



# Dream Weaver

Victoria Frank of Northfield was a world-class special-events planner for major corporations when the economy collapsed. Now what? The answer was the most natural next step she could imagine: Turn a lifelong love of needlework and fabric arts into a world-hopping travel business for people just like her. She and her first 15 customers will visit Portugal early this year to learn the exquisite stitched legacy first created by Moorish artisans. They'll learn the art stitch by stitch. As for Frank, her passion has literally become the fabric of her life.

**QNT: So now you've launched Victoria C. Frank Inc. and are headed to Portugal. Where did this passion for fabric arts arise?**

**VF:** It was my grandmother who inspired me to make my first sampler (which prophetically enough reads, "Visits always give pleasure; if not in the coming then in the going.") So it's all in my genes. But it goes back even to my great-great grandmother who was a famed seamstress for the carriage trade in Quebec. My mother was a knitter and embroiderer; so I get it through my maternal lineage. They gave me art; my father gave me a business sense.

**QNT: Is this a "doing" art for you, or a "collecting" art?**

**VF:** I'm a stitcher, not a collector. Certainly I have a degree in art and art history (college in France and advanced studies at the Art Institute of Chicago) and I've always been interested in expanding my knowledge of art and fabrics of different cultures. Mostly what I do is art for others. I was just sending Christmas stockings to my two stepchildren. My ambition is to create a Christmas stocking for each of my grandchildren. It takes about a year for each. I've created Christmas ornaments for friends and purses for others. I've created monogrammed footstools for friends when they married. My calligraphic background (she studied under American master Donald Anderson) allows me to design backgrounds. But I'm learning all the time. Now I'm developing canvas embellishments which means you use many different ornamental stitches, and apply beads and ribbons.

**QNT: So this is not a craft for you; it's an art form?**

**VF:** I am hesitant to respond because I am humble soul. (laughing)

**QNT: What fascinates you about fabric and needlepoint? What draws you?**

**VF:** Wish I knew the answer, but basically it's just really fun. Since a lot of what I do is for those I love, what better expression of love can there be than giving them something beautiful you have made?

**QNT: Trace your path for us.**

**VF:** I got started as a calligrapher and then morphed into a corporate specialist in event planning, which I did for 25 years. We planned big events. Booked Sheryl Crow and Los Lobos. That sort of thing. But my partner and I closed our business this summer because the recession had just taken the wind out of the business. She sold her house, and she and her husband are moving to Mexico. I had a milestone birthday. So now I'm starting a new business that lets me take the skills I have learned in my 25 years in business and apply them to my passion for needlework. It's just kind of a great win.

**QNT: Why Portugal and why Moorish "Arraiolos" needle point traditions? Is this something you've always known about?**

**VF:** Actually, no. As a matter of fact, I was in Portugal a few years ago and visited this hotel. It was an old 30-room converted palace. But I kept seeing these incredible rugs. Finally I dropped down on my knees to see the fabric and the stitching, and there I am this 58-year-old woman surrounded by 30 year olds, and I'm asking, 'What's the deal with the rugs?' They were everywhere. The people there said, 'It's Arraiolos. Don't you know it?' I said, no ... Actually Portugal is a hard place to get to. It's not like it's on the road from anywhere.

**QNT: You've done event planning in many foreign countries; so how is this different?**

**VF:** I've been on (stitching, needlepoint) programs, but what I saw was very budget-minded. I never saw in my research events like the ones I am planning. I was in London studying with this amazing teacher, Joyce Petschek, and our group of 12 did a week there with behind-the-scenes access, and stately old homes were opened for us. But we stayed at one hotel with no working telephone, another with no heat in one room. And I don't know what was wrong with the beds, but

I got little red dots all over my skin. So we were there with a great opportunity, and we had a great time, but there were wrinkles that didn't need to be there. They needed a professional planner. I had taken 500 people for a special event on the north shore of Oahu and made everything work. I thought I could do this, too.

**QNT: Your itinerary says accommodations at five-star hotels, needlework instruction from master craftsmen, special celebratory dinners at great local restaurants, private tours of museums and homes of note. It seems like you're living and diving into local culture. So what can someone on this eight-day fabric and stitching expedition expect?**

**VF:** Maybe one day I can take my own trip. But I learned so much in putting together the program. You work with experts and work with hotels and do research to find the right locations, know the museums and the right teachers and get access to old homes. So I don't expect to have much time to sit my fanny in a chair and do the stitching I've learned. These trips will be for stitchers to sit with great teachers and learn.

**QNT: How do you assess the market for your new travel planning business?**

**VF:** I attended the American Needlepoint Guild annual seminar in early October, and there were 570 people there. Sitting right here at my home in Northfield, I can identify a needlepoint store in Winnetka, Northfield and Northbrook. This is a quiet thing to do, but there are a lot of stitchers out there, all around the world. There's a chapter of the American Needlepoint Guild and chapter of Embroidery Guild of America in the Chicago area. It's a quiet market, but it's there.

**QNT: Is this sort of business common or are you plowing new ground?**

**VF:** Until a week ago (in November) I didn't think I had any competition. But then I found a woman in Australia who does a wonderful trip to England

every year. My real motivation is that there are other needlepoint trips, but nobody is doing it really well.

**QNT: So after the Feb. 5 through Feb. 11 trip to Portugal, what's next?**

**VF:** I actually had hoped to launch last year and decided on London. But it was such an expensive spot that seven nights was going to come in around \$10,000. It's going to be a fabulous trip, but I needed to establish my reputation before asking people to invest that much. I'm working on a trip to Arizona in November to focus on Native American textile design. And also to visit the Enchantment Resort spa in Sedona to explore "stitching wellness." Stitchers keep their heads down and develop neck problems, arthritis in their hands, and their arms get tired. And stitchers have a tendency to get sedentary. Then Ireland, which has fabulous traditions, and then maybe to Switzerland and St. Moritz.

**QNT: When you return for Portugal and assess the event, how will you judge its success?**

**VF:** Well, no question there. If it's just a perfect experience for people that participate in the program. That they loved the experience so much that they feed me with ideas for other places and other needlework traditions they want to explore.

**QNT: Have to ask. How much?**

**VF:** \$5,950 but that does not include airfare. And 15 in the group is a maximum. Wanna go?

*Victoria Frank is a lifelong devotee of needlework and the cultural significance of fabrics worldwide. She is a board member of The Textile Society and is actively associated with the Chicago chapter of the American Needlework Guild, The Arts Club, The Antiquarian Society, Old Masters Society and the Art Institute of Chicago. For details on her trips, call 847/784-1212 or visit [www.VCFinc.com](http://www.VCFinc.com)*