



# Patrice Perkins Creswell

OF AUSTIN, TEXAS USA

When Pat Creswell was young, she came across a discovery that would help shape the rest of her life. Rummaging through her grandmother's closet like a female Indiana Jones, she came across a treasure trove of quilt blocks in different shapes, sizes, and patterns. She was immediately drawn to them, but curious to learn more.

"I found that I was interested in them immediately, and all of my female relatives seemed to know exactly what their names were. I found it *fascinating*," she remembers today. "The [ironic] thing was, *none* of them even quilted!"

CARMEN'S VERANDA (76"x90")

Today, Pat Creswell has far exceeded the cumulative quilting experience of her entire family, having won awards in numerous U.S. and international competitions, had her work appear in magazines, books, calendars, and on TV, and even had some commissions. Through it all, though, she has refused to stay mired in one specific quilting style or technique, choosing to explore new areas as a way to challenge herself and her creativity.

"Whatever comes to my mind, I give it a shot. There's nothing to lose," she says. "Of course, not *all* of my quilting projects and attempts come out like I'd like them to...I do have boxes of things that maybe *someday* will be good!"

Born in Bakersfield, California, but raised primarily in the Texas cities of Houston and San Antonio (in addition to stints in Little Rock, Arkansas, and



Providence, Rhode Island), Creswell and her family finally settled in Austin, Texas, the state's capital.

It was while attending college and earning her degree in nursing that Creswell made her first quilt. Or, to hear her talk about it, *attempt* to make a quilt. "I still keep that one when I need a good laugh. It was pretty gruesome," she says. "And it was so hard to find fabrics back then. I mean, those horrible little brown calicoes!" Largely self-taught, Creswell eventually found books to learn from, as

well as classes, though those were more on quilting theory than production.

A career as a registered nurse in neonatal intensive care unit's along with a marriage (to husband Jim) and three children in succession forced her to keep her quilting simple, usually exactly copying pictures of quilts that she most admired. "My family has been very supportive of my quilting," she says. "And my kids have grown up with it, so they pretty much take it for granted." After joining the

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*CREWEL WHIRL (89" x 89")*

## artist's statement

Although I have enjoyed making traditional patterns, I prefer the creative energy I feel from attempting to push an existing design or create my own. With me, this positive energy can sometimes flip into frustration and self doubt, but I've learned to be patient—it's all a part of the process. Although my education is mainly in nursing, any art training I've had has come more informally, predominately through other quilters—either workshops and lectures or through admiring their quilts and sharing ideas.

My work tends to be predominately appliqué because it seems to be the easiest way to implement my ideas. I tend to appliqué by hand since it's very portable, but also because I think best while my hands are busy. While I'm appliquéing the part of the quilt I've worked out, my mind is free to think about how to tackle those areas I haven't quite decided on yet. Consequently, my quilts are always evolving, and sometimes even I don't know how they're going to end.

I feel there are so many sources for inspiration—nature, architecture, fine arts, other crafts, antiques—anything involving color, design, or interesting shapes. I start to pursue a possible idea by collecting various inspirations, as well as my own sketches, into a folder, and then play with these images until I get some idea of the quilt. Usually, I have several folders going at once—the one I'm currently working on and others that may or may not become quilts in the future—the "To Be Quilted" files.

I start with my central idea or motif, placing it up on a large design wall. Then I'm constantly standing back, looking and asking the questions—what does it need now? Or what if I do this? There are usually several elements that I want to try to incorporate into the quilt, and I will make these components separately. Then I try to find a way to integrate all of these elements into the final whole. Some of these components become part of the quilt,

some are set aside. It's an interesting, albeit long-term, process to shepherd a project from my original idea folder to components to finished quilt.

I love working in all colors, but find myself gravitating toward a rich, warm palette. Although I'm always collecting inspirations, it is usually a particular fabric that triggers actually getting to work on a project. Because it does take me so long to finish a quilt, I usually have several projects going at once so that I can work on the one that is most interesting to me at the moment. Occasionally I'll work on quick projects when I feel that strong need to complete something. My main goals in taking on a project, though, are to learn something new or attempt a particular challenge, and of course, to enjoy myself. I like wrestling with a project, sometimes walking away in fatigue or frustration, sometimes full of energy and excitement. ♦

BOYS OF SUMMER



PACIFIC PASTIME (89" x 89").

Blocks are enlarged form Jeanne Kimball's "Fairmeadow" pattern.

Austin Area Quilt Guild and hearing a guest speaker encourage diversity, Creswell adopted her "it's all good" approach.

"I started out with just doing my own color schemes and relatively traditional patterns, and then finally moved into my own designs," she says, "although I do have a great [love] for appliqué, and many of my quilts are [created] with that."

Creswell joined IQA about a decade ago after attending International Quilt Festival in Houston. "I was shocked. I had no idea that a [quilt show] could be something of that size and caliber," she

says. "I wanted to be a part of it right away." Most recently, Creswell's *Carmen's Veranda* took first place in the Innovative Appliqué, Large category at the 2001 Judged Show, while *Crewel Whirl* did the same in 1997.

Today, Pat Creswell has retired from nursing to work (and occasionally teach) at The Quilt Store in Austin—no doubt just as much for the employee discount as the chance to meet and talk with other quilters! "Quilting is a great source of learning and enjoyment for me, as well as a creative outlet," she sums up. And to think—it all started with what was behind that old closet door. ♦



UNTITLED (85" x 85")