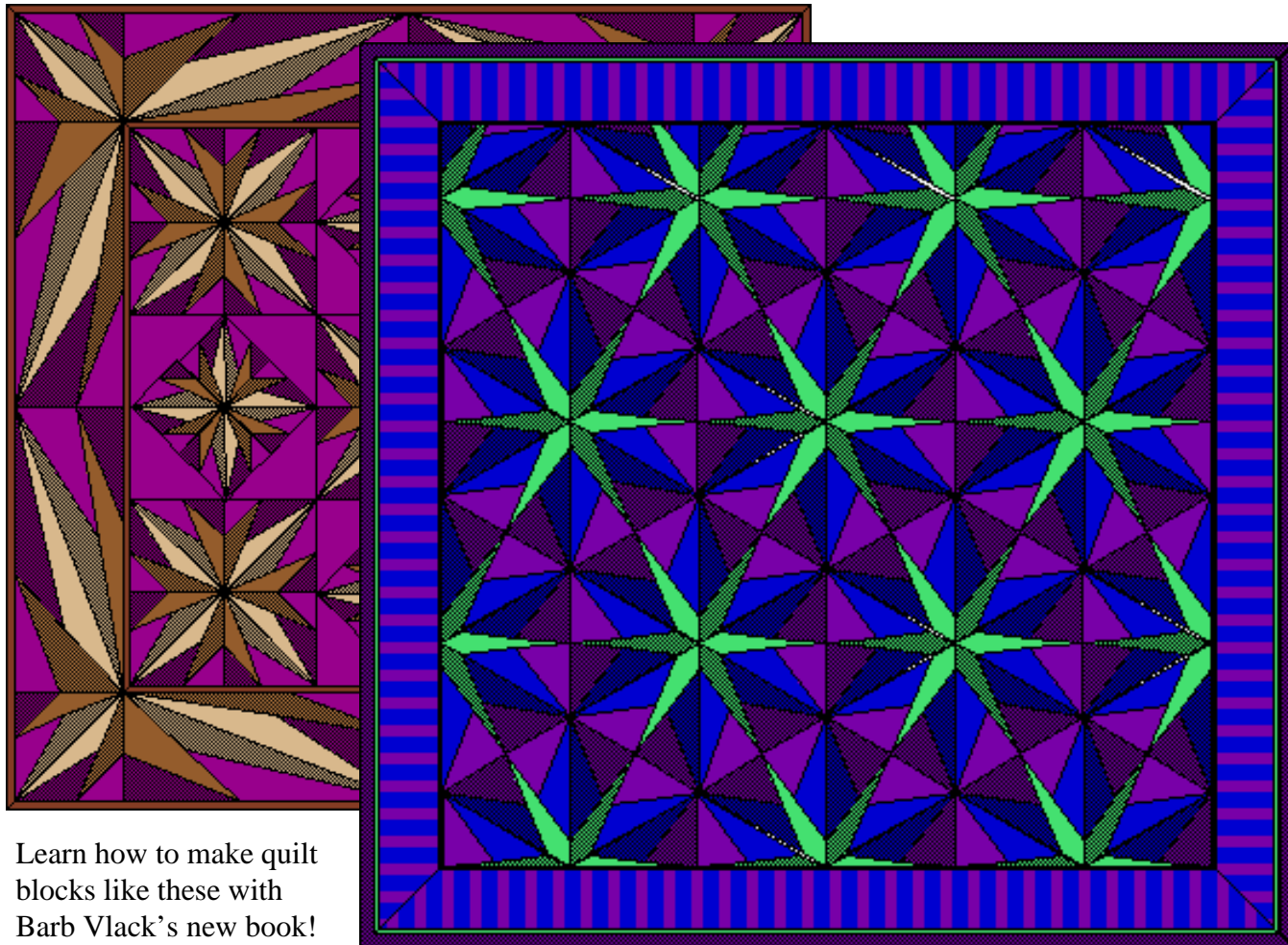


The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for Online Quilters

Issue20 • November, 1997



Learn how to make quilt blocks like these with Barb Vlack's new book!

Do you have [Too Much Fun](#) with your quilt design software? If not, why not?

Also inside:

- [Women Who Sew and the Machines Who Love Them](#)
• [Quilter Profile: Barb Vlack](#) • [A Letter From Houston](#) •
[Quilting In Austria](#) • [Charms & Schnibbles](#)

THE TRAVELING QUILTER

A LETTER FROM HOUSTON

By Corinne Appleton

[Editor's Note: The Houston International Quilt Festival, with its attendant Quilt Market, is one of the biggest quilt events in the world. Like all large public events, it is often an overwhelming experience, leaving attendees feeling "quilted out," yet full of their own rich impressions and emotions based on their personal experience of the show. It is in this spirit that TVQ presents Corinne Appleton's highly subjective and, we think, entertaining review.]

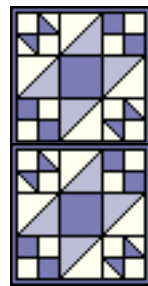
This review was originally written as an e-mail letter to a friend after the Festival, and so contains a good deal of personal information that we have chosen to leave in, despite Corinne's protestation that it may sound "a little me-me-me-ish." Corinne is a quilter whose work is frequently displayed in quilt competitions around the country. Unfortunately while at the Houston exhibit this year she suffered from a bad virus, but that didn't dampen her enthusiasm, or her perceptions.]

Having heard others are giving Festival mixed reviews, I can only comment from my perspective, so here goes: I've only attended the show for two years now but I thought this year's IQA show was a good bit stronger than last year's exhibit. That was pleasing since I hated to have my work juried into a show and then learn that the jurying was almost a joke as they had so few entries that they accepted almost/all of them. (That was a recent tidbit that came to me about last year's show.) On a personal note, my quilts were hung in excellent positions and showed very nicely. --Then they went and rearranged the miniatures and **WOW** did I hear grumbles. (Including my own!) I thought it was a lovely compliment that my large quilt, *Playing the Field*, was hanging with the winning quilts in a double bay. Then people began 'consoling' me because it didn't have a ribbon on it <vbg>. Honestly, I found that a hoot until I realized they were serious; then I began telling them I'd had ribbons on both of my entries in '95 so I really didn't mind "sharing." In truth, a ribbon this year would have been a

nightmare of stress and my body was saying "enough already" as it was.

I no longer bother to question or guess at the judges' ribbon choices; it's not worth it and a ribbon doesn't make a quilt more or less appealing than it would be otherwise, IMHO.

On the other hand, the status accorded a winning quilt and its maker(s) can make for some fun times: Mary Sorenson is a friend whose skill in teaching hand applique has taken her nationwide. The mouth on the woman has probably helped too <g>. Unfortunately, Mary has always been too blinkin' shy when it comes to exhibiting her work. Fortunately, Cindy Blackberg may have had something to say about that when they partnered up and began a series of quilts for their handwork retreats. I am tickled-to-the-toes, truly delighted to report that the ghost I saw walking towards me on preview night turned out not to be a supernatural being but just the super being that is Mary. She and Cindy took the blue ribbon in the small traditional applique category! Vicarious living has its merits; Mary was overly calm (-shock?!-) that night so the joy of exclaiming with pleasure (okay, --screeching) fell to others. Despite a scratchy

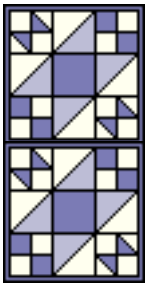


I no longer bother to question or guess at the judges' ribbon choices; it's not worth it and a ribbon doesn't make a quilt more or less appealing than it would be otherwise, IMHO.

voice, I gave it my best shot ;)

The Quilt National pieces were the treat I'd most been looking forward to and while it was fantastic to see them in the cloth, I am still grumbling about the "No Photographs" policy. I purchased the book months ago (as I always do) but the photography in it can't compare

to what I can often get at a show -- be it a detail shot or the full quilt. I think the printing process might be the problem. Anyway, I was caught unaware by their policy and admit to trying to sneak a shot or two. My upbringing must have overruled my quilt mania because the resultant photos showed signs of a shaky hand. (Breaking the Rules!) It makes me a little crazy to be in a venue where you can photograph everything else and then suddenly you are confronted with some of the work you most admire and WHAM! -- the door slams shut. I don't know about you but I love to pour over my photo albums and drink in all that talent. Possibly because I've been injured or sick at the show for each of my visits, I rely on my photographs to give me more 'time' with the quilts. A barking seal cough and congested sinuses do not invite lingering and intense scrutiny. I missed both of my classes and the (Jean Ray Laury) Silver Star Sa-



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lute dinner.

My travel buddy, Patricia --- aka Pat of "She snorts, she snores, she mumbles, she thrashes..." fame, proved her worth <g> when it came time for her to fill me in on what I missed. Her recital of the events and speeches at the Silver Star Salute evening has me determined not to miss the event next time around. Jean Ray Laury's husband made the DH hall of fame by having every woman at the dinner presented with a rose. Of course, his wife is in a different hall of fame courtesy of the invaluable contributions she has made to the quilt/art world.

There were two Virtual Quilting exhibits by members of the QuiltArt list I joined last summer. One was a quilt, Tales of the Boomerang Gang, composed of many fascinating and often highly detailed finished blocks/quilts by individual list members. It was a whet-the-appetite kind of experience; I'd like to see more work by a good number of the participants. The other QA group contribution was an exhibit, which now that I think about

it, might have caused some comment. The aprons: Ruth Reynolds coordinated the Cyber Fyber '97 Art Apron Challenge. These aprons were not quilted -- or at least they didn't have to be and I can see where they might have raised eyebrows with folks looking for a 'quilt' in them ;) . I found them especially interesting because I had visited them on the web and they hadn't shown too well; seeing the real thing felt like someone had brought the projector into focus in a movie theatre. And it was a good movie.

A note from a friend got me thinking about aspects of the show I had ignored - Like all the wearables! ... I have next to no interest in 99% of what was displayed so I simply hurried by them. Now I'm wondering why there were so many and why they seem to be adding more each year. I'm not overly fond of _quilted_ clothing unless it is outerwear for a northern climate!

The majority of us look like snowmen with additional padding in our clothes and I often feel the drape of a garment is ruined once it has a batting added to its construction. My first Fairfield Fashion show viewing did nothing to diminish that opinion. Most of the outfits that were at all fitted didn't *fit* the models at all. A lot of what I saw in the convention center had more to do with applied embellishments and patchwork pieced into jumpers, dresses and vests than it did to do with quilting. Enough already. -- I guess it would be fair to say that I am unhappy with the amount of space devoted to wearables. And dare I say it? -- I'd like to see this trend reversed. But I suspect the likelihood of that wish coming true is slim. IQA *added* a category for wearables this year and there were more entries juried into it than several of those devoted to plain old quilts.

If I'm going to gripe -- and gripe I occasionally will - I might as well mention that I thought the Fairfield show would be significantly more interesting without the commentary. The non-stop recitation of fabrics and trims and beads and threads "provided by" XZY Company or ABC Importers clued me in to the fact that the designers get freebies. It also gave me a headache after the seventh mention of the bead supplier. (Maybe that's why I bypassed the audio tours Quilt Festival was pushing this year <g>.)

There was one 'wearable' of a sort that I wish I'd seen. On our first afternoon in town, Pat took a machine quilting class from Lorraine Scouler of Australia. She came back to our room totally jazzed and anxious to hit preview and find appropriate fabrics to use putting into

practice Lorraine's methods. She went on at equal length about both the teacher and her techniques. Pink and blue streaks in violently red hair? This was someone I wanted to meet. And I did; unfortunately she had changed clothing which apparently necessitated another change because the stripes of pink and blue were gone : (But the personality wasn't and we had a grand time. Lorraine is a hoot; I can see taking a class from her just to enjoy the show. And I'm not just saying that because she knew my work and deemed it "just wonderful" and "tremendously fun, even if you have to use cats!" She does have that one failing, I'm afraid <g>.

Tactile Architecture was interesting but I was sidetracked and surprised by how many of the quilts had hung in the IQA show last year. (Or was it Paducah last spring?) Last year I was quite enamoured of this particular exhibit so it was a shock to see 'repeats'. I didn't realize that this was an option for us and in all honesty, it is something I should pursue. On the other hand, it made for rather disappointing viewing when you walked along wide-eyed expecting a crop of new work.

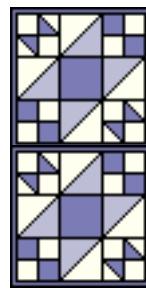
The Teachers' Showcase is always a treat; the diversity is wonderful and you get the chance to see quilts that you may have seen in print even a few years ago but never seen in the cloth.

And speaking of teachers, I had a bit of fun with a teacher-turned-author whose book premiered at the show. Barb Vlack is an expert on using the Electric Quilt program; she has taken her wisdom and turned it into a book. *Too Much Fun!* is an excellent companion to EQ3 and the Block Base programs. Not too many manuals on computer programs make for interesting reading when you're nowhere near a computer! Penny McMorris and Dean Neumann were wise enough to install Barb in their booth where she demo-ed EQ3 and accepted accolades.

After repeated attempts to say "Hi" to Barb -- with whom I had corresponded online -- I was getting a bit crabby as every time I opened my mouth someone beat me to the punch. So I got devious. With my hand hooked into the neckline of my shirt -- thereby obscuring my nametag -- I interrupted a worship session that had gone on for far too long <g>. In a quasi-obnoxious manner, I asked Barb if she knew "anything about some book some lady wrote that's supposedta explain this thing?" And, for good measure: "Do ya think it'd be worth anything?" The gentleman who had been piling on the praise looked at me as if I'd grown horns, while Barb schooled her features to reply. At that point I let my hand drop and

my nametag was exposed. Barb Vlack's eyes can open verry wide; fortunately so can her mouth. She mock-strangled me as she laughed and my horns disappeared. It would have been fun if I had been able to keep that nametag concealed until Barb managed a reply, but I didn't think she deserved to be that sorely tested. She did an admirable job under trying circumstances and as much fun as I was having, any more would've been too much fun! (groan)

The Japanese showcase, Honoring the Seasons, was both lovely and lively. I do enjoy the quilts made by the Japanese that turn up at Houston and Paducah. I've found that I'm drawn to them; the difference in color usage between east and west is particularly fascinating. But I'm not interested in any of these books that go for a strictly styled ethnic look. The Jill Liddell/Patchwork Quilt Tsushin books of a few years back and the New Wave Quilt series hold much greater appeal for me. This



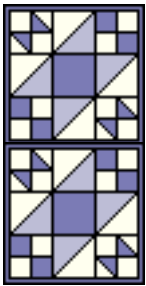
[The Quilter's Computer Companion] *is the kind of book you open just to take a peek at the contents and then find you've read a chapter before you know it.*

exhibit included some funky little (8" x 9"?) quilts hung on a folding screen that were much brighter and cheerier than what we usually expect from the far east. I loved them! Do you think that could possibly have anything to do with my obsession with Keiko Goke's work?!

The vendors were as numerous and overwhelming as last year. But I got smart in between shows and made notes to get to certain booths early. My travel partner and I helped clean Melody and Laura out of Artfab!k's supply of Kaffe Fassett stripes before mid-morning Thursday. By that statement I don't mean that Pat and I emptied our wallets there; our shuttle bus gang from Wednesday night before memorized Artfab!k's booth number after I passed my bag of goodies around. I had also indulged in a chunk of Melody's gorgeous fabric even though I'm doing/dyeing my own more and more. I had **really** indulged in her and Laura's threads because those I'm not doing on my own. It just occurred to

me that if I charged a modest finder's fee for sharing my shopping secrets I could likely earn enough to purchase the embroidered 'thingy' of Melody's that fell in love with me. This 'thingy' is a piece of textile art that decided it wants very much to live in my humble little home. -- Can't say that I'd protest <vbg>.

A major self-help purchase was *The Quilter's Computer Companion*. What an excellent and indispensable



I will always be a soft-to-bright pastel lover at heart no matter where my quilts may lead me.

book! Judy Heim teaming up with Gloria Hansen was a goood thing. It's the kind of book you open just to take a peek at the contents and then find you've read a chapter before you know it. From newbie to know-it-all, IMHO it offers something for everyone. I picked that puppy up at the Art/Quilt booth along with a few other books and then scolded myself thoroughly for adding all that weight to my luggage :).

And finally, -- 'cause my carpal tunnel syndrome is screaming and you may well be too -- I have to mention the wondrous Kaffe Fassett quilts and book. I had this book ordered locally long before it was published and my copy sat here at home while I was off meeting its authors. I didn't realize Kaffe Fassett would still be there and was mightily ticked that I hadn't brought my book for signing. Not that an autograph is usually a big deal to me but his work has been a part of my life for many years; since long before I began quilting I was a major KF fan. So I bought another copy of the book. (Insanity strikes!) Luckily, Pat had borrowed my first copy and was so impressed that she insisted on buying it from me. I thought she was just trying to help me out of the hole I'd dug but she proved otherwise by dragging me to his booth and heading for the cashier <vbg>.

Liza Prior Lucy is responsible for the book's existence; I gather she pestered KF relentlessly. For that

I worship her <g>. Besides, she can really keep things hopping on the QuiltArt front when she chooses to! The quilts that Liza (mostly) made for the book were luscious! I will always be a soft-to-bright pastel lover at heart no matter where my quilts may lead me. Since I'm in a severe slump where that issue is concerned, I think I'll give myself permission to ease off and make one of the quilts from the book. Or maybe just a pillow. I've never made a patchwork pillow. Some would say I've missed a rite of passage but I don't feel deprived <vbg>. Anyway, the great man himself was undoubtedly overwhelmed by admirers but I do have the satisfaction of knowing that while he likely won't remember my face, he said he will remember my tale. Not many people come to him to offer greetings and explain how his needlepoint "Victorian Kittens" caused their cat to be renamed the Victorian Kitten after she nearly died having absconded with and eaten yarn from the kit!

Overall, I'm sure I could look through the Festival program and say "didn't like that" to probably 50% of the exhibits. But...there are soooo many of them and between what I did like and the shopping -- never mind the missed class opportunities -- I think you would have to try pretty hard to convince me that I made a mistake in booking my room for next year's show.

Now I'll let you go and I'll sit here being ****really uptight**** as the day has passed with no sign of Fed Ex or UPS with the quilts I need to turn in tomorrow for Quiltfest Jacksonville. AAARGH! (I can't even make frantic phone calls because I've had not even a squeak of a voice for five days now.) Five entries in the darn show; two of which I opted out of just after the program had gone to press and now the other three are AWOL. This isn't happening in the same time frame that I expected after the past two years' experiences. My face is going to be red if I sneak in to see the show.

UPS is (supposedly) bringing my quilts home from Pacific International Quilt Festival -- and that reminded me that I had a nice bit of news awaiting me upon my arrival home: A cyberpal white-gloved my quilts and dashed to a computer to tell me that one of them was awarded an Honorable Mention. Kind of fun to get home with your ears popped beyond popped and boot up the (misbehaving!) computer and see that news :0!

I'm outta here.



BOOK REVIEW

TOO MUCH FUN!

Too Much Fun: Everything You Always Wanted to Do with EQ3 & BlockBase

By Barb Vlack

The Electric Quilt Company, 1997
202 Pages, Spiral bound Paperback, with floppy disk
\$23.95

While some of us sit around grouching about the limitations of this quilt design program or that one, declaring the glass half-empty, Barb Vlack fires up her computer and proves beyond a shadow of a doubt that the glass overfloweth!

Too Much Fun! is a workbook for users of Electric Quilt 3 and BlockBase software who want to squeeze the last ounce of creativity out of the programs. Beyond that it is quite an amazing thing -- a computer book that makes good reading. It's witty, breezy, and full of inside dope about how to get the most out of these popular programs.

Divided into sixteen chapters with titles like "Can You Lend Me a Quarter?", "Exposing Your Backside," and "Pickles for the Bride," (which Barb quickly explains is not "about a bride who is in a 'family way.'"), the book presents step-by-step instructions for the cre-

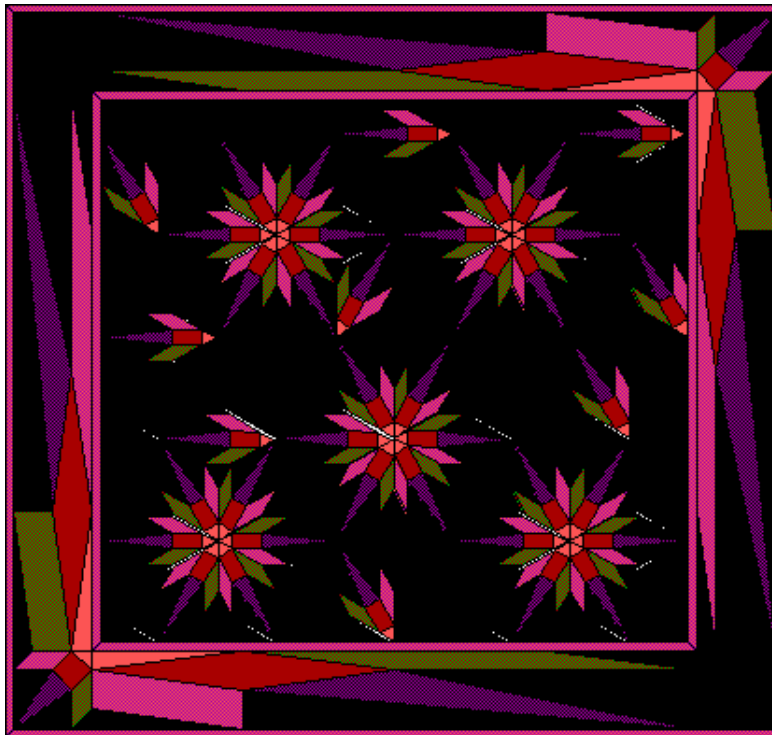
ation of dozens of sophisticated quilt designs.

Step-by-step lessons can be the most deadly of all forms of literature, but Barb's irrepressible sense of humor and enthusiasm for the software makes you breathless for the next step, the next wondrous thing you can make appear on your computer screen.

The writing is supported by superb graphic design, with lots of screen shots, illustrations, and tip boxes that chase away the gray. Each chapter also contains a summary box at the end giving a quick review of the techniques presented.

Supplementing the book is a wonderful floppy disk of the project files that are described in the book along with a fistful of new fabric files inspired by Kaffe Fassett. The disk will install these new projects automatically into your EQ project library and you can view in living color the quilts that are presented only in black and white in the book.

If you're an EQ user and think you have exhausted the program's possibilities, you need this book. And it's not too difficult for a beginner, either. By going through the lessons you will become an expert at using the program, and won't even realize you were learning until afterwards, because it was so much fun.



THE PATCHWORK PLANET: QUILTING IN AUSTRIA

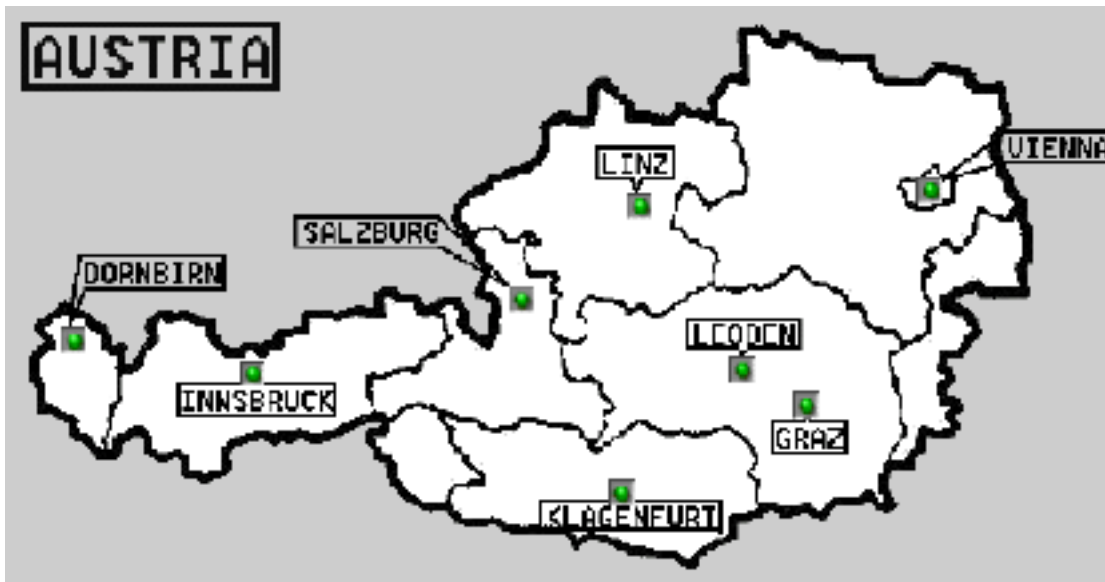
When I asked Ursula Adler, a quilter living in Vienna, to e-mail me a little information about Austria, she replied, appropriately: "This is coming right from the Internet, I hope you can use some of it:

"Austria is a federal state with a total area of 32,367 sq. miles (83,855 sq. km) and consists of nine provinces - Burgenland, Carinthia, Lower Austria, Salzburg, Styria, Tyrol, Upper Austria, Vienna and Vorarlberg. Austria's border has an overall length of 1,682 miles. Austria has common borders with no fewer than eight other countries.

"According to latest figures (1994) Austria has a population of about 8,000,000. This represented an increase of some 435,000 since 1981. In 1991 3.75 million (48.2%) of the population were male, 4.04 million (51.8%) female. For those born in 1992 average life expectancy for men was 72.8, for women 79.3. Austria's population is 98% German-speaking."

Although it has a rich and ancient cultural tradition in music and other arts, Austria's quilting history is much more contemporary. "The quilting history in Austria is next to none," Ursula says. "It all started in the late '70s, early '80s, and I think until the middle '80s every quilter in this country thought she was the only one. Also, in Austria quilting is referred to as 'Patchwork,' and that's what I thought of when I first heard about quilts. You know, the rather ugly '70s 'hippie patchwork.'"

Lilo Wesely, also a Vienna quilter, places the beginning of quilting in Austria more precisely, and even more recently: "Until nine years ago, there were only a few quilters scattered around the country, not knowing each other. The history of quilting in Austria began in



May 1988 when the first Quilt Expo Europe - organized by the then called 'American International Quilt Association,' now called 'International Quilt Association' - took place in Salzburg, the capital of one of Austria's federal provinces. There about a dozen Austrian quilters met. From then on these quilters kept contact with each other and the Patchwork Group Vienna was founded in June 1988. I was a co-founder of this group and it was the first active patchwork group in Austria. Since then, the group organized at least one big exhibition per year to promote patchwork and quilting. This proved to be very successful; further groups were founded and now there is a very vivid patchwork and quilting scene in Austria."

The first national quilting organization in Austria was formed just a couple of years ago. The "Patchwork Gilde Austria," founded in January 1996, now has about 200 members, and organized the first national exhibition in November of that year.

"There is also an informal association representing all European national guilds," Lilo says. "the 'European Quilt Association' (EQA). The international representatives of each national guild meet once a year to coordinate activities, exchange experiences and organize a symposium with workshops and exhibitions. The first one

was held in 1996 in Wales, the next one will take place in Belgium in spring 1999."

Both Ursula and Lilo say that Austria's quilting tradition is still too young to have developed any characteristic style, but certain trends are emerging. "There is a tendency to use Austrian style fabrics," Lilo says. "Traditional American blocks are very popular but there is also a strong trend to contemporary quilting." As for technique, Ursula says "Many quilters I know quilt by hand, very few by machine."

As quilting has grown in Austria, some quilt stores have sprung up to supply their needs. "We have very, very few quilt stores here," Ursula says, "and since the shop owners have to import almost everything from the

thought was that I don't want to give up the Net. <g> I met some of my best friends on Compuserve and the Internet, and I know I would go crazy without them.)"

Ursula and Lilo maintain probably the only two quilting web pages which originate in Austria, and they both represent the small contingent of Austria quilters well. You can find Ursula's at

<http://www.geocities.com/Heartland/Prairie/2262/index.html>

and Lilo's at

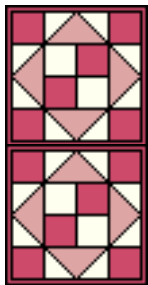
<http://members.magnet.at/patchfan/>

Ursula and Lilo are at different ends of the spectrum as participants in organized quilting in Austria. Lilo as a founding member of Patchwork Group Vienna has been active in the quilting scene. Ursula on the other hand finds that she prefers not to affiliate too closely with a group. The warmth and mutual support of quilters in Austria, as elsewhere in the world, comes out, however, in a wonderful story Ursula tells about her affiliation with a group in Vienna:

"In the summer of 1991 I finally tracked down a quilting group in Vienna, and I was extremely excited about it. I loved all the people there, everyone was so nice to me, and they welcomed me with open arms. After going to the meetings for a while, I found out that it just isn't for me, but it was hard for me to find reasons to stay home. I think I'll have to explain this a little. The quilting groups in Austria are really small (I think the one I belonged to has currently about 25 members), so if you don't come to a few meetings, people will call you and ask what's up, and why didn't you come, and I hope you'll come to the next, etc.

"Now my finding out that I'm not a 'group animal' has absolutely **nothing** to do with the other members; they all treated me very lovingly, and with much care. It's just that I like to do 'my own thing,' at the time I'm ready to do it, and when I **want** to do it. There was way too much pressure for me (my own pressure, not pressure from other people!!) to get the block for a birthday done, or for one of the other group projects. I never found a way to express my feelings about it to my fellow group members. I was so afraid I wouldn't find the right words, and hurt someone's feelings.

"Then something extremely shocking happened.



“ Supplies [in Austria] are terribly expensive. That's why I'm so proud of the Austrian quilters, it shows that they're really devoted to their art.”

USA, supplies are terribly expensive. That's why I'm so proud of the Austrian quilters, it shows that they're really devoted to their art. We also have regular fabric shops, but since almost all cottons Austria produces are 'Dirndl' (Austria's traditional or folklore costumes) fabrics, everything looks a bit old-fashioned and outdated. Now if that's the look you want, you can make quilts for less money. Personally I'm too much a woman of the 20th century <g>; you'll never see one of those fabrics in my quilts (though I did use them as a beginning quilter)."

When asked about computer use among Austrians, and particularly among quilters, Ursula and Lilo agree that "computer quilting" is still in its infancy. "I don't think there's any difference in regular computer use between Austria and the USA," Ursula says, "[but] the Internet is a different story. In Europe it really is expensive, because we pay even for local calls. So the clock is always ticking in the back of your head. There are few people (like me <g>) who don't care about it, and just use it.(Let me put it this way, when my husband lost his job a year ago [luckily he found one again], my first

Our group president Hanna Afritsch died in January 1997, and that 'threw me out of it' completely. Hanna was the last 'thread' that connected me to the group; I would visit her at home (she lived practically around the corner), she would tell me the latest news, projects, tell me about her plans, show me the things the group learned in their monthly workshops, etc. Since her death I have often planned to visit the group, but whenever I

get ready to go, I just **can't**, I know I would be in tears as soon as I entered the room - and Hanna isn't there.

"This is to you Hanna: I miss you terribly, and I wish you could have stayed with us much longer. I feel so lonely without you, but have to try and live without your friendship every day. I hope they're right, and we **will** meet again one day. With all my love, Ursula"



CHARMS & SCHNIBBLES: NEWS NOTES FROM ALL OVER

NEW QUILT MUSEUM OPENS IN WASHINGTON STATE

The only dedicated quilt museum in the state of Washington is now open. Housed in the historic restored Victorian Gaches Mansion, in La Conner, Washington, it is open Wednesdays through Sundays. Admission is \$3 for adults. Children under 12 are free. Winter hours are 11-4pm. It is located up the hill from the "main" street, at 703 South 2nd Street. Phone is: 360 466-4288.

The museum features rotating shows. La Conner is located about one hour north of Seattle, up I-5, and then about 10 miles to the west. Take freeway exit 221, the Conway/La Conner exit and head to the west. It is a charming "tourist destination" town complete with yummy restaurants, antiques and fine American Crafts. The voluptuous tulip fields are a big draw in early April but it can be quite crowded.

Recently the museum featured "One Collector's Eye," a collection of twenty antique quilts from c. 1840-1950. Ann Nash of Bow is curating the exhibition. This show closed October 26th. Several 19th century red and green quilts are featured as well as a room of '30s quilts.

Opening October 29th, a second show features the work of Marilyn Henrion of New York. Marilyn's work is quite geometric and precise. She is well known for her quilt works and for her connections with Russian quilters. The show will close just after the Christmas holidays.

The museum will be closed for the month of January but reopen the first week of February. We hope you will come to every show (six per year) and will support the museum with your membership. You'll gain free admissions to each new show and a quarterly newsletter.

A NOTE FROM JAPAN

Dear Rob,

We very appreciate that you put our announcement of "E-mail Friendship Quilt" in the issue of *TVQ* (October 1). We have closed the message entry for our E-mail Friendship Quilt as of last week, on the close of International Quilt Week '97 Yokohama. In the end, we have got about 200 messages from all over the world. These messages are now being stitched together by Cyber Quilters' Club members to complete the Friendship Quilt. Thank you very much for your cooperation.

Rika Iwashige

TVQ ESSAY: WOMEN WHO SEW AND THE MACHINES WHO LOVE THEM

By Lynn Holland

Women are what we stitch. Our sewing machines define us, probably more so than we realize. Our creativity is more often limited by the shortcomings of the machine than by the imagination. That Pfaff or Elna can determine if our day goes well or badly, strictly by the state of its tension setting. It can certainly help us develop tension of our own. We want the machine with the fewest limits, but we have to stay within our budgets; we read FAQs on different models and agonize on- and off-line about the "right" machine. It's not dissimilar to selecting a spouse.

I just recently realized that the sewing machines I've loved the most were new only to me. The relic that started my sewing career was the result of my mother's most disappointing birthday present. Her well-meaning parents gifted her with an old White portable, which was probably the most insensitive possible selection for someone with an aversion to needlework of any kind. For me, however, it opened the world of sewing, and by age eleven I was making most of my own clothes. The White went with me to college, then off to Boston after graduation and on to California when I married. I loved that machine; I could take it apart on the dorm floor and cure almost any problem it developed. When I finally got a shiny new machine, the White returned to my mother, who kept it around long enough not to offend me before she disposed of it (and a decade of hurt feelings) at a yard sale.

There were two shiny machines that helped me stitch my way through my children's elementary school years. They were adequate and had many more features than the straight-stitch, forward-only White. But I never developed the same bond that I had with my first machine. They both evolved into finicky problem machines that I used to fantasize about shoving off the back balcony. In 1995, I developed Bernina fever. Miser that I am, it was clear that I would need to buy a used model if

I bought one at all. After a number of months of shopping, I located a used 1020 at a price I could almost afford. What a machine! No tension problems, no hours of frustration. I never realized how much time and energy a temperamental machine could take.

My Featherweight acquisition was reinforcement of my long-held belief that certain things are meant for you -- a sort of predestination-of-inanimate-objects theory. I had searched unsuccessfully for a Featherweight bargain for a while, until I dreamt one night of



finding one in an unoccupied house! The next day in the local bargain paper was **THE AD**. Although I had to drive a long way, I was able to buy my one-owner, all attachments, complete original manual Featherweight for under \$100. I even got a twenty-year-old can of oil.

Object predestination was again at work several weekends ago during a trip to Lexington, Kentucky. While visiting the fabulous Joseph Beth Bookstore there, I was inexplicably drawn to James Giordano's book "The Sewing Machine Guide" and uncharacteristically parted with more than \$15 to purchase it. (It's a lot cheaper at the [Planet Patchwork Bookstore!](#))

This book makes interesting reading, even if you're not in the market for a machine right now. In a very

amusing style, Giordano discusses sewing personalities and how they relate to the type of machine you should look for. He provides charts and graphs which examine how your wants, needs, and deserves urges (as in "I deserve a machine that costs at least as much as his golf clubs") influence your machine buying. He also details how to test both new and old machines, how to inspect and clean them, and how to avoid the common pitfalls of machine purchases. Giordano explains strategies for dealing with dealers whether you're buying new or used, and how to recoup some of your loss if (heaven forbid) you spend megabucks only to discover you and your million dollar baby are incompatible.

Reading through it that night, I discovered that the old Singer Touch and Sew models are considered good used machine buys. Since my daughter-in-law has recently decided that hand sewing is getting impractical for making curtains for her house, I decided to keep my eyes open for a potential oldie but

goodie. When my Saturday plans changed and I had several unexpected free hours, my daughter and I set out for the local mall. On our way, we passed a Salvation Army store and stopped. There were **THREE** Touch and Sew available!



After commandeering thread from my car, we began our test drive of the "prettiest" machine. Although I had to cannibalize one of my cathedral window squares and annoy the clerk for an extension cord, I was able to put the machine through its paces. The stitching was even, the bobbin wound without being removed from the case and the machine wasn't even dusty. Furthermore, the compact little sewing cabinet was in extremely nice condition. For \$45, Mr. Machine was loaded into my van for the trip home.

My only worry now is that history is repeating itself. The Touch and Sew is about to become Christina's birthday present.



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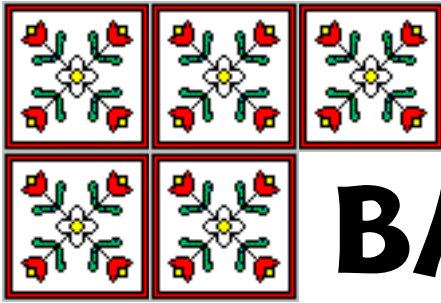
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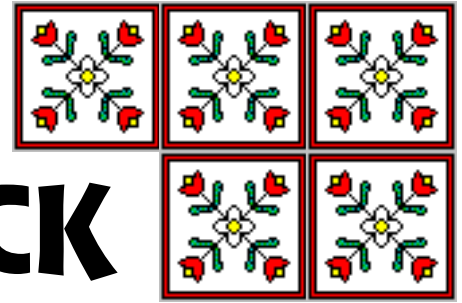
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QUILTER PROFILE



BARB VLACK

Barb Vlack has recently made a name for herself in the world of computing quilters with the publication of her new book *Too Much Fun!* (see review [elsewhere in this issue](#)). This knowledgeable and entertaining guide, published by the Electric Quilt Company, is the ultimate expression of Barb's love (not to say obsession) with computer quilt design using Electric Quilt software.

But what did Barb do before she had EQ? We asked her to trace the origins of her passion for quilting.

"I think my mother would love to think the quilting genes came through her side of the family," Barb says. "Perhaps they did, though my grandmother never quilted nor did my mother until after I started. In fact, after I made my first quilt, my mother admitted that she had always wanted to try that. She even took the first quiltmaking classes I taught. Only then did my grandmother unveil a log cabin quilt that her mother had made, which helped my mother remember a doll quilt that her grandmother had made for her and suddenly we had a matched pair. When the book, *Old Swedish Quilts*, came out last year as part of a commemoration of 150 years of Swedish immigration to the United States, I saw some of the quilting influences from Sweden that probably played on my great-grandmother, who immigrated in the late 1800s.

"I first became interested in making quilts when I was in high school in the early 60s and *Woman's Day*

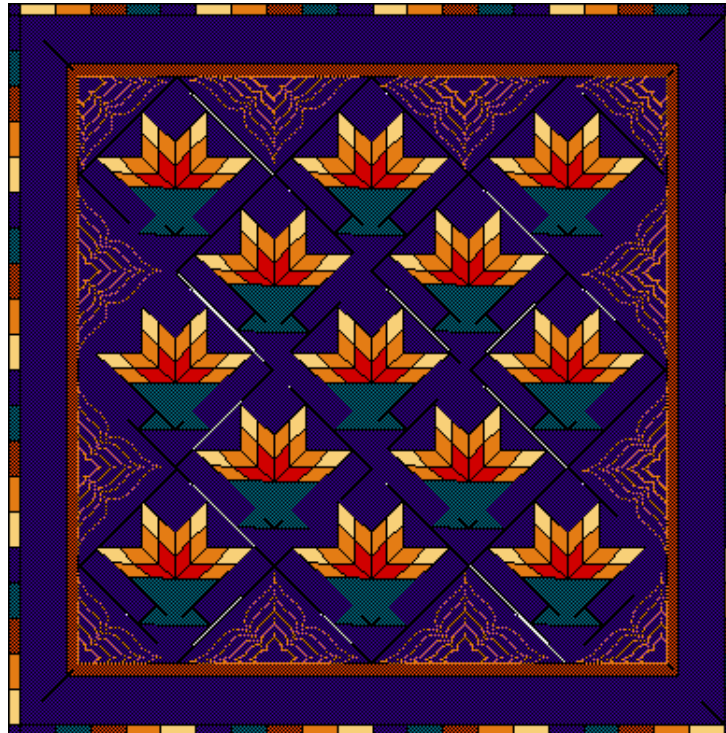
magazine ran a series on Early American crafts. I saved all the articles from my mother's issues, and I still have them. I didn't start anything, but I collected ideas. I started to follow a pattern in *Woman's Day* and applique hundreds of denim squares. I collected all the materials but lost interest after the first couple of squares.

"Then in 1976, with the renewed interest in colonial crafts due to the Bicentennial, I started a Cathedral Window queen size bedspread. To this day I have enough

put together for a nice table runner. That same year I made my brother and his fiancée a patchwork tied comforter from my sewing scraps that probably weighed a ton, especially since I thoughtfully put in a double batt to keep them warm and used kettlecloth fabrics. It was not a big loss when it was burned in a fire that destroyed their apartment a few years later.

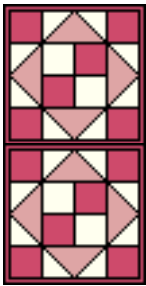
"When my two sons were born, I left the professional world of speech pathology and became a full-time mom. I made my first baby quilt for the

second son and started honing skills that were worthy of a real quiltmaker. I was proud of my machine applique and hand quilting on my first baby quilt and felt (at that time) that the machine applique was a much better technique for a baby quilt than hand applique. But I grew leaps and bounds when I hand pieced and appliqued my next quilt for my first son. I followed a pattern series in *Quilter's Newsletter Magazine* for the Fireworks Over the City quilt, which commemorates my son's July 3rd



birthday."

Those who have seen Barb's quilt designs know that they are based largely on quilt blocks, but what she does with them is not necessarily traditional. "I would call my quilting style 'Innovative,'" she says. "It is based a lot on traditional techniques but I always challenge myself to change from the traditional. I try to use different colorations and different settings. I do venture into the world of art quilts when I make paraments and vestments for churches and clergy. For several years now I have been receiving commissions from many local churches to create sets of altar cloths and clergy stoles



“Machine piecing and machine quilting are the only ways I think I'll get through all the quilts I want to make.”

for various liturgical seasons of the church year. I use quilting techniques for original designs in this area of my work.

"I use machine and hand techniques. For three years I have been designing hand applique patterns for a class I am teaching through a local quilt store. A couple of these designs were drawn in Electric Quilt and several of them are now being published and are available through national pattern distributors. Machine piecing and machine quilting are the only ways I think I'll get through all the quilts I want to make."

As with many creative people, Barb's inspirations come from just about everywhere: "I read lots. I collect fabrics. I go to many quilt shows all over the country. There was an exercise I remember from grade school that probably was a test of creativity. We had to think of lots of different ways to use a paperclip, for example, other than its obvious purpose. I look at quilt blocks the same way. I love Japanese design and get inspired by Japanese motifs and quilts. We live in a woods full of wild flowers in the spring, and they have been the subjects for my hand applique designs and patterns. I also love working with antique quilt blocks and tops. I feel I am doing a collaboration with long past quilters when I

finish their tops, sometimes in ways they may not have originally intended."

She also finds inspiration and knowledge in her fellow quilters. "In 1980 I was a charter member of two wonderful quilt guilds that formed in the Chicago area," she says. "I had previously belonged to an embroiderer's guild and realized that belonging to a guild would enhance my learning curve in quilting. I started meeting and taking classes from nationally known quiltmakers and continue doing that today."

Although she has entered her quilts locally in shows in the Chicago area, Barb says she has not yet ventured into a national arena. "I aspire to do that someday and there's no time like the present, I'm sure," she says. "But too often I just don't have the quilt finished, slides developed, and the entry form, envelope and stamp in the same place at the right time. I work best to tight deadlines; however, priorities sometimes change and I'm off developing a commission instead of readying a quilt for a show. That's okay."

Though she is building a reputation as a quilter and teacher, with the release of *Too Much Fun!* Barb's real claim to fame is as a design guru. Her interest goes back before even the first version of The Electric Quilt. "After using a computer primarily for word processing, I learned about software developed for quilt designing and bought the least expensive program available to try it," she recalls. "I was thrilled to draw blocks and set quilts. Eventually I graduated to Electric Quilt 1.0 and started to have even more fun designing with the computer. I started experimenting to find new and different ways to draw blocks and set them into quilts. Electric Quilt 2.0 offered more possibilities and I played and played. Then Electric Quilt 3.0 came out with even more ways to design quilts. I had developed a list of things I wanted a quilt program to do based on my various experimentations, and EQ3 offered the most. I wanted to be able to set a block on point next to a straight-set block and I figured out how to do that. I wanted to stretch blocks in a border in an uneven grid, and I figured that out. I wanted to set blocks of uneven sizes and an irregular grid to get optical illusions, and I figured that out, too."

"I learned to design quilts on the computer first by trying to copy anything I found in books and magazines, just to see if it could be done. Eventually my playing with What If? possibilities for changing anything in the quilt design led to serendipitous accidents. A new design was born. It didn't take long to figure that I could

and should use my computer to design quilts I would never think to design on paper."

So how did the book come to be? "I had met Penny McMorris [co-owner of The Electric Quilt Company with husband Dean Neumann] at several quilt conferences I attended. When I started posting tips and answers to questions on the Info-EQ list, she already had a face to my name. She started paying some attention to what I was writing since I was offering ways to use the program even she and her staff hadn't considered yet, such as dividing a diamond quilt setting into equilateral triangles for Thousand Pyramids by drawing a square block with patches that would skew to triangles. I showed her and her husband, Dean Neumann (the EQ programmer) some of my project files at the IQA Festival in Houston in 1996 and posted some more ideas for designing with EQ3 on the Info-EQ list after that, so when I met them again in Paducah at the AQS show in April, 1997, they suggested taking my Info-EQ posts and using them as seeds for a book. They had a list of other design ideas they'd like to see addressed, and I told them I'd already been there, done that, and just needed to write the instructions.

"By mid-May, we had negotiated a contract, established a deadline of July 15th for my manuscript submission, and set a late August deadline for delivery to the printer. It happened. We stayed right on schedule. I have to tell you I worked day and night on that project. I forgot to schedule a summer vacation, but that was okay ... this year. I literally spent hundreds of hours learning every nook and cranny of the EQ3 program. As I typed out each chapter, I sent email attachments with the copy and EQ3 supporting design files to the Electric Quilt office for them to check. I loved it each time - and it happened frequently - Penny responded that I was amazing them with new ideas. More than once she phoned me rather than write

email so I could hear her comments personally. It was great.

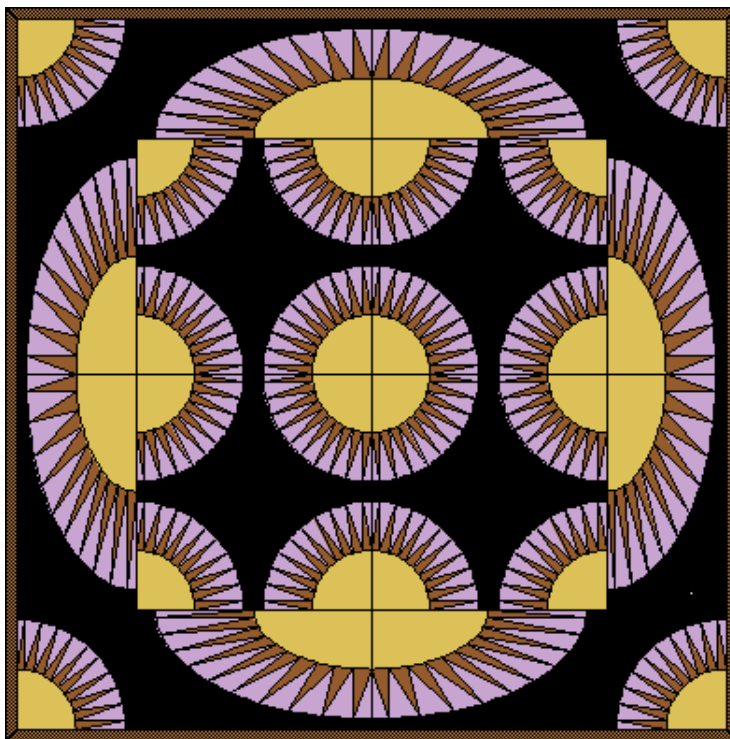
"I was writing somewhat blindly in that I had a goal to fill 200 pages but had only a vague idea of how one fully-typed page would convert, especially when illustrations were inserted. So I wrote until the EQ staff said, 'Stop!' and even then I had six chapters more than they could use. We hinted back and forth that we'd have to go to volume 2 and laughed. We're giggling now because it may be close to the truth, since *Too Much Fun!* is taking off very well right now."

Barb expresses great gratitude to Penny and the folks at EQ who encouraged her and edited her work. At a more basic level, she knows who else to thank: "I now know why many authors acknowledge the patience and understanding of their families during the writing process.

My family endured reduced standards of housekeeping and pitched in; sometimes they cooked or just ate out - with or without me. Early in the writing period, my husband asked me if I had written much on the book that day. I thought he was checking up on me to see if I had procrastinated. Instead, he was checking to see if he should back up my files for the day. He was most helpful in making sure all my computer equipment kept running.

"My greatest reward that has come so far from writing *Too Much Fun!* is

when an EQ3 user says I opened new doors and helped him/her discover more ways to use the program. I'm getting that feedback a lot lately. I love it. I want to say back, 'If you think that's good, wait until you see what could come next!' I'm losing my modesty and I'm not too embarrassed about that. VBG To those who say they don't have much time to spend learning the program, I offer that I already spent that time and *Too Much Fun!*



should save them."

Perhaps more than any single person on the planet, Barb has mastered The Electric Quilt software. But what does she see in the future for quilt design software? And what would she like to have on her desk?

"I think the future direction of USING quilt design software is a whole new generation of innovative quilting. I am truly hoping that *Too Much Fun!* will open some doors for many quilters, especially those using EQ3, so they will design quilts on the computer that they would never do on paper. Some of these innovations would not even involve more complicated construction, but there could be more sophisticated designing. It's fantastic, then, to realize that everything that a quilter designs on EQ3 can be constructed with accurately drawn patterns and templates.

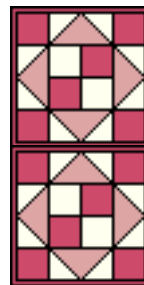
"The future/success of quilt design software looks very good to me, especially if the programmers collaborate with quilt designers to see what quilters could really use. We have a long wish list. I hear many quilters asking for the ability to scan not only fabrics but also drawings. I want to design with odd-shaped polygons, tessellations, circles, and free forms. We want a Windows based program. Many want a Mac program.

"Because I'm not a programmer, I don't recognize ways that programs could be improved with new possibilities or increased efficiency. I'm often happy with what I'm offered, and I'm notorious for finding workarounds for any limitations in a program that I might encounter. Very seldom do I give up. I want to be able to do everything, and I know that no one program will cover the gamut so far. That's why I have two quilt designing programs and a high-powered graphics program. I also recognize that unless I have my heart totally and compulsively set on something that is impossible to design in EQ3 or Quilt Pro or CorelDraw, I could find another possibility and not limit or end my life in quilting."

The other side of computer quilting, of course, is the use of the internet. Asked about her experiences on the 'net, Barb emphasizes how much it has broadened her horizons as a quilter. "I think I've been on the internet about five years. My husband introduced me to a textile arts newsgroup and through that I found the QuiltNet maillist. I networked through that maillist and branched into several smaller maillists with more specific focuses. I now read/write with lists centering on EQ3, art quilts, Berninas, professionals in quilting, fellowship, and

fun and games. Through travels throughout the country I have met many of my cyber penpals. That has been a terrific experience. No matter where I went with my husband on his business trips, I could find quilters with familiar names who could guide me to the nearest fabric store! Now whenever I travel to quilt conferences, I can do the same.

"Through the internet maillists I have participated in exchanges and challenges that qualify for inclusion in a quilting resume. I can honestly say that I am internationally known and not stretch that truth. Some of my quilted pieces have traveled more extensively than I have. Truly I can say the Internet has affected and ef-



"I don't recognize ways that programs could be improved with new possibilities or increased efficiency. I'm often happy with what I'm offered, and I'm notorious for finding workarounds for any limitations in a program that I might encounter."

affected my quilting, especially when I point out that *Too Much Fun!* was conceived on a maillist. I have participated in challenges with nontraditional quilters that have influenced my development and growth as a quilt designer.

"The Internet has definitely influenced quilting internationally. There are web sites with pictures of quilts, there are websites with mail order quilting supplies, there are websites that offer patterns and instructions. Maillists help us network. We can send files and pictures through email and share whatever we want. My imagination doesn't work fast enough to think of where we could go from here."

But what would she **REALLY** like for her computer to do for her?

"I guess I would **REALLY** like the computer to do my mundane repetitive household chores, plan menus, do the grocery shopping, and fold the laundry. Since I am enjoying the process of designing on the computer so much, I would like to feed fabric into a slot and have a finished quilt come out the other side. Since I couldn't begin to think up the internet before it became so universal, who knows if my pie-in-the-sky dreams couldn't someday come true?"



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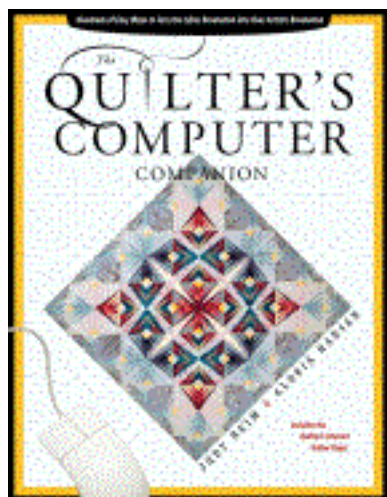
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We'd like news of new classes starting up to teach quilt design on computers, or new approaches to that teaching. New products, maillists, World Wide Web pages, etc., are all fair game, and we'd appreciate any tips you can provide. Send your tips by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

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The Virtual Quilt

A Newsletter for
Computing Quilters

Editor and Publisher: Robert Holland, Decatur, GA

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