

Patchwork, process & print

Carolyn Forster charts her progress from playing with fabric to publishing books on patchwork



I'VE ALWAYS stitched and made things, ever since I was a child. At an early age I was allowed to use my mum's sewing machine, and I was taught to knit and crochet by my grandmothers. Mum made a lot of our clothes when we were small and stitched costumes for school drama productions, so there was always a bag of fabric scraps waiting to be made into dolls' clothes and the like. I did embroidery too; gradually one thing led to another and I found patchwork.

Beginnings

The first thing I ever made was a hexagon flower pincushion in a home economics class at school. I researched patchwork quilts for the 'Interest' section of my Gold Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and made my first quilt for that. I still had a lot to learn but I wasn't put off. I went to Bath and studied Textiles and Fashion at what is now Bath Spa University. For someone who could have spent much time making patchwork for my course, instead I worked on developing my weaving skills. However, I did base my final woven designs on elements from a patchwork shop called The Patchwork Dog and Calico Cat in London. At the time I was making patchwork, but only as a hobby away from what I was doing at college.

When I left college I went to work for Laura Ashley in their shops, which was great, as there was plenty of fabric. It was when I moved to Tunbridge Wells that I

felt my patchwork required a bit of focus and that I needed to have some sort of incentive to finish things. I looked to join a group, but the only thing that fitted in with my working hours was a City & Guilds class – so I started the course. After some staff changes we were very lucky to have a lady called Elizabeth Harrison to teach us; her knowledge of history and techniques was amazing, as were her skills. It has always been old textiles that have inspired me most – the process rather than the finished article. For that reason I tend to have any number of quilts on the go at different stages, so that when one is completed I have something else to move on to immediately.



IMAGE © LANDAUER PUBLISHING, LLC



IMAGE © LANDAUER PUBLISHING, LLC

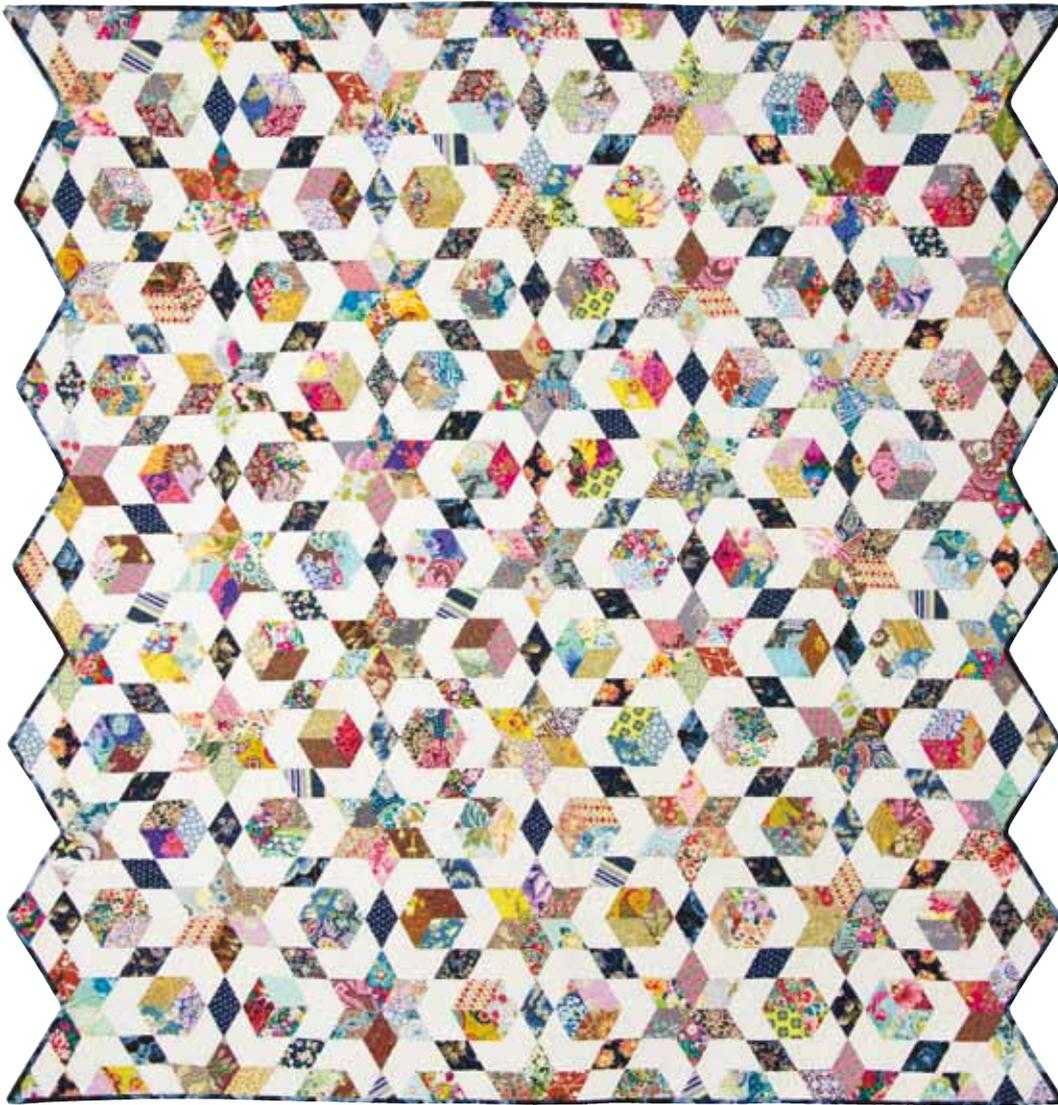


IMAGE © LANDAUER PUBLISHING, LLC

Left:
Stars and Cubes Quilt. 72½ x 69½in

In print

The quilt that I finished for the City & Guilds course was seen by Pam Lintott, who owned the quilting shop The Quilt Room in Dorking. Some time later she offered me a job working for her. As I'd been teaching at the local Adult Education Centre, one of the bonuses of working in the shop was that I could teach classes. I started with 'Quilt as you Go', based on ideas from my Adult Education classes – a course that became very popular. Looking at what was around on the technique book-wise I realised there was a gap in the market, and that using the work I'd done for the classes I could produce my own title to fill that gap. I was fortunate to have Gail Lawther and her husband to work with me on the title, and so I self-published my first book *Quilting On the Go*.

Previous page, from the top:
Carolyn Forster

Blueberry Jam Quilt.
69 x 60½in

A scrappy kite quilt from
the late 1930s which
inspired *Blueberry Jam Quilt*

Since then I've published more books, with the American publisher Landauer, who picked up my self-published book and printed it for me until my second book *Quilting on the Go, Taking it Further* came out with them last year.

Research and process

The books I do with Landauer are based on techniques, focusing on the best way to work through a particular process. As I'm a passionate hand quilter, one of my favourite books with them has been *Utility Quilting, Simple Solutions for Quick Hand Quilting*. A lot of research went into this title, such as finding out how women in times past, with no technology or internet shopping, managed to make so many amazing quilts. I also discovered many quilting designs that have

fallen out of fashion that we can use today, and finishing techniques that can also help us out now. It was another great example of how looking back at old quilts can move our quilting forward today.

To help with my research I'm an avid collector of books on quilt blocks and old quilts. When I have an idea or something appeals to me, I usually make notes in blank books of squared paper. My two favourites are Moleskine® books, and notebooks for schoolchildren which I buy in French supermarkets. I use a black pen to make diagrams and write notes. It sometimes takes a while for an idea to become a quilt, as I find I have to make it from the 'right' fabrics. Like most quilters I buy a lot of fabric and it is from this selection that I choose fabrics for a quilt. Hence they tend to have many different fabrics in them, not necessarily from the same collection, manufacturer or decade. Because of this I often run out of something and then need to find a substitute, but I think this makes the finished quilt more interesting. If necessary I'll piece together every last scrap of fabric in order to make a piece large enough for the patch required – it is patchwork, after all! That is another thing that fascinates me about some of the old quilts I collect: I love it when they contain several fabrics that have been pieced together to create one particular patch.

Through my books and magazine projects, I was approached by the English publisher Search Press to do books for them. These books are great fun as in addition to quilts they contain smaller stitchery-type projects, which lets me 'play' and stitch things that I might otherwise have made and just put away. I love the whole 'doing' part and rarely ever think about what I will do with the quilt or project when it's finished. Putting some of these things in books is great, as it allows me to share with others, not just those in my classes, items to stitch

IMAGE © LANDAUER PUBLISHING, LLC



as gifts or for themselves. Like me, people are often looking for just the right project to use up their lovely collection of fabrics. My most recent book for Search Press is *Little Quilts and Gifts from Jelly Roll Scraps*. As well as the great gift ideas, I loved making the little quilts as it was so satisfying to stitch and finish a quilt in a very short space of time. And it has also given me more ideas for larger quilts based on the little ones. So hopefully over the next year or so I will have time to make those bigger quilts ...

I usually stitch every day and if nothing else I will quilt or hand piece in the evenings. That is when I get most of my hand quilting done; as the work is portable I can do it while sitting with my family or watching the television. It's one of the things I love about combining machine work – which I do when I'm on my own in my sewing room – and hand work, which I can take anywhere and everywhere. With patchwork and quilting there really is something for everyone.

© Carolyn Forster 2015

Clockwise from above:
Hexagon Flower Garden Honeycomb Quilt.
95 x 91in

Laying out the blocks

Carolyn's notebooks

Hexagon Happenings

by Carolyn Forster
Landauer Publishing (www.landauerpub.com)
144 pages p/b, US\$27.95
ISBN 978-1-935726-66-1

Hexagon Happenings is Carolyn's latest title for Landauer. In this book she has enlarged the size of hexagon patches used and instead of joining by hand over papers has pieced then by machine, although if preferred the projects could be hand-stitched. In fact, the projects use four shapes: hexagons, equilateral triangles, diamonds and kites. Around a third of the book covers the basics of working with all these shapes, and the rest comprises hexagon projects, most of which are full-size quilts. To cut out your patches you can make your own templates, use the angles indicated on standard cutting rulers or use special acrylic pre-cut templates (see footnote).

Blueberry Jam Quilt, Stars and Cubes Quilt and Hexagon Flower Garden Honeycomb Quilt are all projects in *Hexagon Happenings*.

Carolyn has created templates specifically for use with *Hexagon Happenings*. You can find out more on her website: www.carolynforster.co.uk

