

Wired—Blocking a Lace Shawl

If you want a seriously tedious chore, other than putting heddles on a loom shaft, you must try blocking a lace shawl. Only the excitement of seeing the finished product will keep you going, particularly when working in an attic whose mean temperature was about 100 degrees.

I had to do it away from the animals. My cats Buddy and Cleo would have used the shawl as a trampoline otherwise.

So here's the final sequence of events, with my observations. I hope this will be of some help to those of you who are interested in lace. Or it could be a deterrant. You must soldier on, when faced with tasks like this one.

Off the Needles

And here it is in its pre-coital state--small, wrinkled but expandable.



You can see the ends sticking out on the upper lefthand corner. These have been woven in but not yet cut because I wanted some extra length to compensate for the stretch when blocking.

I dunked the shawl into tepid water and Eucalan and let it sit for 15 minutes to soak up max water. I then wrapped it in a towel and gently squeezed to remove the excess.

Toys in the Attic

My attic is carpeted. In fact, it would be a great room to use if you could stand up straight anywhere other than in the center. And it has a door. Perfect for getting on your 55-year-old knees and blocking.

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I'm nothing if not systematic. First, a large burgundy bath sheet on the carpeting, then the shawl. I began by blocking the center square, using my short wires (these were ultimately replaced by the longer wires--I needed the length). I could have done this on my bed but I needed to keep cats from using it as a blanket.



I threaded the wires through the yo's that edge the square. It's very easy to catch a thread when doing this, so you have to take it slowly. I think it was at this point that I stripped down to my underwear. You may eliminate this step.

Once all four wires were in position, I pinned the intersection of each corner, stretching out the square as much as possible and adding pins to the sides if needed.

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The right side was still a bit uneven, so I adjusted it by pulling it out and pinning it. You can't see the pins but they're there.

Here's a good picture of a blocked corner. I had to be very careful to keep the border away from the wires. Very easy for it to double back and get caught.



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Now it was time to attack the edging points. So I pinned each corner and immediately discovered I was running out of towel. Tough shit. I was too far into it now. And anyway, the carpet would suffice.



(That right side was still a little off.) You'll find that if you block a shawl, you will be repositioning pins as you go. I insert the T-pins so that they are as vertical as I can get them, and then using the T, make them into little levers by manipulating the T so that the pins are almost horizontal to the shawl, thus creating tension. Works a treat.



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You can see this process pretty clearly. And don't forget, the more tension and pins that are added, the easier the pinning gets. You can expect the points to slide up to the T, as the picture shows in the upper lefthand corner. That's OK. When the pins start to pop out, you've stretched the piece too much.

And here it is, with about 100 T-pins and a gallon of sweat. At this point, I retreated to take a shower and left it for 24 hours. In actuality, it was probably dry within four hours, but I was sick of it and went on to other things.



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Ta-da

Done and done.



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