

CorelDRAW® makes quilting easy

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Barbara Webster
Starforest Quilts



In August 2004, Barbara Webster's quilt "Rhododendron In The Snow" was awarded £5,000 and the top honor of Quilt 2004 among 138 competing quilts at the Festival of Quilts in Birmingham, England. Like many quilters, she uses nature as an inspiration for the patterns of her quilts. Unlike some traditional quilters, she designs her quilts on the computer – allowing her to create intricate, kaleidoscopic patterns of photographic images that would be virtually impossible to accomplish without powerful and easy-to-use software. That software is CorelDRAW.

Barbara Webster lives on a 30-acre mountain farm in the Blue Ridge Mountains in western North Carolina with her husband and two dogs. For many years she worked as a graphic designer in an office, creating brochures and other publications using Adobe PageMaker.

After she moved to the mountains from Charlotte, NC in 1994, she decided to start making quilts. She obviously had a talent for it – her first quilt won Best First Quilt in the Asheville Quilt Show. This event launched her new career as founder and principal owner of quilt designing company Starforest Quilts.

"In the early days you could only use photographic images on your quilts by using heat-transfer methods. It wasn't a very rewarding process – you couldn't really print the images on natural fabrics, the image had a rubbery texture and the quilts were not washable. I also found out I was allergic to the fumes," says Barbara with a sigh.

The combination of new wide-format, specialized printers from companies like Mimaki and the rapid advancement of computer processing power made it possible for quilt designers like Barbara Webster to print high-resolution photographic images in vivid color on 100% cotton fabric.

"I remember casually watching somebody over the shoulder as they were playing with CorelDRAW a few years ago," says Barbara. "They inserted photos into different shapes, like squares and triangles, and flipped them around and manipulated them with such remarkable ease. I stopped dead in my tracks and I knew that this would enable me to create exactly the quilts I could see inside my head."

Barbara bought a copy of CorelDRAW Graphics Suite the next day and started to create her own quilt designs immediately. She typically starts by taking photos of nature scenes with her 5 mega-pixel digital camera Nikon Coolpix 5700. After importing the image files into CorelDRAW, she starts to place the images in different patterns to see if she can come up with an interesting composition.

"DRAW has some amazing features I use everyday. They save me hours," she explains over the phone. "The first one is PowerClip, I just love how easy it is to insert an image into a shape and position it exactly where I want. Another feature is Snap To Object. I could try to line up all the hundreds of shapes in my quilt designs by hand, but it would take forever and it wouldn't be nearly as accurate."

Some quilt designers use special quilt-making software like Electric Quilter and Quilt Pro, but according to Barbara Webster, many professional quilt designers use CorelDRAW.

"There's no comparison in my mind," says Barbara. "You can't really use photos in those other applications. The preview window is tiny, making it very hard to get an idea of what the final quilt will look like. They're just not very user-friendly if you want to use photos. The only advantage is that they calculate yardage automatically, but I don't really need that feature anyway. CorelDRAW not only saves me a lot of time, it actually helps me come up with the designs. It's like having a design partner."

Once she has created her design in CorelDRAW, she exports her files as 300 dpi TIFFs and burns them on a CD. The CD is then sent to a friend who owns a large-

CorelDRAW Case Study – Barbara Webster, Starforest Quilts

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format Mimaki ink-jet printer. This specialty printer is designed to handle thicker fabrics in wide formats – she can print images up to 55" wide and 3 yards long!

Says Barbara: "You can actually print longer than 3 yards. We have discovered, however, that 3 yards is all that will fit reasonably well into the steamer so we limit the runs to 3 yards."

"I prefer to use images I've taken myself, because I really need high-quality, high resolution images in order to get a good result," says Barbara. "Every single shape in my quilts contains a 300 dpi TIFF image. My quilt 'Spring in the Smokies' for instance, consists of over 500 triangles. The final DRAW file was over 1.8 GB in size – I had to buy a new DVD-burner to back it up!"

Barbara Webster fits the profile of a dedicated quilter pretty well. (According to a 2003 study, 99% of quilters in the US are women.) A typical quilter seems

to be a well-educated woman in her fifties who has more than 12 years quilting experience and a higher-than-average household income.

Barbara was recently commissioned to create a quilt for the Holy Cross Hospital in Silver Spring, Maryland. Her 69"x54" quilt "Approaching Summer" is based on photos she took at the nearby Brookside Gardens and machine quilted by her friend and colleague Heather Rogers.

"It hangs on a concave wall in the lobby of the Oncology Unit at the hospital," Barbara says. "The Brookside Gardens is such a beautiful and inspirational park and the center of the quilt includes a large image of a pond that I think captures the tranquility of the place. It has been very well received by staff and patients alike. It makes me happy to think that something I have created, can comfort other people."



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