

# HOW ABOUT?

with Louise Howland

*This month, Louise decides to appreciate the beauty in pieces that are a few stitches short of perfection ... to err is only human after all!*



I asked an embroiderer, whose beautiful stitching often graces the pages of this magazine, how she satin-stitched so well. "It's very simple", she told me with a smile. "If a stitch looks perfect, it stays. If it doesn't, I take it out."

Simple indeed. This philosophy no doubt accounts for the fact that her surviving stitches lie just right and help create pictures of breathtaking beauty.

Sometimes I race to the finish of my project, knowing it's silly but dying to see the result, only to be disappointed on completion that the hasty stitching is so obvious. Yet, at other times the use of glasses and a magnifying light lead me to spending more time unpicking than stitching. Crowded knot gardens that, at a glance, look casually graceful may, from another perspective, appear carelessly stitched and

unkempt. Random piecing of fabric looks relaxed and casual one moment, lazy the next.

Aiming for excellence may be motivating, but striving for perfection can become demoralising. Did you hear those conflicting messages when you were a child? 'Practice makes perfect' on the one hand, 'nobody's perfect' on the other. (Was the former meant to motivate children and the latter to excuse adults when they slipped up?) But the logic of a child wants us to make up our minds, so asks which is right. I love an expert, and try to attain high standards in at least some areas of my life, yet I have managed to find an incredible variety of ways to fail.

Criticising ourselves and our work is more common than self-praise. Great stitching may well require attentiveness and diligence, but too often we become so critical and finicky that we are always dissatisfied with our efforts.

Perfection abounds throughout the natural world, whether through things like the gnarled and twisted branches of a tree, the song of the shrike-thrush or the gentleness and uniqueness of the – tragically and to Australia's shame – endangered koala, but in our creative lives perfection may be hard to define and recognise.

The word perfect is derived

from the Latin word 'perficio', meaning 'to finish' or 'bring to an end'. Today, the word has meanings more abstract, and has blended with other concepts, such as excellence. However, I'm finding the most literal meaning a beneficial way to envisage something completed, whether entirely satisfactory or otherwise.

I'm training myself to seek perfection in something less than unsurpassable; a few cracks let the light in after all! Examples of imperfection are just as useful for learning as models of great competence.

Aiming too hard for faultlessness can lead us to the opposite of our goals, to preventing relaxation and absorption in the art itself. And if the energy spent judging goes into creativity instead, how much more may be accomplished?

As Goethe said, "Certain flaws are necessary for the whole. It would seem strange if old friends lacked certain quirks."

I feel mostly the same about my stitching now – it falls well short of flawless but I can't imagine not having it in my life!

Until next month,

*Louise*

[www.savethekoala.com](http://www.savethekoala.com)