

Living A Creative Life

for Quilter's Magazine – Summer 2021

by Kim Hanson

1050 words

Creativity is a gift. It is the spark that ignites the passion and courage to transform ideas and dreams into reality. But, how is creativity brought to life, embodied, awakened? Is there a secret to living the creative life of one's dreams?

The mother and daughter duo of Sherri McConnell and Chelsi Stratton know the answer. Not only do they both live life creatively, but they have also worked as a team to spawn a thriving online quilting business. Both are married with families of their own and live nearby in the State of Nebraska.

Vibrant and colourful. Traditional with a modern twist. Scrappy and brilliant. Quilts designed by Sherri stimulate the imagination. Her patterns are alive with energy, vitality and literally “leap off the laptop” into heart and home. Patterns have enticing names like Pinwheel Posies, Summer Stroll and Beach House Row. Sherri's life's work can be found in visual form on

her Pinterest page (www.pinterest.ca/AQuiltingLife/created/) At a glance, it's easy to see her work is chock-full of style and personality.

Sherri's in-home sewing studio resembles the stuff of a quilters' dream. A natural, sunlit room with wooden floors and plantation shutters and abundant storage. Touches of teal bring in feelings of calm and serenity. Cutting fabrics is a breeze on the central island-style table. Her quilts decorate and warm the inviting space evoking a feeling of peace and relaxation. The perfect backdrop for creativity!

Insert photo_1_Sherri McConnell's studio

Caption: Sherri's dreamy in-home sewing/quilting studio.

When Sherri was a little girl she loved fabrics. “I was blessed with a mother and grandmother who both sewed for me and were my inspiration. At age ten, I received my first sewing machine and took lessons at our local Singer shop. I happily stitched clothing and made home decor items until 1993. A gentle push from my grandmother lifted me up onto the quilting track. I loved it immediately and haven't stopped since!”

Keeping up the momentum of the generational flow of quilting skills and knowledge is a challenge for all of us in the 21st century. Quilters wonder . . . will our craft survive into the future? Will the legacy of our quilting be appreciated by the next generation? Will our daughters and granddaughters

(or sons and grandsons) carry on our traditions and learn how to quilt? Sherri lives each day secure in the knowledge that her quilting legacy will live on through her daughter.

“Chelsi was young when I started quilting. She wasn't particularly interested in sewing, but she was a creative child. . . she loved to draw and make crafts. As Chelsi grew, she started out intending to work only with fabric design. But, as time went on, she fell head-over-heels in love with quilting, and now spends most of her time working with quilts rather than the fabric design aspect of the business.”

Mother and daughter each design their own unique quilt patterns, but its no surprise that their styles are similar. White is used strategically throughout both Sherri and Chelsi's quilt designs, juxtaposed against deep, saturated colours for high contrast. Red shows up often in their work. Traditional quilt blocks. . . log cabins, stars, flying geese and churn dash with lots and lots of half-square triangles, are spun and twisted into a fresh and modern take on the art of quilting. They both honour and celebrate the simplicity and clean lines of the past, weaving in their representation of house, home and family. It's clear. . . their work is brimming with love.

Insert Photo_2_ Sherri and Chelsi standing together

Caption: Mother and daughter, united in their work, holding bundles of their _____ fabric collection. Chelsi can be found online at chelsistratton.wordpress.com/author/

Quilt design is a process; both Sherri and Chelsi use the same basic method. Pulling out rulers, pencils and erasers, the design is initially sketched onto graph paper. Later, its transferred to computer software, Electric Quilt (EQ) (www.ElectricQuilt.com) to be exact. On the laptop, the quilt design can be manipulated, blocks moved from here to there and fabrics and colours can be filled in. Virtually, their designs are fleshed-out and filled-in. . . springing to life on the computer screen.

Insert Photo_3_Sherri holding a mini quilt in front of fabric storage

Caption: Sherri, holding her Be My Neighbour mini quilt

Sherri and Chelsi come together and collaborate on fabric design. Both are Moda fabric designers, an amazing and tremendous accomplishment. Their fabric collections can be seen at (<https://www.modafabrics.com/designers/sherri-and-chelsi>). Names like Happy Days, Summer Sweet and Harper's Garden brand their collections. (Harper is the name of one of Chelsi's young daughters). Balboa is a brand spanking new fabric line being released in late 2020.

Cathy Stambaugh, a passionate quilter living in Oklahoma, is a huge fan. She says, “One of my favourite quilt patterns is Sherri's Sea Glass. I made it for my sweet 96-year-old mother-in-law, with fabrics from the Walkabout (Moda) fabric collection. She loved her new quilt! I have purchased many of Sherri's quilt patterns – like Beach House Row - and can't wait to purchase some of Chelsi's!”

Insert Photo_4_Sherri sitting at her fabric table

Caption: Sherri in her sewing studio with her Blooms quilt

Sherri McConnell blogs regularly from a www.AQuiltingLife.com. This is her online home; the perfect place to begin a quilt journey. There are tutorials and quick tips and access to countless how-to videos. Quilt books she has written, her etsy pattern shop and newly minted podcast with her daughter can all be accessed via the blog. The podcast is newsy, low-key and wonderfully informative. Their on-camera style is unrushed, affable and easy-going. It's like they're having a conversation with their best friend! (The podcast can also be directly accessed via YouTube.com.)

Donna Danos, a self-described, confident beginner quilter says, "I have been following Sherri's blog for over five years now. It's been fun watching her grow from producing YouTube videos and blogging small projects, to designing her own fabrics and patterns. I am a faithful viewer of Sherri and Chelsi's podcast and watch them weekly. It has been a joy to see how they've evolved over the last few years."

It's no small feat that Sherri and Chelsi manage to remain ubiquitous online. Their family lives are so full and busy, but focusing on productivity and prioritizing their work life helps them to stay on top of it all. It would seem fitting that one day in the future, one of Chelsi's children will "pick up the quilting mantle" and run with it – carrying on the family business. It would be an intriguing evolution to watch it unfold. After all, carrying on the tradition of quilting is one of the most valuable ways we can be sure to keep the past alive.

