

QUILTING IN THE CANADIAN ROCKIES

By Kim Hanson

932 words

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Snow capped mountain peaks encircle the bustling town of Canmore, an hour's drive west of Calgary, Alberta. The majestic beauty of the Rockies takes center stage inspiring artists, quilters and those who create to reach for a higher standard in their craft. There is an atmosphere in town that is palpable; an indescribable buzz of energy, excitement and creativity.

At the hub of all this creativity is the Sugar Pine Company, an enduring quilt shop serving the residents of the greater Bow Valley. Shop owners, Leah and Dean Murphy, both exude a confident air which comes from many years of running a thriving, successful quilting, sewing and knitting business. So many of Alberta's local quilt shops have come and gone, but the Sugar Pine Company remains.

Insert image: Photo_1_LeahandDeanMurphy

Caption: Leah and Dean Murphy on the upper, outside deck of their quilt shop, the Sugar Pine Company, Canmore, Alberta

Real estate professionals never underestimate "location, location, location". The same can be said for the local quilt shop. Part of the Sugar Pine Company's tremendous success can be attributed to its spectacular location. Canmore is a short fifteen minute drive away from one of the most popular tourist destinations in the world, Banff, Alberta. Leah and Dean's shop serves as a landing-place for travelling quilters from other parts of Canada, the U.S., and South America. Dean says, "We even have yearly return visitors from the U.K. and across Europe." American quilters, in particular, often find their way to Canmore on summer vacation and other major holidays like President's Day and Thanksgiving.

Scenery aside, Leah's charming fabric vignettes keep visitors returning year after year. She is tremendously talented and has a flair for color, design and display. As one of Leah's employees gushed, "We all stand back and admire what Leah can do with fabrics...she is a natural."

Insert Image: Photo_2_FabricDisplaysintheSugarPineCompany

Caption: Leah Murphy's charming and whimsical fabric designs in the Sugar Pine Company quilt shop

Insert Image: Photo_3_ChristmasDisplayintheSugarPineCompany

Caption: Inspiring, year-round Christmas fabric and pattern displays in the Sugar Pine Company quilt shop

Claire Bank was Leah's mother... an accomplished and skilled seamstress who led her hard-working and enthusiastic daughter down the path of learning first how to sew, then to quilt and how to become an entrepreneur. In this time of online purchasing, the Sugar Pine offers its customers a variety of items from their website, but Leah's focus is centered on maintaining the bricks and mortar presence. She is adamant that "retail is secondary to relationships." Leah and Dean are both kind, humble souls who wish not only to meet the needs of their quilters, but also get to know them on a personal level.

The quilting community in the Canadian Rockies is strongly connected through its love of nature. Hiking the mountain paths high above the town, living with wildlife as your constant companions and adapting to the changing face of Mother Nature provides a fertile breeding ground for the creative soul.

Insert Image: Photo_4_MountainSightsbyDianeMcGregor

Caption: MountainSights, a quilt made for display at the Sugar Pine Company by Diane McGregor of Castellja Cotton

Insert Image: Photo_5_Deerinthefront yard

Caption: Young deer helping itself to breakfast on a resident's lawn in Canmore, Alberta

Insert Image: Photo_6_SecondChancesbyJenniferMay

Caption: Bow Valley quilter, Jennifer May's quilt named Second Chances, photographed along the Bow River in the town of Canmore, Alberta. This quilt began as a One Block Wonder, but morphed into something beautiful and much different.

Jillian Roulet, incoming President of the Mountain Cabin Quilters Guild (MCQG) is an artist, and a former Parks Canada employee who also happens to quilt. Each abstract piece she creates is unique and, as Jillian puts it, "is inspired by color and by nature." She embraces her natural surroundings; her senses overflow with inspiration from the smallest of

things...wildflowers, birds and lichen. *Green Orb* is a quilt by Jillian that uses a technique called “soy wax resist”. “I like intense, contrasting colors and I like a circle shape.” Jillian gives prominence to the circles and lines on her piece with embroidery thread.

Alluvial Slice is another one of Jillian’s art quilts, made to mimic the erosion of river banks in the backcountry after the devastating 2013 flood, felt provincially along the banks of the Bow River. Jillian explains, “The ability of the tree roots to find a path through all that rock fascinated and impressed me.”

Photo _7_ GreenOrbbyJillianRoulet

Caption: Green Orb by Jillian Roulet

Photo _8_ AlluvialSlicebyJillianRoulet

Caption: Alluvial Slice by Jillian Roulet

As one may guess, Canmore is home to a vibrant, thriving and dynamic art quilt community. Annually, the MCQG presents an exhibit of original art quilts. This year’s theme, Canada – My Home was in honour of Canada’s sesquicentennial; her 150th anniversary of Confederation. Diana Petrik’s stunning entry *Spiral Galaxy* is a depiction of her interpretation of nature’s great art. Inspired by Hubble telescope photographs, Diana used a technique popularized by Japanese artist, Noriko Endo. Diana explains, “Small pieces of fabric – confetti – are stuck on the background of batting and held in place by black tulle and free motion quilting.” Although the results of her work is breathtaking, Diana says, “the technique is really rather simple.”

Photo _9_ SpiralGalaxy

Caption: Spiral Galaxy by Diana Petrik

Charity in the Bow Valley is alive and well. An unconventional entry in the 2017 exhibit was a sample “touch quilt” crafted by Jorie Adams, a little fabric creation that can change the lives of patients living with dementia. Touch quilts are stimulation tools; a way to keep restless hands busy twisting, turning and pulling the fabrics, buttons and bows. Dr. Sharon Moore, a Canmore resident, has been researching the effect that touch quilts have on Alzheimer patients and her work is continuing. Guild members have lovingly created and donated many touch quilts to long term care facilities in the region, making a difference in the lives of the elderly.

Insert Image: Photo _10_ TouchQuiltbyJorieAdams

Caption: Touch Quilt by Jorie Adams

It's apparent that no matter where one resides, Canada, the U.S. or elsewhere, we all find creativity and inspiration in *people* we know, *places* we live and visit and *things* from our environment. From the stunning beauty, majesty and wonder of our natural surroundings to the kindness, concern and humility we experience in human nature, our universal goal is to capture that flicker of amazement and to recreate it in our work...our quilts.

***Author's Note:**

This is a photo of one of my quilts, *Carina*, photographed in Kananaskis country. *Carina* was featured on the cover of Annie's Quilting, More Quick & Easy Quilts for Kids published earlier this year. Kim Hanson