

Painting with Thread

Learning the art of Japanese embroidery

By Sophie Braccini



Lynda Fu prepares her silk thread before starting to embroider.

Photos Sophie Braccini



Pansies embroidered by Fu

Japanese embroidery (nihon shishu in Japanese) is a millennium-old art that was first used to adorn sacred items and was intimately linked to the production of Japanese traditional dresses, robes, Noh and Kabuki costumes. A demanding discipline, it is practiced at the higher level by few embroiderers. One of them, Lynda Fu, lives and teaches in San Francisco. She will be teaching level 1 nihon shishu in Moraga, at BDK America, once a week for four weeks starting Oct. 23.

"Many of the themes come from traditional imagery, with specific use of forms and colors," says Fu. The patterns are largely inspired by nature: flowers, birds, plants, water or wind, but in a stylized, yet naturalistic way. "One of the things that makes Japanese embroidery unique is the fact that we use silk thread on a silk fabric."

Fu sits at the wooden frame where the silk fabric she will embroider is tightly stretched, about to begin with the first petal of a cherry blossom. She picks a single yellow thread of silk, holds it, pulls a second one and twists it. For this flower, the embroiderer twists three threads together that she passes through the eye of the needle; then she starts embroidering. Stitch after stitch, she adroitly covers the petal in silk, like a painter would with fine strokes of a brush. The small petal shows the distinctive notch of a cherry blossom, not to be confused with a round plum blossom.

The silk threads come in 500 different colors. The pattern, the season and the age group of the person who will use the finished product all come into consideration when choosing the right colors. The embroiderer also chooses the appropriate techniques to

be used. Japanese embroidery has 43 embroidering techniques, which vary in terms of thickness, bulge or dots that can be created. The different techniques allow for subtle and intricate imagery – a true art form.

Fu started embroidering over 30 years ago. "I always enjoyed handwork, and had tried western style embroidery, like trapunto, cross-stitch, crewel, but nothing really stuck with me," she said. "I had always been looking for something, and as soon as I saw Japanese embroidery I knew that's what I wanted to do."

Fu was attracted to the silk material and appreciated the natural designs tremendously. "Working with silk is working with the king of all fibers. The variety is amazing; it comes in strands made of 12 single cocoon threads put together. There is an infinite variety that comes with the silk from either splitting or twisting the strands together, depending on what is required by the design," she explains. It took her seven years to complete the 10 phases of the curriculum. The Japanese Kurenai Kai school of embroidery opened a branch in Atlanta where Fu was able to take advanced classes after the 10 phases of initial training, and she became a certified instructor of the Japanese embroidery center.

Phase 1 of the art will be taught from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. during Fu's Friday classes in Moraga. Participants will be able to master the basic techniques and gain enough knowledge to finish their first piece on their own; Fu will provide support after the class, if needed. No prior embroidery experience is necessary, says Fu. "If someone wants to learn it, they will do it. You just have to have the desire," she says. "I have had a gentleman who had no experience and wanted to study. All he could do was sew a button. He has done fabulously." Fu says that in Japan men embroiderers are often more respected than women.

Since moving to Moraga at 1675 School Street, BDK has organized, in partnership with the town of Moraga, a meditation class and a class on the history of Japanese Buddhism, and is seeking other partners, such as Saint Mary's College, to be an active part of BDK's endeavors in the Lamorinda community. In January 2016 two other art and culture classes will be offered: Ikebana - Japanese flower arrangement; and discovering the Japanese way of tea. For information and to register for the embroidery class, visit bdkamerica.org.



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Lynn's Top Five Financial Planning Days 2015

By Lynn Ballou, CFP®

Each fall the Certified Financial Planner Board of Standards, in association with the Financial Planning Association, the U.S. Conference of Mayors and the Foundation for Financial Planning, holds an extraordinary event called Financial Planning Days. What started out with just one location in Oakland has now expanded to five venues in the Bay Area alone. In addition to Oakland, Silicon Valley and San Francisco, opportunities have opened up this year to expand the event into Alameda and Martinez. The first Financial Planning Day will be held in Oakland on Saturday, Oct. 10 at City Hall; the final day will be held in San Francisco on Saturday, Nov. 7 at the Public Library.

Here are the top five things you need to know about Financial Planning Days:

1) It's free! This is a fantastic chance for the public to meet one on one with a Certified Financial Planner professional or other qualified expert in their field to discuss any and all personal finance-related questions, free of charge. The event is staffed by vetted professionals who are vol-

unteering their time with no strings attached.

2) It's all about you. One of the founders of this event is the well-known Certified Financial Planner professional Frank Paré, who feels that it's very important for the public to know that "we will have financial planners there who are experts in helping people plan versus focusing on a product as a solution. In addition, if attendees receive advice from a planner-expert and they want a second or third opinion, they can get it right there the same day."

3) Making financial planning fun and safe. Marco Chavarin, vice president of development for Consumer Credit Counseling Service of San Francisco, has participated in and helped run SF's Financial Planning Days since its inception. His organization provides support and practical ideas for attendees. He offers the following: "When most people think about financial planning, they don't think it applies to them and unfortunately the norm is for people to take the ostrich approach and just bury their heads in the sand. Our planners are fantastic at what they do and really

care – we're trying to normalize financial planning." Chavarin points out that exit interviews over the years with attendees have shown that participants definitely "walk out happy with the service and tools they gained."

4) Helpful one-of-a-kind workshops. In addition to one-on-one private consultations, also included are a variety of classroom workshops on topics that range from budgeting to estate planning. And at some venues consumer counselors are on hand to assist those who need specialized help. While walk-ins are welcome for one-on-one counseling, you should absolutely sign up in advance for the workshops as they fill up quickly and might be full by the day of the event (see link below).

5) Why go? "Because you don't know, what you don't know!" as this year's chairwoman of Financial Planning Days in San Francisco, Jennifer Hicks, CFP®, points out. She offers the following motivational advice: "Professionals exist because each of us have our specialties, and it is impossible to know everything about everything! I

don't know what I don't know about cars ... so I go to a mechanic. I don't know what I don't know about being sick ... so I go to a doctor. You don't know what you don't know about financial planning ... so come see a financial planner at Financial Planning Day!"

6) How do you prepare and how do you participate? Visit <http://financialplanningdays.org> for the information you need to sign up for the event most convenient to you. Once you have signed up you will receive further links to worksheets to help you prepare. As a volunteer over the years, I recommend you bring a current budget, details about your current sources of income, a list of your assets and any debt details, and a recent tax return to refer to. But most important: bring a list of your questions and any supporting documents you think might be helpful to review with a planner.

I have really enjoyed volunteering at this event and all volunteers I've worked with over the years feel the same and find this to be one of the most rewarding experiences of our careers. I en-

courage you to share the link to this extraordinary opportunity with any friends, colleagues or family members you feel could benefit. Hope to see you there! Happy Financial Planning Days!



Lynn Ballou is a CERTIFIED FINANCIAL PLANNER™ professional and co-owner of Ballou Plum Wealth Advisors, LLC, a Registered Investment Advisory (RIA) firm in Lafayette. Lynn is also a Registered Principal and Branch Manager with LPL Financial (LPL). The opinions voiced in this material are for general information only and not intended to provide specific advice or recommendation for any individual. Financial Planning offered through Ballou Plum Wealth Advisors, A Registered Investment Advisor and a separate entity. Securities offered through LPL Financial, member FINRA/SIPC.

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