

Stitch Pro

Jean Campbell

The Secret Ingredient to Firm and Protect Beadwork

Do you have floppy beadwork? Is your thread breaking from rough-holed beads fraying the thread? Then try this tip I learned from Diane Fitzgerald many years ago. It's a method for firming up beadwoven pieces with clear acrylic floor finish. (Yes, you read that right, *floor finish*!) The acrylic firms a piece, but it also works as a sealant, protecting the beads and thread. It's especially effective on pieces that have been woven using crystals.

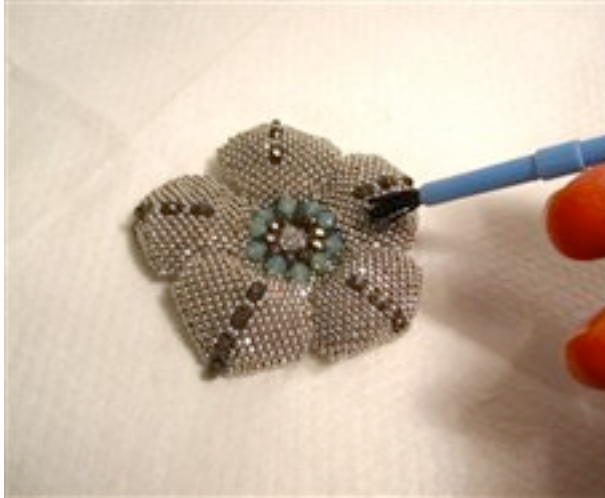
This is a great tip, and it won't break the bank. I bought a big bottle of the floor finish at my local grocery store (brand name is "Pledge with Future" clear acrylic floor finish) right after Diane told me about it, and the bottle is still 3/4 full. For the few dollars I spent, the finish has protected dozens of pieces. I haven't had any problem with discoloration or breakage over time, but I do have a couple of caveats: I'd recommend that you only do this technique on something that's already shiny. You can apply the finish to matte beads or pearls, but it will alter the look of the beads. I'd also not recommend this technique for use on crystals with an after-market finish because I've run into some problems with the after-market finish coming off. As with any technique like this, it's best to do a test on an inconspicuous place on your beadwork. Or, better yet, apply the finish to some loose beads that match the ones you used in your piece. Let me show you how the technique is done as I firm up a floppy beadwoven flower:



1) See how this beadwoven flower is a bit limp? The petals are all over the place. After all that work I did, I want them to sit up and look pretty! I also want the thread I used to stitch those bicones at the center to be protected. When I apply the acrylic, those threads will have a sleeve, buffering it from the rough bead holes.



2) To prepare, first layer paper towels on a tray (I've used an old pie tin here), then lay the beadwork on top of the paper towels. I'd recommend working in a dry place with lots of ventilation. The floor polish doesn't smell bad, but if you work this way, the piece will dry quickly, allowing you to shape the piece as it dries.



3) Next, use a paintbrush to apply the floor finish to the beadwork. I use a cheapo plastic-bristle brush from a kid's watercolor set because it's easy to wash, and there's no chance of bristles getting caught in the beadwork as might happen with a horse-hair brush. I've found the best way to apply the finish is to dip the brush directly into the bottle and dab the finish on the beadwork.



4) Once the front of the beadwork is dry to the touch, flip it over and apply the finish to the back. Getting the back is just as important as the front! Once the beadwork is dry to the touch, use your fingers to gently shape the beadwork into the form you desire. The beadwork won't be stiff, but it will hold its shape. Depending on the type of beadwork you're working with (especially sculptural or crystal-encrusted pieces), it's not a bad idea to do another coat or two.

Ta-daa! My floppy flower has miraculously become perky. It still feels like beadwork, acts like beadwork, but it has a light support that makes it look much better.



Jean Campbell is senior editor of *Beadwork* magazine and a jewelry-design artist and teacher. She is the author of several beading books and appears as "Stitch Pro" on the most recent season of *Beads, Baubles, and Jewels*. Visit her at www.jeancampbellink.blogspot.com.