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Kadire Biberaj embroidered napkins for an outdoor showhouse vignette by interior designer Annette Hannon.  
PHOTO BY ANGIE SECKINGER



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Artist Kadire Biberaj in her studio.  
PHOTO BY STACY ZARIN GOLDBERG

## ART STUDIO- MADE TO ORDER

*Kadire Biberaj creates custom embroidery for the region's top interior designers*

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Growing up in Kosovo, Kadire Biberaj spent many evenings around the hearth with the women on her family farm. There she learned to embroider delicate floral patterns on white linen, as her grandmother twisted washed sheep's wool into yarn, and her mother knitted the yarn into socks and sweaters.

Now, 40 years later, Biberaj updates traditional handwork with modern methods. In her Manassas, Virginia, workroom, she uses an industrial embroidery machine to create made-to-order designs for leading interior designers and other clients. Proprietor and sole practitioner of European Design, Inc., she embroiders familiar motifs and imaginative concepts to exacting standards.

"Whatever I have customized from my mind or from a pattern on the walls, Kadire can apply as a decorative element on fabric. I've found her work exceptional," says Rina Yan, senior designer for Hughes Design Associates. Biberaj has translated Yan's sketches into embroidery on a table skirt that's ornamented in a leaf figure with muted hues matching those on a rug.

Her appliquéd pillows are on display through May 9 on a veranda created by interior designer Kelley Proxmire at the 2010 DC Design House in Chevy Chase. Proxmire based the design of these chocolate-brown pillows with a floral motif and grey thread on the pattern of a carved-wood plaque, and colors she selected for an adjoining sitting room.

Biberaj has precisely executed designs by Thomas Pheasant—a stylized Greek key on sheets and shams, a discreet vine on an upholstered ottoman. She has also elegantly monogrammed hand towels for The White House, including ones created for the current President. And she reproduced a flora-and-leaf cluster on 80 yards of silk for interior designer Barry Dixon, after he discovered that a fabric chosen for master bedroom draperies had been discontinued and all coordinating fabrics in the room had been ordered. Biberaj "replicated it to a T, even better than the original," says Dixon, adding appreciatively, "Hers is such a bespoke effort."

Biberaj loves resolving each new challenge. "Whatever the client likes or has, I can reproduce or personalize," she says. The dark-haired artisan with sturdy hands and a serious purpose pulls out books of design motifs and calligraphic styles for those seeking a particular theme or monogram. More often, designers provide their own sketches or samples with measurements.



Biberaj created custom starfish on slipcovers in a dining room by Gary Inman.  
PHOTO BY THOMAS KOJCSICH



Biberaj also embroidered pillows for this showhouse vignette by interior



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designer Annette Hannon.  
PHOTO BY ANGIE SECKINGER

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In her second-floor workroom, embroidery hoops hang along one wall ready for use on the machine, which is equipped with 12 large spools of thread. Two sewing machines assist in fabricating pieces to be embroidered, mainly duvet covers, pillow shams and dust skirts. A central worktable conceals bolts of fabric piled beneath.

Biberaj moved to the U.S. in 1968 and founded European Design, Inc., 14 years ago. Starting as a hobby, her interest led to classes in embroidery and on using an industrial embroidery machine. She worked first as a seamstress for Carol Studios in Fairfax, before turning to embroidery full time. Her former employer now sends her work.

While machine embroidery speeds up the process, it has its own rigors. "You have to understand how to work with it to get the effect you want," says Biberaj. Patterns must be positioned and meticulously lined up on a fabric, whether on a chair back or as a leading edge on curtains. Her most complicated assignment involved resizing a two-inch compass design to 30 inches, then perfectly joining its four separate quadrants and finally centering it on a headboard.

Sketches are sent out for digitizing before the program is inserted into the electronic machine. The process typically takes four or five cycles of corrections. "Everything has to be figured out perfectly before I start. It takes a lot of thread and a lot of time," Biberaj says. To create proper coverage, for example, a six-inch cornflower pattern called for 3,100 stitches in outline form and 5,600 stitches when completed with a shaded effect. Raised designs require an even higher thread count.

Depending on the look desired, or by special request, Biberaj may add beading or monogramming by hand. In all cases, she prepares a fabric sample for approval before getting started.

It's a long way from where Biberaj started as a child. The accomplished professional mentions with amusement words that still ring in her ears: "My mother said, 'You're so lazy, you need a machine that does things for you.' Now there is [a machine], but she's not around to see it." Or what her daughter achieves with it.

*Writer Tina Coplan is based in Chevy Chase, Maryland.*

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\*\*Out of the array of interior design magazines, Home and Design magazine stands out as a primary idea source for luxury home designs. Wonderful visuals of inspired décor and lush landscapes are combined with expert advice to provide a fundamental reference point for bringing amazing home interior design ideas to life.

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