

Quilting -- It's All About Color

by Susanna Stewart

Color is what it is all about for me. Right now I am enjoying looking out the window and seeing splashes of bright yellow from the forsythias, dotted here and there by batches of daffodils and narcissi. Then there is the wonderful purple of the redbuds behind them. The love of using my hands to make things has translated over the years to gardening, stained glass creations, ceramic tile, photography, carpentry, and quilting. There was a time when I was engaged in all these efforts, but my focus in recent years has been chiefly on creating things out of fabric. To my great delight and astonishment, the fabric designers have in the last couple of decades gone wild with printing cotton with vibrantly colorful flowers. I found my niche: Flowers and fabric.

I learned to sew as a child, and went through years of making clothes for myself that never seemed to turn out quite right. Yet I always had a passion for the bright prints and colors and had quite a stash of fabric even before I made my first real quilt about 20 years ago. I was in a local fabric store wondering about making a quilt for my newly arrived twin granddaughters when I fell in love with a quilt hanging on the wall in the shop. One of the fabrics had sweet little bluebirds in it. I was captured, and have been ever since. I took a class and off I went.

Currently I find myself drawn mostly to bed quilts or throws, yet I am peripherally attracted to other kinds of fabric art. Perhaps one day I will get there, but for now I have dozens (hundreds?) of quilting projects in my head. Sometimes I have three going at one time. I am fortunate enough to have adequate space and light (windows on two sides of my studio) so I can spread out. Once I have designed and patched the quilts together and made the backing, I hire someone else to quilt them together. I am not drawn to that part of the process and there are people in my area who have fancy expensive equipment that make the job uncomplicated for me.

The prices of the quilts vary. I factor in the cost of fabric, which generally runs about \$12/yard. The cost of having them quilted is mostly priced by the square inch and can run as much as \$250 for the bigger quilts. Baby quilts are of course less. Some quilts may involve a

lot of “fussy” cutting, which means cutting out a particular design or flower from a piece of fabric; this is very time consuming but is very pleasing to create. Some quilts involve more piecing than others, which runs up the hours as well. But, as for factoring in my time, well, it probably comes out to about \$1.00 per hour, if that.

Marketing is a difficult aspect of making quilts. Some of my bigger ones are 9 feet x 9 feet. Displaying a quilt this size presents many challenges. Most of mine have been hanging in the gallery in my home, where hardly anyone sees them except during the Chatham County Studio Arts Tour. Recently, however, I was asked by a librarian who works at the Health Science Library at UNC if I would like to decorate their big empty walls with my quilts. As the library has six loors, there are many blank walls, many of which are equipped with tracks that make hanging them easy. You can only imagine my delight in this offer, and I am very grateful to Karen Crowell for this opportunity. You can see them there, located in the basement floor, and the first, second, and fifth floor. I also have four smaller wall hangings at the Galloway Ridge Artist Collaboration show, two of which are hanging in the Duke Fitness Center. You can also view all my creations on my web site at www.quartzhillquilts.com

There is a saying among quilters: she who dies with the most fabric wins. I know I am one of the top runners, although I am not dead yet! I am disinclined toward quilts that are mostly brown or dark red with a lot of brown in it, or that use old dull scraps that have been around forever. I always figured if you are going to go to all that trouble to make a quilt, why not fill it with a brightness of color that captures the mind’s eye? Aside from my own quilts, and those I make for family and friends, I am willing to take on commissions providing I love the fabric and design. The details can be worked out by phone or visits to my studio and to fabric shops.

People always ask me how long it took me to make a given quilt. Some of them I can crank out in a couple of weeks. Others have taken me years to finish. It just depends. One quilt took me a whole year just to pick out the fabric. You can see the results of that one hanging on the fifth floor of the HS library. To blend the colors and fabric takes me to a deep and quiet place, and my hope is that people who end up with them will find some of that for themselves.