



Wednesday 19 August 2009

In this week's instalment of Sew 'n' Sews, read about the colourful, outrageous and eyebrow-raising lifestyle of the most famous name in sewing machines – Isaac Singer. Something to ponder on the next time you're pumping that treadle. Also, we have a profile on Blueberries tutor Monica Poole. Enjoy.

Sew 'n' Sews Part 4

A brief and roughly stitched together history of the people who invented the sewing machine

Isaac Merritt Singer - Flamboyant, unconventional and promiscuous



Isaac Singer's name has become the one most associated with the sewing machine, mainly because his model was more practical and accessible than others and, most significantly, could easily be adapted for domestic use. Until Singer's model, sewing machines had primarily been manufactured for industrial use only.



However, Singer was still forced to pay royalties to inventor Elias Howe (see last week's issue), as the lockstitch his model created was a clear infringement of Howe's earlier patent. Nevertheless, Singer's invention had some original features of its own; its needle went up and down instead of side to side and it was operated by a foot treadle instead of a hand crank. These features helped the Singer sewing machine go into mass production in the 1850s, making it the world's first home appliance and establishing I.M. Singer and Co. as one of the first American-based multinational corporations.

However, it was Singer's personal life that really raised eyebrows. He had always been a flamboyant and magnetic personality, originally pursuing a career as an actor, and had no trouble attracting women. In 1830 he married Catharine Haley and had two children with her. While still married to Catharine, he proposed marriage to another woman, Mary Ann Sponsler, with whom he ended up having 10 children.

Singer and Mary Ann lived as a married couple under Common Law, but the arrangement turned sour when Mary Ann discovered Singer was involved with one of his employees, a young woman named Mary McGonigal, with whom he had already fathered five more children. Mary Ann took her husband to court on charges of bigamy, and Singer and Mary fled America for Europe to escape the scandal. In the aftermath, it was discovered he had a fourth "wife"; Mary Eastwood Walters, with whom he'd fathered a daughter.

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In 1863 he married yet again, a Frenchwoman named Isabella Boyer, who was already pregnant to him. That same year his company I.M. Singer and Co. was dissolved but continued operations as The Singer Manufacturing Company.

By the time Isaac Singer died at age 63 he had fathered 19 children by five different women. He left an estate worth \$14 million, two different wills and bitter legal battles between his various “wives” each claiming to be the real Mrs Singer.

Next week: The Sewing Machine War.

New Fabrics Instore

We have new Fabrics, from the Santorini range, that has arrived instore this week. Click on the image below to view the fabric online. It is \$23 per metre.



Tutor Profile on Monica Poole

The secret life of handbags

Blueberries tutor Monica Poole admits that handbags are her specialty. With years of design experience in the fashion industry and the owner of a successful pattern-making business, she explains that handbags have gradually become the items she’s most known for.

“My handbags evolved because of my fashion industry background,” she says. “While quilting means working with a flat surface, handbags have more dimensions and that utilises my pattern-making skills.”

Not that Monica shies away from quilting, or indeed, from practically any form of sewing, as her passion for this kind of creativity is hard to miss. She started at age 16 studying fashion and pattern-making at TAFE and worked her way up to become a fashion designer.



“In the fashion industry I specialised mainly in evening wear and wedding dresses,” she says. “Then, after my first child was born I took a part time job at a sewing shop, where I started teaching sewing. That was also when I got into patchwork and quilting. After the shop owners closed the business, I started my own home studio, with a lot of the girls following me from the shop to the home studio.”

In 2002 Monica established Moonshine Designs, selling patterns across Australia. Monica explains that she tries to keep her designs interesting enough for people to want to make them, but also to include something unique in each pattern, like a new sewing technique. Her individuality also shows through in her quilting.

“I’m not a traditional patchworker,” she says. “I have more of a modern slant on it. I like to use modern fabrics with bright colours and machine-sewn, rather than by hand.”

Which brings us back to those famous handbags. Monica is philosophical about why they’re such a hit. “The good thing about handbags is that they don’t have to actually fit anyone,” she says with a smile.

Monica website is www.moonshine-designs.com. To email your interest in attending one of Monica's class click [here](#).

Til next week!
The Blueberries Team