

latch-hooking rugs

Lynda Spiro

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A & C Black ■ London
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Dedication

For Michael, Mark and James. Amongst other things, thank you for your patience, help, interest, enthusiasm, support and unconditional love.

And for my Dad, who I know would have been so proud.

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contents

| | |
|---|-----|
| <i>Acknowledgements</i> | 6 |
| <i>Getting Hooked</i> | 7 |
| <i>Introduction</i> | 8 |
| 01 Why Latch-hook? | 9 |
| 02 Equipment and Materials | 11 |
| 03 Methods and Techniques | 15 |
| 04 Before You Begin | 19 |
| 05 Rugs to Make | 23 |
| TYPES OF STRIPES 23: <i>stripe tease</i> 24 | |
| <i>stripe me down</i> 30; <i>landing stripe</i> 36; <i>stripe hype</i> 42 | |
| CHEEKY CHECKS 50: <i>cross check</i> 50; <i>check point</i> 52 | |
| <i>check your speed</i> 54; <i>check mate</i> 58 | |
| BUILDING BLOCKS 61: <i>metropolis</i> 62 | |
| <i>sunset boulevard</i> 66; <i>gridlock</i> 68; <i>mosaic mania</i> 70 | |
| GROUNDWORK 72: <i>sidestep</i> 73; <i>surface tension</i> 78 | |
| <i>retro route</i> 80; <i>mind the gap</i> 82 | |
| SEE 3D 84: <i>receding block</i> 84; <i>ribbons</i> 86 | |
| <i>stairway to heaven</i> 88; <i>trellis</i> 92 | |
| BLOOMIN' GORGEOUS 95: <i>flourishing flowers</i> 96 | |
| <i>lazy daisy</i> 98; <i>flower power</i> 100; <i>floral fantasy</i> 102 | |
| MONOCHROME MAGIC 106: <i>spots and dots</i> 106 | |
| <i>ripple</i> 108; <i>opposites attract</i> 110; <i>puzzle</i> 112 | |
| <i>soon to bloom</i> 114 | |
| 06 Finishing | 117 |
| 07 Oddballs: Using up Leftover Wool | 123 |
| <i>oddballs pattern</i> 124 | |
| 08 Design and Inspiration | 126 |
| <i>houses</i> 130; <i>dancing hands</i> 133 | |
| 09 Combining Colours | 135 |
| <i>colour chart rug</i> 136 | |
| 10 Hanging and Displaying your Work | 140 |
| <i>Conclusion</i> | 141 |
| <i>Suppliers</i> | 142 |
| <i>Index</i> | 143 |



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| <i>Suppliers</i> | 142 |
| <i>Index</i> | 143 |



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To my friends (who I hope are still my friends after this process) and my family (who will always be my family): I can now come out and play again, having finished 'doing the book'. Thanks for your support and encouragement throughout.

To everyone's favourite photographer: Adrian Pope. Thank you for your skill, suggestions and patience.

To Yasmin, my lovely cousin and my hand model; thanks for picking up latch-hooking so quickly and beautifully.

Thanks also to my hooker-helpers (you don't honestly think that I made them all myself?), for following instructions carefully and for working quickly to get them all finished.

All the wool used in this book has been supplied and manufactured by Anchor. (Their generous contribution of the finest quality wool and rug canvas is much appreciated.)

GETTING HOOKED

Craft is making a comeback. Traditional crafts have always had a following, but it is now fashionable again to buy and even make your own 'crafty' home accessories (along with loads of other things). This revival of interest in the crafts and in hand-skills is known in some circles as 'traditionalising'. Crafts that had slipped out of the trendy spotlight for a while are now more popular than ever; are we all reacting against mass-market, identical products and the throwaway society, or are we just remembering the joy and pride inherent in working with our hands to create beautiful, one-of-a-kind, decorative pieces, and in being able to say 'I made it myself'? Latch-hooking is now often referred to as a 'vintage craft', but I don't want to overanalyse the rise and fall of such trends and their sociological significance here – suffice to say, it is wonderful that a passion for making is being rekindled in so many different craft areas and it is exciting to be able to share some of my latch-hooking tips with you in this book.

Remember the 1970s craze for latch-hooked rugs? After a bit of a break whilst other crafts took centre-stage, latch-hooking is the latest old school craft to enjoy a revival; it is cool, kitsch, fun and amazingly easy to do – think painting by numbers using pieces of coloured wool instead of paint. Latch-hooking your own rugs is a simple, creative, cost effective and versatile way to change the look of an interior, and importantly it is fun and easy as well. Once you have had a taste, I guarantee you will be hooked; it is a relaxing pastime and fun for all ages and abilities. Most importantly, you can learn to latch-hook in just a few simple steps.

Whether their first role is practical or decorative, rugs must incorporate the right colour and shape balances to appeal to those who live with them and to complement various components of the room. I believe in drawing on colours from nature and translating these colour themes into rugs; nature has its own way of tempering colour to convey emotion, and mimicking these in the home helps create a sense of comfort and well-being. With that in mind, the rug patterns featured in this book have all been designed to be, above all, bright, happy and fun.

Over the years while my grandmother crocheted, my mother knitted, and my sister embroidered, I, as the youngest, latch-hooked – I loved it from day one. When I was asked to write a book on rugs my initial reaction was pure joy at being able to share the pleasure of this craft with so many new people – such an exciting prospect. I hope that you enjoy catching the latch-hooking bug and hook yourself some beautiful rugs to be proud of.

INTRODUCTION

A latch-hook is a combination of a hand hook and a latchet, derived from knitting machines in the mid-1920s. Latch-hooking became particularly popular as a technique in the mid-'30s, because of its simplicity and versatility.

Rugs have served as an essential part of home interiors for thousands of years, serving both practical and aesthetic functions. In the beginning, rugs gave essential warmth and protection from the elements as well as providing visual features. Animal hides provided the first flooring, sitting and sleeping surfaces and covers. As our societies have developed, we have become better protected from the elements; our homes are more secure and we enjoy more leisure and luxury. The function of rugs has progressed past their purely practical function and they are now decorative vehicles for artistic expression as well as simple floor coverings.

I have always felt that decorating with rugs can usually be categorised in three different ways. The first is to use the rug purely as a focal point. The second is serving as a home décor accessory, tying in with other elements of the interior. The third category is employing the rug mainly in its practical role. Perhaps, even more importantly, rugs are a relatively quick and easy way to update the interior's look, transforming a room without the complicated hassle of redecorating. A room can also be divided easily through the careful use of rugs when it is not possible to physically divide the space with walls or furniture. Rugs can add softness and interest to hard floors.

You don't have to restrict your rugs to the floor though – you can hang special rugs on the wall to make a striking statement, in just the same way as you would use a painting. Remember, whether you decide to hang, drape, or lay your latch-hooking efforts, the addition of such a unique, one-off piece of handmade work to your home is something to display with pride.

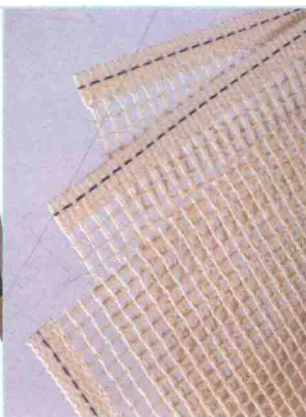
01 why latch-hook?

There are so many different reasons for wanting to latch-hook. Personally, I find it relaxing and therapeutic, as it gives me the chance to sit and work with my hands for a while; this can be an amazing luxury within today's fast-paced lifestyles, but it is just so important to make time to recharge your energy with creative activities somehow. The repetitive movement of latch-hooking can be a great stress reliever – in many ways, the emotional benefits are similar to those of meditation. Also, let's not forget the huge positive boost of personal satisfaction when you complete a project.

Portability is a plus too. When you are creating a latch-hooking project, you can take it with you and continue work on the bus, in the doctor's waiting room, even during your lunch hour. You can latch-hook for a few minutes here and there – even if you don't have large chunks of spare time in your day you can make little windows of latch-hooking opportunities while watching television, talking with your family, sitting in the garden, waiting for a cake to bake, or listening to the radio. You don't have to finish the whole rug at a gallop – you can work on a section for a while then come back to it after a few months, working slowly to complete your work carefully and precisely rather than racing to get a project out of the way. You can pick it up and put it down when it suits you.



Latch-hooks



Canvas



Wool

The process of latch-hooking couldn't be simpler – you just hook a pre-cut length of wool through woven canvas using the hinged hook. The wool is looped under and around each horizontal canvas thread, resulting in a short strong knot. The process of creating a whole rug does take time – no instant gratification here. But the time and effort that you put in are a big part of what makes this kind of work so special, and making your own rug (or rugs for family and friends) will give you a real sense of achievement.



One tool



One knot

In terms of equipment and techniques, one simple tool and one easily-learned knot are really all it takes to get you hooking. The latch-hook tool is strong and easy to use, and even if you do happen to make a mistake, you can very easily undo one knot and reuse the wool – just think of it as getting extra practice.

02 equipment and materials

LATCH-HOOK

You only need one tool for latch-hooking but there are several varieties to choose from. All latch-hooks are made of a steel hook and latchet. The stem of the hook may be either straight or curved, and the handle of the hook can be either wooden or 'bendy'. Personally, I prefer to hook with a straight-stemmed tool with a wooden handle – the old fashioned way – as this is how I was taught to work. But different hookers prefer different tools, and I would suggest that you experiment with both types and various different brands to find your own favourite type of hook.

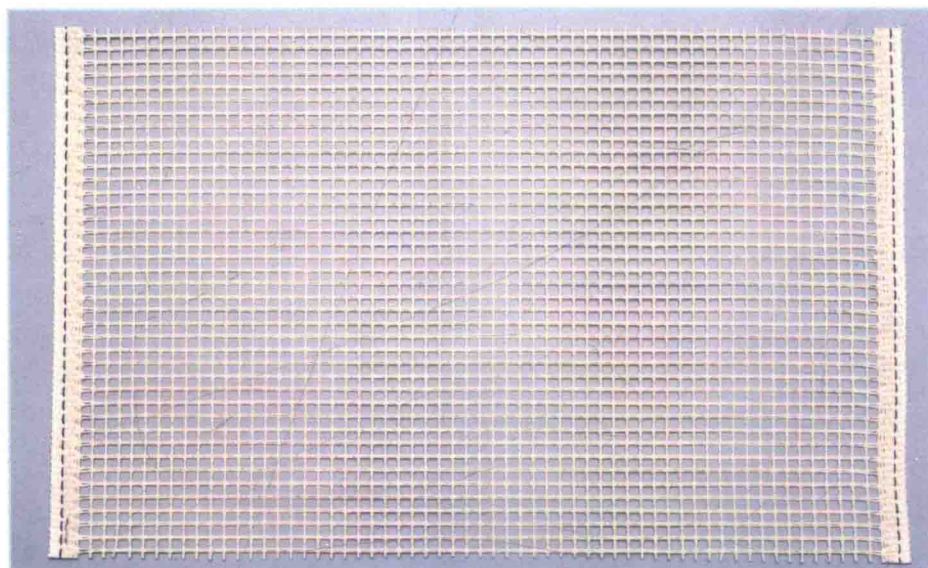


Wooden- and rubber-handled latch-hooks

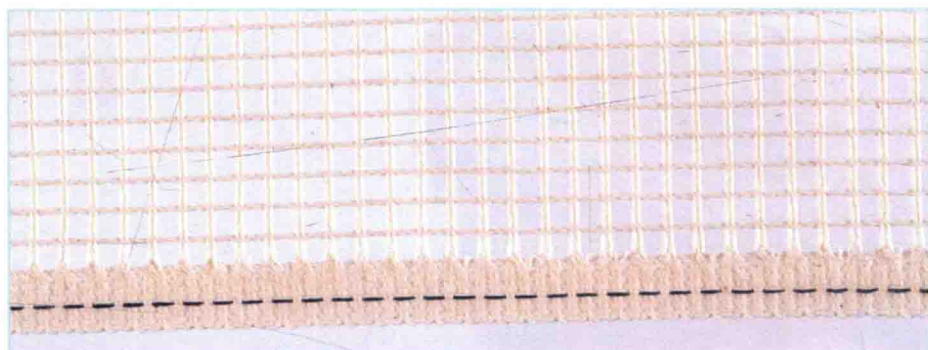
CANVAS

The canvas used for latch-hooking has an open mesh of double threads with approximately 3 holes to 2.5cm (1 in.) of canvas. Look at the canvas closely and you will see that it is woven with double horizontal threads and twisted vertical threads. The knots are made over the double horizontal threads. Each hole on the canvas will be used to house one knot.

Canvas is available to buy in a variety of widths and you then cut it to your desired length. This means that whilst the edges on each side are properly finished with a woven selvedge, there will be a raw edge at both the top and bottom of your piece. Raw edges are dealt with in the Finishing section (p.117). Don't forget, when you trim your canvas, to leave an extra four holes at each end for finishing.



Canvas



Close-up of selvedge-bound canvas



Wonderful wool

WOOL

Rug wool is available either by the hank (skein) or in ready-cut lengths of approximately 6.5cm (2½ in.). I have used ready-cut lengths of wool for all the designs in this book. If you prefer to cut your own lengths, choose something like Rowan Big Wool 80m/100g skeins of 100% wool (bulky weight) available from www.knitrowan.com.

BINDING TAPE

Binding tape is available from any good haberdashery shop or craft supplier. (See Suppliers on p.142.) Heavy-duty cotton tape (approximately 4cm (1½ in.) wide) is also available. I try to avoid using binding tape too often as I do find it quite fiddly. But when I do use it, I prefer to use the cotton-tape type that requires sewing on by hand as opposed to the self adhesive one that seems to un-stick very quickly.



Binding tape