



Wednesday 30 September 2009

Quick, what do bullet-proof vests, parachutes and underwater cables have in common? And what do these seemingly disparate items have to do with a woman named Stephanie Kwolek? In this week's 'Mothers of Invention' column all these questions will be answered.

This week we are also happy to bring you the inaugural instalment of a brand new column called 'Show and Tell'. Each week, Blueberries customers are invited to use this column to profile one of their own creations, something that they're particularly proud of, and tell everyone the story behind its creation. It's all about sharing the inspiration around, which, as we all know, begets more inspiration. So we encourage everyone out there to volunteer a completed project for its own fifteen minutes of fame in 'Show and Tell'.

[Click here to read and see the photos about the All Night Sew-a-thon held at Blueberries on Saturday night](#)

Mothers of invention

Stephanie Louise Kwolek – inventor of Kevlar

Okay, before we go any further let's get the obvious question out of the way. Kevlar is the material used in bullet-proof vests that makes them bullet-proof. It's a synthetic fabric five times stronger than the equivalent weight of steel, rust-resistant, waterproof and lightweight. And it isn't just policemen and women who owe their lives to Kwolek, as Kevlar is also used in safety helmets, radial tyres, brake pads, parachutes, underwater cables, space vehicles, suspension bridge cables, racing sails, safety gloves, hiking and camping gear and building materials. Quite a versatile little number, really.

So who was Stephanie Kwolek and how did she come to invent one of the world's most widely used and important materials.

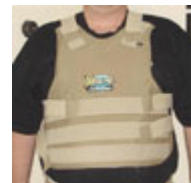
Born in 1923 in Pennsylvania of Polish and American parents, Kwolek worked as a research chemist at America's DuPont Company for over 40 years. She invented Kevlar almost by accident when she was experimenting with high performance chemical compounds, but it was clear from the outset how significant the invention could be. Kwolek patented Kevlar in 1966 and it was first marketed commercially in 1971. Today it generates hundreds of millions of dollars worldwide.

During her 40 years at the DuPont Company, Kwolek obtained 28 patents for a diverse range of inventions, of which Kevlar was the most significant. In 1995 she was inducted into America's National Inventors Hall of Fame, surely a worthy and long overdue accolade for the inventive personality behind such a ground-breaking and important substance.

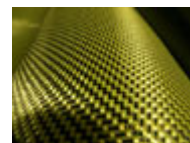
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Stephanie Kwolek



Bullet-proof vest



Synthetic fabric

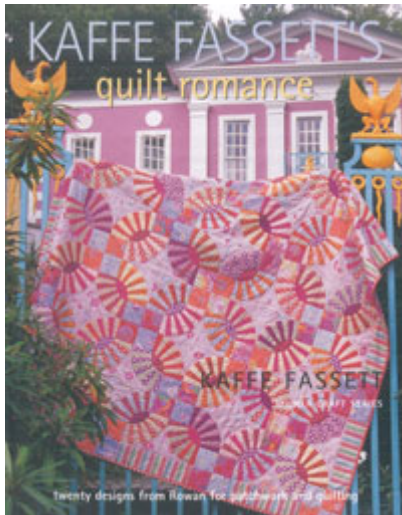


String-knit gloves

Books, Books, Books...

Kaffe Fassett's Quilt Romance

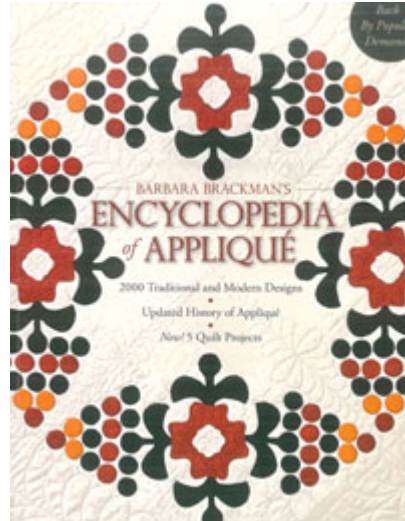
20 quilts from Kaffe Fassett and his chosen designers, photographed at Portmeirion, Clough William-Ellis' renowned Italianate village in Wales.



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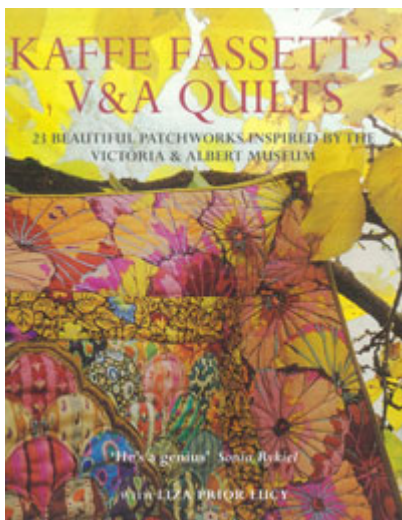
Encyclopedia of Appliqué

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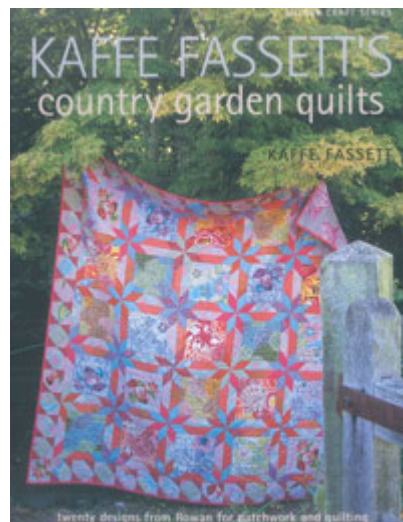
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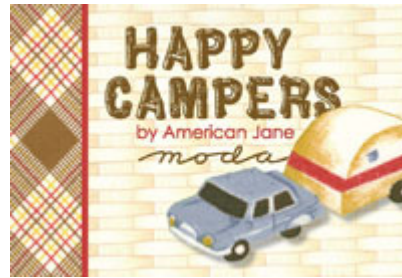
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Show and Tell

Show us the item and tell us the story



Clare Curtis



*Handbag made
by Clare*

Clare Curtis—Handbag Renegade

What was your inspiration for this handbag?

It was the material itself that really inspired me. It was green and white striped as well as green and white dots - just delightful. I was looking for a particular colour to make a handbag to match a pair of shoes I'd just bought. Blueberries has a great range of materials and whoever the buyer is seems to be in synch with what I like.

Was it your own design?

No, it came already cut into a kit pack. Unfortunately it probably isn't meant to be the handbag that they cut it out for because I ended up making the bag in my own way so that it could match the shoes as closely as possible. I've had a lot of comments on the shoes and the bag. People are always asking; "Where did you get the bag?"

Have you made handbags before?

I'm in a sewing group and we've made quite a few handbags over the years because it's an easy way of getting exactly what you want to match what you want. I also had the group as an incentive to get on with the job. If you're sewing on your own you tend to dilly dally around. But because I really liked what I was doing, I wanted to get it finished and show the girls when we had our next get together, because they were all making handbags too.

If you have an item you'd like profiled in 'Show and Tell', [click here to email us your contact details.](#)

Til next week!
The Blueberries Team.

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