



Barbara Bush's Hand-Made Rug

It took Mrs. Bush nine years of stitching in 17 countries and 36 states to complete her needlepoint project. Today her rug graces the private dining room in the White House family quarters (above). It all began when

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Mrs. Bush visited Blair House, the presidential guest house in Washington, D.C., and saw a needlepoint rug that she liked a lot. She decided to start a needlepoint project of her own.

When she next went back to Blair House, she brought Washington, D.C., designer Eileen Sterling Crawford with her. Among the many motifs Mrs. Bush has worked into the rug are the designer's initials—along with the date Barbara Bush started the rug (early in 1975) and its completion date (late 1983).

Mrs. Bush stitched her rug on a #10 needlepoint canvas, using the basketweave stitch and a single strand of yarn. The design, a nature lover's delight, includes birds, chipmunks, frogs, and a turtle all frolicking in a sea of flowers that bloom in her favorite colors against a pale blue background.

The rug was conceived in eight panels each measuring 18 inches by eight feet. When the needlepointing was finished, the panels were woven together to make one canvas measuring eight feet by 12 feet.

Asked why she undertook such an enormous task, Mrs. Bush replied, "I had worked for years on needlepoint pillows and purses, which you outgrow

as you change decor and style. I wanted something I would have forever."

The canvases accompanied Mrs. Bush wherever she went—and by the time she had finished the rug, it had been worked on in 17 different countries and 36 states. It even went to the Peoples Republic of China when President Bush was Chief of the U.S. Liaison Office there. Her stay in China is commemorated in the rug: Mrs. Bush worked in her initials (B.P.B. for Barbara Pierce Bush) in both English letters and Chinese characters. Included too are the initials of her first four grandchildren.

While she worked on her needlepointing, Mrs. Bush kept a journal in which she jotted down which portion of the rug she was working on during family holidays like weddings, birthdays, etc. The journal also contains her personal notes on family and world events—as well as her comments, and progress reports, on the rug itself.

Transporting the large pieces of canvas was difficult at first, but she solved that problem by having a large canvas case made in China to hold the needles, wool, and the rolled-up section of the rug she was currently working on. She also kept clamps on each corner of the section she was doing so that the canvas was always open to the exact place

being stitched. The big bag had a second advantage—it proved to be a perfect pillow whenever she wanted to take a quick catnap during a trip.

So for nine years, while she traveled, watched TV, or talked with colleagues and family, Mrs. Bush stitched her "labor of love."

When the rug was finally finished it was sent to New York to be blocked and lined. A two-foot border of broadloom was attached around the canvas making the overall rug size ten feet by 14 feet. The finished rug was returned to Washington and, eventually, reached its present home in the family quarters of the White House.

What does the President think about his wife's creation? "He always makes a point of showing it to visitors," replies Mrs. Bush, smiling. "He's very proud of it."

The rug, of course, is an heirloom that can be handed down in her family for generations to come. Though she has taught her daughter, Doro (Dorothy), and her seven-year-old granddaughter Barbara to needlepoint, it remains to be seen whether they will ever undertake a project as formidable as the one Mrs. Bush has accomplished.

Her rug, because of all the circumstances surrounding it, can truly be called a "tapestry of history." ★