



My Art Will Keep You Warm

The Quilts of Bernice Enyeart





Baltimore Bride (detail)

Huntington, Indiana is home to one of the finest quilters around: Bernice Enyeart. Although nearly unheard of outside Huntington County, Bernice has been making boldly expressive, unique quilts for the last thirty-four years.

Bernice has been stitching things since she was big enough to hold a needle, but she didn't make her first quilt until 1972. That's when she quilted a double wedding ring pattern that was pieced by her foster mother in 1931. "Well," thought Bernice, "you raised me all these years, the least I could do was finish your quilt." Bernice had been an active hobbyist, doing needlepoint, cross-stitch and even woodcarving before she decided to take a chance on quilting.

At first Bernice was a little apprehensive. "I knew no one who quilted," she says. "It sounded like some kind of a magic thing. But I thought, 'You can do this.'" Bernice quilted the top and was surprised at how well the results turned out. "I said, 'You can do this!' Now I think maybe I should make me one, and once I got started and found out how, I couldn't stop."

Between 1972 and 1976 Bernice made thirteen quilts. "Those were the years when the house was a mess," she quips. Then in 1976, she began to enter—and win—regional and national competitions. In just eight years, Bernice won sixty ribbons at national and international quilting shows, including the National Quilter's Association, the San Diego Quilt Show and the prestigious Houston International Quilt Festival. Her awards include twenty first prizes, ten viewers' choice and three best of show. She has been featured in several books and publications including *Quilter's Newsletter*, *Ladies Circle Patchwork* and *The Quilt Digest Two*.

Although she was initially very active in competing and groups,

Bernice grew tired of the competitions. She explains, “I wasn’t doing it to beat people.” She eventually stopped entering contests, preferring instead to refine and redefine her art from the privacy of her home. “Sitting in a comfortable chair with my feet up, that’s fun.”

In the wintertime she may work on a quilt six or seven hours a day. Despite her experience, “It still takes a couple of months to finish a quilt.” She readily shares ideas but says, “I want to do my thing, my way, at home by myself.” In working alone, negotiating the challenge of an unfinished quilt, she is happiest.

Bernice owns a quality Singer sewing machine, but each one of her quilts is sewn entirely by hand. She uses #8 needles and averages ten stitches to the inch. Bernice will even go so far as to use a quilting hoop instead of her large frame when she can. Hand quilting allows Bernice to embrace the quilt in its entirety. She considers each piece of fabric both individually and as part of the whole as it is stitched.

Innovation and Tradition

Bernice does not hand quilt simply as a way of hanging on to the “old ways.” She will readily adopt new devices and new techniques that ease the task of making a quilt. She uses computers and graph paper to transfer and enlarge her designs, professional compasses to create giant circles, and translucent plastic templates to ensure that each piece of fabric is as identical as



Garden Path

possible. This last technique predates—but is very similar to—the “stack and whack” cutting technique that has become so popular in the last few years.

Bernice learned early on that the simple substitution of colors in patterns could lead to very expressive results. “Say you’re doing a log cabin; you could use two colors, blue, if you wish.” She adds, with a twinkle in her eye, “but I’ve learned that if you put a strip of yellow here and there, you [get] a beautiful blue one.”

Over the years, Bernice has used traditional ideas as springboards for her own creations. By substituting colors, mixing quilt patterns and designs, or even incorporating designs found elsewhere, she manages to create quilts that are completely unique, without losing that essence that makes a great quilt. This technique leaves her with no shortage of ideas. “I have, I suppose, five or six layouts now,” she reckons, “that are all sitting there—colored in—saying, ‘Why don’t you do me?’”



Rose of Sharon (detail)

More than Material

Although Bernice is an avid collector of fabric, she doesn’t buy it with a particular quilt in mind. She buys what she finds appealing, usually in half-yard increments. Her sewing room is flanked by large chests, filled with thousands of fabrics in every color, pattern and hue.

“I’ve got this stuff,” Bernice notes, referring to the fabric, “and I think, ‘Gee, that would look pretty.’ Then sooner or later you see a design and think, ‘Oh, that color would look good there.’ I don’t know but when I do get an idea, I see it in my head.”

Reflecting on her creative process, she continues, “And there is a challenge. You can take the traditional pattern, you can jazz it up, you can change it, you can combine it with another, you can go out to a multitude of different designs, Art Deco, abstract,

very contemporary. And you would still do it with fabric the same traditional way. A layer of fabric on top, a layer of padding in the middle and a layer of fabric on the bottom, stitched together, is all it really amounts to. And all that changes is its color and the design. There's no end to challenges.”

In anticipation of this retrospective show, Bernice has been busier than ever. In addition to choosing beloved and significant quilts from her thirty-four year career, Bernice has been actively finishing up both old projects and brand new designs alike. “My favorite quilt hasn't been made yet,” she muses, adding, “I think everyone is that way. No one can look at something that they've done and say, ‘Oh this is great.’ Why do people build houses and then put additions on them?”

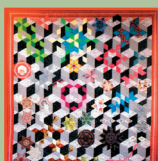
“I guess that's what being a human being is about. You're never satisfied with the status quo.”



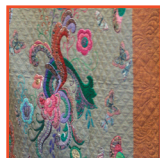
Welcome to Star City



Baby Baltimore
1994
46 x 50 in
Design by Pat Cox



Every Which Way
1994
61 x 73 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Flurry
1998
43 x 49 in
Design by Pat Cox



Roses
1996, 2006
62 x 78 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



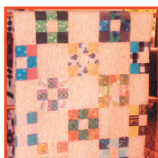
Baltimore Bride
1983
96 x 96 in
Design by Pat Cox



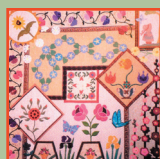
Rose of Sharon
1994
82 x 98 in
Mountain Mist pattern



Lone Star
1976
90 x 90 in



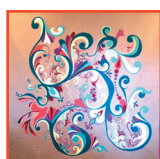
Orange 9-patch
1972
77 x 98 in



Mountain Mist Garden
1998
68 x 70 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart
Pattern by Mountain Mist



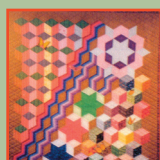
Coming Home
1980
67 x 67 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Phantasy
1985
90 x 90 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



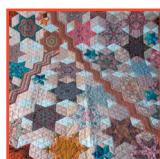
Stars for David
2006
54 x 60 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



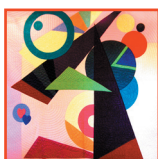
Stairway to the Stars
1989
55 x 60 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Unfinished Quilt Top
1952
36 x 36 in
Pattern from Women's Day magazine



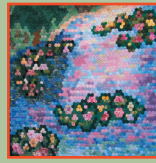
Starwalk
1995
57 x 65 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Balance
1983
80 x 108 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Baltimore Album #2
1985
100 x 100 in
1965 Woman's Day pattern



Waterlilies
2005
64 x 76 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Xanadu
2005
62 x 58 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Whig Rose
2006
57 x 57 in



Fred and the Birdbath
1998
80 x 97 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



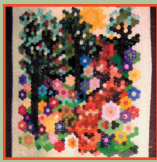
Seek No Further
1980
90 x 90 in
Dresden plate adapted by
Bernice Enyeart



Sunflower Star
1960's, 1998
84 x 84 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Over the Rainbow
1985
86 x 107 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Walk Through the Woods
pre-1980
57 x 64 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Welcome to Star City
1983
90 x 110 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Dark Maze
1991
63 x 74 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Opulence
1994
56 x 74 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Garden Path
1991
57 x 66 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Effervescence
2006
41 x 74 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Catastrophic
1996
55 x 62 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart



Tumbling Stars
1980
90 x 120 in
Design by Bernice Enyeart

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