

Quilting Any Size

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I started quilting before

there were rotary cutters, when a pair of Gingher shears was the best gift ever. I began with traditional bed quilts—all hand quilted—with lots of places to show off feathers and fancy patterns. If I wanted to quilt with colored thread, I used beeswax on embroidery floss. Soon I started dyeing fabric, and by 1985 I was using my own hand dyed fabrics exclusively and learning to machine quilt. Needless to say, by the time I bought a longarm machine (which cost enough to pay for a small car), I was even more serious about the quilting part of quilt making. My work stands apart because of the individual look of my hand dyed fabric. It is uniquely my expression and has become intertwined with the meaning I want to convey with each of my quilts. *The quilt top alone, though, is not enough.* The added layer of meaning that the quilting design gives a piece is the magic; the stitches not only tie the layers together, they create shadows that make shapes, lines and patterns that bring together the ideas I am trying to convey. I look at each top I finish, and then plan the stitching to fit that particular quilt—stitching that may add imagery or concepts that are not seen in the flat fabric alone. I use my APQS for all sizes of quilts, even very

small ones, and often I add stitching with one of my Bernina 1230s and/or hand stitches. I use the stitch that fits both my inclination as to how I want to work and makes the mark I want to see. I like to look back after finishing a quilt and review the choices that made the quilt what it is. Just for fun, I will note how long the steps took.

Wave #11 for K-E

The top: I think of art quilts as not just for the wall. As I planned a wedding gift for my niece Kate and her husband Eduardo to use on their bed, I limited myself to the blues and turquoises which are favorites of Kate, with a theme of water. I dyed lots of ‘water’ fabrics, (**Photos 1 and 2**) and ended up with several choices. I chose one whole cloth piece (the fabric is 120 inches wide) as the background, and one much lighter piece for appliquéd waves. (**Photo 3**) I considered very seriously how I would appliqué the waves—there were yards of them—by hand or by machine. I decided I must use turned edges for a quilt that might have children jumping up and down on it in a few years. Considering my lack of experience with machine stitched appliqué, I

1. Applying blue textures with rollers in Ann's dye studio.

2. Later, dark blue painted over most of large piece, dragging on the floor. White fabric soda soaked and ready to paint.



Photos by Ann Johnston

3. Chosen piece on the wall with one wave placed for appliqué.

4. Detail of front of Wave #11 showing printed wave under appliqué wave under quilted wave.

5. Detail of back of Wave # 11.

felt that it would be more relaxing and produce better looking results if I did it by hand. I hand appliquéd every day for an hour or two for about two weeks to avoid straining my hands.

The quilting: I wanted my quilting design to enhance the idea of waves. So Decision Number One was how to handle the appliquéd waves; should I stitch over them or outline them? I do not like stitching in the ditch, and I am not very good at following an exact curve on the longarm. Even if I could do that capably, I know from experience that stitching along the inside and the outside of the seam would result in an even higher raised edge, an edge subject to more wear.

Because I had two sets of waves already occasionally overlapping—the printed and the appliqué—I decided that I would make a third set of waves entirely with the quilting stitches, also occasionally overlapping. It seemed to fit the theme.

I used a chalk pencil that rubs out easily to sketch horizontal pairs of wavy lines about 3 inches apart, with approximately 10–12 inches between each pair, directly on to the fabric from top to bottom. A wool batting was used for loft and warmth, and I used a thin thread (Superior's Sew Fine) in a value that blended well with the whole top and was not very visible. Using the sketched chalk lines as guides, I stitched the quilt's entire length. This effectively tied the layers together and made a commitment to where the rest of the quilting would be executed. It took about two days to make the decision and sketch the lines, and about three days to quilt the 18 lines.

Now I had waves with puffs between them. It was obvious that I needed to do a lot more quilting to make the background behind my quilted waves physically recede. Decision Number Two was how to make the waves I had just outlined show as much as possible, so they would not be visually lost against the other two sets of very light colored printed and appliquéd waves. Using five



colors of blue, I matched the fabric as it graded from light to dark, top to bottom, quilting gently waving, horizontal lines about ½ inch apart. Every place a line met with one of my pairs of quilted waves, I turned around and went back the other way, leaving the pairs of lines empty and filling all the other spaces. This took about three days.

Now I had puffy waves. First I sketched *on paper* possible patterns I could use, and I thought long and hard about whether or not I would stay exactly within my original stitched wave outlines. Decision Number Three was to use a very dense spiral and bubble pattern to contrast with the other quilting patterns, and very light thread colors to highlight the quilted waves. It was not hard to stay within the lines, but I purposely let the spirals stray outside of the lines occasionally to keep a relaxed look. The quick, frequent changes of direction required by my pattern were much more strain on my arms than the long waves were, so it took a week to fill in the 11 quilted waves. (Photos 4, 5 and 6) I finished the quilting, washed and dried the quilt by machine, had it photographed and exhibited it at the Northwest Quilting Expo. I was able to deliver it to my niece and her new husband in October. Oh, but the wedding was in June! I figure that presents within a year meet wedding gift standards! (Photo 7)

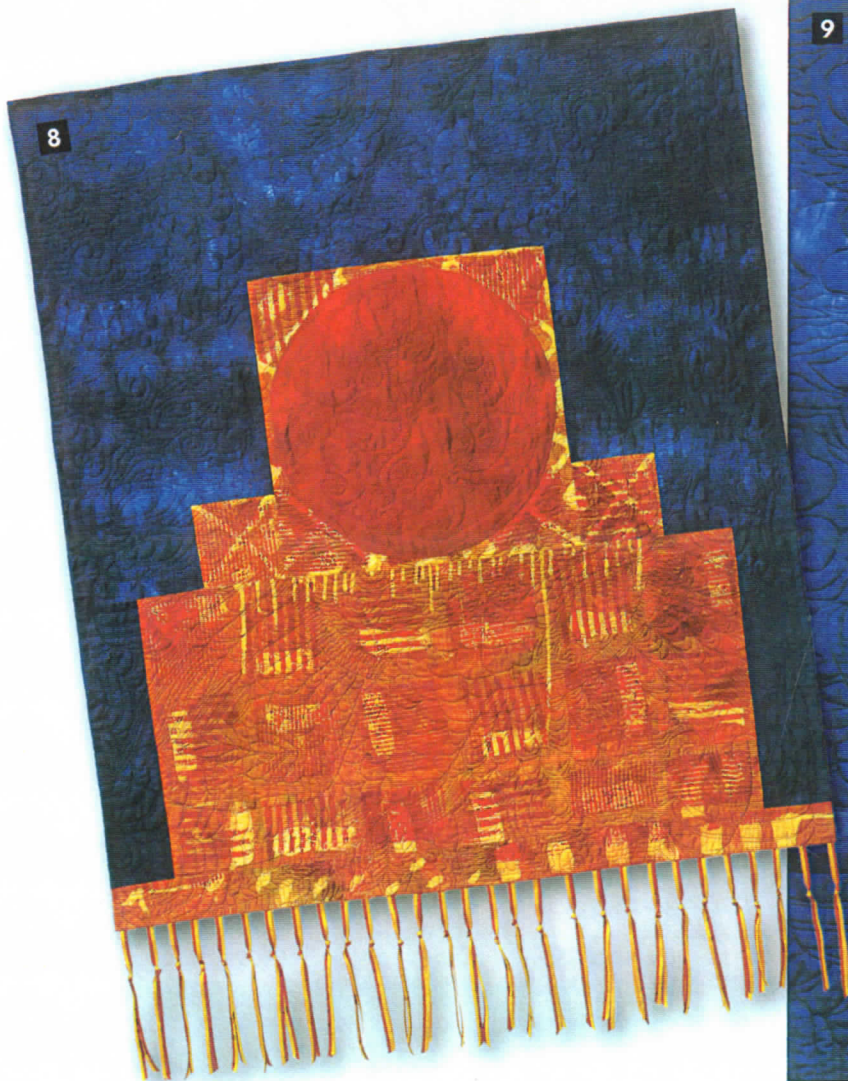
Dragon and Phoenix

This quilt (Photo 8) is a meditative, altar-like composition, influenced by our travels in Asia and designed for our living room. I noticed a suggestion of scales and loops in my blue fabric that made me think of the dragon, an ancient symbol for the emperor. Tied in very tightly with the emperor is the phoenix—the empress. After looking at several images in books, I drew my own designs of the dragon and the phoenix and made them shadowy figures in the quilting. (Photo 9) I have learned to manage a variety of different shapes and lines



6. Whole back of Wave # 11 for K-E.

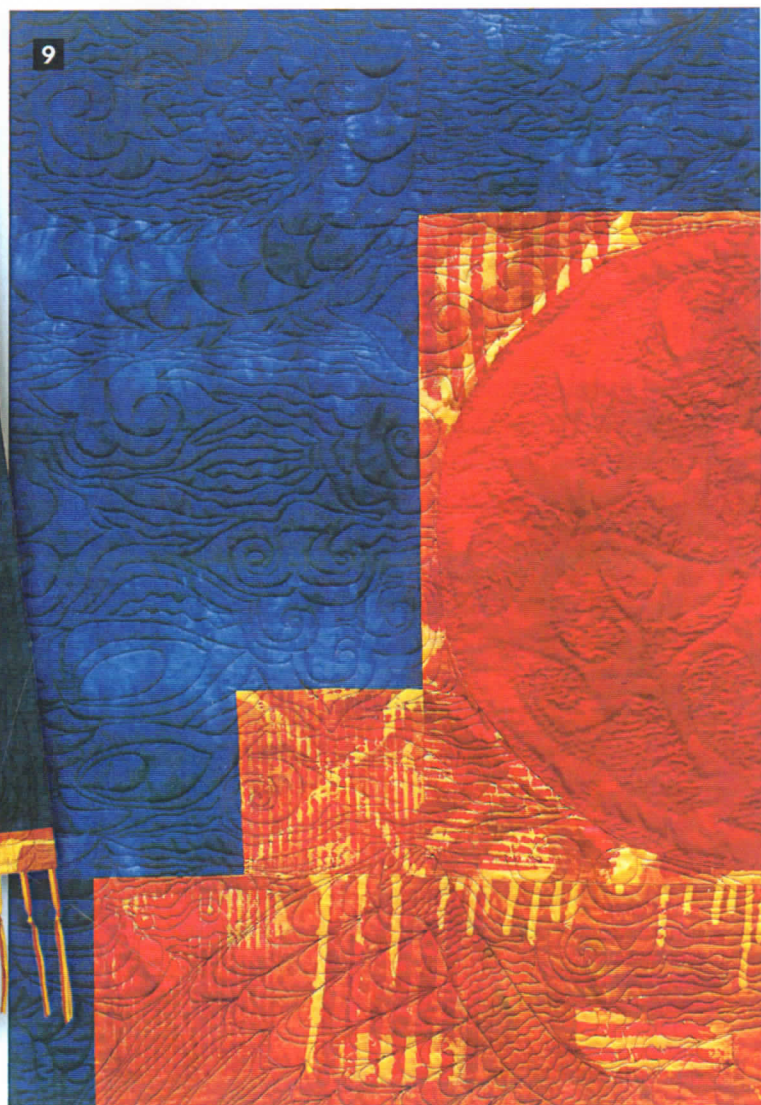
7. Wave # 11 for K-E on a bed. 2010, 98 × 98 inches, washed and dried.



8. *Dragon and Phoenix*, 2010, 57 × 50 inches.

9. *Dragon and Phoenix*, detail.

10. *Dragon and Phoenix*, back view.



on my longarm, but I knew that using only a few chalk pencil lines as guides would be a challenge to my freehand style. Using dark blue thread, I looped the dragon in and out of the top half of the quilt. Dark red thread was then used to surround the lower part of the red circle with phoenix wings, head and body. When the machine work was finished, I hand quilted the *Wheel of*

Dharma inside the circle to give it a soft-edged design.

The figures in the quilting are not immediately visible but can easily be seen on the back. (Photo 10)

Opening Up

The top: Scraps from an already forgotten project caught my eye. I played with them off and on for a couple of days and arrived at the composition seen here; two larger pieces on the right and left and a very narrow piece between them. I altered the curve on the top edge only slightly from how I found the fabric pieces. I used the marks in the fabric to determine the shape of the narrow middle piece. (Photo 11) The assembly took about an hour.

The quilting: I used a thin cotton batt and red and violet threads to stitch lines with my longarm that echoed, but

did not follow, the marks in the fabric. I then stitched-in-the-ditch with my domestic machine, using dark thread to deepen the shadows and make the seamlines more visible. To enhance the sense of upward and outward movement, I added cream colored lines and filled many of them in with free motion zigzags, giving them more weight and definition. **(Photo 12)** At this point the center piece was unstitched and it remained a puzzle; how to add interest and focus with stitches without hiding the delicate marks in the fabric. I decided hand stitches would bring the viewer in closer. **(Photo 13)** With cream and violet threads, I created stitches that added detail and shadows without covering the edges of the colors. The longarm quilting took a day to decide and choose thread, and an hour to stitch. The fill zigzags took a couple of hours a day for four days, and the hand quilting was finished in a few hours. I do like to make a quilt that comes together and is finished in a week every once in a while! *MQM*

A review of Ann's book, *The Quilter's Book of Design*, Second Edition, can be seen in the Bookshelf section of this issue.



11. *Opening Up*, 2009, 21 x 14 inches.

12. *Opening Up*, detail of machine stitching.

13. *Opening Up*, detail of hand stitching.

