

The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for Online Quilters

Issue 11 • October, 1996



Mental Swimming Pool

Amanda Sherwin made this quilt to help relieve stress at work. Learn about the way her quilts reflect her life and about her part in the birth of America Online's Quilting Forum in this month's [Quilter Profile](#).

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GEOMETRIC PATCHWORK



RENEWING ITS VIABILITY AS ART

In a time of great experimentation with quilts, when a lot of cloth is being hand-painted, hand-dyed, and assembled by applique and other non-linear methods, I wonder about the status of straightforward patchwork: triangles and rectangles of commercial fabric neatly sewn together. Does the visible geometry of such patchwork — the fact that it could seemingly be done by any pa-

social groups, with people who don't function as mainstream arbiters of artistic taste. The art historian [Oleg Grabar](#) made some blunt observations on this in a lecture he gave at the [National Gallery of Art](#) (available in his book *The Mediation of Ornament*, see p.129). After making a survey of non-Islamic ornament, Grabar concluded that “. . . the areas and times that most consistently exhibit geometric ornament are at the periphery of major cultural centers or at the edges of dominating social classes.” He went on to speculate that “. . . geometry was the privilege of the illiterate, the remote, the popularly pious, the women using (and/or making) textiles and ceramics.” Grabar also noted that [M. C. Escher](#), a graphic artist famous for his geometric work who falls into none of these underprivileged categories, is nonetheless “an orphan within the pantheon of contemporary painters and draftsmen.”



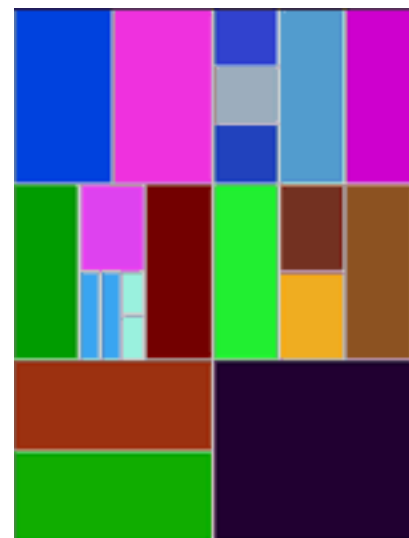
Geometric art, which looks deceptively simple, challenges common expectations of art.

tient needleworker willing to follow directions — make it somehow less viable as art? If not, if such patchwork can indeed be serious art fit to take a place alongside great painting and sculpture, where does its artistic essence reside — in the pattern, in the choice of fabrics, in the labors of the fabric designers, or in the hours of stitching that put everything together?

These questions are not new. Geometric art, which looks deceptively simple, challenges common expectations of art. Its straight lines conceal the mark of the maker's hand, and its orderly arrangement of parts discourages last-minute creative revision. In an era that prizes individuality and the frenzy of artistic inspiration, geometric work can come across as too impersonal, too well-crafted, and too deliberate.

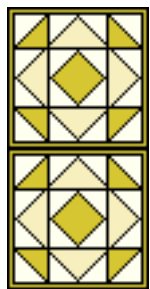
It's also true that except in the [Islamic world geometric art forms](#) (patchwork and basketry, for example) have been associated with relatively underprivileged

While some twentieth-century abstract painters have worked with hard-edged geometric shapes — notably the [Russian constructivists](#), [Mondrian](#), and American op and minimal artists of the 1960s — they've generally used these shapes as major elements in a painting rather than as subordinate units in an overall decorative pattern. There have been many acclaimed painters of rectangles and triangles, but few concerned with geometric design of the sort that has evolved in patchwork quilts. Escher is indeed an orphan among modern artists in his love of complex ornamental geometry. Given the marginal situation of geometric art, it's



hardly surprising that people pushing for acceptance of quilts as art sometimes play down the geometric aspect of patchwork. Penny McMorris, for example, in introducing [Nancy Crow's](#) new book **Improvisational Quilts**, proclaims that “Nancy Crow works now like a great jazz musician.” And Dorothy Joiner, reviewing a show of Yvonne Porcella’s quilts for [Surface Design Journal](#), compares her work to the celebrated painting by Mondrian known as [Broadway Boogie Woogie](#). Linking quilt-making with jazz — with free-form, urban music performed mostly by men — is a tempting way to upgrade the status of a geometric and traditionally rural, feminine, textile-based art form. But I question whether the analogy holds and whether the constrained, geometric nature of patchwork may not, in fact, be a positive feature, a source of artistic power.

As far as I know, Eli Leon was the first writer to



Patchwork, like any art, involves choice and the risk of failure. But it's not quite the same as improvisational jazz.

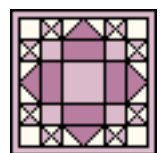
compare patchwork with jazz. He studied [African textiles](#) and music and found a possible common source in African aesthetic traditions for both jazz and certain kinds of African-American quilt-making. He also speculated on the origin of the geometric quilt block patterns adopted by white American women and on how these might have evolved from less rigid African-American prototypes. While Leon is clearly a man with an agenda — giving credit to the African roots of certain American art forms — he approaches his subject in a scholarly way and avoids any too-direct comparison between quilt-making and improvisation during a live performance. After all, the quilt-maker can rip out stitches or refrain from using a certain patch or block in the first place; the musician performing live can't take back a note that's already been played. Patchwork, like any art, involves choice and the risk of failure. But it's not quite the same as improvisational jazz.

Nancy Crow, in the foreword to her **Improvisa-**

tional Quilts, writes about the “frankly obsessive, unrelenting and too time-consuming” techniques of traditional quilt-making and about her need to work in a more spontaneous way so as to produce compositions that “dance with a magic freshness.” But her latest quilts reveal only a limited rebellion against premeditation and geometry. She now dyes her own fabric and cuts patches without templates, thus eliminating the machined look of roller-printed goods and the regularity of multiple identical patches. On the other hand, the very act of assembling an inventory of pre-dyed cloth for use in a given series imposes certain design constraints. As does the sewing process itself. Since Crow needs to work efficiently, she uses rectangles and assembles them by strip-piecing and log-cabin techniques. The resulting work is both free and unfree, both reflective of her individual moments of inspiration and subject to predetermined rules of construction.

I don't see the lack of freedom in Crow's quilts or in patchwork generally as needing any apology. An intractable medium (e.g., cloth with seams tend to be straight), can sometimes inspire better work than a very adaptable medium like paint. [Anni Albers](#), the weaver and printmaker who taught at the Bauhaus, had much to say in favor of “material that demands circumvention and invention.” She thought the advent of commercial tube paint had made life too easy for slovenly painters and that they'd lost a useful discipline when they ceased grinding and mixing their own colors. I'm not sure I'd go that far, but I do admire the way Albers turned to aesthetic advantage the restrictions imposed by industrial weaving processes and the way her graphic work exploits straight lines and geometry.

So if geometric art needn't apologize for its limitations, if it has such distinguished defenders as Anni Albers, why do so many artists making quilts today avoid patchwork altogether or assemble patches in a seemingly random way that minimizes geometric patterning? I can think of at least two reasons. First, as quilts have gained recognition as a valid art form, they may have attracted artists interested more in color, texture, and non-geometric imagery than in qualities specific to patchwork. Second, after two decades or so of intensive exploitation of the design possibilities inherent in traditional quilt blocks, a sense of *deja vu* and weariness may have set in.



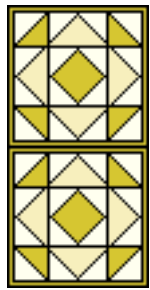
While quilt-maker [Ruth McDowell](#) has written

about underutilized kinds of geometric patterning (about the seventeen mathematical symmetry groups beloved by crystallographers), her work has not so far sparked a major new movement of geometric design in quilts. In fact, as mathematician Doris Schattschneider points out in her book ([Visions of Symmetry](#)) on M. C. Escher, those seventeen symmetry groups don't necessarily represent the only way or the most artistically productive

plan the pattern and select and assemble the fabric, others to color or decorate the fabric in the first place, and, often, still another to do the actual quilting, may come to involve whole teams of unseen artists.

Given the modular way that software gets built today, I can readily imagine a team of software designers consulting with artists to produce a pattern-generating engine, which might in turn get licensed to other software developers for use in a quilt-design program shaped by still other artists. How could such a program's ultimate user lay claim to any pattern generated? Maybe in the same way quilt-makers have traditionally laid claim to a pattern: by tinkering with it slightly and then spending hours and hours applying it to scraps of old cloth that hold personal memories.

I don't think that geometric patchwork is dead, even if artist-quilters are at the moment moving more toward fabric embellishment and free-form construction. I just think it's hard for an art form that's already somewhat marginal, due to the peculiar position of geometric work within the world of art, to find its way in a time of technological change. Commercial fabrics have changed, and so have rag-saving habits since the early days of quilt-making. Meanwhile, television and computers, not to mention various art movements, have changed the way we see pattern. Light-and-dark log-cabin designs that were dazzling a few generations ago when implemented in 500 shades of faded cotton, may look less impressive today made up in a smaller selection of new cloth. To maintain its power as art geometric patchwork may need to explore new designs, make more use of computers, and possibly even return to its humble, recycling roots. I can imagine this kind of quilt-making becoming still more collaborative, but not fading away.



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way to approach problems of two-dimensional design. The concerns of crystallographers, mathematicians, and artists overlap, but don't always coincide.

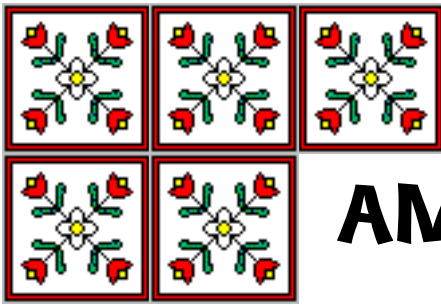
While I believe there are vast and thrilling design possibilities as yet unexplored in geometric patchwork, I think the surface of this field is already well picked over. Going deeper may require the use of computers, which can be programmed to generate random patchwork designs and then reprogrammed, through feedback from artists, to generate more interesting designs. Exciting and disquieting opportunities may arise for collaboration between machines and artists. Quilts that are already a collaborative effort, involving one person to



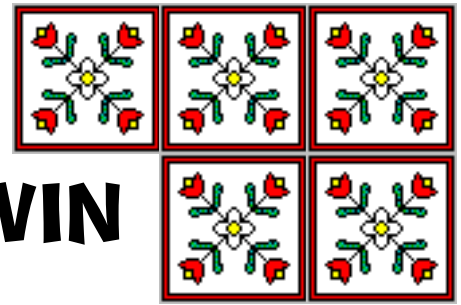
THREAD AND THIMBLE STASH BUILDER'S SPECIAL!

Get ready for Christmas with this collection of green fabric from Benartex. 10 fat quarters of different moss green prints including 3 that are designed by St. Nicole and have a Christmas feel to them. \$12.25 plus \$3 shipping (\$15.25 total).

View the fabric at my web site: <http://www.az.com/~karenm/thread.htm> or e-mail karenm@az.com for more information.



Quilter Profile



AMANDA SHERWIN

Amanda Sherwin’s quilting roots go deep into the midwestern farm life of her ancestors in Missouri and Illinois. Now an easterner by choice, and [America Online](#) Quilt Forum co-leader by happenstance, Amanda is also at the forefront of quilting’s newest frontier in

part of life on the Illinois and Missouri farms where my ancestors lived. One of my prized possessions is a quilt my Grandfather Steward made when he was 12, in 1900. My mom used it as a doll quilt, so it is worn and faded, but you can still see the ninepatch pattern and quilting stitches.



Amanda Sherwin (right) with Micki Mello, one of her partners in the AOL Quilting Forum effort.

“My first quilt when I began again was for my parents’ 50th wedding anniversary. After beginning a very complicated birds and trees top, I switched direction and decided to make a heritage quilt. Although the pattern was a very simple 12" block with straight sashing and four-patch corners, the quilting incorporated hand outlines from each of my parents’ children and grandchildren. One of my brothers used his then two-year-old son to get Mom and Dad’s hands too. In the border are quilted symbols of my parents’ life and interests: camera, book, their church, club logos, caduceus for my doctor dad, etc. Even though I had no idea what I was getting into, the quilt was fully hand quilted and finished two weeks before the date :-D”

Amanda says her own quilt design style is a bold

cyberspace.

About her quilting origins, Amanda says, “My Great-Great-Aunt Massie (Catherine Massa Farmer) died in the late 1930’s. Somehow her unfinished quilt blocks wound up in my grandparents’ house, and my mom and I found them in the 1970s. We each pieced a number of quilts together - 9 in total- which were then quilted by a local church guild, and given to all Aunt Massie’s female descendents. (I kept the Old Maid’s Puzzle pattern, which is on my bed.) That inspired me to take a quilting class, and I am using the pillow made in that class (1978) as a back brace. But at that point my interests were more crocheting and knitting, so I stopped quilting. I got to the point in knitting when I was designing my own patterns, but most of them were traditional quilt patterns, such as the Carolina Lily. I finally realized what I was doing and switched <g>.

“Although Aunt Massie was the only documented female quilter in our family, quilting must have been a



Amanda’s Celestial Pond quilt.

one: "I like to make quilts that are visually exciting, that show movement, have strong colors and contrasts. Most of the designs are traditional patterns which have been updated, such as Fish and Frogs, fast double wedding ring (my current project), etc. Most say something about my life at that time. For example, I have a wall hanging made during a period of stress at work. 'Celestial Pond' is full of fish, frogs and flowers, bordered with star fabric. I hung it in my office so that whenever things got too hot, I could jump in my pond and cool off for a few minutes. It works!

"Much of my work has been gifts for others — [quillows](#), baby quilts. With all my past crafts, I realized that no one could ever recognize or appreciate the work I put into a gift, no matter how grateful they were. So when I make quilts for people, I try to create something that will have meaning to them, and that will be a challenge for me. That way, each gift is a gift of learning to myself, as well as something special for someone else."



"Talk about quilter's heritage - this is the quilt my Grandfather Charles Steward made when he was 12, in 1900. It's a simple nine patch, frayed and faded by my mother's use as a doll quilt. But I love it."



"My father always wears bowties, and I've made quite a few for him over the years. This computer cover illustrates some of the things I love about him. There's the Dapper Dad bowtie (plaid), the Handyman and Camper bowtie (fish); the Travellin' man bowtie (he took our seven-member family on many trips on Route 66), and the Surgeon on his rounds bowtie (he often took me along). The (not TOO square) corners show violins for all the times he serenaded us and made us dance."

Amanda says computers have both helped and hindered in her quilting life, though she doesn't appear to have any inclination to give them up: "One of the first ways computers enhanced my quilting was in the project for my parents. I was able to use computer clip art, such as a camera, print it out, and simplify it into a quilting pattern. I have just broken down and purchased a computer quilting program, including [BlockBase](#), which is terrific. Early on, I subscribed to all the quilt maillists I could find. But as I've become more involved with the AOL forum, there just hasn't been time to keep up with the other groups.

"The volume of email that has to be answered is one way that computers have **not** enhanced my quilting life, but instead cut into it. Overall, though, the greatest benefit I've found from going online has been the many friends and acquaintances gained. What I love about the Quilt Forum, as well as other hobby groups I belong to, is the sense of community and sharing. It's been my privilege to meet some of these friends in 'real' life, too. Those meetings were special because we clearly knew each other; we weren't strangers at all. For someone like me, who's always been a little shy, meeting people online helps get over that slightly awkward stage."

Like many who begin online life innocently enough, Amanda found herself slowly being drawn

deeper into the workings of the Quilting Forum. “I started on AOL when quilting was just a topic on the sewing area message board, and you had to go five levels down to find it. No wonder there were fewer than 200 quilters then; many of them had been online for several years. There was a wonderful camaraderie as we swapped ideas and fabric, and dreamed of having our own forum.”

The development of the forum from an AOL afterthought into a full-blown presence on the world’s largest online service, was a long process with many fits and starts. Amanda is quick to point out that the forum has always had two leaders, with Betsy Brazy and Micki Mello working closely with her to bring it to full fruition. She credits many others as well:

“Getting the forum was purely a group effort: Nancy Rosenblum started hosting superchats, Cathy Bauer started hosting regular chats and keeping counts till we got a time in the Hobby Shop, Linda Breshears and Mary Ann Harpe made several proposals to AOL, and many others participated in keeping the dream alive.

During a message board brainstorming, we came up with the idea of making a quilt to celebrate AOL’s 10th anniversary ([see TVQ #1 for the story behind this quilt](#)). I volunteered to contact their PR department, and by default became the contact to AOL. (It taught me that there are times when e-mail is not enough.) Betsy and I took the proposal Linda and Mary Ann had sent before, adapted it, and the third try was the charm.

“We became a forum on December 15, 1994, with a message board and library. The keyword allowed quilters to pour in. Micki and Cathy started a newsletter, the NinePatch News, and subscriptions soared from 200 to 2400 by April, 1995. We obtained a chat room in March, 1995, due largely to Cathy’s consistent chat reports which showed strong attendance.

“In AOL’s view at that time, volunteer hosts provided technical services: managing the message boards, virus checking library files before release, maintaining contact with AOL. Only a few forums, such as ours, had a strong sense of community, requiring leadership beyond technical expertise. In talking with other forum leaders, most have achieved leadership the same way we did: by volunteering to do one thing, which led to something else, which evolved into something bigger than we ever imagined.



“This quilt, ‘Autumn Fencerails,’ began as an AOL autumn colors swap. Only, I liked my fabrics so much I dropped out of the swap and made this instead. Machine pieced and appliqued, machine quilted with long swoops and hand quilted with swirls and circles to show the winds of Autumn.”

“AOL is now more organized in its training and development of Forum leaders, primarily in reaction to the paid areas. But when Betsy and I started, there was no template, no training. We learned through our mistakes, as did everyone else. Much of our focus was on keeping pace with the area’s growth, responding to the needs of the new and old cyberquilters, and justifying our continued existence to AOL, to ensure we could continue to get more space and resources.

“Overlaid on this was the effort to maintain that sense of community and camaraderie, to respond to the membership, and to create ‘a cozy place for all quilters’, as Betsy put it. Any group growing at that rate has internal struggles, and we had our share. I think the most difficult challenge for a forum leader, particularly in

AOL's environment, is to provide space for the huge diversity of cybercitizens.

"The Quilt Forum debuted a new look and new areas in July of this year. The Forum staff actually began planning the area last October, and 'construction' began in November. Micki and I both trained to learn AOL's programming software, so that we could build each area.

"The new Forum is soooo much better: we have three message boards, devoted to Quilting Fun, Serious Quilting and Not Just Quilts. We have an online exhibit of quilts, and a separate area for each member's work. There are reference areas to help enhance the online experience, and links to quilt-related websites, including the newly remodeled Planet Patchwork.

"For me, the pleasure of being a forum leader lies in the fact that quilters all over the country can meet to share ideas, information, pictures, and have a flexible space that evolves to meet new needs. I enjoy the technical side of planning a new space, building it, adding to it. And I love meeting quilters from all over the country and world, getting to know them, seeing what they do.

"We now have nearly 4,000 quilters in the Forum, counted by active subscriptions to the NinePatch News. This gives us several challenges for the future. One has been, and continues to be, content. There's so much in-

formation about quilting available, and Micki and I are trying to bring it online."

Asked about her family life, Amanda says, "My DH, Bobby, is 24 years older than I. We met when his

oldest son and I worked together at an advertising agency. We've now been married for 13 years, and have 9 grandchildren through his three grown sons. (The sons call me the [Wicked Stepmother](#), the grandchildren call me Grandamanda.) We have two basset hounds, Mr. Peabody and Cera, who are very dear, spoiled kids, as well as three cats.

"I recently left my job in Connecticut and we are moving to our vacation home in Southampton, New York. I grew up in St. Louis, but have lived on the East Coast for 20+ years and absolutely love it here, particularly the seashore. In addition to quilting, my hobbies are gardening, collecting matchsafes and early lighting (candles, lamps), and doing [cross-word puzzles](#)."

Amanda's devotion to the quilting community at America Online over the last several years shows in the increasing stature that quilters on the service enjoy and the sense of fellowship which still prevails despite the explosive growth of AOL and the Quilt Forum. Quilters on AOL are a long way from their original place there, "five levels down."



"This was made for a co-worker who adopted a baby girl from China. I wanted to express the excitement and the high hopes we had for them. The balloon fabric was given to me by a daughter-in-law - it was torn and in odd shaped pieces, but had just the right feeling. The design just built itself around the balloons. Machine pieced and quilted."

PLANET PATCHWORK 
<http://planetpatchwork.com>



QUILTING GIZMOS!

PRODUCT REVIEWS BY ADDY HARKAVY

I'm exposed to a great many new products, and I usually start out skeptical. Following are reviews of two new inventions which, despite my initial doubts, have won a place in my sewing room, and in the Pinetree Quiltworks catalogue!

TEXAS TURNTABLE

Retail \$24.95

"The Texas Turntable," which its manufacturer subtitled "The Quilter's Friend" didn't strike me as a gadget I couldn't live without, but I decided to test it anyway.

Description: As its package claims, it's a 9" round turntable — a lazy Susan — topped by a self-healing ungridded cutting mat.

Stability: After pushing down on it at various off-center spots and after making tiny cuts with a rotary ruler and cutter, I had to conclude that the thing is remarkably stable, a must when using any instrument as potentially dangerous as a rotary cutter.

The test: A real test of its usefulness quickly presented itself. In a moment of reckless abandon, I told a friend I'd make her two tiny pineapple log cabin blocks on muslin foundations she would provide. This seemed like a good test because each time four strips are sewn on, one must fold the back and trim the new pieces to 1/8" beyond the next sewing lines. I did the first couple on 6" x 8" rotary mat with a 28mm cutter and 4" square ruler, turning the mat for each successive cut. Then I did the next round on the Texas Turntable. I liked it so much that I did the one after that, and the one after that, and the one after ...

Could I live without it? Definitely! On the other hand, it came in really handy on those tiny pineapple log cabins, and I know I'll find other uses for it, such as trimming up small blocks and pieces.

In short, The Texas Turntable seems really useful for miniatures or for any piece that requires much turning and cutting between sewing steps.

The Texas Turntable is available from Keepsake Quilting and PineTree Quiltworks.

A WONDERFUL ALTERNATIVE TO THE DOUBLE NEEDLE THREADER

To say that it looked like a child's toy is a vast understatement, but after trying it, I had to agree that it might be the answer to many a quilting prayer.

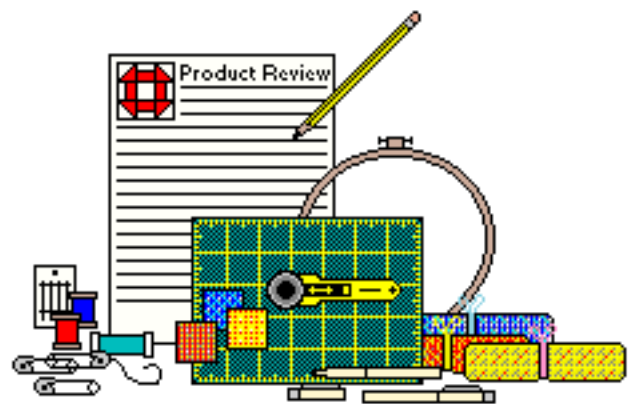
My first thought was, "If Rube Golberg were to design a needle threader, he'd begin here." And when I heard that the Amish quilters use it, I **had** to try it for myself.

Advantages:

1. You don't even have to be able to see the eye of the needle
2. You don't need sufficient coordination to thread a needle threader

Disadvantages:

This wonderful gizmo does not thread Piecemaker and JJames size 12s at all (pin is too large) and though it threads other 12's after a few tries, I think its use for size 12 needles is marginal at best. I wouldn't use it on any between (quilting) needle smaller than a size 10.



Description:

The gizmo is a red box that stands vertically and slides into a white stand. There's a little spindle to hold the spool of thread. A white tower comes from the red box, kind of like the cooling tower in a nuclear plant,

and a white “pedal” (the kind rats in experiments have to push) extends from the narrow side of the box. OK, it looks pretty peculiar.

How to use it:

You put the needle into the “tower” eye end down, lay the thread across a little gulf, and push the white lever gently. Sometimes it takes a few pushes to turn the needle so that a little wire (propelled by the white lever, I assume) catches the thread and pushes it through the needle’s eye. Anyway, a loop of thread comes out, you grab it and pull. When the end of the thread’s out, you lift the needle, cut the other end, and there’s a threaded needle.

My reaction:

I couldn’t stop giggling when I first tried it, had to

have one, and felt like a kid in showing the gadget to anyone (nonquilters included) who’d indulge me.

Compared to Clover Double Needle Threader:

Now, I dearly love my old double needle theader with the wires, but it still presupposes that I can a.) see the needle eye to get the wire through and b.) have the coordination to do this and then to thread the wire.

Who makes it; price:

Distributed by Collins (their #82), made in Germany, retail price \$3.00.

ADDY HARKAVY lives in Maine where she co-owns [Pinetree Quiltworks](http://PinetreeQuiltworks.com) and manages the film career of her Irish Wolfhound. Addy can be reached at aardvark@ime.net.



Land on the third quilt from the sun with a

Planet Patchwork T-Shirt!

If you want to be the first in your quilt guild to sport a Planet Patchwork t-shirt like that shown at right, you can order one now for our special introductory price of \$15, including postage.

These high-quality, all cotton tees (Hanes Beefy-Ts) feature the distinctive Planet Patchwork quilted earth logo in full color on the front, along with the Planet Patchwork URL.

For more information on ordering, surf to:

<http://planetpatchwork.com/tshirt.htm>



AVAILABLE NOW AT A [WEB SITE](#) NEAR YOU.

FT. WAYNE TO HOST QUILTING SHOW.

The Tri-State Quilting & Sewing Show will be held October 25, 26, 27 at Memorial Coliseum in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

The show will include presentations by many top quilting and sewing teachers, including: Clotilde on "Fashion Sewing," Carolyn Schmidt on "Tessellations," Linda Allard on "Christmas Tree Skirting," Bev Gunn on "3D Quilting," Trudie Hughes on "How To Eat An Elephant," Judy Glover on "Wonderful World of Paper Piecing," and Ami Simms on "Creating Scrapbook Quilts" and "World's Worst Quilts." For more info check the show's web site at <http://www.fortwayne.com/fws> and go to page 2 of The Fall Home Shows or E-Mail Ernie Kerns: erniek@iquest.net



FEEDSACK CLUB OFFERS NEWS AND INFORMATION TO MEMBERS.

TVQ recently received e-mail from Jane Clark Stapel, the founder of the Feedsack Club, who enthusiastically offered us the following information about the club's activities:

"THE FEEDSACK CLUB was formed in 1988 and started out with 5 or 6 ladies who wanted to trade, buy, or sell feedsacks in different sizes. . . . As they began to ask questions about feedsacks — when were they first manufactured? Where? By whom? For what reason? Who designed them? — it became too complicated and costly for me to answer each singly, hence the newsletter began.

"We now total 600+, we are international, and we exhibit and display for museums, universities, historical sites, quilt guilds/seminars, and hold a convention yearly at Lancaster, Pa in April.

"Membership is \$12.00 annually for a bi-monthly newsletter and master membership list. Write to THE FEEDSACK CLUB at 25 S STARR AVE #16, PITTSBURGH, PA 15202."

"WORST QUILT" HONOR MOVES FROM ATLANTA TO NASHVILLE.

Southerners continued their stranglehold on the coveted "Worst Quilt in the World" honor as the 1996 award was won by an anonymous Nashville, TN quilter.

A photo of the winning quilt, "Penrose Folly," described by contest founder Ami Simms as "totally pathetic," is displayed at the World Wide Quilting Page. Follow the links from the front page, if you dare. A somewhat baggy portrait of the quilter is also available for all to see and cheer. More than 20 other quilters won "Abominable Mention" or "Special Recognition" awards and shared in a total of more than \$6,000 in prizes donated by corporate sponsors.

TVQ OFFERS NEW SERVICES TO COMPUTING QUILTERS.

Since the last newsletter you received in August, The Virtual Quilt Company has completely revamped our website and reopened it as Planet Patchwork. If you haven't swung by for a look, it's at <http://planetpatchwork.com>, and contains all the best of the Virtual Quilt Page plus many new features. You can even be the envy of your quilt guild by sporting a Planet Patchwork t-shirt!

TVQ has also opened a new internet maillist called Quiltopia. It's designed for the discussion of issues relating to quilting and computers, and is open and free to all who wish to subscribe. It's available in both regular and digest formats. To find out more and to subscribe, point your browser to <http://planetpatchwork.com/quiltop.htm>

Finally, this newsletter is now available in an additional form, besides the plain text and web-based versions. Subscribers can now download TVQ in an Adobe Acrobat format which has the look and feel of a magazine, and even has hypertext links. The Adobe version contains photos and graphics not possible in the e-mail version. If you'd like to learn more, go to <http://planetpatchwork.com/tvqpdf.htm> and learn how to download and view the "new" TVQ. Acrobat TVQs will typically be available about a week after the plain text version.





MULTIMEDIA
REVIEW

VIDEO QUILTING WITH JUDITH MONTANO

“Crazy Quilting” and “Silk Ribbon Embroidery”

By Judith Baker Montano

C&T Publishing

Length: 60 minutes

Price: \$19.95 each

<http://www.ctpub.com/homepages/multiMedia.html#jmvideo>



Anybody who has ever watched any sewing or quilting shows on [public television](#) knows, well, knows why they are on public television!

Whether it be Georgia Bonesteel, Shar Jorgenson, Nancy and her Notions, or “wild and crazy” Eleanor Burns, these shows lack much theatrical sense or even decent film editing and are, in a word, boring. It is only our interest in the subject matter, and the techniques being presented, that keep us doggedly glued to the screen. And sometimes even that isn’t enough.

At the risk of being accused of having no attention span, I submit that quilting on television has no more right to bore us to death than anything else. We wouldn’t accept such treatment from drama or situation comedy, or even sports (well, maybe golf), so why should we accept it from quilters?

It was with this admittedly surly attitude that I approached the two videos recently released by Judith Baker Montano through C&T Publishing, [“Crazy Quilting”](#) and [“Silk Ribbon Embroidery.”](#) I was hoping that these new videos would show me something quilting TV never has — some style and grace of presentation.

I’m afraid I was disappointed.

Ms. Montano is quite accomplished in her sewing skills, but she is as stiff as a darning needle when she stands or sits before a camera. She does a credible job of maintaining a patter and describing the details of the technique she is demonstrating, and she has a subtle sense of humor, but her flat presentation and sometimes strained enthusiasm aren’t exactly riveting.

I understand perfectly well that Judy Montano is neither a born nor a trained actor, and I don’t fault her

for not being [Katherine Hepburn](#). Although I do think a little training (and better directing) could help.

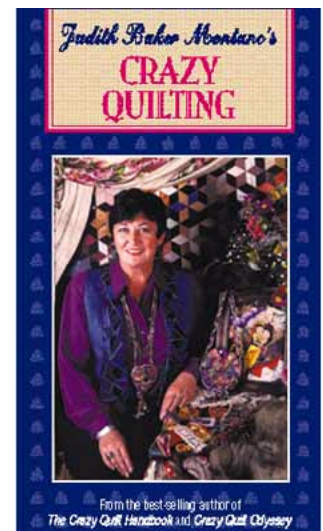
I have less patience with the film’s producers, however, in their heavy-handed approach. This kind of material, admittedly static and difficult to present, demands MORE sensitivity, not less, than your average film. Instead the folks who produced these videos seem to have capitulated to their material and their attempts to give the viewer variety are at best reluctant and studied. There are no interesting camera angles or special effects, and the pace is deadening. The camera people know little but zoom and pan, and most of the time the camera does nothing at all except stand there dumbly.

O.K., so we don’t watch these videos to be entertained. We watch them to **LEARN**, right?

On this score I have to give them high marks. Clearly Ms. Montano knows her material, and presents it in a logical way, with the steps clearly defined and demonstrated onscreen.

In the “Crazy Quilting” video, she begins with a brief history of the origins of crazy quilting, stating it was the first commercial sewing craze to sweep the U.S., following an international exposition. She then walks us carefully through the various aspects of crazy quilting, including the basic design, piecing, and embellishment. She explains the peculiar effect of crazy quilt piecing, created by irregularly-shaped patches, and demonstrates with a small sample how to piece and trim to maintain that irregularity.

One of her most interesting digressions is a quick lesson in color, the types of colors that best go together, and the different effects you can achieve with pastels,



jewel tones, and other variants of the spectrum. It is from their use of color as much as their unconventional geometry that crazy quilts get their distinctive look.



The advantage of video over the printed page, of course, is that it is closer to classroom teaching, where technique can be fully demonstrated instead of just diagrammed.



These videos are perhaps most useful in their careful teaching of specific stitching techniques. "Crazy Quilting" teaches a number of fancy large applique stitches, with good close-up work and explanations from

Ms. Montano. She is obviously very experienced and a competent and caring teacher.

There is more of this kind of detailed teaching in the "Silk Ribbon Embroidery" tape, where she systematically builds a small brooch, demonstrating the construction of each flower as she goes. She also shows a variety of ways in which silk ribbon embroidery can be incorporated into other types of needlework.

The advantage of video over the printed page, of course, is that it is closer to classroom teaching, where technique can be fully demonstrated instead of just diagrammed. These tapes would both be great additions to a guild library or to your personal collection, even if they **weren't** produced by [Steven Spielberg](#). They provide as much detailed information as a beginning class, and of course you can go back to them for a refresher whenever you want to fire up your VCR.



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BOOK REVIEWS

Computer Quilting, Binding, & Stripes

Computer Quilting Made Easy Series

By Sharla R. Hicks

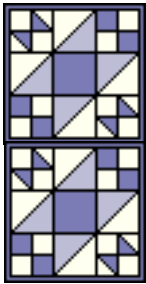
Soft Expressions

\$9.95



In connection with teaching about computers and quilting, Sharla Hicks has tackled a problem which faces anyone trying to familiarize novice and often intimidated students with the intricacies of a quilt design program. Frustrated by lengthy manuals and instructions which are not sufficiently detailed for beginners, Ms. Hicks has set out to produce what she calls “short, illustrated tours” of the major quilt design programs, including [Electric Quilt](#), [Quilt Pro](#), [VQuilt](#), and [QuiltSoft](#). These spiral-bound, 8-1/2 by 11-inch black and white manuals are designed to be at once quick and THOROUGH introductions to the programs.

The strategy is a very graphics-intensive series of



If I were a complete beginner at both computers and quilt design programs, as many quilters are, I would find such an intensive, hand-holding approach reassuring. I might also find it to be a bit overwhelming.

exercises to be used as the student sits in front of his or her monitor and learns the basics of block selection, coloring, patch or line manipulation, quilt layout, borders, drawing, printing, fabric selection, etc. The instructions and illustrations are **very** thorough — Ms. Hicks works hard not to leave out **any** steps, and to provide constant clarifications of procedures which might be misinterpreted. To do this she adopts a kind of shorthand at times in order to maximize the amount of information on each page.

If I were a complete beginner at both computers

and quilt design programs, as many quilters are, I would find such an intensive, hand-holding approach reassuring. I might also find it to be a bit overwhelming. To achieve her goal of thoroughness, Ms. Hicks places at least three detailed and annotated screenshots or illustrations on each page, with accompanying dense text laced with bold and italicized highlights. Unfortunately this has something of the opposite of its intended effect, providing so much information that it often makes the programs seem more complicated than they really are. After a little while, the pages become a gray blur; they could really benefit from a little bit of white space.

The other problem I have with this laborious approach to these programs is that it’s not much fun. In spite of Ms. Hicks’ admonishment that one should relax and have a good time, these exercises do very little to make the learning process anything other than work. The exercises in the software manuals do a better job at this, for the most part, than “Computer Quilting Made Easy.”

The best use of these manuals is probably as a quick reference guide. Nicely indexed and in a brief format, they are quite useful when you’ve forgotten how to do a certain procedure and need a quick refresher. At \$9.95, they are reasonably priced and make a useful adjunct to the software companies’ user guides.

A Fine Finish: New Bindings for Award-Winning Quilts

Cody Mazuran

That Patchwork Place, 56 pages

\$12.95



Review by Addy Harkavy

Though **A FINE FINISH** may not be the definitive reference on quilting bindings, it’s a handy reference that should be in any well-stocked quilting library. Cody Mazuran takes readers on an eye-opening tour that goes way beyond basic bindings.

After a brief introduction, Mazuran discusses the nature of fabric, demystifying grain line, touching on


value, color, and preparation of fabric for use. On the last topic, she plays my song loud and clear, emphasizing that quilters should wash and thoroughly rinse fabric to remove chemicals that may have been added during the manufacturing process. She also notes that reds, some dark greens, some blue-greens, and navy blue are most likely to run. In addition, Mazuran adds a really super trick for keeping quarter- and half-yard pieces from becoming tangled during washing. It's so simple anyone who doesn't do it will wonder why they didn't think of it themselves. Hint: it isn't clipping the corners of fabric, which never worked for me anyway.

One tip I will share, however, is that she is adamant that borders should be cut from lengthwise grain. Wonder where that leaves those of us who tend to make pieced borders? That notwithstanding, her advice is sound, and borders cut from lengthwise grain are more likely to yield a quilt or wall hanging that will hang flat and straight than one with borders cut from cross grain or bias.

Now the fun begins. Starting with borders with boxed corners and moving on to mitered corners, she moves ever outward to the bindings! Want to do sculptured and scalloped edges? Look no further. French bias binding's demystified, as are piping, framed-again bindings, prairie points, scallops, scalloped edges and more. Want to do on-the-edge ruching? Here it is. So are yo-yos, Victorian bindings, cottage quilt binding, lacy loops, and piping. Lest you wonder what these fine finishes look like, a full-color quilt gallery provides inspiration and motivation.

Mazuran feels strongly about documenting quilts, so she finishes with a brief section on doing just that, followed by a few patterns to get readers started.

And that's it. From start to finish. Here's to finer finishes for all our quilts!

Stripes in Quilts 
Mary Mashuta
C&T Publishing, 96 pages,
\$21.95

Review by Addy Harkavy

There's a lot more to stripes than meets the eye, and though this book talks only about stripes, it is really about design. The content can be generalized far beyond stripes.

My first flip-through of this book left me intrigued.

It was obvious that this book deserved some serious time. The first few pages won me over as Ms. Mashuta presents a compelling discussion of stripes in terms of what they are, their functions in quilts, how to assess them and more. She distinguishes between regular and irregular stripes, an important distinction in determining not only how to use a given piece of fabric, but in anticipating how it will look in a design. In discussing design, she emphasizes using negative and positive space and gives examples in the mosaic tile block, x blocks, grids, and continuous designs.

Mashuta uses color photographs, schematics, and block layouts to illustrate her points as she shows readers how to use stripes in expected and unexpected ways. Readers will learn to identify blocks that are good candidates for stripes, how to play with a block to use stripes to their fullest advantages, and how to overcome problems with stripes. Special cases in point include attic windows and stripes; beveled windows and stripes; and other stripe blocks such as the log cabin, sawtooth, basket, stars, jewel box, and one-shape designs.

Since stripes can be used throughout a quilt, Mashuta covers stripes in sashings, borders and bindings. In addition, she devotes a section to machine quilting stripe quilts; I found her comments applicable to hand quilting as well.

All in all, if you are open-minded about design and are interested in using stripes in new and different ways, this book is well worth a look-see.

[Addy Harkavy](#) lives in Maine where she co-owns [Pinetree Quiltworks](#) and manages the film career of her [Irish Wolfhound](#).



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ONLINE QUILTING COMMUNITIES

With the continuing growth of the Web and the ease and affordability of setting up websites, many online communities are supplementing their maillists or BBS-type forums with websites which feature their members and their work. This issue's Quilting on the Web will focus on several sites established and maintained by, or on behalf of, online quilting communities around the world. The TVQ rating system is based on a simple scale of one to five stars, with five being the best.

Judy Smith's Quilting, Needlearts, and Antiques page (<http://www.his.com/~judy/>) is a very nicely designed site by the host of the QuiltArt internet maillist. As its title states, the site is about more than just quilting, as it includes information, photos, and links relating to other needle arts, especially knitting, as well as



Judy's other passion, antiques. Perhaps the most fascinating part of the site are the pages devoted to collectible reamers (juice squeezers). Judy maintains pages for the "National Reamers Association," which has 350 members in the U.S. and Canada, and displays photos of her extensive personal collection arrayed on her kitchen wall.

Judy's first passion is quilts, however, and featured on her pansy-bestrewn front page is an extensive list of quilting links that's worth a visit in and of itself. A link from the top of the page takes you to a gallery of her own quilts, where she displays three of them plus a collection of quilt blocks made by quilters on [Genie](#).

Another link from the front page takes you to the [Quiltart page](#). The Quiltart list has been maintained by Judy at her personal expense for several years and has an active membership of art quilters. The page provides a description of the list and subscription instructions, a link to the group's archives (downloadable through your browser), a table with links to the web pages of the list's members, and a link to the [Quiltart Gallery](#), where members' work is displayed.

The Gallery features pages devoted to the work of 22 different quilt artists, displaying several quilts by each along with brief descriptions or stories about each one.

It is quite an impressive undertaking. Quiltart also sponsors an [Internet Relay Chat](#) (IRC) channel, for which instructions are posted at the site.

Judy's flair for graphics is evident on every page, with sophisticated use of backgrounds, gifs, and tables to provide an attractive, varied layout. She has also incorporated many animated gifs into her pages, and if I have one criticism it's that there are too many of them. Her front page might also be broken up into two or three, as it's quite long and sometimes takes a while to load, even on a fast connection.

Overall these are only minor annoyances in an otherwise stunning site.

RATING: Four-and-a-half Stars



A homier and more narrowly focussed quilt site is that maintained by the **QuiltBee mailing list** at <http://www.eskimo.com/~tla/quiltbee.htm>. The QuiltBee web page is a truly collaborative effort, both in its making and in the activities it fosters. Led by Teresa Atkinson of Pine Lake Fabrics (<http://www.eskimo.com/~tla/pinelakefabrics.htm>), the members of QuiltBee have put up an array of pages that have grown out of activities on the list — swaps, blocks of the month, a birthday club, secret angels, etc.

The site also features a page with scans of members' quilts (though space limitations dictate only one photo per member), a FAQ about quilting-as-you-go, links to members' pages, a page of smileys and internet abbreviations, and other helpful or humorous contributions. My favorite page is one called [Quilters' Inspirations](#), on which several list members tell stories about memorable experiences they have had involving quilts. See especially "Life is sweet and short and precious" by an anonymous QuiltBee member.

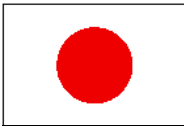
Aside from its bright and cheery front page flag depicting the design for the QuiltBee pin, this site isn't long on graphics or fancy html. It is plain and straightforward, and in its simplicity and collaborative nature is a good deal of its charm. You come away from this site

thinking, “what a bunch of nice people quilters are!”

RATING: Four Stars ★★★★★

Quilters are nice the world over, as readers of TVQ’s international profiles know, and a group of online quilters at Nifty-Serve in Japan have established their own website (http://www2b.meshnet.or.jp/~cr-quilt/e_index.html), which they have graciously translated into English.

FCREATE is the needle- and handicraft forum of **CompuServe**’s Japanese subsidiary online service in Japan, known as Nifty-Serve. With 1.7 million members, the service is the largest in Japan, and like all online communities has its contingent of quilters.



The Quilting Board on Nifty-Serve has about 50 active members who trade information and encouragement, and participate in many collaborative activities, including the making of annual friendship quilts. These are usually samplers, and several of them are displayed at the group’s site.

Overall the site is divided into an introductory section, a gallery, a page of links, and a library of icons. It would appear the latter are designed for use on web pages (and they do appear throughout the site) but their use by others requires written permission of their creator, Tohoru Hatoho.

The gallery features a monthly exhibit of quilts by members with the current theme being Christmas quilts. Each quilt is accompanied by some commentary of a homey nature, such as the following by Katuko Hidaka: “Bethlehem Star was a pattern I had yearned for for a long time. To tell the truth, however, I just wanted to use all of the cloths I had stocked. So, the result was a little different from my favorite chic style. Machine piecing was full of troubles such as mismatching at the corners, twisting, and so on. Twisting of the center star is apparent in spite of all my efforts.”

With all the perfection and fine detail that many westerners attribute to the Japanese quilts, it’s encouraging to see they struggle with the same problems as the rest of us!

Japan has tight copyright laws, apparently without “fair use” provisions, so the quilters at Nifty-Serve cannot display many of their quilts made from proprietary

patterns. They display a generous collection nevertheless, and their quilts display the variety of pattern and skill found in any quilt guild. The scans are well-lighted and the presentation charming.

The **FCREATE** site, made through the volunteer efforts of a group of dedicated online quilters, is a welcome window into quilting in Japan.

RATING: Four Stars ★★★★★

Canadian Quilters Online (<http://www.barint.on.ca/~wfitzger/cqolhome.html>) is maintained by Kathleen Fitzgerald of Ontario for a loose community of internet-based quilters. The site is “dedicated to the Canadian quilting experience” but is designed to reach a broader worldwide audience.



The site’s design, with simple but dramatic use of red and blue against a white background, is quite arresting, although the use of the maple leaf border on the left makes the text run off the page to the right, so some sideways scrolling is required.

The site is primarily a communications vehicle for Canadian quilters online to make contact with one another through several bulletin boards where notices and questions may be posted, and through online chats over the internet. Chats (at least formally organized ones) don’t appear to be too frequent, as the next one is scheduled for October 28. The group uses a piece of Windows software known as “Powwow” and offers a link for downloading it and trying it out.

There is also a “secret sisters” club called the Canadian Stitchin’ Sisters, and the site has established a way that the participants can thank each other anonymously through postings on the board. The site also publishes notices of quilt shows, contests, stolen quilts, and a variety of other items of interest.

The links list of the CQOL is an extensive and well-organized one, with an emphasis on Canadian sites. You may find some corners of the web here that you haven’t visited before. My only complaint about this site is that there aren’t any quilts here. The site is heavily text-based, and it would be nice to see some of the quilts produced by the large and enthusiastic community of Canadian quilters. This may be a factor of time and scanning equipment, but even some home-made scans of snapshots would be nice.

RATING: Three-and-a-half stars ★★★★★

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About the Rotary Cutter

The rotary cutter you see at the end of each article is more than just a decoration.

Beginning with this issue of TVQ Acrobat Edition, clicking on it will take you back to the table of contents on the front page.

Isn't this better than ASCII?



COMMENTS, QUESTIONS, NEWS, IDEAS, BRICKBATS?

Like any news publication, TVQ is always hungry for information about new developments in the area we are trying to cover. If you have an idea for a story, or want to tell the world about something you are doing which relates to computers and quilting, we'd like to hear about it.

We'd like news of new classes starting up to teach quilt design on computers, or new approaches to that teaching. New products, maillists, World Wide Web pages, etc., are all fair game, and we'd appreciate any tips you can provide. Send your tips by e-mail to rholland@atlanta.com.

If you have a comment about an article, a complaint or a correction, we're glad to hear that, too, and may publish some comments as letters to the editor. Again, these may be sent to rholland@atlanta.com.



The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for
Computing Quilters

Editor and Publisher: Robert Holland, Decatur, GA

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**"I don't know which machine I like better... my
Bernina or my Pentium!"**



THE BEST OF BOTH WORLDS.

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