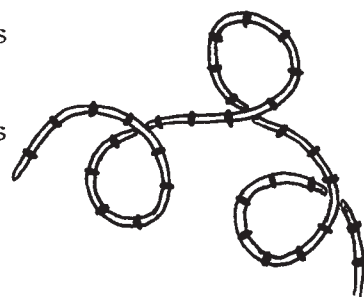


Random Lines:

Areas of ground fabric are intentionally exposed when an area is filled with randomly-spaced lines. These lines may use a single or double strand of

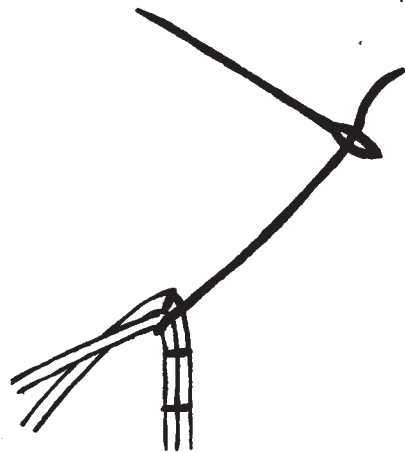


Japanese metal. The spacing of the couching stitches may need to be somewhat irregular in order to maintain the metal in the desired curves but the stitches are always to be at a right angle to the metal. When the random lines intersect it is much preferred to cut the metal and plunge rather than to allow the metal to ride up over the top of itself.



Bending the Metal for a Sharp Turn:

The sharp turns necessary for corners and points require some special attention. When couching a double strand of Japanese metal, each strand must be handled individually. To make a "bend" or kink in the metal, bring the couching thread to the front of the work on the inside edge of the metal in position to begin a couching stitch. Pull the couching thread with one hand until it is taut and take ahold of the metal with the other hand. Overtwist the metal slightly and hold it firmly. Now pull the couching thread and the metal in opposite directions—the tautly-held couching thread will actually make a kink in the metal. This action is abrasive to the metal resulting in damage if the twist of the metal is not tight when the bending action takes place.



Complete the couching stitch and, to hold it securely, take a tiny back stitch in an area nearby which will subsequently be covered with embroidery. If you are working with a double strand of metal, repeat this maneuver for the second strand, taking care that the two strands of metal fit snugly next to each other at the turn. (Refer to "Turning a Corner" and "Turning a Point" for examples.)

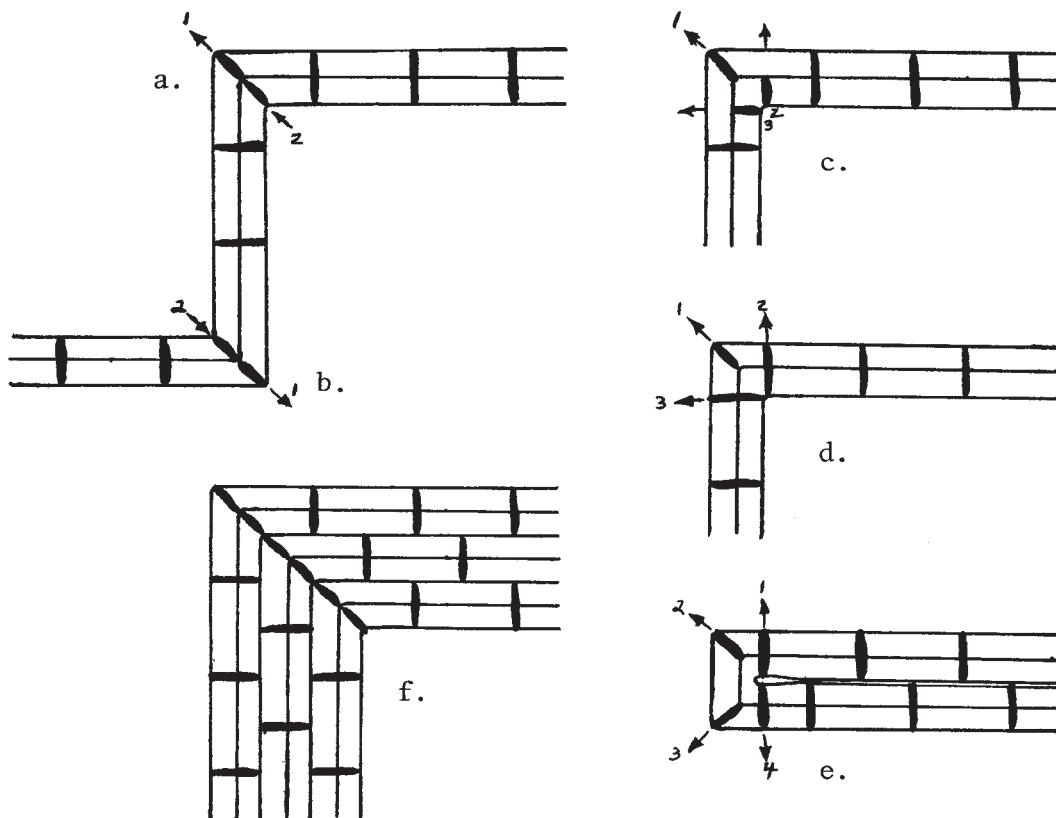
Turning a Corner:

The method chosen for turning a corner depends primarily on what works the best for you to accomplish a clearly-defined turn. When filling an area solidly, it is advised that the method used for the initial row be continued for all the subsequent rows to maintain uniformity. (Fig. f) When couching a double strand of Japanese metal each strand is turned individually. To effect a sharp turn it is necessary to actually make a bend in the metal—Refer to "Bending the Metal" above.

For an outside corner, couch the outer strand first, taking each couching stitch from the inside of the metal to the outside. (Fig. a) An exception to this would be when you are turning a corner around a previously-filled area—in that situation you should couch the inside strand first.

For an inside corner, couch the inner strand first, taking each couching stitch from the outside of the metal to the inside. (Fig. b)

If preferred it is possible to take the second corner stitch over both the strands, not just one. Regardless of the method used, it is important to take a tiny back stitch after each corner stitch so that the couching stitches will not loosen up later and cause the metal to "jump" out of place.



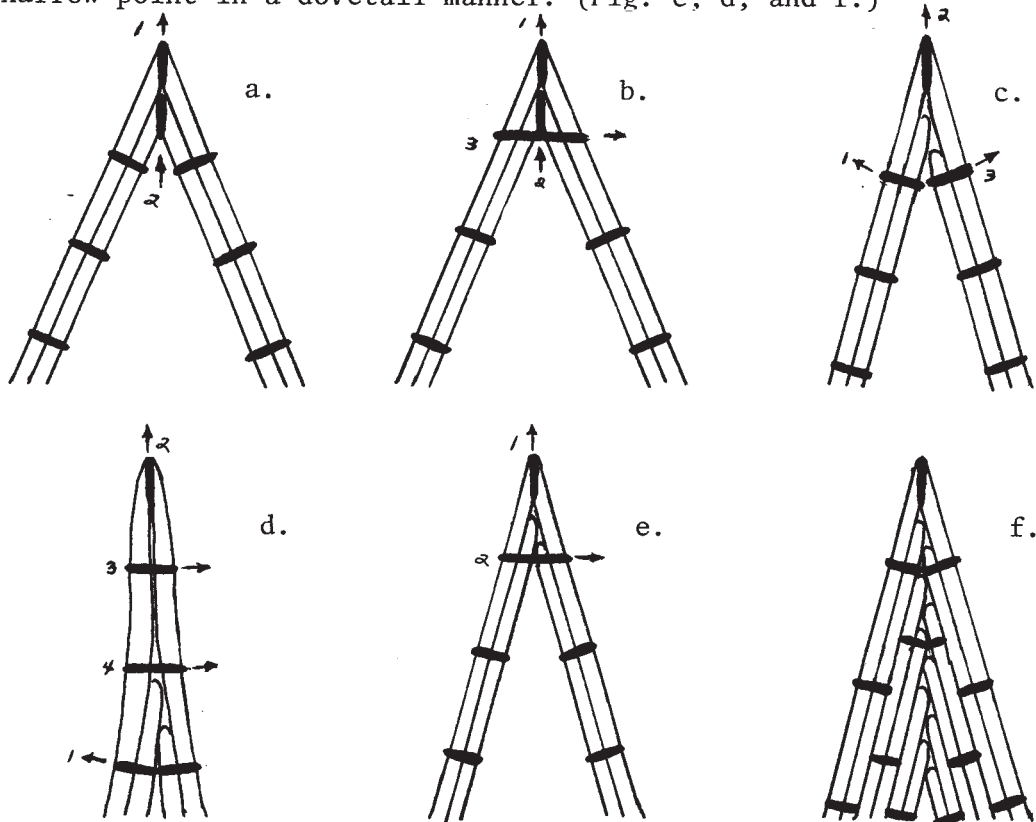
Turning a Point:

The method chosen for turning a point or sharp angle depends primarily upon how narrow the point is and the relationship between the latter and the size of Japanese metal used. When couching a double strand of metal each strand is turned individually. To effect a sharp turn, it is necessary to actually make a bend in the metal—Refer to "Bending the Metal", p. 34.

For a point, couch the outer strand first, taking each couching stitch from the inside of the metal to the outside. An exception to this would be when you are turning a point around a previously-filled area—in that situation you should couch the inside strand first in order to be assured of a tight fit of metal against this filled area.

It is important to take a tiny back stitch after each stitch at the point so that the couching stitches will not loosen up later and cause the metal to "jump" out of place.

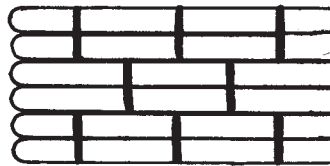
For a narrow point, it may be possible to take only the outer strand or two around the point. For all subsequent rows of metal it will then be necessary to cut the metal, leaving 1" tails, as the point is reached. Begin the metal again, leaving 1" tails, and continue down the other side of the point. Then plunge the tails at the point. Note—if it is impossible to take a strand around the point, it is also impossible to plunge its tails adjacent to one another. Do not force the strand into an area which is narrower than the width of the strand—all that will be accomplished is that one strand of metal will pop up and lay somewhat over the top of another strand. The solution is to plunge the tails at a narrow point in a dovetail manner. (Fig. c, d, and f.)



Arrangement of Couching Stitches:

When two or more rows of Japanese metal are placed side-by-side consideration must be given to the arrangement of the couching stitches. The most inconspicuous sequence is to stagger the stitch placement from row to row, this technique referred to as bricking.

It offers the most "invisible" arrangement possible when worked in silk sewing thread in a color to match the metal used. When worked in silk filo-



floss in a color contrasting the metal, bricking is the most subtle arrangement to simply give a "flush" of color to the metal.

There are many other possible arrangements for the couching stitches but these are best worked in a color contrasting the metal when a definite feeling of pattern is desired. (Refer to the section on "Pattern Couching", pp. 46-48.)

Solid Filling—General:

When filling an area solidly with Japanese metal, couch the outermost row first—this outlining gives a smooth, uninterrupted line around the shape. For this outer row, work from the design line to the inside edge of the metal—this offers the assurance that the outline of the shape will be followed precisely. Specifically, bring the needle straight up next to the outer edge of the metal and then take the needle straight down on the inside edge.

In order to obtain a tight fit of metal from row to row, all subsequent rows are couching from the inside edge of the metal back to the preceding row. It is important, in these subsequent rows, not only that the needle is brought up slightly from under the metal to be couched but also that the stitch is completed by taking the needle at a slight angle just barely under the preceding row. If you were to begin each couching stitch of a subsequent row by coming up between the two rows of metal you would be working "blindly" and take too much chance in damaging the metal by nipping it with the needle. If you were to complete each couching stitch by going straight down between the two rows of metal you would cause a separation between the two rows which is the width of the needle.

