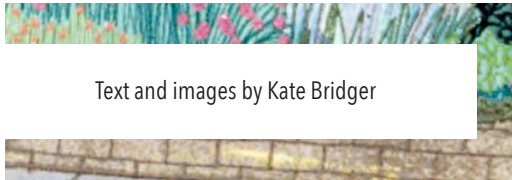




Artist

Textile artist **Kate Bridger** shares her love of house portraits and guides us through the process step by step.

Kate Bridger the house that kate built



Text and images by Kate Bridger

Houses, much like the people who occupy them, come in many shapes and sizes. But, regardless of whether one's 'castle' is opulent or humble, large or small, new or old, most people pour love, money and sweat into their homes and the payoff is a bank full of life's daily happenings and events, fond

memories and pride.

I learnt early on in my interior consulting career that 'home' is more about how we feel in our houses and less about what they are made of or filled with. This lesson was further reinforced as I began stitching commissioned



house portraits for various clients. Clearly, it didn't matter if the house was a beautifully appointed structure on a grand estate, or a humble bungalow in a subdivision, what it represented to its occupants was all that mattered.

I stitched my very first house portrait, *Samways Acres*, in 1994. This cute little house in New Zealand belonged to my father and his wife. In February of that year, my family and I escaped the northern Ontario winter and spent six weeks there. The house became a symbol of the happy times we'd shared and the portrait, rudimentary though it was, was a perfect way to say 'thank you'.

Since then, I have stitched dozens of homes from all over the world. I rely on the photographs and anecdotes provided by my clients for those houses that are miles beyond my neighbourhood and the reach of my camera lens; for example, this home in Britain,

right. On the other hand, I did enjoy the privilege of visiting this beautiful home near Oving, UK. It is one of many brick houses I've stitched. As you can imagine, stitching bricks is very labour intensive and I have become a great fan of clapboard siding since! One of the challenges with this portrait was to add the greenhouse to the front of the building and yet maintain its transparency ... and so began my



Above: *Samways Acres*, 1994



Above: *A British Home*
Below: The challenge of a greenhouse







love affair with organzas and sheer fabrics.

In many portraits, the context and surroundings are as important as the structure itself. That's when the landscape architect within shows up - of course, unlike Capability Brown, I don't have to wait too long for the shrubs and trees to mature.

To me, the most important addition to a house portrait is something that the client holds dear ... be it a pet, an object, or a memory. The house top left was

commissioned by a couple now living in Arizona. As students, back in the 1970s, they had rented the upper front rooms. But, here's the best part ... this home stands right across the street from where I live now. As I worked on the

piece, it was great to be able to hop across the road to check on an awkward angle or confirm a bit of trim detail. I included my clients' dog in the picture as well as a skunk trying to get into a rubbish bin on the porch—two





notable memories from their time there. It's those personal touches that make the finished portrait so special ... notice the cat on the windowsill and the BMW parked on the driveway in the other two pictures.

Some homes are very elaborate and ornate, others are plain ... some are rustic and some are merely summer retreats, but obviously all of them are loved and cherished by their occupants at the time and my work provides an attractive visual trigger for their happy memories for years to come.





The Process

The most complicated home I have ever 'built' out of fabric is a piece I was commissioned to do in 2015. It is a beautiful, ornate old building in Ontario, Canada, that now serves its community as a successful restaurant. However, it was once home to a family and a young girl who spent many happy times there while visiting her grandparents. This young girl, now a mother herself, has two daughters and they decided that a stitched rendition of the property would make a wonderful birthday gift for her.

I was delighted to be asked to create the piece but, at the same time, somewhat daunted by the task. The perspective, the gingerbread detailing, the bricks (oh, the bricks!) and even two stained glass windows made this a seriously challenging undertaking. To illustrate just how complex the layering and building up of this picture was, I photographed my progress each day so you can see precisely how the 'house that Kate built' came to be...



1 & 2

I laid down

a background for the house and then blocked in the main structure leaving openings for the windows (oops, I missed two ... don't worry I'll cut them out later). Then I tossed a few clouds into the beautiful blue Goderich sky, planted the front lawn and used a couple of strategically placed trees to obscure the views of any other buildings in the neighbourhood.



3

I spent the next day creating forms and shadows to go behind the glazing on the windows. I even installed tiny stained glass details in the upper sections of the two most prominent ones.

I began the first part of the red brick detailing just to see if I had the patience to cut them with my scalpel.

Still forgot those two other windows, but I'll get to them before long.

'A. J. Cooper' was carved into the cement on the path in front of the house and the lawns were edged.



4

This photograph illustrates several steps in my process. I finally got around to installing the missing windows and adding window frames and sills to all of them.

I installed the doors and put up a foundation for the porch I've yet to build.

And then ... it was all about the bricks ... lots of bricks!

Shade was applied to the lower left section in anticipation of the shadows that will be cast by the porch when it's added.





5

Still bricking it! Brick detailing and stones are added above the windows and I tacked the wooden porch on to the facade.

It all looks a bit sad without a roof and with steps I wouldn't trust, but I'm so relieved to be finished with the bricks, I'm ready for anything!



6

Much progress has been made ... the house finally has a roof on it! Even the chimneys are peeking out over the top.

The porch has been properly attached and a border of flowers is already growing up in front of it.

Unfortunately, the stairs look even more

treacherous than before ... they'll have to come out.

But, as you can see, some finicky detailing above the upper windows and beneath the roof overhang is well underway.

7

Adding the foundation planting has made the building look far more grounded and less likely to fall off the page.

There's also a gorgeous hanging basket filled with geraniums and lobelia hanging from the porch and some irises have popped up on the front lawn.

The stairs look a bit more solid and, with the addition of banisters, they're probably quite safe now.



8

The wrought iron railings were installed today ... incredibly intricate work, but well worth it.

A bit more fine-tuning to attend to (just noticed that the hanging plant is suspended in thin air, perhaps I'd better secure it to the porch) and then I think this beautiful House Portrait will be ready to be presented to its new owner:



For more information about Kate:

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