

SERVICE

We're hooked

BY *Laura Jean Whitcomb*

PHOTOGRAPHY BY *Marty McAuliff*

Shirley Morton is smiling down on her daughter. Ann French learned hooking from her mother, a well-known New England rug hooker who died in 1999. “She was a stickler and always made me finish my rugs correctly. Even though I complained, I did it,” French laughs. “Now it’s come full circle. People say: ‘I can’t believe you do that. I hate that part!’”

French started her business, Rugs Finally Finished, two years ago. The retired elementary school teacher frequently finished rugs and other projects for people, who didn’t like the final time-consuming stage of a hooking project. Her daughter thought that she could make a business out of her hobby, so French created a web site and printed business cards. Now people from all over the country send her projects — from rugs to pillows to wall hangings — to finish. “Finishing is kind of tedious and time consuming,” French says. “People will make a beautiful rug, but when they don’t finish it carefully it takes away from their project.”

Marie Ciaffa of Blairstown, N.J.,



Your rugs will finally be finished, thanks to Ann French.

has a big cardboard tube reserved just for French. “I’m a terrific rug hooker, but I don’t sew,” she says. “When you put a couple hundred hours into a rug, you want it finished beautifully. Ann’s work is exquisite, and she’ll go the extra mile for her customers.”

As part of her service, French can pick out the binding materials for

your rug. She can finish it traditionally by turning the edge under and using binding tape on the back to cover the raw edges. Or she can whipstitch the edge — placing a cord or welt on the edge of

the rug, then whipping over it with wool or yarn. “If your rug is going to be used on the floor, this is my favorite. The whipstitching protects the edge, making it nice and sturdy so it won’t break down over the years,” she says. For people who prefer to hang up their rug, French can add a tunnel to the binding on the top of the rug to slide in a piece of molding. “It is a nice way to hang the rug. The weight is distributed evenly.”

The price is reasonable — \$15 an hour or \$16 per linear foot. French wanted to keep prices low so those unfinished projects would make it out of storage and on to the wall, floor or couch. “If you’ve found grandmother’s rug, you don’t need thousands of dollars to finish it,” she says.

French spends part of each day hooking her own projects or finishing someone else’s. Her three daughters all know how to hook, and her youngest,





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Annvitté, helps with customer projects if French gets behind. Her husband, John, who knows how to upholster chairs, has even helped with a unique project: upholstering the back of a chair for a lady who had hooked a scene of her house and garden. The final product was featured in a national rug hooking magazine.

It's not all binding edges. French sees a lot of repairs as well, such as antique rugs that have holes or edges that need to be fixed. "I've been in the antique business for over 30 years, and over the years I've had the opportunity to buy really nice rugs but never had anyone to repair them," says Judy Davis, an antique dealer in Franklin. "Ann does an exceptionally good job. One of the things you need to consider with antique rugs is keeping the integrity of the rug. She matches colors, uses traditional bindings, and does more than just a patch — it's a talented technical repair."

"I also get projects where mother or grandmother started a rug years ago, and a daughter has found it and wants it finished," French says. "I get so much enjoyment out of finishing a treasured thing for someone in the family. There's sentiment attached to fixing something very old that has been loved for many years and just needs some repairs."

WHO: Ann French

WHAT: Rugs Finally Finished

WHERE: 63 Andover Road, New London

WHY: Just say no to staples and nails that a traditional framer might use

HOW MUCH: \$15/hour for most projects

WEB: www.rugsfinallyfinished.com

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