



Landscapes

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I first fell in love with the needle arts in Grade 7, when my very first Home Ec teacher taught us how to embroider Holly Hobbies dolls in beautiful glossy coloured threads. I was hooked. By grade 10 I had progressed to making my first landscape for Art Class, all in the beautiful coloured threads that I loved so much. My love of the needle arts has moved forward ever since, but it wasn't until 5 years ago when I went to my first quilt show that I realized that I had been making miniature landscape quilts all along. So when I realized that the theme for this issue of *CQA/ACC* would be about miniatures I just had to write in.

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As some of you know, my first love is handwork and all of my miniature landscapes are done by hand. That isn't to say they can't be made by machine, only that I'm not clever enough with a machine and wouldn't know how to use it to make miniatures. I leave those tricks up to those of you who are more adept.

One of the things that I love the most about making miniature landscapes is that they can be made relatively quickly. They are a wonderful way to sneak in a bit of handwork in between those large quilting projects. But don't be fooled, making miniatures is not as quick as might first appear. Manipulating tiny bits of cloth to get it to do just what you want, takes patience, dexterity and good eyesight.

As a small project, a miniature doesn't seem so onerous when you first start out. The background is surprisingly quick to assemble and

you get the bug to keep going right away. When you start to add the details, things slow down considerably and that's when your other quilting skills and talents come in handy—your sense of colour, design and stitchery. Oh, but what fun! This is the part where you can let your imagination take over and let it go wild! The more detail you add, the more detail you realize you can add, and on and on and on. One of the trickiest parts is knowing when to stop. After all, your quilt does have to be able to hang on a wall without drooping.

The miniature landscapes I talk about are not postcard size, although those are miniatures too, of course. The miniatures I mean can be of any size you want; it's in the details that the miniature part comes in. This is where this article could be confused with one on embellishments because if you love embellishments, you'll love making miniature landscapes. The details you add to your miniature provide the narrative for your landscape. And they become the focus of your little quilt.

Perhaps it's an old key to a special place that you want to highlight, a beautiful shell you found on a wonderful trip, the lone survivor of a favourite pair of earrings. All of these can be stuck onto your miniature landscape and a narrative designed around your precious treasure.

Another approach to making a miniature landscape focuses on the narrative. This is my favourite way to make landscapes. Start off with a fond memory of a favourite place. Draw a very simple picture in your head. Simple lines work best, as you do not want to

clutter the background. The clutter comes in the details. Transfer this design onto fabric to make a very simple background. I usually use solids, as I need things to be extremely simple. Once you're happy with the background, start to add the details of your story. In my case, the stories often take place outdoors, so I start to add tiny trees, etc. Once those details are in place, I then continue to add more and more tiny details. These details come from the moment I'm trying to capture. In the case of the *The Ski Lesson*, the details came from the way everyone looked as they were skiing that day: the braids in my hair, the tuque that fell off Joel's head, the way Anne looked just before she crashed. And if you're like me, you'll want to add details that just aren't true, but you're having so much fun that you just can't stop! The bunny, the moose, the scripted exclamations. This really is a whole lot of fun!

Having a few special tools and supplies will help make your adventure into miniature landscape construction more enjoyable, as manipulating tiny bits of cloth, thread and doodads can be tricky. The most important tool you'll want is a small pair of very sharp pointy scissors. You simply cannot cut tiny details properly without them. I use at least two pin cushions. One holds quilting needles all threaded in the colours I am using to appliqué the details; the other holds embroidery needles threaded in various colours used to add embroidered embellishments. This way I do not need to stop the flow of my



muse, just because I need a new colour. You use so little thread of each colour and you are constantly changing from one to the other, so it is much easier to have many pre-threaded needles on the go at the same time.

It can be very difficult, if not downright impossible, to fold teeny tiny bits of cloth into a specific shape. If I do not want a frayed edge, then I use Fray Stop. Actually, it is one of the mainstays in my box of supplies. I use it to prepare various colours of fabric before starting a project. I paint several small pieces fabric with Fray Stop and once dry, I am able cut it out as if it were paper. This is my favourite product to use to keep small bits of fabric from fraying as it goes on easily, dries quickly and does not have any unpleasant odour. It also does not change or fade the colour of the cloth over time. I use it sparingly as it does stiffen the fabric and makes it a little harder to sew through by hand. But it is one of those wonder-tools that I keep in a steady supply.

One of the really fun parts about making miniature landscapes is adding details that are not made by hand or thread and cloth. Adding a variety of materials provides added interest to your piece, new textures and sheen. This is where you incorporate those personal treasures I spoke about earlier. But if you don't have a treasure for a particular bit of fun, check out your local Dollar Store for little toys, use a variety of beads or buttons to create an image or even glue seashells and other tid-bits directly onto your piece. And, as I recently discovered through my clever neighbour Anne, you can also use modeling clay such as Fimo to create those little extras. After all, it isn't something to be washed so you can use whatever you want.



One of my favourite places to find great details is at the stores that cater to the miniature dollhouse market. You'll be amazed at what you can find in these shops. And if you don't live near one, there are several good ones where you can shop and order on-line. And since the items are miniatures, cost

of shipping is kept to a minimum. *Paul's Magnificent Treehouse* is a good example of using all of these elements in one landscape. Although this piece is not a miniature, it measures 29" X 39", it is filled with miniature details that give it life and tell the story.

Well, I could go on, but I need not bore you. I do hope I've managed to convince some of you that miniatures really are worth trying out.

