OFFICIAL MAGAZINE OF THE INTERNATIONAL MACHINE QUILTERS ASSOCIATION

PASSION ~ ARTISTRY ~ BUSINESS

SPRING
2008

ON TRACK!

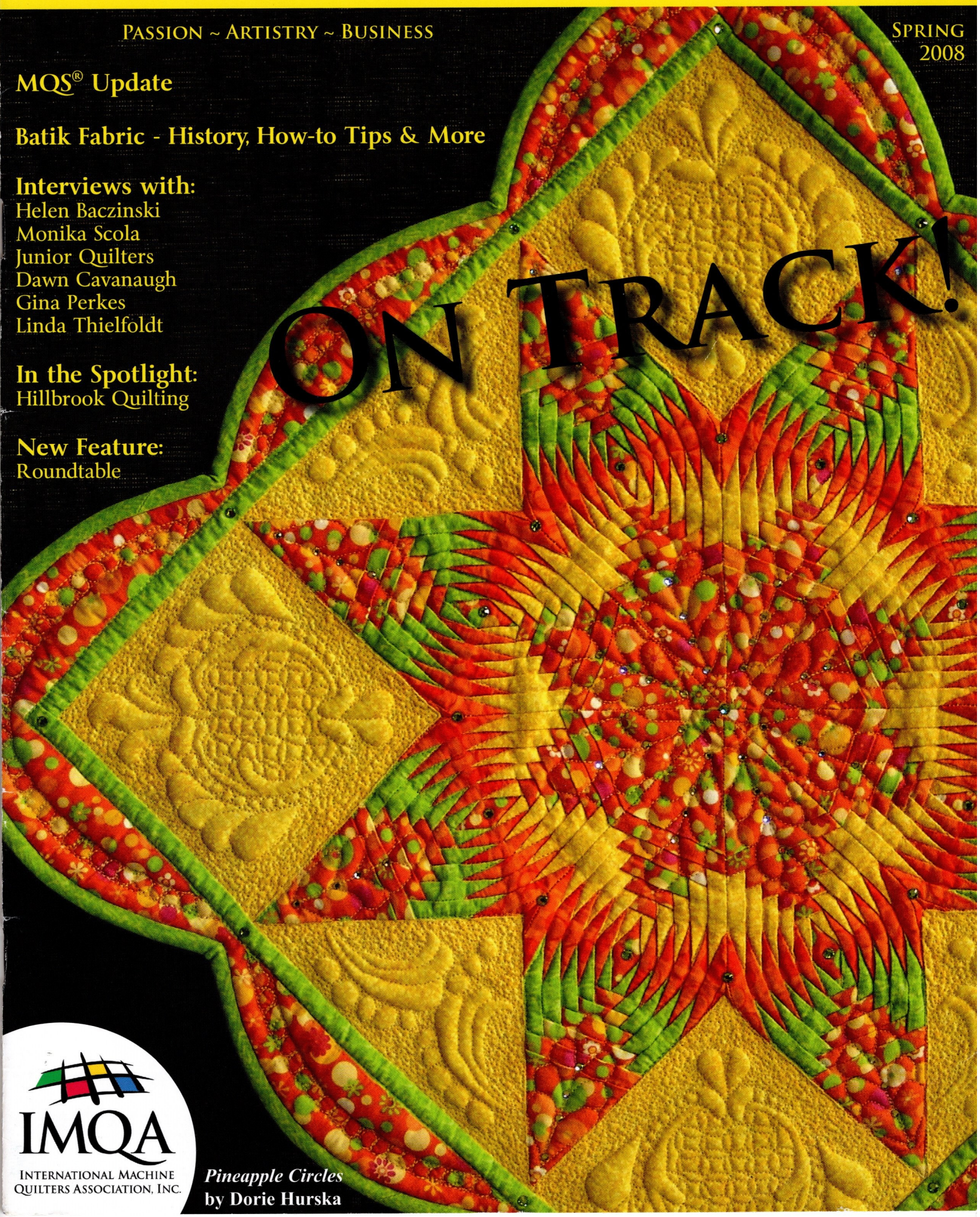
MQS® Update

Batik Fabric - History, How-to Tips & More

Interviews with:
Helen Baczinski
Monika Scola
Junior Quilters
Dawn Cavanaugh
Gina Perkes
Linda Thielfoldt

In the Spotlight:
Hillbrook Quilting

New Feature:
Roundtable



IMQA
INTERNATIONAL MACHINE QUILTERS ASSOCIATION, INC.

Pineapple Circles
by Dorie Hurska

My Love Affair with Batiks

By Judy Lyon

A Budding Romance

I first became aware of Batiks in the early 60's. Yikes, I'm revealing my age! I loved to shop at import stores. The interesting items from all around the world intrigued me. Their fabric offerings were in the form of stamped batik designs and were used for skirts, tablecloths, and bedspreads. They were great with the Ravi Shankar music and the incense sticks of the 60's.

Later, in one of my college art classes the teacher taught actual batik-ing. For me, it was love at first sight! My equipment was a jaunting (pronounced "canting") tool, a wooden frame, and a small kettle. Jaunting tools typically have a wooden handle with a long metal tip composed of a chamber for holding warm wax and a spout extending from the lower end or point. I used a combination of beeswax and paraffin in the jaunting tool to draw out my designs, mainly paisleys on scarves, etc. I still have the tiny kettle I used for melting wax. In fact there's still a layer of wax in the bottom. *Anyone who really knows me understands. I don't throw anything away! "I might need it again," and I usually do!*

Wax, melting pot, jaunting tool, and wooden stamp

Good quality dyes were hard to find, so I used colored Rapid-o-graph brand inks. *Not having an Internet was crippling!* The color sequence was carefully planned out because I over-dyed each ensuing layer of design and color. The process was time consuming, but I enjoyed what I was doing.

Over the years I learned more about batik, tie-dye, and other processes, but as a busy student, then mother, I seldom had time to use what I had learned. Not producing batiks didn't mean

I wasn't enjoying them constantly. In Asia I dressed my family of 8 in matching batik clothes. I laugh remembering at the Temple of the Emerald Buddha, tourists were taking pictures of our family dressed in the matching outfits! Yes, we were all thoroughly enjoying this wonderful design application. Even my husband had perhaps a dozen batik shirts.

While living in Malaysia, an old college acquaintance, (isn't that amazing that we'd meet on the other side of the world!), took me with her to a small outdoor batik factory. She had been there many times. The people were very friendly and she had been encouraged to try her hand with the jaunting tool on their suspended fabrics. I was jealous, but at least glad I was there. The location was out in the country – jungle – surrounded by trees and wildlife. There was an office and showroom where batik scarves and fabrics were sold in addition to starter assortments of powdered dye, mordant, and fixative solution. Mordant is the treatment given to the fabric to enable it to accept and hold the dye. The process requires soaking the fabric in a chemical compound, sometimes for days.

Out behind the showroom building were some large work areas 40 to 50 feet square. The floor was bare dirt, pummeled smooth and hard by the feet of the workers. Overhead was a roof, some of tin, and some of canvas. All the rest was open air. It was very picturesque, but also utilitarian. The fires and heat for the hot wax would have been stifling indoors and those who do any dyeing at home know a well ventilated space is needed to avoid inhalation of toxic fumes. (Of course it was stifling outdoors as well. This was a hot steamy jungle environment. I loved it!)

The fabric itself was stretched out in 10 to 15 foot lengths at about my hip height. That was probably waist high for the Malays. As I recall it was stitched or clamped onto a bamboo framework and held taught. The men and women who drew the designs had probably done them hundreds of times and needed no patterns. The wax was drawn onto the fabric trying not to rest the tool onto the fabric. This method prevented globules of wax pooling and making "blobs" in the designs – a problem I had experienced in college.

A variety of Jaunting tools exist. There is the original with one channel for the wax to flow. Another has a row of channels and can be pulled across the fabric making stripes or other linear designs. This type can also be used to make multiple dots on the fabric. An alternative is the "cocohan (tiny dots) decoration wherein a tool called a calle complongan, shaped like a comb of fine needles, punctures the wax leaving dots of color,"[1] instead of white dots.

Another factor in the clear reproduction of a design is the tightness of the weave in the fabric. A tight weave helps the "resist" stay put and not soak into unwanted areas. A thin fabric enables the wax to fully penetrate rather than puddling on the surface. Not all batik dyes are resisted with wax. There are various pastes made from rice or Cassava that can be used and which can be removed more easily and without staining. They each have their own unique qualities and drawbacks. For instance, in a home workshop where the wax is melted for removal with an iron, it can, if not expertly done, soak into the fabric and leave an oily mark.

Back to the jungle, after the wax had cooled, the dyes were brushed into the partitioned areas. They were beautiful clear colors—synthetic

dyes the colors of watermelon, orchids, parrots, and tree frogs. It was amazing. After the dye was dry and permanent, the wax was removed, the fabric dried and another part of the design drawn again in wax with more dye following in sequence. Actually, I think one of the things we all love about batiks are the brilliant colors. I can tell you that not all Malays and Indonesians wear the bright hues we hold dear. Shades of brown, blue, turkey red, and gold are popular for clothing. The Indian people wear brighter colors in the form of saris. Hawaii, in contrast, sports many bright tropical colors in batik, and pseudo-batik printed fabrics.

Early Batiks

The first production of batiks was apparently in Africa or India, then spread to Southeast Asia, notably Indonesia. "It is believed that the Indians were familiar with the resist method of printing as early as first century A.D.... Since early days of Indian history dating back to nearly 2000 – 1500 B.C. Indians have been known to wear vibrant colours and dyes which were made from barks of trees, leaves, flowers and minerals. Blue was obtained from indigo, while orange and red were from henna. Yellow was from turmeric and lilac and mauve from log-wood. Black was created by burning iron in molasses and cochineal from insects."[2]

There is also evidence of batik in Japan. Roketsu-Nome batik panels were created during the Nara period (710-794). During the Edo period (1600-1868) batik with a rice paste resist was used for Kimonos and fans. Wooden stamps dipped in wax and printed on silk introduced a type of manufactured batik. [3]

African batiks were primarily made with Indigo. Even today the blue and white batiks from the Dark Continent are much admired. Eventually the Dutch manufacturers began producing machine wax prints for the African market.[4] It was the full circle from the original Indigo batiks attributed to Nigeria.

Indonesia eventually became the recognized "capitol" of the Batik world and the creation of "Batik Batawi." (Cotton Batik). The word Batik means "dots" in Indonesian and batik tulis means "write."[5] Because of Indonesia's position on the trade route, the introduction of foreign cultures and their influence was inevitable. Ancient Hindi inspired fabrics often displayed animals, flowers, and motifs significant to religious beliefs and superstitions, etc. but the batiks of Indonesia developed into mainly geometric shapes and even variations of stripes possibly due to the Islamic culture and its restrictions on design.

> "Foreigners introduced such motifs as irises, daisies, chrysanthemums, swans, hummingbirds and butterflies [-the motifs we enjoy today]. Sarong designs changed from strictly geometric motifs to floral bouquets, birds and diagonal bands. Colors also reflected Chinese and European influence; ming yellow, bright red, turquoise, royal blue and green. European batik was characterized by areas of flat color and minimal detailing. Chinese designs...used many shades of an individual color and intricately filled the motifs with tiny dots."[6]

Late into the 17th century, batiks were still made in the homes. Women considered working outside the home dishonorable.[7] The method of drawing patterns in wax on fine machine-woven cotton was practiced as a form of meditation by the female courtiers of Java."[8] As in other cultures, women were the artists who first and foremost created clothing for their families. A wide variety might have been traded between households for many distinctive designs and colors were needed for social events. Certain colors were only available in specific villages and batik fabrics were transported to those various towns when their color was wanted.

Engagements, wedding, business meetings, etc. all required specific types of batik. "Middle aged women wore reds and blues and men wore blue, brown, purple and green." [9] Social standing was also proclaimed in the fabrics chosen until the Dutch prohibited this practice. "In the first half of the 19th century the Dutch actually imported imitation printed batiks to Java, using cotton from the United States. This stopped around 1860 due to the Civil War."[10]

The popularity of Batiks waned in western culture through the early 20th century but enjoyed a resurgence of popularity in the 1960's. In Southeast Asia, its popularity never diminished. People of all genders and ages commonly wore and wear batik. In fact, when a man is asked to wear formal dress for an evening occasion, that means, wear batik.

Batiks for Quilters

The batik fabrics quilters like to buy and incorporate into their quilts are of several different types.

- Traditional one-layer Batik is a drawn design of resist with dye flowing into the space created. It can be multi-colored because the dyes can be applied individually into the sectioned pieces of the motif. Also, a lighter tint of the colors can be achieved by turning a tightly woven fabric to the wrong side where there is less wax, and brushing on the dye bath.
- Traditional multi-layered batik is that in which a second application of resist is applied after the first dye bath is dry and with or without the original application of wax being removed. The fabric is again dyed, then again resist is applied, and the process is repeated until all the colors have been achieved through over-dying. With three colors of dye, if applied in proper sequence the artist can have the colors yellow, orange, red, green, blue, purple, and brown.
- Crackle batiks are achieved by applying a thin layer of resist, with high paraffin content over the fabric and when dry and sometimes refrigerated or even frozen, (if done at home), wrinkling the fabric creates cracks in which the subsequent dye bath will soak into the unprotected lines and creases. Traditionally this "veining" was considered an imperfection. In indigo dying the cloth is exposed to the sun to keep it supple, thereby avoiding cracks.
- Stamped batiks create almost mass-produced patterns with a copper block (tjab) or wooden stamp dipped in the resist and stamped onto fabric over and over to produce a repetitive over-all design. Alternatively, stamps are used to stamp the dyes themselves and mimic traditional batik motifs.
- Splash and scratch is another method reminiscent of the black paint covered crayon drawings of our childhood. The wax or starch is spread on the fabric and a design is excised or dots applied with the needle comb, both allowing a pathway for the dye to form a design.
- Tie-dyed fabrics are often sold in the same section as batiks and produced by the same manufacturers. They are not batiks, but they are beautiful.
- Mottled, hand-styled fabrics may also be sold from the same shelf. They are simply unevenly dyed, infrequently using a light splash application of water-soluble resist which breaks down quickly in some of the thinner areas. This makes a beautifully marbled or mottled fabric popular with quilters.

Batik Pros and Cons

Because the colorfastness of the dye is seldom an issue in these days of high-tech chemicals the major distinction between various batiks and their manufacturers is the tightness of the fabric's weave. Recall that a tight weave makes fine and distinct designs possible. Therefore fabric destined for the batik process

is typically tightly woven of fine yarns. This can create a few problems for quilters.

- Most hand-quilters have come up against – literally – batik fabrics. It can be very difficult to push the needle through the fine weave. Therefore the quilting requires more time, fingers get sore, needles bend, and tempers flare.
- Many quilters say appliqué using batik is great. Although it is "hand-stitched" and the fabric is tricky to "needle," a small allowance can be turned without fraying (a real blessing) because of the tightly woven fabric. The brilliant, distinctive hand-dyed colors are also just what the appliqué artist wants.
- Mistakes are hard to hide with tightly woven batiks. Recall in the sewing of apparel that once you've sewn over satin or real velvet, it always leaves an impression if you try to "pick it out." This is a problem with batiks as well. Last year I received a quilt back from judging with the notation that my mistakes were visible on the back. Arrgh! The backing was a tightly woven, crackle batik. As my machine's #20 needle popped through the fabric, it actually broke some of the fine yarns of the weave. Spraying it with water, rubbing it lightly, etc.—none of the

tricks would make those holes disappear. I've promised myself I will never again use batik as a backing! (I probably will weaken, just because I love the colors etc. so much.) Perhaps you will want to try a smaller needle and a finer thread when machine quilting batiks.

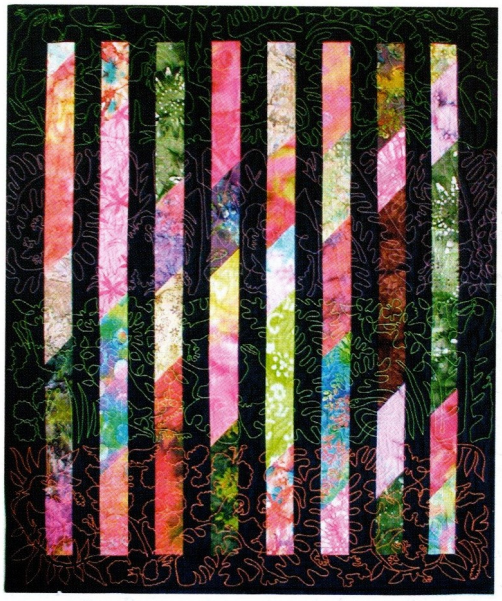
- Because of the tight weave, fusible appliqué with batik can be very clean and successful. Unlike more loosely woven fabrics there is not the fuzz and fray that sometimes develops along the unturned and unprotected edge. Taking the problems into consideration, many companies that manufacture batiks have begun using fabrics that are a little more loosely woven and have a softer "hand." This is one of the selling points of SewBatik fabrics and other companies have followed suit. The Princess Mira line is also quite supple essentially meaning a bit more loosely woven. Will this make clean appliqué more tricky? Possibly so, but the difference is likely minimal.
- One final consideration is the causticity of the dyes and the possible breakdown of the yarns. Over the years I have noticed my garments made of Malaysian batik tend to break at the crease lines just as the old silks weighted with tin once did. Were the fabrics in our batik clothes weighted with tin? I don't think so. It may be that the chemical composition of the dye was slightly caustic. I also suspect that because of the tight weave the yarns were finer and may not hold up as long.
- Batik dyes, on the other hand, are typically long lasting as far as brilliancy and intensity. This is due, in part, to the requirement that the dyes be extremely permanent and able to withstand the repetitive boiling out that was sometimes required. It is also because the dye soaks through and penetrates the fibers, rather than being introduced only to the surface as with printing or stamping.

Most of the pros and cons are things each quilter will have to wrestle with on an individual basis. Decisions will have to be made concerning which fabrics to buy for their particular needs, and which needles to use. Also trying to make few mistakes that have to be picked out is helpful! For hand sewers, even which sore finger remedy to try must be decided! Fortunately fabric companies are aware of these things too and are working all the time to improve their products. Aren't we glad? Thank you, batik manufacturers, for beautiful, colorful, exotic fabrics from around the world. Thank you for looking ahead and addressing these problems and constantly making quilting better for us! Thank you for nourishing our creativity!

Footnotes:

1. *http://discover-indo.tierranet.com/batikpag.htm*
2. *1a. Batik—In Vogue Around the World, p1, http://www.indiaprofile.com/fashion/batik.htm*
3. *Batik: Modern Concepts and Techniques, by Noel Dyrenforth, p.33, http://books.google.com/books?id=pIsaWsxg6KwC&pg=PA33&dq=batik+methods+Africa&sig=dmIwC_O00eAeK75R7cg5fgBRvr8#PPA20,M1*
4. *Batik: Fabled Cloth of Java, by Inger McCabe Elliot, p. 96, http://books.google.com/*
5. *http://discover-indo.tierranet.com/batikpag.htm*
6. *Batik: Fabled Cloth of Java, by Inger McCabe Elliot, p. 96, http://books.google.com/*
7. *Batik: Fabled Cloth of Java, by Inger McCabe Elliot, p. 105, http://books.google.com/*
8. *http://discover-indo.tierranet.com/batikpag.htm*
9. *Batik: Modern Concepts and Techniques, by Noel Dyrenforth, p.118, http://books.google.com/books?id=pIsaWsxg6KwC&pg=PA33&dq=batik+methods+Africa&sig=dmIwC_O00eAeK75R7cg5fgBRvr8#PPA20,M1*
10. *Batik: Fabled Cloth of Java, by Inger McCabe Elliot, p.96, http://books.google.com/*

Managing Editors Note: *Designer Judy Lyon is a graduate of BYU with a BA in Art and MA in Humanities. From an early age she has loved sewing and fabrics. Her mother told bedtime stories of the fabrics used in her Grandmas' quilts—silk and woolen log cabins from Canada at the turn of the century; cotton flower gardens from Minnesota. Living worldwide with her Army husband has amplified her interest in varied cultures and art styles. With her husband and 8 children, she has lived in Oklahoma, Utah, California, South Korea, Malaysia, Hawaii, and now Kansas for the second time. She met her friend and now business partner, Angela Meadows while in Kansas. And, when she needed a special quilt she had made quilted for her son, Judy designed the quilting pattern for Angela to use. Thus started a business partnership that has grown into what is now MeadowLyon Designs, LLC. Visit their web site at www.meadowlyon.com. Judy will be teaching at this years MQS®.*



Contemporary Strip pieced quilt made by Judy Lyon and Angela Meadows. "Seashore Blankie" patterned after a quilt made by Mickie Swall.