

Charles Henry and Elin Petronella create pieces inspired by stunning European architecture

Paris, Barcelona and Venice, oh my! The creative duo love to city-hop in search of their next design idea

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# Charles & Elin

MEET THE CREATIVE COUPLE WHO USE NEEDLE AND THREAD TO CAPTURE THE ARCHITECTURAL SPLENDOUR TO BE FOUND IN SOME OF THE WORLD'S MOST BEAUTIFUL CITIES...

Words by Daisy Game



**B**oy meets girl, girl meets boy; girl introduces boy to embroidery – and so blossoms a wonderfully crafty romance. Now, that's our kind of love story. French-Swedish couple Charles Henry and Elin Petronella, founders of Charles and Elin embroidery, met in Paris seven years ago, and have been creatively inseparable ever since.

"I had started my embroidery Instagram account (@petronella.art) just a couple of weeks before we met", says Elin: "I was stitching my first commission when Charles became intrigued and wanted to try it out himself. At the time, he was a professional artist and fashion photographer in Paris, so he found the idea of experimenting with a new medium really exciting"

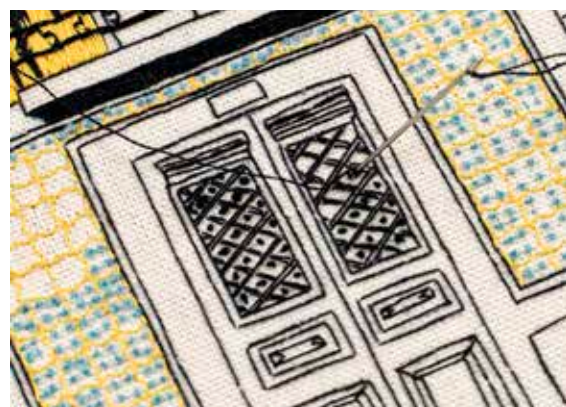
Things grew from there; Charles suggested that Elin try turning her then-architectural-drawings into stitched artworks, Elin thought that was a brilliant idea – and they were off. Through the autumn of 2016 until the winter of 2018, the artists spent their days holed up in a tiny, roof-top studio in Paris, and local cafés, stitching. They began displaying their finished artworks around the city and then shared them further afield again via Instagram. For the first year and a half of their embroidery journey, Charles and Elin created designs inspired exclusively by the Parisian cityscape. From architectural landmarks such as the Place Dauphine and the Eiffel Tower, to the intricate details of Haussmann buildings and metro stations, the duo's designs captured Paris in all of her little-to-larger glory. And with architecture playing such an important role in

these designs, we couldn't help but wonder what it is about embroidery that makes it such a wonderful medium for depicting these intricate buildings... "I think it's thanks to the 3D element that the thread adds to each design," Elin suggests: "Imagine the fabric as your paper, and the thread as your pen – in a regular drawing, you can't 'feel' the artwork when you close your eyes and stroke a finger over it. With embroidery, on the other hand, you always have that physical connection with the added texture, which adds another level of depth."

When Elin graduated from university, she and Charles decided to give the nomadic lifestyle a try, leaving their beloved Paris behind to find creative inspiration in new surroundings. The couple's favourite design to date depicts Casa Batlló in Barcelona: "It's quite a special one, both with regard to the design of the Antoni Gaudí building itself, and because of how we used French Knots to resemble mosaic on the wall," Elin tells us. Today, Elin and Charles have put down roots in the Belgium countryside, where they live with their two daughters – perusing the large →

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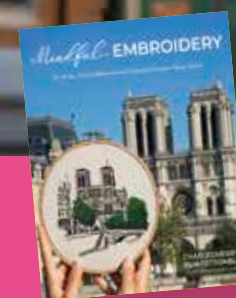
bank of images accumulated through their travels when in need of additional design inspo. The duo's design process has also changed a little since those early Parisian days. When the couple first started stitching, they would design and embroider separately from one another – working to similar briefs, but under their own individual steams. Since having their children, however, they tend to collaborate more often to save on precious parenting time. One of the two will draw the design, the other will transfer it, and then they'll stitch it up together. Parenthood has also had an impact on the materials Elin uses to create: "I used to be able to sit and stitch for hours with no end. After becoming a mother, I suddenly had limited time to get creative – and I had to come up with a way to express my ideas quicker! Paint adds colour to your work within a shorter time frame. I love the adaptability of the embroidery medium, depending on what season of life you're in..." Elin muses.

Its adaptability is not the only thing about the craft that Elin finds so appealing. She and Charles are huge advocates of stitching as a method of reconnecting with yourself in the overstimulating wake of a busy, increasingly digital world: "It's part of our mission – to get people to create more with their hands, and to take some time away from technology. Embroidery is a slow craft and it requires a lot of attention. It encourages you to concentrate on what you have in hand, and let other distractions fall away."

Keen to help other find creative shelter from a chaotic world, Charles and Elin now sell patterns for their designs as well as finished artworks, and are the proud authors of *Mindful Embroidery: Stitch Your Way to Relaxation with Charming European Street Scenes*, published by Page Street Publishing. They also offer online workshops via the Charles and Elin Academy – a digital resource where those who are curious about embroidery can explore the craft through a variety of courses and tutorials: whether it be one of the architectural stitch-along projects, or a more structured course teaching students how to create their own embroidery designs. "Our mission," Elin explains, "is to give students the tools they need to be creative on their own terms. We hope that our classes inspire students to consider how they might incorporate embroidery into their lives as a way to relax, unwind, and to express themselves creatively."

And Charles and Elin, just like their students, continue to educate themselves about their craft: "We've naturally been in a slower season with the expansion of our family, but as the girls grow, we want to include them more in our creative life. Our oldest is already experimenting with some embroidery, which will potentially provide the inspiration for some kid-friendly courses in the future... so stay tuned!"

Go globe-trotting with Charles and Elin on Instagram via @charlesandelin, and learn more about the Charles and Elin Academy at [charlesandelinacademy.com](http://charlesandelinacademy.com)



Pick up a copy of *Mindful Embroidery: Stitch Your Way to Relaxation with Charming European Street Scenes* by Charles Henry and Elin Petronella (Page Street Publishing), and immerse yourself in its chic city-inspired patterns. There are 20 designs to choose from, which can all be worked using just five stitches. [pagestreetpublishing.com](http://pagestreetpublishing.com)