

Quilting

**A good way to spend time,
but you'd better have lots of it**

When Dorothy Bettis, a 71-year-old Eugenean, found life slowing a notch in her late fifties, she decided to do something creative with the time on her hands.

She stitched, basted and embroidered, weaving her new-found time into prize-winning quilts.

Time — lots of it — is an essential ingredient to handmade quilts like the ones Bettis churns out with spell-binding deftness. Her quilts have been displayed nationwide and have nabbed just about every blue ribbon in country fairs around Oregon.

Bettis' quilts take time because she believes in stitching them by hand. What's more, she believes in casting each stitch as close to the next as she can. The stitches are tiny; the work, slow. But for Bettis, it's all a fun hobby she can't keep her hands off.

Quilting is more than piecing together bits of cloth to create a colorful bedspread. Piecing is only half the job, if that. The actual "quilting" comes later when the pieced layer is stitched to a bottom layer, with dacrion filling in between.

The way in which the two layers are "quilted" together is Bettis' favorite part of the job. The designs she creates in the quilting process are sometimes her own, sometimes taken out of books, but they're always Bettis' top pride.

The quilting work is best seen on the bottom layer, which is usually a piece of solid-color cloth. To emphasize her quilting work, Bettis shows off her quilts' bottom sides as well as the more-colorful top layers.

"This is the bulk of my work," Bettis explains as she flops one of her bedspreads to show its bottom side. Quilting, and its puckering effect, gives the bedspread a subtle light and dark design. Bettis explains that the more stitches — and the tinier and closer they are to each other — the more dramatic this light and dark effect becomes.

"A quilter doesn't have to sew the stitches as close together as I do, but that's just my way," Bettis says. "The light and dark effect is important to me."

Bettis also relishes the initial work of quiltmaking — choosing the fabrics and colors she'll use. She says she tries to use only all-cotton fabrics, although she finds this difficult when searching for a certain design or color.

Sometimes Bettis will even set samples of fabrics and colors together and let them sit for a while so she can think about their compatibility.

"Sometimes when my husband goes hunting for a few days," Bettis says, "I'll lay all the fabrics out on the living room floor and leave them there for a day or so. As I pass through the room, I glance at them and go about my work. I like to just come upon them suddenly and see what my initial reaction is to them. Or sometimes, I'll ask anyone who comes in the door what their reactions are."

Bettis says she stays away from pastel colors and likes to use as many different fabrics in her quilts as possible. In one quilt, for example, she used about 50 different fabrics. Consequently, she says the hardest fabric to choose is the background piece because it has to go with every other fabric in the quilt.

Although Bettis made her first quilt in 1935, she didn't fully launch into the hobby until 1964. Now she averages two quilts a year.

All totaled, she has made 18 quilts, each with a hefty portion of detailed stitching and lots of tiny pieces.

On one quilt, for her grandchild, she embroidered and appliqued tiny animals, numerals and the entire alphabet. She calls it an "educational quilt" because it teaches a child the ABCs. Next to each letter is an animal.

D for dog.
Q for quail.
L for lion.

The educational quilt, which Bettis says is probably her most famous, also has a rainbow border, as another teaching device.

Bettis used to sell her quilts for up to \$300 a piece, a cheap price for all her labor. Now she either keeps them or gives them away to friends and relatives. She still makes a few on consignment, however.

"There's no money in quilts," Bettis stresses.

With glaucoma and diabetes threatening her eyesight and arthritis inching into her hands, Bettis says quilts take more effort for her than they used to. Refusing to abandon her high standards, however, she says she'll altogether quit the quiltmaking business when she notices the slightest slip in her abilities.

Handmade crafts lost their demand when the machine age dawned. Mass production lines replaced the solitary worker and labor costs jacked quality handmade goods out of reach for the modern consumer. Despite the odds, however, the joy of creating by hand still flourishes in many backyards of Eugene. Lots of people have tried their hand at various crafts, but only a few have mastered the art of creating high quality products that wallow in a sea of "oohs" and "ahs" from onlookers who wish they could create in the same way. The work is slow, the wages are low, but the thrill of creating is skyhigh.



Tiny stitches are what make Dorothy Bettis' quilts the prize-winning beauties they are. For the quilting process, Bettis stretches her bedspreads out on a large frame (above) set up in the basement of her Eugene apartment. Details of a finished quilt are pictured at left.

Photos
by
MARK PYNES

Wood

**Though it burns well for heat,
it's also great for furniture**

Anyone looking at Charles Rasmussen's rickety garage-turned workshop and then at his handmade furniture would never guess the two are related.

The garage, floating in a sea of mud near Rasmussen's home at 1615 High St., is a dingy, cold old shack with no particular order to it.

The furniture Rasmussen handcrafts in the garage, however, is some of the finest woodworking around town. His mitered corners angle to perfection, and his nail-free joints interlock with precision. Rasmussen's handmade wooden furniture is unquestionably sleek.

Rasmussen is a jack of all arts, with a master's touch in woodworking and painting. He says his "purest pleasure" is painting, although woodworking is an easier way to make a living.

But woodworking isn't a "get rich quick" vocation.

According to Rasmussen and Pat Cross, who operates the Made in Oregon furniture store in Eugene, high-quality woodworking has virtually no monetary return for its tedious hours of nit-picky tinkering.

A set of dresser drawers Rasmussen is working on now, for example, will sell for \$500. He estimates the project will take him about one month of full-time work to complete.

"No one could afford to buy my work if I set my prices according to how much time I put in," Rasmussen says.

"But that doesn't discourage me. My greatest return is the thrill of doing something excellent. If it wasn't, I wouldn't be doing this."

Rasmussen's case is a classic example of earning a living from a hobby. How does he keep his hobby from becoming plain mundane work?

"I don't make more than one of anything," Rasmussen remarks. "My work would become drudgery if I was mass producing one piece of furniture."

To maintain this philosophy, Rasmussen has turned down several opportunities to construct replicas of his original works.

A few weeks ago, for example, Cross asked Rasmussen to make her a desk as a floor model in Made in Oregon, with the understanding that customers

could place orders on the desk and Rasmussen would fill the orders.

"I'm going to make a desk one of these days," Rasmussen says, "but it's not going to be a floor model. I just don't like the idea of making something all over again after I've finished it. I'd get bored with it."

Ideal working conditions, Rasmussen says, would be constructing an original piece of furniture — whatever and however he wishes — and then selling the piece. Unfortunately, Rasmussen says he usually takes orders from customers and creates furniture to meet their expectations, not his.

Rasmussen started woodworking in June, 1975, and is a self-taught furniture maker. Although he has taken several art courses at Mt. Angel Community College and the University, he says none of them pertain to woodworking.

Instead, he says one day he just decided to try his luck at the craft, bought some hardwood and a few tools and set up shop in his bedroom. Pretty soon, he recalls, the hobby had spread out of his bedroom and into the hall, then into the living room.

When he decided to launch full-fledged into the art, he acquired his workshop. He credits most of his knowledge to one book, "Encyclopedia of Furniture Making," by Ernest Joyce.

The most important thing to learn in woodworking, says Rasmussen, is accuracy, especially when using joints instead of nails as he does.

"There's no give or take in this," he says. "You can't even be off by a sixteenth or a thirty-second of an inch. Otherwise, nothing fits."

In addition to accuracy, Rasmussen is dedicated to the old adage, "I'd rather do it myself," and shuns the idea of seeking someone else's work for the non-wood components of his furniture.

When needing upholstered cushions for a chair he once made, for example, Rasmussen first thought of asking a friend who weaves to make the cushions. He abandoned the idea, however, enrolling in an upholstery course at Lane Community College, and made the cushions himself.

Precision is the password for hand-made hardwood furniture that Charles Rasmussen churns out. Rasmussen examines a curved piece of wood he's working on (above left). At left, signs of the handicraft that goes on in Rasmussen's garage-turned workshop.

Photos
by
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