



Rosie Allen Quilter

At the age of 12, Rosie Allen learned how to make piece quilts from her mother. She soon mastered the Nine Patch and Star patterns. Today she prefers to make quilts with more elaborate patterns such as her favorite, "Trip Around the World."

Her work often reflects her African-American culture, which she is committed to preserving. Although her mother enjoyed the relative luxury of quilting with a frame suspended from the ceiling, Allen creates her quilts on a bed without the benefit of a frame, a common technique in homes with limited space. Lack of space has not dampened Rosie Allen's creativity. She pieces together quilts in her spare time, while she is watching television. The quilting pattern that Allen uses is known as the term "blocks."

In order to block her quilts, Allen mentally measures off a series of half squares between 3 and 12 inches long. This style is a variation of the traditional shell quilting design, which is a series of decreasing semi-circles. This process allows her to place the quilt on the bed, spreading the lining of the quilt over the bed, and lay the cotton out over it; the edges that are too long are folded over one side. Allen begins to quilt or tack the quilt at one corner and then works down the side. Tacking, the second method of holding the cotton or polyester batting in place between the lining and the patchwork top, is also done on a bed rather than on a frame.

Allen uses both polyester and cotton fabrics to make her quilts. Cotton is a more popular fabric with quilt buyers but Allen prefers polyester. Since many of her neighbors use polyester in their sewing, Allen always has plenty of remnants at hand. Since the knit fabric is much heavier than the cotton, Allen does not often quilt the patchwork tops she makes. The lesser known traditional Afro-American strip quilt is one that Allen does not make very often. She does make strip linings for her patchwork tops, but she prefers to piece colors together in a variation of Trip Around the World. In this pattern, the squares measure one and one-half inches instead of the regular three to four inches which allows for more color and smaller pieces.

Rosie Allen and her husband David both present their work at festivals in Louisiana and were asked to attend the prestigious annual Smithsonian Folk Art Festival in Washington DC. David Allen is known for his hand-carved walking sticks.

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