SMOCKING ARTS GUILD OF AMERICA



Designing Your Own Smocking Plate

by Kathleen Choren with Carol Kick

SAGA Stitches
SMOCKING BASICS SERIES
Program 8

DESIGNING YOUR OWN SMOCKING PLATE

A SAGA PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR SAGA

By Kathleen Choren©

PURPOSE: To learn the techniques of basic design to enable one to design a plate to suit a specific area, adapt a plate, or create something uniquely your own. This will be accomplished by first stitching the samplers and then studying them for the form and effect the stitches make relative to each other.

DESCRIPTION: Perhaps you want to create a design that is truly your own, you like part of a plate but not the rest, or you have a problem fitting a design to suit a certain project. What to do? This SAGA program will teach you basic design techniques to enable you to design smocking plates! We will cover creating texture, shapes, color, and creating your own plate. Three samplers of practice stitches will be stitched to learn and practice the affects of different stitches and combinations. An optional fourth sampler is offered for your subsequent use. When completed, this program will be a wonderful reference to keep and use.

ADVANCE PREPARATION: The group leader should make copies of the program for each participant and notify participants of needed supplies. She should also pre-test the program by stitching the samplers and then having them available for participants to use.

Participants should obtain needed supplies and have fabrics pleated, tied off, and ready to begin smocking.

SUPPLIES:

- Three pieces broadcloth 7"x 45" pleated with 16 rows; tied off to comfortable smocking width (about 7-8")
- Optional fourth piece of broadcloth 8"x 45" pleated with 20 rows
- Floss: black, green (leaves), three shades of one color (pink, blue, etc.) of choice or three contrasting colors; optional metallic threads and/or blending filaments
- Smocking needles: #7 crewel (geometric) and #7 darner (picture smocking)

Program can be divided into as many two-hour sessions as group needs to accomplish all skills. Recommend Sampler A be presented in sessions I and II, Sampler B be presented in session III, and session IV be used to cover sections on color, creating your own plate, and "My Favorite" /sampler C. Optional fourth sampler D can be done individually or in a group session. Group leader should stitch each sampler before presenting it. She should read each step and instruct students on which rows to smock which stitches, etc. following samplers. Graphs must be read and followed carefully to achieve results.

This SAGA Program is made available to affiliated members of the Smocking Arts Guild of America for use in their local programs.

CREATING TEXTURE - SAMPLER A

- *Mark approximate midpoint of pleated piece on front AND back of pleated piece. Refer to sampler A graph and note placement of various stitches.*
- *Work rows 2 – 5 as backsmocking on back of pleated piece. Work cables to midpoint; stop; work trellis from midpoint to end of row.*
- *Remaining rows are all smocked on front of pleated piece. Use left side (to midpoint) to smock sampler A rows 5 – 15. Use right side (midpoint to end of row) to smock "A Sampler of Curves."*

A. Backsmocking

(1) Treat texture first because it can be created by backsmocking. I recommend backsmocking be done first to create a smooth effect. A neater job is accomplished by backsmocking before doing the surface embroidery.

(2) Cable backsmocking gives the effect of straight lines. White on a dark fabric gives the illusion of snowflakes.

(3) Trellis backsmocking is very effective. It is best not to do it closer than one row apart. Deep trellises (covering 1 ½ to two rows or more) are most effective. By placing the trellises carefully you can frame a surface design. This is usually done with the same color of floss as the fabric but if dark floss is used on a light fabric you get a shadow effect. **[Rows 2 – 5 on back of pleated piece]**

B. Surface texture with cables

(1) If cables mirror each other i.e. opposite cables, you get a ribbed effect.

(2) If cables duplicate each other i.e. parallel cables, they develop an interesting "V" pattern. **[Rows 2 – 3]**

C. Duplicate stitching - Duplicating stitches over several rows creates interesting textures. The greater number of rows that are duplicated, the more pronounced the texture. Experiment with a sample to see what effect you want. You may want to try working the duplicate row ¼ step away or ½ step away. **[Rows 13 – 15]**

DESIGNING SHAPES – SAMPLER A

Note: Examine and refer to graph frequently; some stitch changes are subtle. Mark center of sampler piece; use left side to stitch sampler A.

A. Triangles and diamonds are the simplest shapes with which to work.

(1) Triangles are basically waves or trellises. Diamonds are the same as triangles or trellises done in mirror fashion. In designing your plate you will find them helpful in filling gaps in your design. **[Rows 5 – 6]**

(2) Rectangles are a little trickier. They aren't used as often but make an excellent border or more tailored design. **[Rows 7 – 8]** Two rows of staggered baby waves are joined by 3-step trellis to form rectangles. Also, mirrored rows of *3-step trellis, top cable, 2-step trellis, down cable, 2-step trellis, top cable, 3-step trellis, down cable* will form rectangles. Examine graph rows 7-9 carefully, then stitch rectangles.

B. Circles, curves, vines, scallops etc.

(1) Circles are basically a trellis with cables top and bottom **[Row 12]**. It is very effective if you duplicate your stitches above and below the original trellises and cables, as in rows 13 - 15. The circular effect is more pronounced.

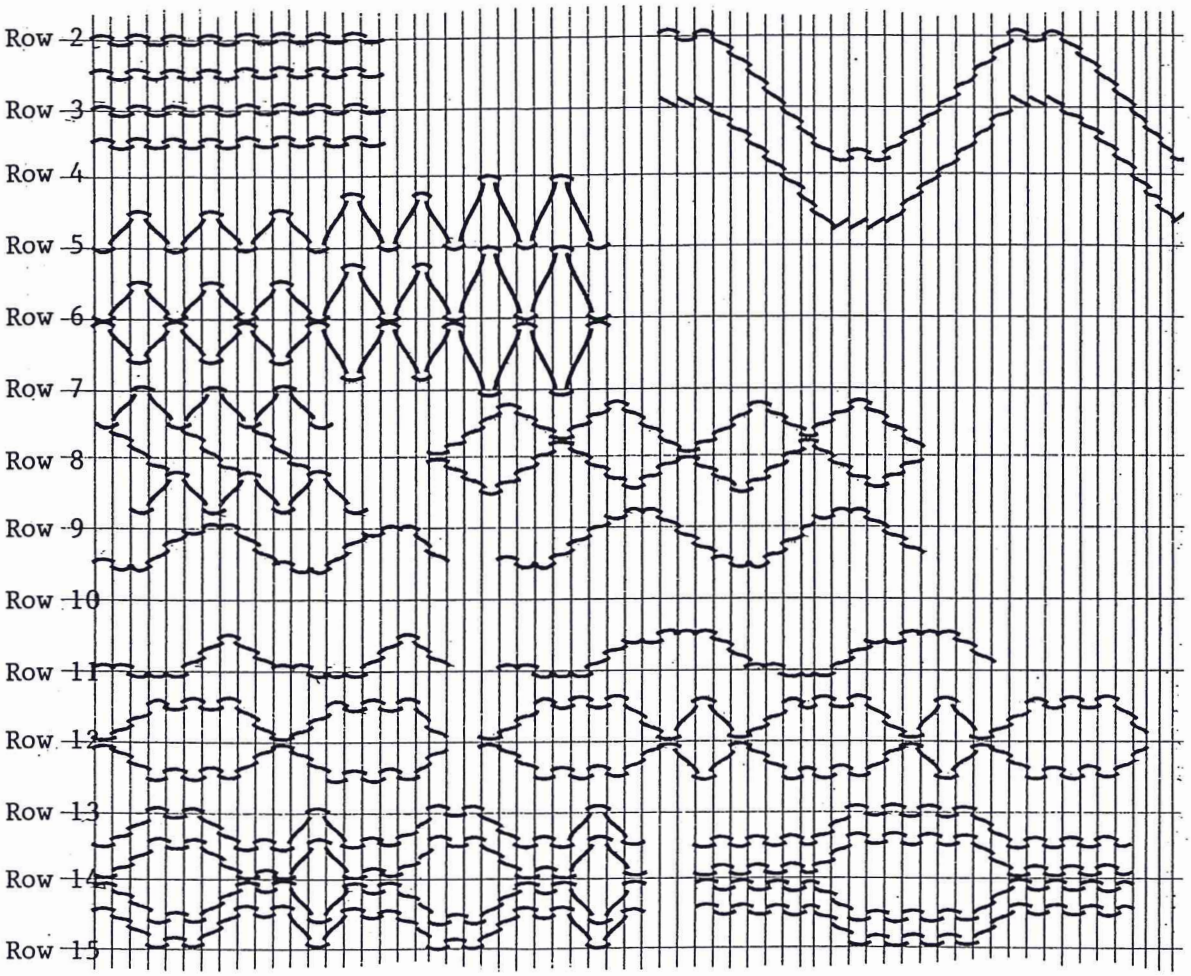
(2) Vines are trellises with many stitches within one row. Before reversing the direction, a series of cables in an uneven number is worked (usually at least 5 cables). Other suggestions for the peaks and valleys of vines are:

- a series of stem and outline stitches, or
- a reverse cable as developed by Nellie Durand. **[Row 9 ½]**.
- In the areas of the peaks and valleys, flowerettes, French knots, bullion roses and leaves are usually worked.

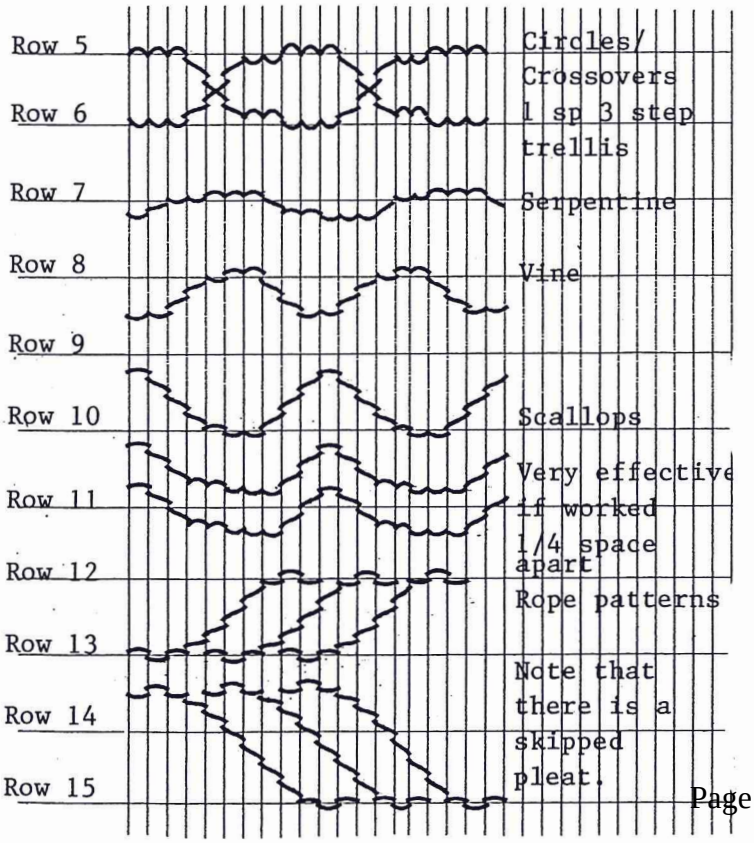
A SAMPLER OF CURVES – SAMPLER A

Use right side of sampler A (**midpoint to end of rows 5 – 15**) to smock "A Sampler of Curves" (below) as offered by Nellie Durand in Nellie's Needles, published in *The Smocking Arts* Sept-Oct 1987 issue. Notice how she "reverses" the cables and creates a smooth curve.

SAMPLER A



"A SAMPLER OF CURVES©"



HEARTS AND PICTURE SMOCKING – SAMPLER B

Mark approximate midpoint of pleated piece. For sampler B, work rows 2 – 11 (hearts and flowers) from beginning of row to midpoint. Use right half of sampler B to work rows 2b-11b (bottom portion of sampler B graph).

A. Hearts – We will finish our discussion of geometric smocking with hearts.

- As you can see on sampler B, hearts are a combination of cables, waves, and trellises. Determine the center of the heart and work your trellises toward that pleat.
- Depending on the number of cables at the top and whether you arrive at them with trellises or waves establishes how deep the heart goes. **[Row 2]**
- Hearts can also be reversed to fill the openings. **[Rows 3 – 9]**
- Tops of hearts begin with down cables.
- Succeeding rows can be mirrored; (row 4) i.e. an up cable bumps a down cable. Study the examples to learn the pattern.

B. Techniques for creating leaves **[Rows 10 – 11]**

Leaves can be formed by straight stitches, trellises, or lazy daisy stitches. To create long leaves such as for iris or cattails, lay a thread across the area to be covered to establish the direction and length. Work trellises along the imaginary line over the point where it crosses the pleats.

C. Flowerettes and bullion roses as fill-ins **[Row 11]**

Flowerettes can be used to fill larger spaces that might otherwise puff out. They can also add a touch of color. French knots, flowerettes, and bullion roses are used where you want a floral design.

D. Picture smocking shapes **[Rows 12 – 16 and Rows 2b – 11b]**

Use right half of sampler for rows 2b-11b

- Mark the top of your fabric so you do not get confused as you reverse your stitching.
- Generally, picture smocking using four strands of floss takes 4 to 5 rows to fill the area between two gathering threads.
- Floss should always be stripped and 4 strands used.

- Stacking in picture smocking fills the space very closely. It is not always easy to determine how many rows a figure will cover. In graphing, it helps to make the graph rather large so you can see what you are doing.

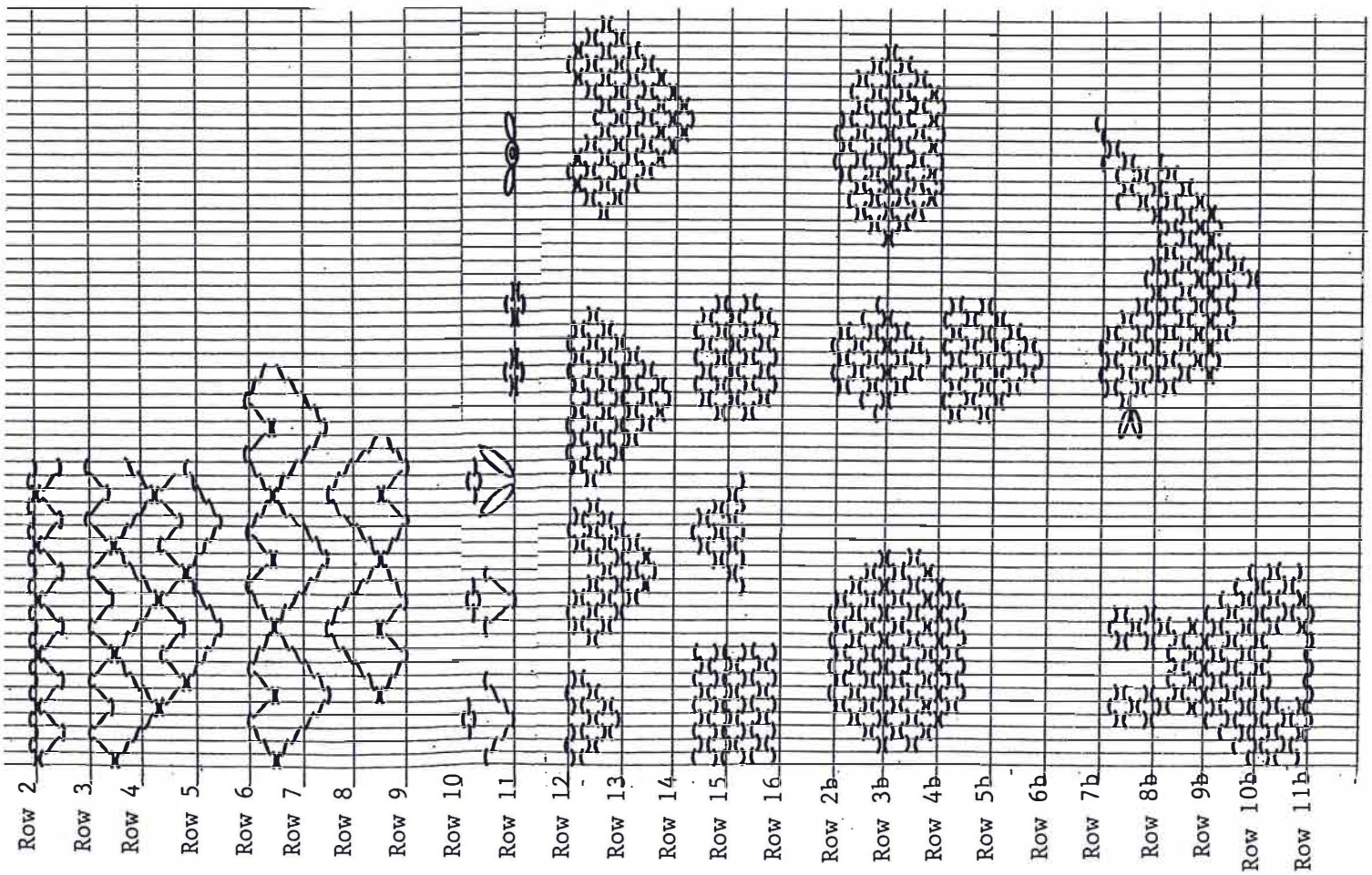
- It is wise to decide where you want the main portion of a row to fall. Begin at that point; i.e. if apples are combined with a row of waves, work the center row of the apple in line with the waves and work up and down from there.

- If you are stitching an animal, begin where he sits or stands or you may end with him in flight.

- Balls, squares, cones, and artificial shapes are fun to do. Balls become balloons with an attached string; cones are hats for elves, cones combined with balls are ice cream cones. Depending on the type of ears, animal heads can become different animals.

- Counted cross-stitch designs can often be adapted to picture smocking. Be aware that a counted cross stitch scale (which is square) does not match perfectly to pleated fabric (which is rectangular), therefore, rows may have to be repeated so that you do not end up with a short, fat figure.

SAMPLER B



COLOR AND "MY FAVORITE" DESIGN – SAMPLER C

Divide this pleated piece horizontally into two sections. Use rows 2-8 to play with color and design.

A. Try adding white to a color for a more subtle effect, i.e. for an infant garment, strip the floss and use two strands of white and one strand of pale pink or blue. It will give just a hint of color.

B. Another effect can be created by first using two strands of white and one of the color. On the next row, use one strand of white and two of the color. On the third row, use three strands of the color. The process can then be reversed. Graduating color can create another effect. On the first row, use two strands of white and one of color.

C. You can use the same technique with graduated shades of a color, i.e. shades from white to black.

D. I mentioned earlier that if you backsmock with a dark color on a light fabric you will get a shadow effect.

E. Metallic flosses or blending filament can be combined with your floss to add luster.

F. If you are doing duplicate rows to emphasize a shape, it is very effective to use graduated hues of a color, going from light to dark or vice versa.

CREATING YOUR OWN PLATE BY PUTTING TOGETHER PARTS OF DIFFERENT PLATES

A. Determine your main design and center it, making sure it falls where you want it.

B. Check the major shape. Where will it fall in relation to the next design? You may have to add cables or waves to fill in between the major shapes to create symmetry.

C. "Use an odd number" of stitches is almost an unbroken rule.

D. Don't be afraid to experiment! It is important to try out different shapes so that you get familiar with how they work.

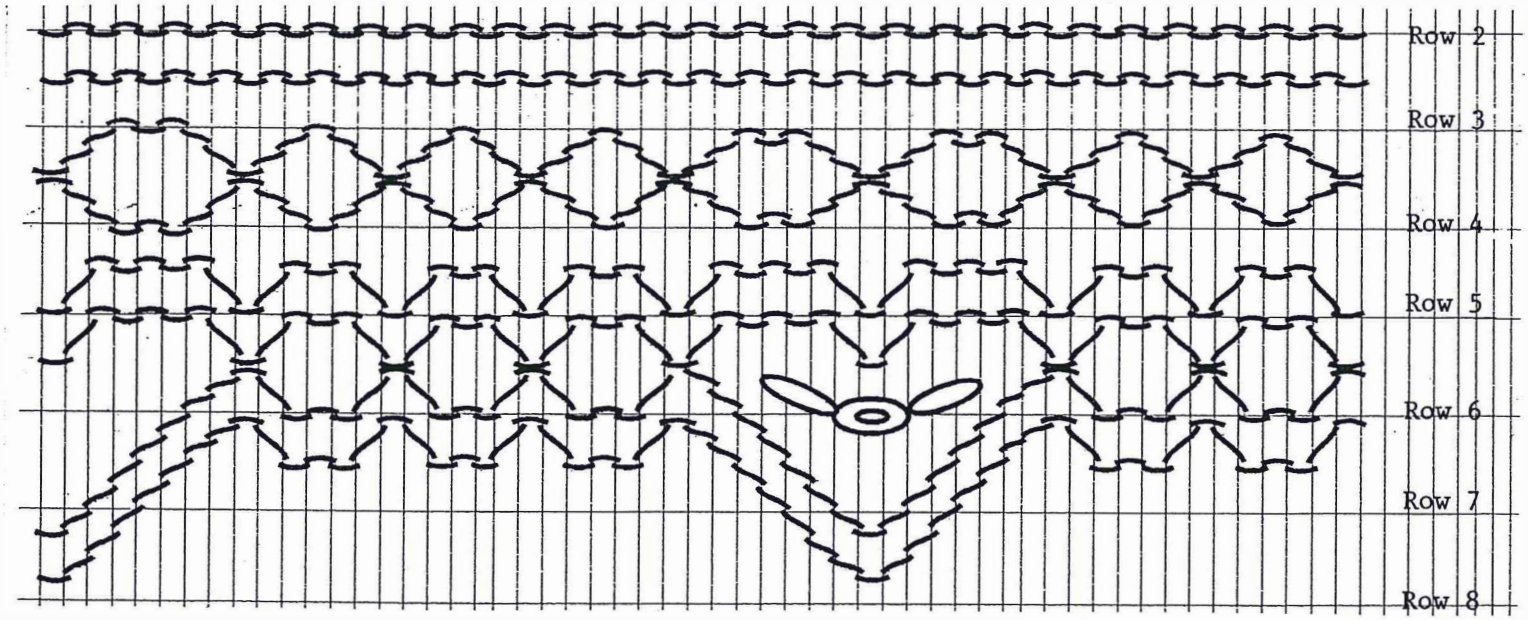
- Space your shapes.
- Can you add to the number of trellises?
- Do you need fill-ins to avoid puffing?
- Is back smocking needed?
- Can you use circles, ovals, triangles, diamonds or vines?
- Will duplicate stitching enhance the design?

E. Tips and hints

- Try your complete design for a few inches of each row to see if it works well.
- When ripping out stitches, don't pull the whole length of thread through the fabric. Cut your knot on the back and pull out the stitches from where you started. It saves wear and tear on your floss.
- Always work your main design row first and center your design. It will be easier to catch mistakes if your stitches don't line up.
- Running floss through fabric softener sheets helps to keep it from tangling.
- Stripping floss gives fuller coverage.
- Study your design to determine if backsmocking will be needed. Consider doing it before you work your design.
- You will notice that an odd number of pleats and stitches work best in creating a design.

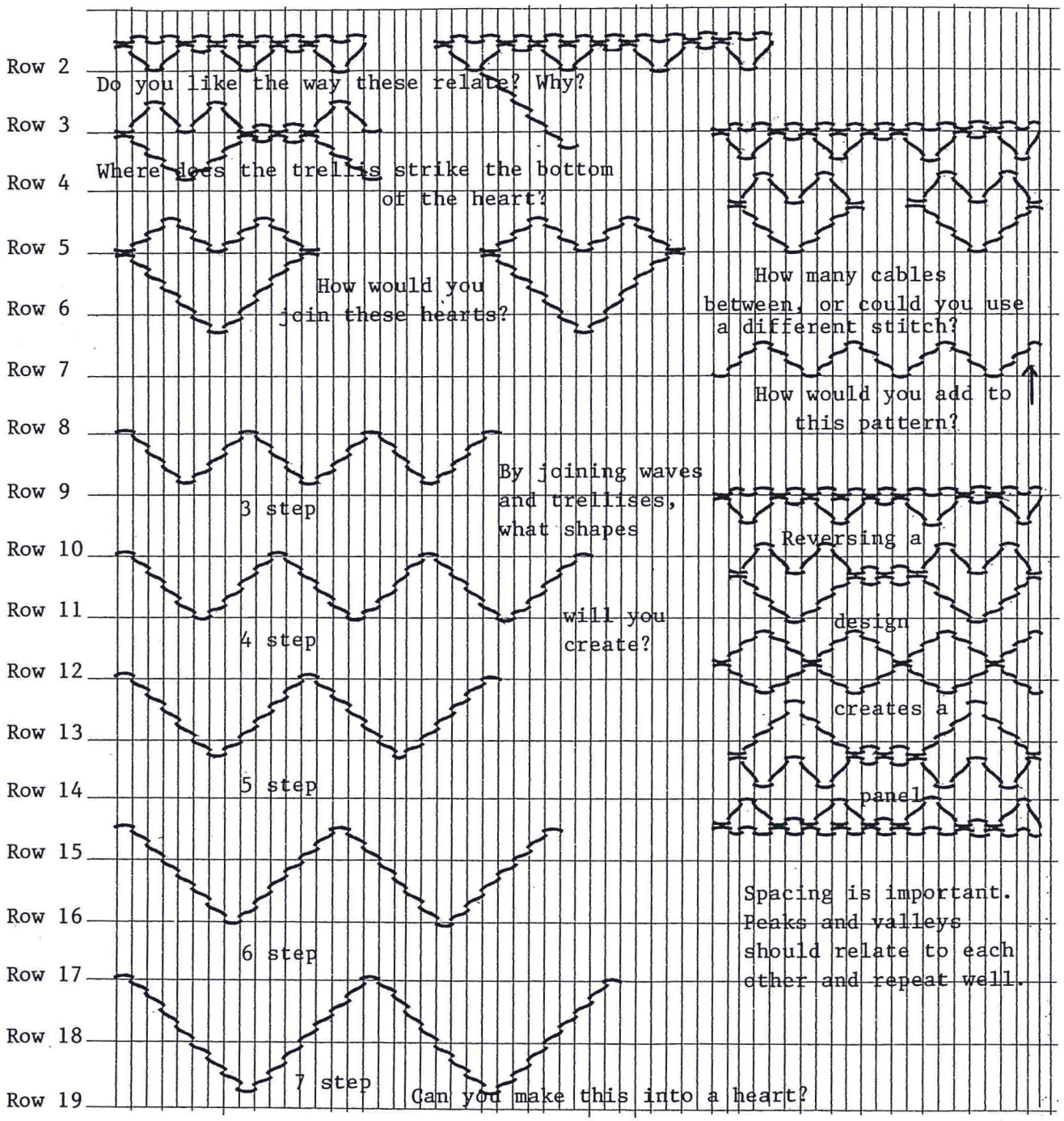
I would like to share my plate that I call, "My Favorite," for you to stitch on the bottom half of your third pleated piece. Use rows 9 – 15 on sampler C to stitch "My Favorite" in your favorite color scheme, i.e. three shades of pink. (Later, if you wish to lengthen this design and cover more rows, duplicate rows beginning on row 2 ½, one-half row above and below and move the entire design down.) You may want to use flowerettes in the hearts instead of bullion roses, or if you use the bullion roses, you may want to put a seed pearl in the center. Play around with it. It is yours to enjoy!

"MY FAVORITE" – SAMPLER C



OPTIONAL FINAL PROJECT – SAMPLER D

There is a great deal of satisfaction in "doing your own thing." You have worked three samplers while learning basic design techniques. Now you will stimulate your thought process and promote your creativity on sampler D. Smock the optional sampler D on the 20-row pleated piece. Play with color and design. Experiment. You are ready to design your own smocking plate. Who knows what clever designs you may create. Share them with others!



BIBLIOGRAPHY

"Nellie's Needles" by Nellie Durand, *The Smocking Arts* Sept-Oct 1987 issue.

"Choosing the Right Color" SAGA Program by Bobbie Demmer in collaboration with Nellie Durand's "Nellie's Needles," *The Smocking Arts* Jan/Feb 1987.

"Fun with Backsmocking" SAGA Program by Estella Davis.

"Advanced Smocking Stitches and Design" SAGA correspondence course by Nancy Malitz.

"Iris for Debbie" by Kathleen Choren, *The Smocking Arts* Jan/Feb 1987 issue.

"Aileen" by Kathleen Choren, *The Smocking Arts* Sept/Oct 1987 issue.

ARTISAN POINTS AWARDED FOR
PARTICIPATION IN A SAGA PROGRAM

It is the responsibility of the Group Leader or individual member to use a copy of this form to notify each participant of the Artisan point that has been rewarded to her.

Please make a copy of this form for each SAGA Artisan member who has participated in a SAGA Program. The SAGA member should keep this form with her Artisan documentation as proof of participation in the SAGA Program. It is the responsibility of the Artisan enrollee to document her participation in the SAGA Program.

One Artisan point will be earned for the participation in a SAGA Program.

Name of SAGA Program_____

Group Leader's Signature_____

Date of Participation_____

Participant's Name SAGA # Artisan #

Note: Note: Artisan Handbook Revised Edition 2006, page 1, letter F, "An Artisan participant may apply points that were awarded up to 30 days prior to enrollment."

Dear SAGA Program Participant:

Thank you for participating in this SAGA Program. For those of you who are enrolled in the Artisan Program, it is no longer necessary for you to send a copy of the Artisan point form to the Artisan Committee Chair for verification at the time SAGA Program is undertaken.

Each participant must keep a copy of the completed form with her Artisan card as documentation. When the Artisan Program participant sends a copy of her card to the Artisan Program Chair for verification of the points attained, a copy of all documentation must accompany the card.