

Carol Premack

I made a New Year's resolution in 1990 to take a quilt class, the only resolution that I've ever kept. That April I took a six-week beginner sampler class at Eydie's in Minneapolis. I had always liked quilts, and it was just a matter of time until I learned how to make one.

I knew that the class would be no problem because I had been doing needlepoint, cross stitch, knitting, crochet, and hardanger for many years---how hard could quilting be? But I put off taking a class because I had rarely used a sewing machine since 7th grade home ec, and I also thought that quilting might take all my needlework time.

Well, quilting did "take over" and I'm OK with that, although I still do hardanger and the occasional knitted scarf.

I made nine sampler blocks with the pastel small floral prints that were widely available then. The hand quilting is mostly complete, but I have no plans to finish---it's one of my few UFOs.

I soon found out about Hoffman fabrics, batiks, bright colors, black/whites, stripes, novelty/juvenile, and larger scale florals. My fabric collection now is varied and large (quilt group garage sales, "free tables," and Textile Center's garage sales deserve some of the credit). I have made bed quilts for my sons and have gifted many baby quilts and other small wall hangings, but I keep most of the quilts I make. They are all scrap quilts (OK, some of my "scraps" are half-yard pieces), and I never worry about running out of a fabric because I know that I can find something else that works and will possibly be better than my original choice. The more fabrics, the better! My current favorite fabrics are Kaffe Fassett, hand dyes, floral, and novelty. I prefer bright colors and bright pastels and am finally using the black/white fabrics that I've long been collecting. I also use fabrics that I've painted, sun printed, or colored.

Gwen Marston's Liberated Quiltmaking book changed my quilting---I discovered "liberated" houses! I liked the traditional house block quilts, but they were all the same design and had too many pieces. Liberated houses have no pattern, every house can be a different design or size. I've made houses with seven windows and a door, and more recently with just a rectangle and triangle. Precise measurements aren't required. I have created many house quilts since that first one in 1999 and will continue to make them---so many fabrics, settings, and possibilities! The book is still an inspiration to me.

I don't follow patterns very well so I would much rather improvise. I might have a very vague idea of what the quilt will look like, but I am always challenged and surprised along the way. I've learned that the quilt will "tell" me what it needs, I just have to listen. I know that sounds crazy to some people, especially non-quilters. I am not a fast quilter---it takes a lot of time to audition fabrics, cut and sew, rearrange blocks on the wall, and hand-quilt, even for a small wall hanging.

My favorite part of creating a quilt is choosing fabrics, especially finding just the right novelty fabric for a door or window---some of my fabrics look like Swiss cheese, and then I hand quilt with size eight pearl cotton. Sewing on beads and buttons, embroidering and adding other embellishments is a slow process, but I enjoy adding even more detail, (door knobs on houses, bead earrings), colors, and sparkle/bling. I think of it as a "reward" for anyone who takes the time to look closely at the quilt.

I had no idea when I took that first quilt class how many wonderful and talented people I would meet, how many new friends I would make, how much fun quilting would be, how much time, energy, effort (and money) I would spend, or that I would eventually need a room and a half for fabric and other quilt essentials. To quote a song from one of my favorite musicals, my life has "been changed for good."

