

Believe it or not, an entire quilt exhibit can blossom from just a seed of an idea. You know that old saying “from tiny acorns, mighty oak trees grow?” In this case, the mighty oak was a full-blown, “flower-powered” quilt exhibit that involved a dozen quilters and more than two dozen diverse and colorful quilts.

Flower-powered quilts reap huge rewards





Cherry Blossom, 50 x 42 inches, by Kim Butterworth

*I enjoyed the interaction and energy in working with others.*

—Kim Butterworth

*By Alex Anderson*

Here's how the idea sprouted. About 18 months ago, California quilter **Jennifer Rounds** heard that quilt show organizer Mancuso Show Management was planning to inaugurate a large quilting event, the World Quilt Show, in West Palm Beach, Florida. Jennifer, who grew up in south Florida, thought it would be fun to contribute something to the show. She had worked with the Mancusos before, curating a special exhibit of quilts from her book *A Dozen Roses: Beautiful Quilts and Pillows* (co-authored with Catherine Comyns for Martingale & Company), for a number of their quilt shows around the country. On a whim, she contacted Peter and David Mancuso, who agreed to a special exhibit for the following year.

Upon hanging up the phone, she faced the big question: now what?

**A concept takes root**

For some time, Jennifer had been experimenting with new ways to incorporate dimensional appliqué into floral-themed quilts, an offshoot of the work she did for the *Roses* book. She had been teaching a



Eden's Flower, 22 x 27 inches, by Rene Steinpress



*I tried mixing my two favorite art forms—painting and quilting.*

—Rene Steinpress

Zen Roses, 58 x 86 inches,  
by Jennifer Rounds; machine  
quilted by Elaine Beattie;  
label at bottom



**Wow! I can do  
this as a quilt!**

**—Jennifer Rounds**

class that featured a small, dimensionally appliquéd, floral still life. Aha! She had her concept.

Knowing she had about a year to pull the exhibit together, Jennifer did what many quilters would do in a similar situation: she called upon her friends. Initially the plan was for each to make a floral-themed piece similar in size to Jennifer's still life, incorporating—and even building upon—her techniques. As the quilts began to take shape, however, it became obvious that this free-spirited group needed more “generous” boundaries, so the concept expanded to embrace any quilt, using any technique, so long as it adhered to the exhibit's “flower-powered” theme.

Almost all the quilters involved were from the Bay Area, so once the quilts came home, I had the opportunity to see many of them up close and personal. I was amazed at how uniquely each quilter had interpreted the theme, and I sensed that some real “stretching” had gone on. My curiosity got the better of me, and I decided to ask how making a quilt for this exhibit had helped its makers to “grow.”



## Stepping out of the comfort zone

Working together, longtime friends and collaborators **Laura Nownes** and **Diana McClun** accepted the original challenge to experiment with and expand on Jennifer's techniques. Their quilt, *Bella Flora*, was inspired by a photo spread in *Veranda* magazine. Once the pair had agreed on a "loose" design, Diana assembled the background, and then the piece passed back and forth as the pair added a wide variety of dimensional blossoms.

For Laura, working in such a free-form manner was definitely "a step out of my box. I'm pretty steeped in tradition, so it was a challenge to work on a dimensional piece that could be called an art quilt. Initially, I was hesitant, but once I committed myself, I knew I could do it. I just had to trust that creative part of myself, to get rid of the blocks, and the 'I can't's.' Watching the piece evolve was enlightening."

For Diana, who—in her own words—likes to "work large," a big part of the challenge was working on such a small scale; the quilt's finished dimensions are 17 x 25 inches. In the spirit of a true adventurer, however, Diana embraced the chance to try something new. "It was a fun little thing, and a positive experience...but then any time Laura and I work together, it's fun!"

**Kim Butterworth** drew inspiration for *Cherry Blossom* from—of all places—the cover of a colorful file folder. "As soon as I saw that folder, I had my idea. I had recently purchased a variegated fabric that I knew would work for the background, and I had been wanting to experiment with (the late) Joan Colvin's appliqué techniques for a while."

Planning and executing the quilting design was also part of Kim's learning curve. She wanted to incorporate traditional

sashiko quilting motifs, and while doodling on paper, she noticed that some of the patterning resembled mountain peaks. In the end, she drew the entire quilting design full size on tracing paper and transferred it to the quilt.

Each of the quilt's 1,068 fused blossoms is quilted individually. The quilt is hand-embellished with pink, white, and off-white pearls in varying sizes to suggest buds in various stages.

"It was exciting to work outside my comfort zone. I enjoyed creating a piece for a specific purpose and the interaction and energy involved in working with others toward the same show." For the record, Kim still hasn't signed off on the piece. "I still feel it's unfinished. Let's call it a work in progress!"

*Gustav's Dream* was the exhibit contribution from **Darra Williamson**. "Some years ago, I purchased a greeting card with an image of Gustav Klimt's painting *Tree of Life*, thinking it might be fun to interpret the composition in a fabric collage. I had made lots of free-form flowers

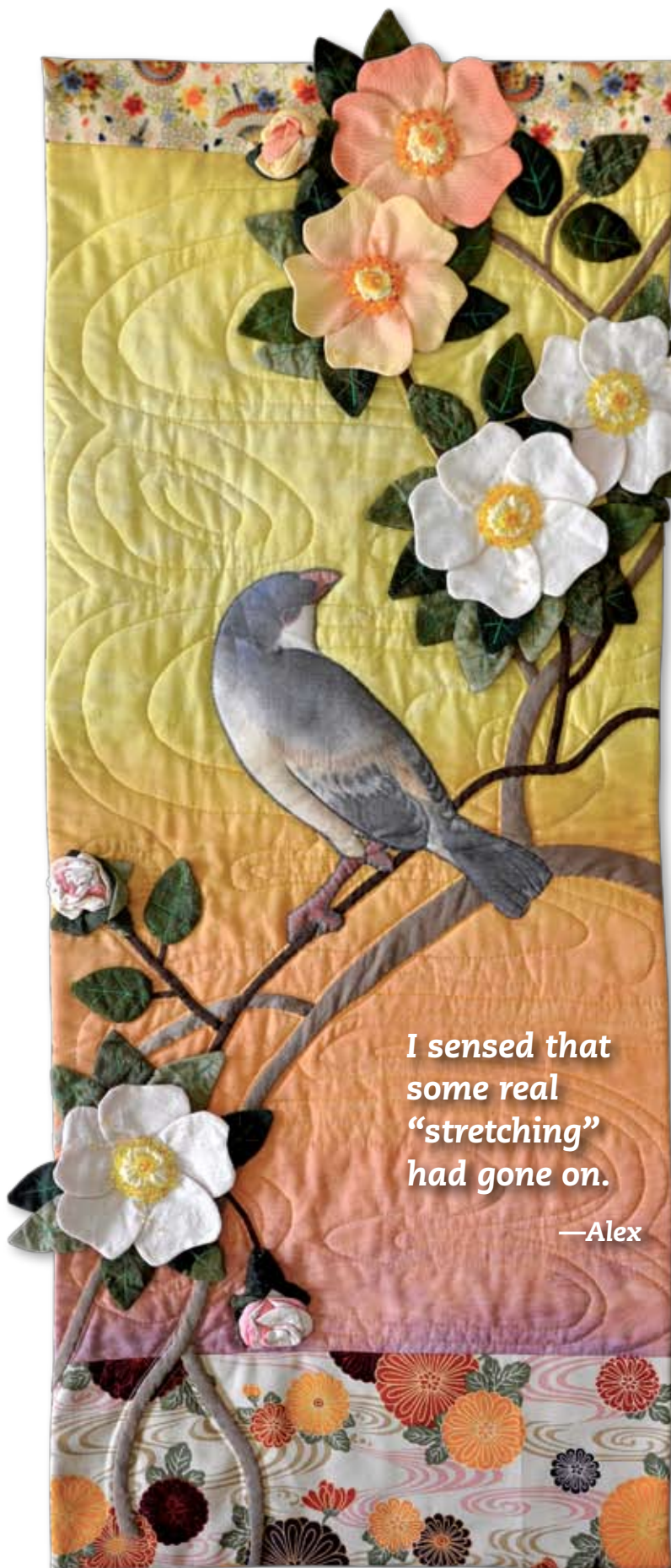


*Gustav's Dream*, 20 x 27 inches, by Darra Williamson



**I found a way to conquer each design problem as it arose.**

**—Darra Williamson**



Dawn Beckons, 14 x 34 inches, by Jennifer Rounds

*I sensed that  
some real  
“stretching”  
had gone on.*

—Alex

before, using a hybrid of Log Cabin and crazy piecing that I called Log Cabin with Attitude, but never so small!”

The big question for Darra was whether her technical skills were up to the challenge of her vision. “My methods might not have been the most conventional, but I found a way to conquer each design problem as it arose in my own unique fashion. I tied the blossoms on with gold metallic thread and added a folded ‘crumb-catcher’ (flanged) border. I probably should have quilted the background first, but—since I didn’t—I secured the layers with little satin-stitched bars.”

Making Eden’s Flower allowed **Rene Steiness** to try mixing two of her favorite art forms—painting and quilting. After painting the flower on silk organza, she played with sheers and tulles, placing them beneath the painted fabric to create shadowy leaves and fronds. Machine stitching accented the subtle foliage and anchored the sheers between the painted organza and the background of green silk dupioni.

For binding, Rene selected a dupioni silk with threads that incorporated the colors of the painted piece. A standard finished binding didn’t feel quite right, so—in a brilliant experiment—she frayed the edges of the binding strip, folded it, and sewed it with the frayed edge showing on the front of the quilt. “I was pleased with the effect,” she said. “What’s more, this technique allowed me to apply the binding completely by machine using one of the decorative stitches on my new sewing machine.”

Exhibit coordinator Jennifer Rounds has a great eye for drawing and combining inspiration from unusual sources. “One day, as I was walking past a flower stand, I saw a greeting card based on a Japanese wood-block print, and thought ‘Wow! I can do this as a quilt!’” She used the opportunity to make Dawn Beckons, exploring the long



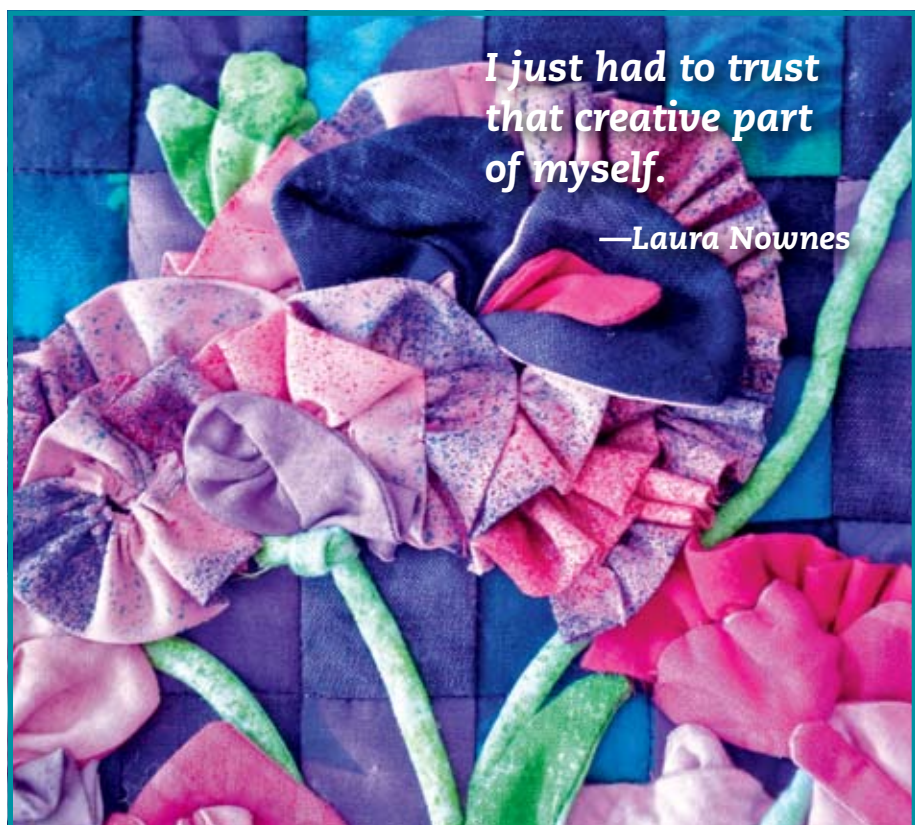
*A big part of the challenge was working on such a small scale.*

—Diana McClun

vertical shape, playing around with photo transfer, and trying a faced edging.

The creation of her Zen Roses, Jennifer admits, involved “a lot of serendipity,” beginning with the possibilities she saw in a wall mural pictured in a French shelter magazine. She adapted the look in the muted palette suggested by the photo, incorporating materials such as shot cottons and buttons she just “happened to find” in the right colors and shapes to work perfectly for her vision. She also “used the piece to continue my commitment to finishing my quilts with unique labels.”

As I reflected on my conversations with each of these talented and gutsy quilters, one thing stood out: From challenge comes growth, and by rising to this flower-powered opportunity, each quilter had reaped a heap of benefits. There’s a lesson for us all in that, don’t you agree? [TQL](#)



*I just had to trust that creative part of myself.*

—Laura Nownes

Bella Flora, 17 x 25 inches, by Laura Nownes and Diana McClun; machine quilted by Sharon Winters