

# Beyond the Fringe



## Adding Creativity to Rag Quilts

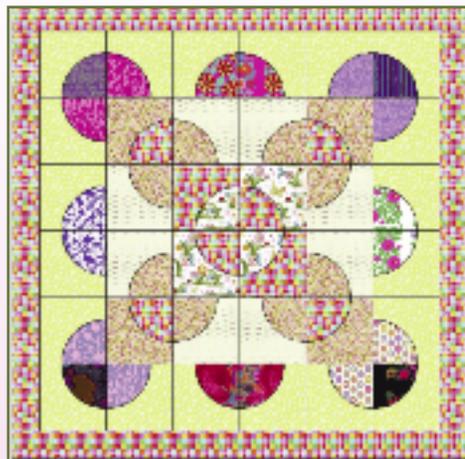
by Lauren MacDonald

Retired and ready to quilt! That was me a few (maybe more than a few!) years ago. My grandmother had quilted and it was always part of my retirement plan. Without really planning for it, I retired to one of the best places around for wannabe quilters—Manitoulin Island. I joined the Happy Quilters, centered in Gore Bay, and was thrilled by the help I received by the members of this club. They didn't mind my attending and completing nothing that first year! They taught me how to hand quilt while letting me put stitches on their quilts (now that really shows their generous spirits!) and gradually I was able to start making their "blocks of the month", although it took me a few years to actually make a quilt.

After a while I decided to join some of them on a monthly trip to the Island Quilters Guild (then in Little Current and now meeting in Mindemoya). This monthly sharing of quilts and quilting information made me aware that there was computer software to design quilts. Well, I was hooked! I can't draw up my quilts like one of our quilters, Myra Tallman; or visualize and create them like Jackie White; but I figured that with some help on the computer I could start designing my quilts. After trying out a couple of programs, I ended up choosing Electric Quilt®, which I would have to say is the Microsoft Office of the quilt world. In other words, there are other programs, but Electric Quilt seems to have the widest audience. I really can't say how many quilts I have designed since buying EQ 5, but even in the current version, EQ7, I have hundreds of designs in many different categories like child, baby, challenge, guild, club, family, and rag. It just seems that even if I like a pattern in a book or magazine, I need to make some changes and it's more reassuring to me if I make those changes on the computer (being slightly math-challenged as I am!).

Rag quilts are fun to make and to design and I make up a new design every year, mainly as a creative exercise but also to enter it into our local fall fair (the Providence Bay

Fair). At Happy Quilters one day, one of our quilters gave us her hand-written pattern about how to make a rag quilt. Of course, a group of us jumped on this new wagon and quickly made a small lap quilt. It so happened that I needed to make some baby accessories, so I used this method to make up a cute diaper bag to go with some flannel bibs and burp cloths that I was sewing. But that was the end of my square rag quilt pattern! I don't like remaking the same pattern, so when the next baby was coming along, I went on the Internet for ideas. Elisa Wilson (backporchdesigns.com) had a video online at the time for a "drunkard's path" square. The idea of curves appealed to me so I went on EQ5, printed out the templates I would need for a 7" square (allowing a 1" seam allowance) and got started with my stack of flannel fat quarters. By first sewing all the



curved sections together into a block with the wrong sides together, I made all the blocks for the top and arranged them in order and used tape to number the row and column. Then I layered each block with batting and backing and carefully ran a quilting stitch around the curve and a diagonal line from the middle of the curve out to the opposite corner. After that it was pretty easy to sew all the blocks together by lining up the backsides of the blocks and sewing them into rows and then joining the rows togeth-

er. Clipping a half an inch down and half inch apart along each seam allowance took just about as long as the sewing did. Following advice from my fellow Happy Quilters, I did not strain our septic system by washing the quilt at home. I spent an hour at the local Laundromat washing and shaking and then drying the quilt. As well, I sprayed it again with water, rubbed the raggy seams then dried it again, repeating this step until the quilt was warm and cuddly looking. By the way, I did not tell the new parents the traditional name of the quilt; instead I called it a Melon Patch quilt!

Soon it was time for a new baby quilt and this time I thought it might be fun to make a rag quilt with circles on it. So I cut a bunch of flannel circles out, layered them on each flannel square and then layered my square with the batting and backing. I pinned the squares together securely and used a quilting stitch to quilt each circle on to the fabrics, starting from the largest circles and moving to the smallest ones. As you can see from the photo, some blocks were completed with smaller circles and some with larger ones. On the blocks with the smaller flannel circles, I made a quilting line outside the circle as an echo line.



During the following autumn, I went on a trip with a friend and we saw a Christmas tree in a shop window. I'm not sure if it was flannel or not, but we loved it and I came home

and designed one like it right away so that my friend and I could make it up as a wall quilt that we could make into an advent calendar. We had a great time gathering green and beige fat quarters for that project and, of course, during the sewing weekend we spent sewing and arranging the tree! Electric Quilt does wonders at helping you design a quilt, but you are on your own when it comes to sewing a triangle-rectangle unit together! Plus, we wanted it double-sided so that gave us a fur-



ther challenge. Luckily, we were spending the weekend with two other non-quilters who like to cook—what a great combination! I did make copies of this wall hanging—one for each close relative with young children, with pockets attached for treats through December. However, as quilters, you can just imagine how many green and beige pieces I had left

over after making five of these! So...what to do? Well, I hadn't made a bed sized rag quilt yet, so on to a twin sized one. I decided on a pattern of a log cabin surrounded by pine trees. I picked one of the log cabin blocks from Electric Quilt and sewed it up in flannel, then cut out a bunch of green flannel pine trees to appliqué on to the beige rectangles—appliquing about half an inch from the edge

so that the edges of the trees would rag. The back of the quilt was made up of almost all of the rest of the green rectangles that I had left in my stash. That worked out well and, actually, when you add block to block to make a row, then add one row at a time to make the quilt, you never have too much fabric under the throat of your machine. I put a stool to the left of my machine so that the weight of the flannel didn't drag on the part that I was sewing. First prize at the Fair!



This past summer brought a new challenge in the field of rag quilts for me! I'm almost through my stash and I have a baby quilt to make for a baby girl arriving this November. What to do? The mother has quilted a bit so would appreciate an old pattern, so...how about a rag quilt made of one log cabin block? I looked up all the pinks and baby flannels I had and the darker flannels and measured



amounts of fabric. After much fiddling with the size of the layout in Electric Quilt, I ended up with a quilt that would be 42" square (44" once the binding was attached) and each "log" would be 5¼" wide. Luckily, I had a couple of yards of a plaid flannel that didn't get used for another flannel quilt that could be applied as the backing. The issue when making larger



pieces for a rag quilt is the actual quilting of each piece. I didn't think a simple X would do, so I did free motion hearts and loops on each piece making sure that I started and finished at the corners. I was advised to put a binding around the edge if it was for a baby so you can just see part of the wide binding at the top left of the photo. Second place at the Fair!

What next in rag quilts? Well, recently I had weekend visitors and one of them fell in love with the comfy feeling of a rag quilt! Being an artist though, he decided to design his own pattern. How is that for a challenge? I may put flannel circles in where it looks like a row of buttons and it's going to be fun gathering the fabrics in a range of colours from light to dark. It will end up about 72" x 48". But he won't be getting it until after the next fair!

