



Wednesday 28 October 2009

Quick, who's been nominated for (and won) more Academy Awards than any other woman? Streep? Hepburn? Davis? No, you're not even on the right track, or the right side of the camera, for that matter.

Introducing Ms Edith Head, costume designer extraordinaire, who, with no formal training in the area, worked on over 1,000 Hollywood movies in a career spanning more than five decades. She created many of the most memorable and stylish on-screen outfits for some of the biggest names in Hollywood and was truly one of the greatest sewers of the twentieth century. In this edition of Midweek Moments we begin a journey that examines the life of this unique and enigmatic individual, as well as some of her most famous and recognisable creations. So you'd better go put the kettle on...

And keep sending in those samples for the 'Show and Tell' column. Don't be shy now. It's all about sharing.

### [Wardrobe Mistress](#)

The life of legendary Hollywood costume designer, Edith Head.

#### **Episode 1 - The extraordinary career of Edith Head**



*Edith Head*

Edith Head was a legendary Hollywood figure, although as a costume designer she remained mostly on the other side of the camera throughout her dazzling career, which spanned more than half a century. In this time she worked on more than 1,000 films and cultivated close professional relationships with some of the most famous and glamorous actresses of Hollywood's Golden Age, including Barbara Stanwyck, Grace Kelly, Bette Davis, Mae West, Marlene Dietrich and Elizabeth Taylor. She also worked closely with some legendary Hollywood directors, most notably Alfred Hitchcock, becoming his favourite designer and cultivating the image of his trademark "Hitchcock Blonde".

She was born Edith Claire Posener in San Bernardino, California in 1897, although many details of her birth, parentage and early life are unclear. This is partly due to the fact that all official records from that time were destroyed in a courthouse fire and

also because Head herself remained deliberately vague about these details throughout her life. Biographers have determined that her parents were probably of Jewish heritage, although Head never publicly acknowledged this. She also claimed to have been born ten years later than her actual birth year, although this didn't match up with dates of her college graduation and first marriage. In a rare admission of her own ambiguous background, Head once famously said; "I have in my mind a special room with iron doors. The things I don't like I throw in there and slam the door."

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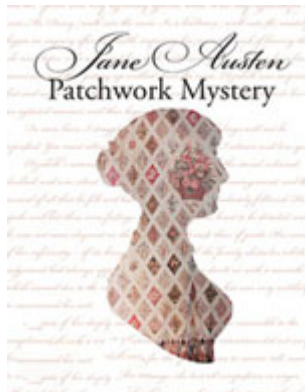
As a child, Head didn't appear to have many human friends, instead spending her time with dogs, cats and donkeys, which she enjoyed dressing in scraps of material, a childlike, eccentric precursor to the career path she would eventually take. After graduating from the University of California with a French major, she taught at a Hollywood girls' school, which was when she met her first husband, Charles Head. Although the marriage officially lasted for 15 years, it wasn't a happy one, due to Charles' alcoholism, which Edith claimed brought her "great mental anguish". Edith and Charles separated not long after the wedding, but it wasn't until 1938 that Edith eventually divorced him.

Unfortunately the separation put her on the back foot financially and she became desperate for an additional income. She answered an ad for a costume design artist at Paramount Studios, boldly faking a portfolio with work she "borrowed" from other art school students. It did the trick though, and the chief designer, Howard Greer, was so impressed with this phoney portfolio that he gave her the job. At last she had actually broken into the movie business, but before she went any further, she knew she had to confess to her deception.

Tune in next week...

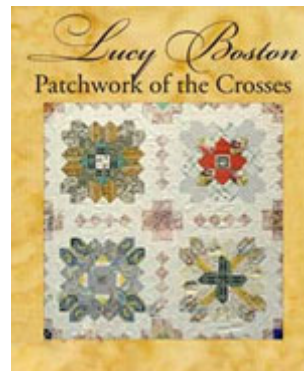
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## Show and Tell

Show us the item and tell us the story

### Linda's Blue Royal Cross Quilt

#### What first attracted you to this quilt?

I had saved this pattern of Tazzie's Quilts from a patchwork magazine some time ago - it was called "Scrap Happy Royal Cross Quilt" in the magazine, and was mostly in reds and whites. I was very attracted by the wonderful use of light and shade with the fabrics, and the visual appeal of the crosses and circles.

#### How did you make the quilt?

When I wanted to make a quilt for a niece's wedding gift I knew her favourite colour was blue, so decided to make this Royal Cross pattern. I used lots of fat quarters of various blues and creams, and my husband and I had heaps of fun sourcing the "right" blues from lots of shops, and it was not really an expensive quilt to make. It was machine pieced, and finished with hand quilting - my first attempt at hand quilting, and I was very pleased with the result.



*Blue Royal Cross Quilt made by Linda Tiernan*

#### Did you learn anything new while doing this quilt?

One valuable lesson I learnt was to always get the proper pattern if possible - having cut templates from the pattern in the magazine, it was not the perfect "fit" when piecing the cross section, so I got on the computer and ordered the pattern, which worked beautifully. Joining the finished blocks was quite complex, as I tried to ensure no fabric duplications at any joins - nearly ended up cross-eyed!!!

#### Are you pleased with the way it's turned out?

I have made many quilts since commencing my "passionate affair" with patchwork in 2001, and consider this one of my best - it is apparently now quite a talking point for visitors to my niece's home, where it takes pride of place laid over the back of her lounge sofa.

*Don't forget to get your very own V&A mug, click [here](#) to view the full range.*

Til next week!

The Blueberries Team.