

November 2008 Newsletter

Textiles & Quilting 101 - Sustainable Consumption

This month I am choosing to approach the subject of textiles quite differently. I would like to review a topic called “sustainable consumption”. This is not a new concept, but one that we have never discussed before.

The history of quilting is long and vast, but the majority of the original quilts made by our grandmothers, and great-grandmothers used the concept of sustainable consumption. But they used a different name. The phrase went something like this – “use is up, wear it out, make it do, or do without”. It could also be called reduce, reuse, and recycle.

The idea is that we use the items that we have (fabric in clothing, etc) and turn them into something useful again. If you have clothes that your children have outgrown, or there is a hole in the garment, which makes it beyond repair, we find a new use for it, by cutting it up and creating a new item. This is sustainable consumption.

There are a multiple reasons why this is good environmentally, but our purpose today is more focused on fiscal responsibility

Recently, I created an item for a class that I am taking, which used this concept. Not new to me, but it sparked my thinking. Quilting was a concept that began by sewing together extra scraps from handmade clothing, or using old and worn clothing to create a new item. It was a way to create warm bedding, without too much additional cost. Pieces were cut and hand sewn to create very elaborate designs, using appliqué or strictly piecing a quilt. Grandmother’s flower garden quilts are a fine example of this. None of the fabrics had to match to make the item beautiful. Beauty came from the skill and the ability to name the items from which the new quilt was made (children’s clothing especially).

Several years ago, I made a jean quilt. I was young at the time and I spent a long time cutting 5 inch squares to create the top. I cut through seams and pockets to collect enough fabric to finish the 65 x 85 inch top. I am sure that my mother thought this a great project for me, because it kept me busy for quite a long time. I chose blue and white flannel striped backing and tied the quilt in light pink! I still have that quilt. My kids love it because it is sooo heavy and warm! My only concern is that it is difficult to put into my washing machine, because it is so big. And my dryer has a hard time getting it dry, so I would probably make it smaller (if I were to do it over again).

If you are thinking of creating a quilt like this of your own for someone special this season, let’s discuss a few important details. I would not make a quilt larger than a standard twin sized quilt,

unless you don't mind visiting a laundromat. I would maintain the same types of fabric throughout the top to create continuity. This will also make it easier to work with. If you are using jeans fabric with stretch (quite common these days), be careful not to stretch the pieces you are working with. You may consider basting them before piecing together. Offset each row so that not matching corners/rows – for example start every other row with a half square so that you can keep some of the bulk out of the seams. I would avoid cutting and sewing through seams and pockets, if possible – just because it is easier. Use a 100 needle or jeans needle to keep from using so many. I would also use a cotton/poly blend of thread – it will hold up to the jeans fabrics better. Use a lightweight batting – 80/20 adds bulk. I would not use flannel backing, but something substantial and not quite as thick.

I hope this sparks some ideas for you this Holiday season. You could try a pillow to start with or a Grandmother's Flower Garden pillow would be fun too. Small availability of funds should not stifle our creativity. Madame Alexander (the famous doll maker) once said, "Necessity is the mother of invention".

Happy quilting.