



Rachel Wetzler

OF ST. CHARLES, ILLINOIS, USA

***IQA Journal:* Tell us a bit about your personal background.**

Rachel Wetzler: I was born in Atlantic, Iowa, in 1954. Shortly thereafter, our family moved to the Minneapolis, Minnesota area where I was raised, went on to receive a degree in Religious Education and, in 1976, married my college sweetheart, David. In 1980, we moved to the Chicago area and currently live in St. Charles, where David's publishing business, ChurchSmart Resources, is located. We have no children.

My most recent work experience involved data processing and market research in publishing companies. In 1998, I had the luxury of choosing to leave the corporate world to quilt full time. I'm living my dream!

***IQA Journal:* How did you first get exposed to quilting...and what has kept you interested?**

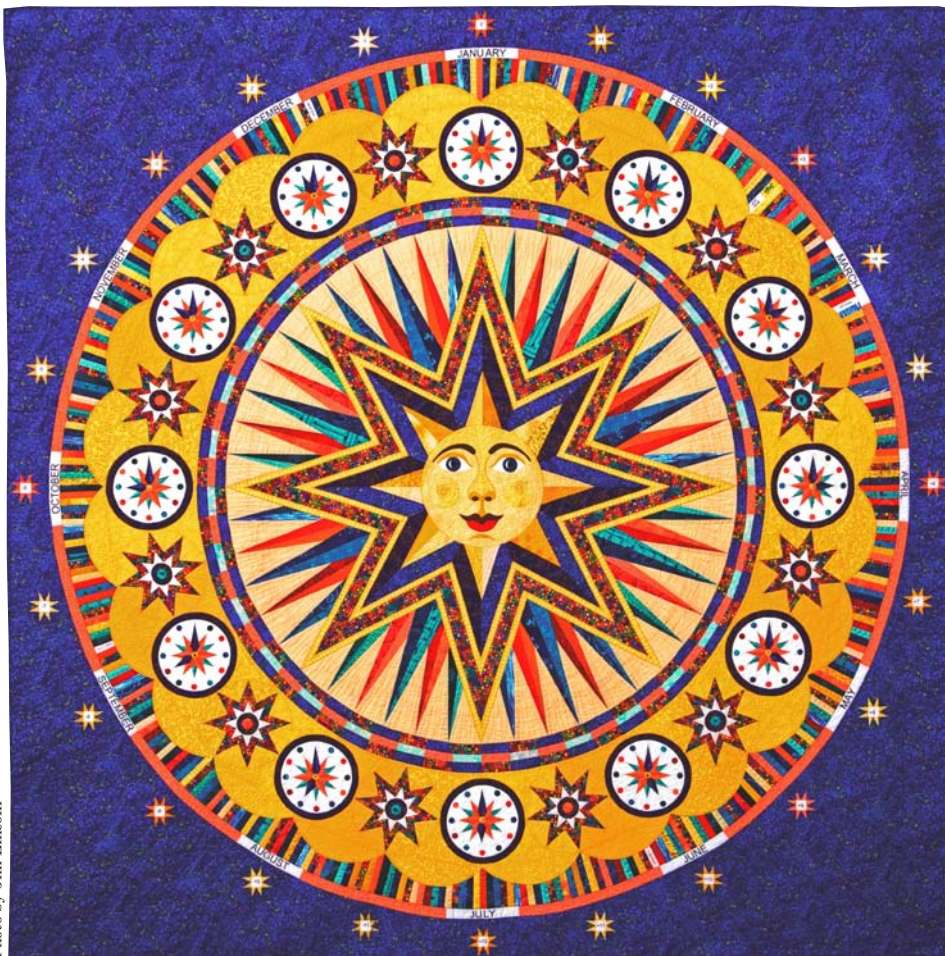
Wetzler: As a child, I learned needlework and sewing skills from my mom. I've sewed everything from coats and lingerie to draperies and stuffed animals. In 1989, a quilt magazine pattern for a twelve-block sampler caught my eye. I machine stitched and hand quilted this in a hoop. I don't know how to explain it, but I knew from this time forward that quilting would be my thing. My dad made a quilting frame to help me hand quilt my next eight quilts. All but two were my own attempts at design—a few more successful than most.

It was a magazine that spurred me to the next level in my quilting, as I studied winning entries in contests. I was drawn to competition as a personal challenge as well as an opportunity to contribute something positive to the viewer. *Heartburst*, my first show quilt, was accepted in the 1999 IQA Judged Show. This was also my first trip to a judged contest, and I was so encouraged and excited to be part of such an inspiring show.

Keeping interested in quilting is never a problem. I like to say (only partly in jest) "I quilt. Everything else is an interruption." My biggest frustration is not being able to produce quilts more quickly! To speed things along, I have been machine quilting since 2000.



CELEBRATION



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IQA Journal: What are your favorite styles/techniques?

Wetzler: The majority of my quilts are radially symmetrical. This must be part of my DNA because it just comes naturally to me. Recently, I have ventured into architecturally-inspired pictorial designs—something I never thought I could achieve. My brain enjoys precision patchwork. My heart is drawn to the story aspect of pictorial appliqué. My hands can do either. I enjoy the precision of paper piecing, outline fused appliqué, and Caryl Bryer Fallert's appliecing technique.

IQA Journal: Where do you find inspiration for your designs?

Wetzler: Mostly ancient ornamental motifs used decoratively in objects and architecture such as an English cathedral floor, French wall tile, American stained glass, Egyptian pottery, and an Italian terra-cotta plaque.

In the case of my quilt, *Arms of Love*, the inspiration was the movie *The Passion of the Christ*. When I determined that a coat of arms might be appropriate to my idea, I researched heraldry at the library. The library and internet are great sources of information and inspiration.

Several designs resulted from just doodling. I'm partial to square designs of four mirrored quadrants and enjoy the challenge of taking one simple block and creating a Medallion-style design using value placement exercises.

IQA Journal: Any funny or interesting anecdotes about your art?

Wetzler: Many people shy away from yellow in quilts. A little yellow goes a *long* way. But I like yellow! It's the color of sunshine. There's nothing more cheerful than a sunny day. Every one of my contest quilts incorporates yellow—some far more boldly than others—but a bit of yellow is my trademark statement of hope. One of my mostly yellow quilts, *Hope Flourishes*, describes my concept of yellow: "Hope is the sunshine of the soul."

IQA Journal: Your work has a lot of colors in it. What appeals to you about including such a variety of shades and hues?

Wetzler: No matter what the design or style, quilts that hold my interest the longest use strong colors achieved with a wide variety of fabrics. The best quilts have great visual impact from a distance and become more intriguing as you get closer. The level of detail as well as the variety of colors and fabrics contribute to this effect.

ARTISTS' STATEMENT

Each of my quilts is original or an adaptation of ancient ornamental designs. Many of my quilts are radially symmetrical but more recent works are architecturally-inspired pictorial designs. Each piece is an expression of hope and gratitude to God. My work is characterized by strong visual impact, use of color, complex design and attention to detail.

Perhaps my color philosophy is summed up in my quilt, *Celebration*, which was adapted from a traditional, softly-colored stained glass window by Richard Diens. I translated it into a rather wildly colored quilt. The show description reads: “Color gives a quilt its voice. Whether a quilt is elegant or exuberant, mellow or mysterious, color tells the story. With a full spectrum available, color can speak to me in a whisper or a shout. This quilt flamboyantly celebrates the versatile language of color.” I like a quilt with a little bite to it.

One judge evidently didn’t get the idea as the only comment was “Colors overwhelming.”

Better overwhelmed than bored!

IQA Journal: Does where you live affect your quilting at all in terms of atmosphere?

Wetzler: The greatest contribution to my quilting creativity is my participation in PAQA—the Professional Art Quilter’s Alliance, which meets monthly at a local library to showcase our work and learn from each other. If I didn’t live within driving distance, I would not have met this group of talented, creative artists. Their encouragement, ideas, and adventurous spirit have sparked a certain amount of boldness and freedom in me to try new things. They embody an atmosphere of adventure that has rubbed off on me and altered my work.

IQA Journal: What developments in the quilting industry have you liked over the past few years? What have you not liked?

Wetzler: Batiks are a real plus for people like me who do not choose to dye our own fabric but love the look of hand dyed in a commercial fabric. I don’t like the fact that I can’t buy every new gadget on the market!

IQA Journal: What hints or suggestions would you give members about successfully entering and competing in judged shows?

Wetzler: The biggest challenge in entering shows is tracking your entries. Paperwork is a necessary but time-consuming part of the competition package. My brains are on paper. When I began entering competition I created a contest schedule spreadsheet to track my entries. Headings include important dates: entry form received, acceptance notification, entry accepted, and accepted quilt received.

I’ve had a quilt accepted in every IQA World of Beauty competition since 1999, with the exception of 2002. That year I submitted entries for the special exhibit In the American Tradition. The entry form deadlines for both the special exhibit and the Judged Show were very close. In my mind I had submitted all my entries for both judged show and exhibit, but found later—to my horror—that I had overlooked the Judged Show. At this point I added two columns to my spreadsheet: entry form mailed, accepted quilt shipped. It’s no guarantee I won’t mess up again, since I still have to remember to refer to my brains on paper, but so far I haven’t missed another deadline.

In 1999, I entered one quilt in two international contests. In 2005 I entered 11 quilts in contests and special exhibits for a total of 22 entries. One quilt went to five shows—that’s a scheduling accomplishment!

I would quilt even if no one saw or liked my work. But I enjoy the competition and choose to share my work in this way. Awards are wonderful when you get them, but the most important thing is to get your work out there where others can appreciate it (or at least see it).



TURNING POINT



ARMS OF LOVE

Just be true to yourself and what you want to accomplish in your work. I’ve had the same quilt win nothing in one show and first place in the next. If my quilt receives a ribbon, I proudly display it for a few weeks in my studio. Then it goes in a drawer with the others. Put away the trophies and move forward. ♦