

Southern Quilts and Quilting

To bring you a "state-of-the-quilt" address is no easy task. Quilting in the South is not an unique phenomenon or a cohesive movement. It is an uncoordinated pattern of efforts and events, some very personal and others boldly public. From a panoramic patchwork of talent, motives, backgrounds, and materials, Southern quilting draws its vitality and beauty.

The historic backbone of quilting is a largely anonymous group I call the Quilt Ladies. Their distinguishing characteristic is an early introduction to, and indoctrination in, the art of quilting. From predominantly rural backgrounds, these quilters developed sewing skills in an era when being a housewife and mother was almost the only vocation for women. Theirs was a tradition of utilitarian construction almost as old as cloth itself. But just as early women soon stretched their skills beyond warmth and comfort to creative beauty. The art of these Quilting Ladies grew in one of the few areas where self-expression and imagination were accepted by their society. What they lacked in resources and education they compensated for in skill and resourcefulness.

Before the age of ten, their first quilt was assembled from the variety of fabric in their mother's or grandmother's scrap bag. It was often a traditional design--the Nine Patch or Sunbonnet Girl. As their skill increased, their mentors gave them more difficult designs and they went to the store for fabric.

Quilts and quilting were important to these ladies. It was an art whose evidence was not consumed at the kitchen table and did not require daily repetition. Quilts were her personal property and a special pride when recognized by her peers.

The Quilting Ladies are important to the state of the art; out of pride and love they have kept it alive and flourishing, beyond the period when quilting was an important domestic industry. In another generation the quilting ladies will no longer be with us.

In contrast to the tradition-supporting Quilting Ladies, the Textile Artists are an innovative and enterprising group. To them, sewing has never been a way of life

and cloth is simply a new medium of creative expression.

The Textile Artists recognize few barriers to their quilting, and draw upon related techniques of design from other disciplines. This group is the spice that surprises established tastes and opens new avenues of quilting ideas even when they upset us. The Textile Artist can add to a quilting tradition, though they cannot overcome or dominate it. The South is relatively untapped by this group.

Should quilting lose its status as an established and commercially successful fad, the Textile Artist will find greener pastures. We should prize and celebrate their contributions while we can and keep alive that cultural sensitivity that recognizes quilting as more than an historically important handicraft.

In the South, the Hobby Quilter is a mixed source of joy and dismay. Her exuberance is a reflection of the pleasure of making one's first quilt, but the quality of her creative dedication too often depends on how many quilting projects she can complete and gift wrap before Christmas.

Some Hobby Quilters get beyond the stage of wanting to recreate every "keen" idea they find in a woman's magazine and believing they can assemble a king size quilt in five evenings. Even those whose dedication fades before the strict demands of quilting do provide an essential service. They form an ever increasing cadre of people who recognize and appreciate the accomplishments of more serious quilters. Their exposure educates them and prompts them to educate others in the art of quilting. In addition to stimulation of public appreciation that is the breath of life to artists, they encourage the development of commercial value which can provide the staff of life to struggling quilters.

The products of the Hobby Quilter vary with her diverse background and talent. Some develop skills and techniques and become the lifeblood of Southern quilters; they evolve into the Heritage Quilter.

Heritage Quilters are a diverse group, but they generally lack the childhood emphasis on quilting skills or experience the economic pressures of the professional Textile Artist. Their love of the art is a choice, not a domestic or commercial necessity. Heritage Quilters prize the widely varied contributions to the art, whether they be past, present, or future. They see quilting as a craft of days gone by, but as an on-going and growing form of human expression. They serve an art form in which appreciation has always been very personal and never very commercial.

The products of Heritage Quilters are destined to become both family heirlooms and museum pieces, but their primary value will always be in the hearts of those who cherish the love, as well as the art, which went into the construction.

The popular success of any art is established by the non-artist who experiences its beauty and value.

--Sue McCarter--
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QUILTS ARE

- To explain to acquaintances
- To labor over with friends
- To inspire endless searches through fabric shops
- To have an excuse for staying home
- To cling to and cherish with pride
- To pass on to children with trepedation
- To catch your best dreams in cloth
- To add some sparkle to days too busy for daydreams
- To hang in art exhibits, living rooms and over church altars
- To make love under for a lifetime
- Quilts are, and were, and hopefully always will be
- Creations of love - warmer than any cloth,
--brighter than any color
--and more meaningful than any poem.

--John McCarter--
©

On the Book Shelf

QUILT KANSAS!

by Jean Mitchell. 44pgs, soft cover pattern book. \$4.50 including postage and handling.

This is a book of workable patterns including 8 original designs by the author. Each pattern is accompanied by a brief note about Kansas history.

Proceeds will be donated for the preservation of the Carrie Hall quilt block collection at the Spencer Museum. Order from Publications Dept., Spencer Museum of Art, Univ. of Kansas, Lawrence, KS 66045.

QUILTER'S CHOICE: QUILTS FROM THE MUSEUM COLLECTION

880 pgs, 8 full color photos and 70 B&W illus., soft cover.
\$4.50 includes postage and handling. Order same as above.

A catalogue of the 1978 quilt exhibit at the Spencer Museum of Art (formerly known as the Thayer Museum). The collection includes the Rose Kretsinger quilts as well as others.

The catalog was prepared by the Museum staff with the cooperation of the Kaw Valley Quilter's Guild.

A Selection of Books for Shopping Giving and Keeping
THE QUILT ENGAGEMENT CALENDAR 1979 5.95
Quilt lovers look forward each year to this handsome calendar with beautiful full-color quilt photographs. Comes boxed for mailing.

THE GOODFELLOW CATALOG OF WONDERFUL THINGS 7.95
The finest in contemporary and traditional American handicrafts. Detailed descriptions, biographies of the craftspeople and complete mail order instructions. 350 pages, 700 photos. Inspiring browsing.

THE SHOPPERS GUIDE TO MUSEUM STORES 6.95
Where to buy unique furniture, jewelry, toys, furniture and needlework - and other assorted oddments.

AMERICA'S PRINTED AND PAINTED FABRICS Pettit 22.50
All the ways there are to print upon textiles. A most complete history of world fabric textile prints. All about the printers and patterns of America and other things that went on from 1600 to 1900. Hardcover.

AMERICA'S INDIGO BLUES Florence H. Pettit 18.50
Resist-printed and dyed textiles of the 18th century. 256 pages, 7 1/2" x 10" ,150 illus. -8 in 2 colors. Hardcover.

THE QUILTERS Patricia Cooper and Norma Buford 12.95
You'll enjoy these heartwarming stories of Southwest quilters and the beautiful photographs of their superb quilts. 160 pages, Many halftones, including 35 color plates. Hardcover.

THE CREATIVE WOMAN'S GETTING-IT-ALL-TOGETHER-AT-HOME-BOOK
Jean Ray Laury 6.95
This warm appealing and practical book presents real experiences and solutions of inventive, talented women in meeting the problems of combining self-expression and creative work with requirements of homemaking. 144 pages, 25 illustrations. Paperback.

Are there other books you'd like to find? Send a SASE for a list of quilt, needlework, design, decorative clothing and doll-making books (including DOVER books!)

Shipping & Handling cost, 1st book-50¢, add'l bks-25 ea. California residents add 6% sales tax.
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