

Meet JANET TAILLON | *A sunny afternoon on Janet's comfortable patio, a discussion of her many sources of artistic inspiration (travel, color, shape, and the energy and interactions of her job at Back Porch Fabrics), and a peek into her quilting journey so far. Only a fraction of our far-ranging conversation fits here, so please take a moment to greet Janet at the next guild meeting, or on your next trip to the quilt shop.*



Q. Do you come from a family of makers?

A. My grandmother was a seamstress. She would come out [to California] during the winter. And she was a real grandma. She had the corsets and all, with the little curly hair and big clunky shoes. She was probably only 50! Every afternoon, I would bring her her highball and her saltine crackers. That was her happy hour. And we would sit and she'd take that time to tell me what she was doing. I really did learn at her knee. She made a quilt for my mom and dad. It was whole cloth, wool, and it was all hand-quilted. She spent many, many hours quilting that quilt.

Q. And your own start as a maker?

A. I went to Catholic schools, so I had to wear a uniform. Once a month, we had free dress day. Now, I come from a family of six kids. If you wanted something, you had to figure it out. So I would make all own my clothes. I made a lot of clothes! Oh, and this is my poor story: I had my saddle oxfords, and I had one pair of shoes that were my fancy shoes. My dad, bless his heart, would dye them for me, and he'd cover them in fabric to match my dresses. That pair of shoes must have gone through twenty iterations!

Q. Tell me about your quilting style.

I primarily do art quilting, and I do improv. I've really always liked three-dimensional things: my quilts always have some sort of dimensional aspect. I'm in a little group, and we do challenges. I have done some pretty crazy things with those challenges. One is a swan floating on water, with fish below it, floating between its feet. I don't do exact piecing; that's just not me. Although once in a while...for example Gail did a pattern at one of her Saturday demos and I said, 'That's so pretty I think I'll make that.' I'll show you what state it's in now [laughs]. And it *is* going to be so pretty, but [gestures to indicate intricate piecing] oh my god, just shoot me now!

Q. Do you have other creative outlets?

A. Recently I've been helping PacRep [Theatre] do costumes. The last one I did was the Little Mermaid, and they had 105 costumes. You had to make octopi and mermaids and all this wild stuff. The gal who is the costumer, she is so inventive. The mermaids—we had corsets, all different kinds, really old funky ones, that we covered in sequins. I had sequins all over the place. My husband came home from out of town and said, 'What kind of party did you have here?' I was thrilled to see every scene, and to say, 'Oh my gosh I made that!' It was fun—pure creativity.

Q. Tell me about travel as a source of inspiration.

Twenty years ago, we didn't have plans to quit working. But my mother had died very unexpectedly, and a year later I think it finally hit me. I said to my husband, 'What are we waiting for?' We rented out our house in the Bay area, and we bought a truck and trailer and spent a couple of years driving around the U.S. and Canada and Alaska. The first year, we followed the seasons. We went up into the Rockies, and across Canada. We dropped down into Wisconsin: we buried my mother with her parents there. Then up to Montreal, across Québec, to Prince Edward Island, all the way up into Nova Scotia and then back around. The following year was Alaska. We took two months getting there, two months to get back, and spent two months exploring the state. It was an amazing trip. Between those two years, we probably hit over 70 national parks and monuments.

Q. Parks! What are your Top Five National Parks?

Zion. Glacier. Waterton. Capitol Reef. And Needles, which is the southern part of Canyonlands. You have to drive waaaay in; it's got a fabulous campground. Oh, and Banff. Lake Louise. I have pictures of me at the campground there, with a big umbrella over me, sewing at my little featherweight machine. Yes, I took my featherweight on the road! I had a cabinet with all my sewing stuff in the trailer.

Just the Facts, Ma'am

Q. Where are you from?

A. I was born in Milwaukee, WI, but was just a couple of months old when my parents moved to California. I grew up in Southern California, then moved to the Bay area in 1974, so I've been up here longer than I was ever down there. We moved to the Monterey Peninsula full time in 2000.

Q. What's your favorite spot on the peninsula?

A. In the past few years we've been going to Fort Ord Dunes State Park. You know where the Stillwell used to be on top of the cliff? We start there, walk down the path, then drop over the cliff and walk on the beach. If that beach were anywhere else, it would be wall to wall people. But because you have to make an effort? There's nobody on that beach.

Q. What's your favorite cuisine?

A. My husband does all the cooking, so whatever he cooks is my favorite.

Q. What about your day job?

A. I was a CFO for hire, a consultant. It was a nutty, nutty job. I quit [that] in 1998, so we've been retired for 20 years. And now I do two days a week at Back Porch. I've been there 13 years.

Q. What's the best place you've ever been?

A. Oh, we've been on some amazing trips. Last year we did a safari and ended by trekking to see the gorillas in Rwanda. We went to one of the reconciliation villages, too, where the [genocide] perpetrators and victims were living together. It was powerful. Another trip was three months in New Zealand and Australia. Everything was incredible, but we did a camping trip across the top end, on the Indian Ocean, from Broome to Darwin, sleeping out in our swags under the stars. It was magical, truly magical. And we just got back from a river cruise. We went on the Danube, the Main and the Rhine—from Vienna to Amsterdam, essentially. Talk about was sedate, but gosh was it fun!

<i>This or That?</i>	
On a free day, hike or spa?	Hike
Mountains or beach?	Beach
Sweet or salt?	Salt. I'd rather have cheese than chocolate, any time.
Introvert or extravert?	I'm an extravert, but I'm shy. I put myself out there, but it's hard for me.
Artist, craftsperson or maker?	I call myself an artist.

Q. Why do you continue to quilt? What does it bring to your life?

A. It brings me joy. I just have to create something, to do something. That's [one reason] I've stayed at Back Porch so long. It keeps me creating: that energy, the people coming in. I originally took the job because I was so bad at picking colors and fabrics. I thought it would help me learn, and it has. I can help anybody pick fabric, and I do a good job at it. Even if it's in a color scheme that is not to my liking I don't say, 'Yuck;' I say, 'Do you like it?' I might say, 'This might look a little better,' or "Don't you think that puts a little spark in it?" That was why I took that job: to learn to pick colors and fabric. And then I started to teach the classes, and that's a kick in the pants, too.



(Part of an occasional series in which a MPQG member, chosen at random, is interviewed about her quilting journey. You can find all of the series interviews at <http://www.mpgg.org/member-interviews.htm>.