

Market crafters ready for 'Quilt Shop Hop'

By MEGAN LEE

In November 1990, when Linda Hitchcock opened Undercover Quilts in the south arcade of the Economy Market, there was only a small handful of quilting shops in Western Washington.

Now, there are almost 40 local quilt specialty shops. Hitchcock feels this renewed interest is only natural, but is still surprising. These diverse and specialized quilt shops stitched themselves together several years ago for the Western Washington Quilt Shop Hop (WWQSH), a five-day affair. The annual event is now in its seventh year and interest is snowballing.

Stop by Undercover Quilts for your passport to hop.

Any level of quilting enthusiast is welcome to join the Quilt Shop Hop, June 22 to 26, it begins with picking up a passport at your local quilt shop beginning June 1.

Undercover is a great place to start, Hitchcock, her helpful husband and the experienced staff will enthusiastically get you started.

To participate in "The Hop" hoppers take the passport to as many of the more than 32 participating shops (scattered from Lynden, just north of Bellingham, to Vancouver, Washington) to have it stamped.

Holders of passports stamped by at least 16 shops, by June 25, are eligible to win prizes. Follow all directions carefully, participants must be over 21 years-old, but children under 10 will receive a 4-inch surprise from each shop.

'Hoppers' will receive a block kit from each shop. Each block kit includes three pre-cut

squares of fabric: One chosen by the particular shop and two squares reflecting this year's "Flower Garden theme."

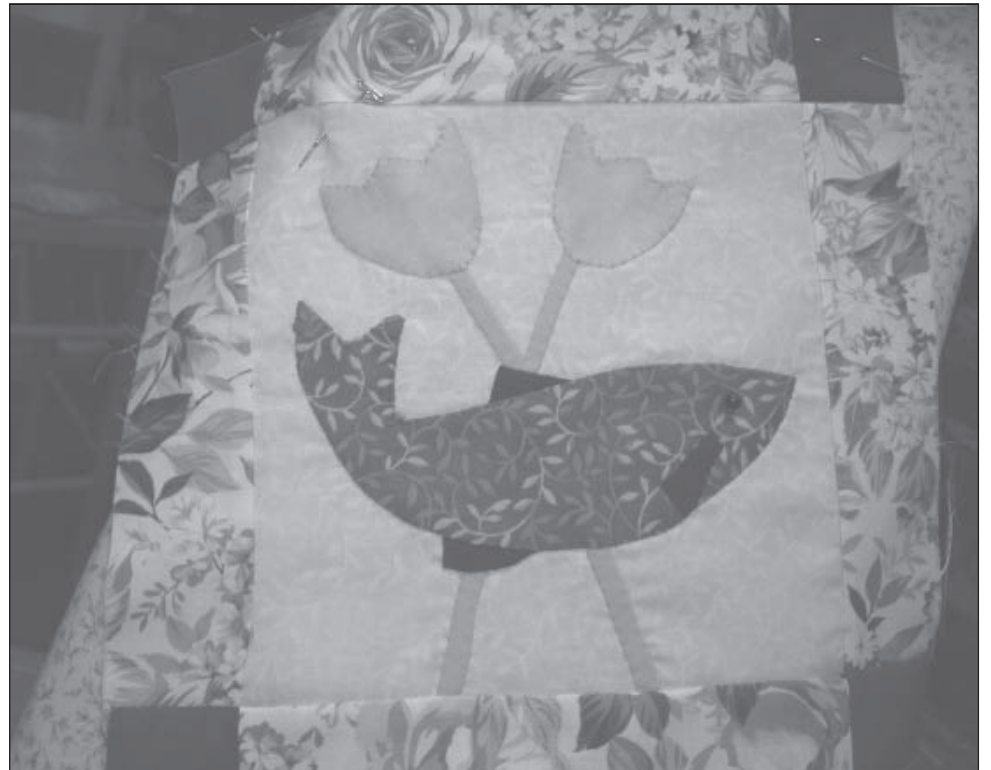
This year Undercover Quilts' chosen fabric is a fish and a tulip, brilliantly representative of the Market. The idea is for "hoppers" to collect Block Kits to create their own individual quilts, using the flower garden blocks collected during the hop. Pop by Undercover Quilts to see finished examples from years past, or for a sneak peak.

Participants explore each shop's patterns, books, fabric and finishing kits, share advice and meet featured artists. Check out the official "Quilt Shop Hop Journal," which includes directions and information about each destination. During the "Hop" Undercover Quilts will host an array of activities and demonstrations in the common area in Economy Market's south arcade (near the entrance to the Pike Place Brewery.)

Those who don't (or won't) drive are welcome to hop on the 'quilter's bus' for a full day of shop hopping with other quilters. Contact WWQSH to ride, the deadline for bus sign-up is June 15.

There are two grand prizes: One is a two-night stay for one-person, and nine friends, at "The Gathering Place: A Quilters Retreat," in Stanwood. The second is a special "quilter's edition" Viking sewing machine, courtesy of In the Beginning, quilt shop. Other prizes include a night at the Palace Hotel, in Port Townsend, goodie boxes of books, fabrics, notions etc., gift certificates or one of the many door prizes.

Besides the annual Hop, quilters do an astonishing number of organized events,



Undercover Quilts' unique quilt block for the Quilt Shop Hop. Photo/Megan Lee

activities and outings, including charity work. Undercover Quilts customers bring in fabric, the shop matches each donation. More than 6,000 individual quilts have been made for preemie babies.

Joyce Williams teaches quilting at the Day Break, which aides battered women, recovering addicts and people in need. Quilting is a relaxing, Zen activity, Hitchcock says she has a lot of nurses and lawyers who quilt to relax. There is even a "Quilting Cruise," in which 150 quilters from all over the world cruise from Seattle to Alaska, stopping at port to seek out special shops and having classes on-board.

"Each shop is unique, every shop has a different feel," Hitchcock explained. "I specialize in specialized fabrics: kimono-inspired fabrics from Japan, hand-dyed fabrics from boutiques in Indonesia, retro-fabrics, Pacific Northwest fabrics...and antique quilts."

Antique quilts are her favorite, her passion. So many were made under hardship and tell stories through the fabric, the pattern and the colors within the patterns. Each manner of design and stitching indicates something

specific, such as sickness, marriage or a barn raising.

If a quilter used the log cabin pattern and chose red in the "chimney," it meant there is a fire burning and visitors are welcome. Rural quilters used simpler, utilitarian patterns and stitching. A quilt with the same fabrics, but made denser, with finer quality is more likely from a city, where women had more leisure time.

Different regions have their own look, such as Amish. The Sears catalogue sold mix-and-match bundles. Hitchcock remembers her grandmother ordering bundles, hoping for diversity of fabric, not all "shirt material or something boring." Variety is key.

Patchwork quilting is a true American art form. At Undercover Quilts Hitchcock buys, sells and collects these traditional works of art, and Nineteenth Century and Civil War reproductions. She truthfully jokes that if her house was on fire, she would rescue the quilts, the kids and the cat, though not necessarily in

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Quilt hunting in Arkansas: Left to right, Mother Jimmie Hitchcock, aunt Irene Fennell, quilting friend Delma Woolsey and Linda Hitchcock

The Market's Market



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