Quiltfolk EXPLORER

LONDON, ENGLAND

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FOLK

/ FŌK /

noun: used as a friendly form
of address to a group of people

adjective: of or relating
to the traditional art or culture
of a community

Welcome to the first edition of *Quiltfolk Explorer*!

Discovering the story of quilts in America will always be *Quiltfolk*'s central mission, but quilts are made and loved all over the world. We've always hoped that one day *Quiltfolk* could take our readers on an exploration of quilts beyond the United States to discover what quilters all over the world have in common as well as how their quilt stories are different from our own. This summer, we got our first chance.

Our adventure begins in England. London, specifically. With the *Explorer* series, each edition will focus on a foreign city. Covering an entire country at once would be overwhelming and besides, the cities on our radar have enough quilt stories within them to keep us going for a long time. Just think: Cardiff, Wales; Islamabad, Pakistan; Tokyo, Japan; Marseille, France. Oh, the places we'll go.

I might have left my heart in London though. The city's history is gripping, the people are thoughtful, and the fish and chips are excellent. (I did a lot of field research.) As for the quilters we met, well, let's just say that if during one of the interviews, the queen herself had asked me to tea, I would have politely refused. Please accept my apologies, Your Majesty, but the "quiltfolk" in this special issue are just that compelling.

As Shakespeare might say, let us hie to London. Come along as we explore a city teeming with people who love quilts as much as you do. We covered the passport and airfare, now all we need is you — and a map.

xoxo,

Mary Fons
EDITOR IN CHIEF

Quiltfolk

EXPLORER

OCTOBER 2019

LONDON, ENGLAND

MAKERS

HISTORY

ON THE COVER, FROM LEFT: Fussy-cut scraps in Kaffe Fassett's studio; a Union Jack flies over the entrance to world-famous department store Liberty, in London.
BACK COVER: Kantha-style stitching brings texture and warmth to a Kaffe Fassett whole-cloth quilt.

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Welcome to London

The English writer Samuel Johnson wrote in 1777 that to be tired of London is to be "tired of life, for there is in London all that life can afford."

Johnson's London looked a lot different than the one we explored. In 2019, motorbikes and double-decker buses honk their way through traffic, the "tube" moves 5 million passengers a day, there's a smartphone in practically everyone's hand, and the most recent royal wedding was televised to an audience of 29 million. But there's no doubt the energy of London remains the same. Since its founding by the Romans in AD 47, London has been a city in constant motion, an ever-evolving, glorious mess of the best (and worst) any global metropolis has to offer.

Quiltfolk stepped into this fray — minding the gap, of course — for a whirlwind four-day quilt adventure. We expected a certain sense of decorum from the London quilt set, a reserved "keep calm and sew on" approach to life and piecing technique. England is the land of tiny hexagon patchwork and dainty cucumber sandwiches, after all; we were determined to be on our best behavior.

We're happy to report that London "quiltfolk" are in first place for Most Relaxed Quilters in the World. The attitude we found in England was warm and gloriously laissez-faire, a world away from some stiff English stereotype. In any of our interviews, if we had spilled tea on the tablecloth, we're pretty sure our subject would have waved it off and suggested we cut up the cloth for our next quilt.

TOP: Sheer raw-edge appliqué samples hang in the window of Cloth House, a fabric shop in London's Soho neighborhood. **BOTTOM:** Double-decker buses wind their way through the narrow streets.


TELEPHONE


GREENE KING
GREAT MARLBOROUGH ST
SHAKESPEARE'S HEAD
PURVEYOR OF
QUALITY
CASK ALES
& CRAFTED BEERS
WESTGATE BREWERY SINCE 1799
SHAKESPEARES HEAD
The Finest Quality
Fish & Chips

A quilter in London will find inspiration everywhere: Delicate flowers on a teacup at The Savoy might inform a future quilting motif.

In England — London, at least — making quilts feels like a lifestyle choice. Patchwork is supposed to be a mishmash, a mix of this and that, a way to take disparate memories and the marks of time and assemble them into a thing of humble use or transcendent beauty — or both. You're about to see this perspective in the mosaics and fabrics of megastars Kaffe Fassett and Brandon Mably; in an agonizing but beautiful memorial quilt; and in the work of legendary artist Faith Ringgold and London quilter Chris Webb, who, for all their dedication and skill, can still let it be.

Are you ready for *Quiltfolk's* first trip abroad? If so, grab some chocolate biscuits and a pot of tea, because there's really only one question left to answer:

One lump or two?

MAKERS

Kaffe & Co

THE COLOR OF LONDON

Innumerable quilts have been made with the Kaffe Fassett Collective's iconic fabric. **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Kaffe Fassett and Brandon Mably at home in West Hampstead, London.

London, 1964

The aged cobblestones of Carnaby Street are slick with rain. The sky is gloomy. Everything feels so *drab*. Then a black taxi pulls up and the door opens. Out steps a bright-eyed young man, fresh off a plane from California. The young designer, dashing and handsome and probably wearing a striking yellow-and-pink scarf of some kind, is Kaffe Fassett. London is about to get a lot more colorful.

The career of Kaffe Fassett is unlike any other in the quilt industry — or in the knitting industry, or in the fashion industry, for that matter. Precious few designers manage to move so seamlessly between commercial categories. Even fewer have achieved such astonishing success in each.

Any quilter who has been inside a quilt shop instantly recognizes the work of Fassett and the Kaffe Fassett Collective: exceptionally talented artists Brandon Mably and Philip Jacobs and genius coordinator Liza Prior Lucy, the friend who first convinced Fassett to design fabric for quilters. Some fabric designers offer a "line"; Fassett and his comrades offer their own genre. The group's graphics take cues from nature, architecture, and classic geometrics. Cerulean, royal purple, lapis lazuli, goldenrod, and other jewel tones color the fabrics. All of it combines to create an original look both whimsical and dramatic, often imitated, never duplicated.

Since Fassett's first line with Westminster/Rowan Fabrics was released in 1995, you'd be hard-pressed to find a quilter who doesn't have at least a fat quarter of his fabric in their stash. Those obsessed make the majority of their quilts exclusively with "Kaffe," and references to his perennial prints have become jargon (for example, "I love how you used that Kaffe dot," or "I just bought nine yards of the new Kaffe stripe in all four colorways, please forcibly remove me from this quilt shop.").

FROM LEFT: Embroidered couch cushions designed by Mably rest under a panel of Chinese ancestral portraits purchased for the house; Fassett shows a knit blanket with decidedly quilt-like characteristics.

In every room, objets d'art engage the eye. Reflected in a wide mirror, floral bunting from a former project hangs high on a wallpapered wall.

Living color in London

In present-day London, Fassett and Mably live and work inside a three-story West Hampstead house.

Kaffe Fassett's home is exactly what you'd expect: beautiful and vivid and practically vibrating with color. As you make your way through the parlor, the second parlor, the living room, the other living room, and climb the stairs from one floor to the next, you witness the yield of a life spent as a prolific professional artist. Everywhere are various archives, boxes, sample books, and sketch pads, alongside props from shows and gifts from collaborators. Textile treasures from faraway lands mingle with family heirlooms, and every piece of shabby chic furniture comes with a story, like the cracked mirror a few paces from an early oil painting by Fassett.

Mably and Fassett met in 1990 when they started chatting at a bus stop. Since then, Mably, a designer in his own right, has lent his sizeable talent to the world built around his partner in life and business. Mably's work is complementary to Fassett's, but it is distinctly his.

FROM LEFT: This fabric collage was given to Fassett by an adoring fan; dishes arranged by color create a still life.

The affable Mably is also a shrewd business manager.
Here, he holds up *Dotty World*, hand-quilted by Fassett in 1998.

A formally trained artist, Mably tends to engage more directly with a foreground and background in his designs. Where Fassett embraces florals, Mably's shapes are corporeal, more cell division than polka dot.

Four to five months per year, Mably and Fassett leave London to teach and lecture to their enormous fan base. There are appearances to make at various exhibitions and grand openings. But the work the world sees all begins here at the West Hampstead house. All three and a half stories are filled with the makings of art: paint pots and scissors, embroidery needles, tape, swatches, color studies, and various things stained — intentionally or unintentionally — with heavenly looking dye. Even the messy corners of the place look fabulous.

Fassett's main studio room is a bit overwhelming. This is the home office of a man who recently collaborated with Coach (yes, like the handbags) on its debut fashion collection. At the time of our visit, Fassett was selecting pieces for a gallery show to be hosted by retail giant Anthropologie. On the south bank of the Thames, the American Museum featured a solo exhibition of his work.

FROM LEFT: Oil paintings atop a flat file cabinet holding years of sketchbooks and color studies; a close-up of the art and palette for a 2018 fabric line.

ABOVE: Mably works on his latest needlepoint design. **LEFT:** Many of Fassett's prints, including a number of stripes, have never gone out of production.

Artist, teacher, author, speaker, and established Englishman, Kaffe Fassett.

And Fassett is the only living designer who has had a solo show at the Victoria and Albert Museum. A person could be intimidated to ask about his "process" and why he likes London so much. Thankfully, Kaffe Fassett is really nice.

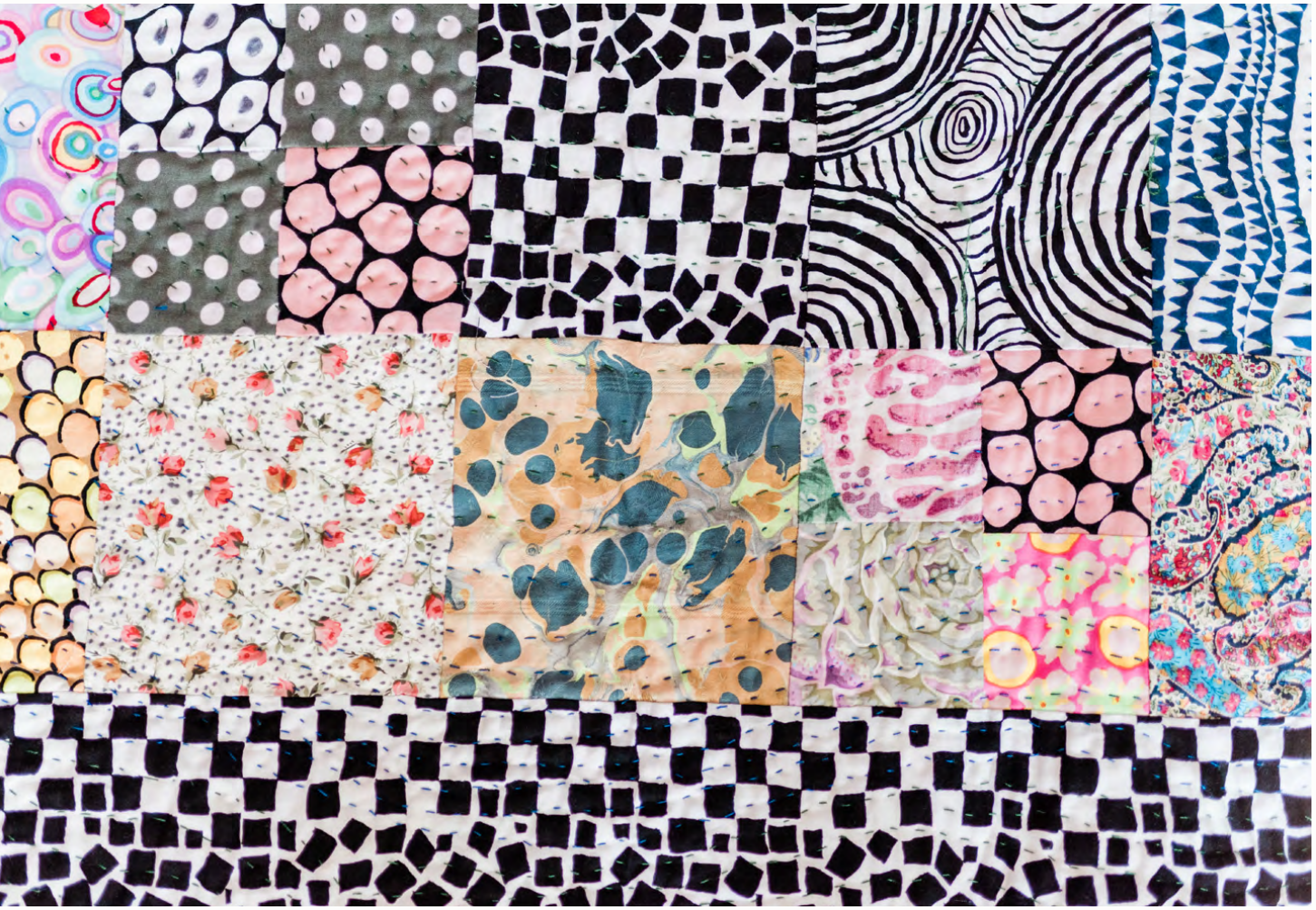
"When I got to England, I realized how relaxed people were," Fassett said. "They'd let their houses go to ruin and say, 'It's patina, darling!' That was wonderful. To me, Americans had to be new and fresh. If it got worn or broken, you have to run out and [replace it.]" Fassett was (and still is) of the persuasion that a cracked pot shouldn't go into the bin; it should appear in his next still life.

"And then I also loved that I could jump over to Scandinavia or Paris or Prague," he said of life in London. "It was all on the doorstep, comparatively speaking."

Dozens of finished quilts are kept inside a massive hand-painted cupboard.

England has been the right place for Fassett and his team to build their quilt-world empire. And on the subject of quilts, it was time to get a peek. Each of the 30 quilt-related books Fassett has published contains multiple projects, and every project needs its own sample. Besides, both men quilt for pleasure too. So surely there was a big quilt warehouse somewhere.

More like the oversized cupboard of your dreams. Next to two armoires also full of quilts, the big cupboard rises 8 feet tall. Its six generous cubbies are hand-painted by Fassett in dreamy pastels. Great stacks of quilts are kept inside, all carefully tagged. (Stacked this way, these famous quilts almost look like bolts of fabric.) The giant cupboard and twin armoires live in a sumptuous living-cum-storage room. A dozen or so quilts were separated into a stack bound for the Anthropologie show to be displayed and then sold. Like any quilter, both men looked with pain at the quilts about to leave the nest. But with an inventory climbing toward 500 and with more books and patterns on the horizon, letting go was the right thing to do.



FROM LEFT: Simple patchwork and deft color play are what “Kaffe” quilts are made of; this recently completed quilt will spend time on the road before eventually coming home to London.

When asked what medium he likes best — fabric, yarn, paint, or clay, Fassett's answer is always the same: "color."

Another day in paradise

Their beloved London will likely always be home base for Fassett and Mably, but these are two people at home in the world. When the designers are not in London, they are in Morocco, or Italy, or New York. They might be visiting Liza Prior Lucy in New England, or manning a booth at Quilt Market in Houston. Or perhaps it's off to Belize to sketch and knit next season's samples.

The pair might also make a stop in Big Sur, where Fassett's family owns a restaurant, high on a cliff overlooking the Pacific Ocean. This is where Fassett grew up, among the white salt, fuchsia bougainvillea, and blue skies of Northern California. Back in 1964, those colors are what he first brought to London, a city so very glad he came.

Faith Ringgold

AT THE SERPENTINE GALLERY

Thread, fabric, and paint in Faith Ringgold's story quilts. **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Three quilts from the artist's 2010 series *Coming to Jones Road Part 2* are hung as a triptych. **L-R:** *Martin Luther King Jr. Tanka #3: I Have a Dream*; *Sojourner Truth Tanka #2: Ain't I A Woman?*; *Harriet Tubman Tanka #1: Escape to Freedom*.

An American quilter in London

America's patchwork and quilting traditions came over from Britain. But at the Serpentine Gallery in London this summer, artist Faith Ringgold brought her singular American quilt tradition to Britain. Spanning 50 years of work, the survey exhibition featured paintings, prints, and several of the artist's exceptional story quilts, and it marked Ringgold's first-ever solo show in Europe. The Serpentine show was a big deal.

Ringgold, now approaching 90, has been making paintings, performances, books, quilts, and art that defies categorization, for nearly seven decades. Yet audiences in England had never before been able to view so many of her groundbreaking works in one place. In the airy, chapel-esque Serpentine Gallery, nestled in the verdant landscape of Kensington Gardens, gallery goers moved from room to room in silence, confronted by hard themes told in soft quilts.

Before Ringgold embraced quilts, she was a painter. Formally trained in art and education at The City College of New York, Ringgold grappled in her paintings with racial tension, gender inequality, class war, and cultural violence of the physical and symbolic kind. The personal has always been political in Ringgold's work, and vice versa.

Faith Ringgold was born in New York in 1930. Her mother was a fashion designer and her father a jazz musician. The artist learned "free-form piecing" from her grandmother, whose quiltmaking skills were passed down from women in the family.

Ringgold's quilts are public explorations of personal experiences. **L-R:** *The American Collection #11: Listen to the Trees*, 1997; detail, *Mother's Quilt*, 1983.

Writing on her quilts gave the artist the freedom to “publish”; here, a detail from *Change 2: Faith Ringgold’s More Than 100 Pounds Weight Loss Performance Story Quilt*, 1988.

But Ringgold wouldn’t take to fabric again until the 1970s, when her story quilts came to life partly from necessity. The dust from her wood and clay sculptures was causing asthma, and her manuscripts had been repeatedly rejected by publishers. Quilts became a brilliant solution: Not only would she feel better, but Ringgold could use her quilts to “publish” her own writing. By literally writing words — sometimes a lot of them — on her quilts in pen and ink, she insisted her prose would reach the world.

In an interview with art critic and Serpentine Director Hans-Ulrich Obrist before the show opened, Ringgold said of this strategy: “I have what’s called freedom of speech and that’s what America has and that’s what I do. The only way you’re going to get it taken away from you is if you don’t use it. [On the quilts] I could write whatever I wanted to, because that’s freedom of speech.”

The artist's first European solo exhibition featured story quilts like the seminal *Who's Afraid of Aunt Jemima?*, 1993.

FROM LEFT: Ringgold has said her 1974 *Windows of the Wedding* series was her first truly abstract work; these "prayer rugs" are pieced and painted with acrylic paint.

A message of faith, family, and hope lies at the heart of Ringgold's boundary-pushing art. Detail, *Coming to Jones Road Part 2 #2: We Here Aunt Emmy Got Us Now*, 2010.

Ringgold's story quilts aren't made of fabric alone. Typically, an acrylic- or oil-painted canvas at the center of the work is then framed by patchwork, some of it quilted, some of it only pieced. The material might be silk brocade, upholstery fabric, cotton, or a variety of woven and other textiles. These quilts were immediately controversial in the art world for their subject matter and use of lowly "craft" materials, which wasn't a surprise to Ringgold. But then an editor saw a poster of the now-famous *Tar Beach* quilt hanging in a doctor's office and approached Ringgold about writing a children's book. Since that time, Ringgold has written 22 books for children, one of which was placed on a bench in the gallery for visitors to sit and read.

The story quilts of Faith Ringgold represent an invaluable contribution to the larger story of quilts as an art form. This legendary artist, prolific as ever, demonstrates the power of quilts as a means of personal expression. In England, in America, and in galleries around the world, that language is universal.

Chris Webb

THE QUILTER NEXT DOOR

Free-motion, modern-style quilting complements Chris Webb's graphic patchwork. **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Curious about all aspects of quiltmaking, Webb hand-quilts his latest masterpiece.

Quilter in the city

Most of us have looked up at the windows of city apartment buildings and wondered about the people who live inside. Maybe there's a young family on the top floor; maybe the lady in 3C is having a spot of cheese. We know for sure a quilter lives on the second floor above a sundries shop near Finsbury Park, and there's a good chance he's sewing right now.

Fourteen years and many creative adventures ago, Chris Webb came to England from his native Canada for a museum internship. After bouncing around the country for a few years, he settled in fabulous, noisy, one-of-a-kind London.

"London is an amazing place," Webb said. "You can't sit still. For every frustrating or difficult part to [the city], there's something amazing or fresh or new." For creative types, Webb says London is pure energy. "There's such a big creative scene here. Artists, makers, studio visits, open houses — there's always something going on."

This soft-spoken chap knows something about creative energy. In the quilt world that exists online, he gained visibility for starting an ambitious — and successful — social media project called *52 Quilters*. The idea was to set up an Instagram account and let a different quilter "take over" each week of the year to share pictures, inspiration, how-tos, and stories with an engaged audience eager for fresh content. Closing in on its fifth year, the staunchly non-commercial @52Quilters is nearing 17,000 followers and has no lack of willing participants. How has Webb managed to not just sustain but grow a project in the here-today-gone-tomorrow world of social media?

On the balcony of his London flat, Webb shows off his *Shot on an iPhone 6* quilt, a freehand pieced map of London made in 2018.

"I think the reason it's been so successful is because the people who do it love it," he said, petting one of his two extra-fluffy cats. "For some people who don't have a big following, [*52 Quilters* is] a chance to show off and share a bit. And for the people who take over who have a 'real' business account, it's a little bit of a freeing experience because it's about telling a story rather than selling your products or your time. [Participants] really appreciate the opportunity to have that platform."

Webb typifies a young, urban quilter in London: busy, online, and able to produce outsize work in a tiny space. Webb's paper piecing is impressive and he knows how to create depth with color in quilts large and small. All this work is done without the luxury of a big studio, proving that you don't need a dedicated sewing room to be committed to a quilt practice.

Webb's got it in his bones; his great-aunt is likely responsible for it. Aunt Jean encouraged artistic creativity, exploration, and playtime with art supplies, including fabric.

FROM LEFT: Detail, Webb's London, rendered in fabric; Ripley, a very British kitty, looks out on Finsbury Park.

ABOVE: Webb admits making quilts has had a negative impact on his guitar practice. **LEFT:** In Webb's flat, light fixtures, place mats, and coasters have a "quilty" vibe.

ABOVE: Vintage how-to books and modern paper piecing in Webb's makeshift studio. **RIGHT:** Good advice on a pincushion made from a pattern by Heidi Staples.

The @52Quilters project inspired Webb's mini-quilt titled *Chris Evans*, one in a series that explores the positive and negative effects of social media.
NEXT PAGE: A close-up of the "cheese" in Webb's special quilt from Aunt Jean.

She taught Webb to sew. Aunt Jean didn't just pass on quilting skills to her grandnephew, she gave him a quilt too. Made for Webb when he was 12, the now-tattered and worn patchwork quilt has traveled England with him like a kind of security blanket and instruction manual for making quilts the way his aunt did: with a spot of "cheese."

"My aunt had this thing about how you have to have a piece of the quilt that's the 'cheese,' the thing that sticks out," Webb said and pointed to a bright red square in the lower third of the quilt. "The cheese is something that makes your eye move from place to place and see more than just the big picture. [...] She'd always pick all her fabrics and then maybe one more that didn't quite match because she thought it gave [the quilt] more depth."

In terms of cities, few have more depth than London. Each of the 8 million people there has a unique life story, and those stories create the city patchwork we see as we look up to so many apartment windows. In his cozy London flat, there's a young man whose story is told with quilts — and a spot of cheese.

Sewing Stardust

GRENFELL MEMORIAL QUILT

Tender words and embellishments in fabric and felt.
PREVIOUS PAGE: Alexandra "Allie" Brown and Tuesday Greenidge of the *Grenfell Memorial Quilt* project.

The most beautiful sight in London is not Buckingham Palace. It's not the spire of Big Ben or ships bobbing on the Thames. The most beautiful sight in London can be found once a month, in a working class neighborhood, under a highway overpass.

There you'll find a gathering of people who, despite the unspeakable sorrow they feel in the wake of a neighborhood tragedy, insist on making space for joy, faith, and mutual support. Since the Grenfell Tower fire of 2017, there are many stories to tell; this one concerns a quilt.

Everywhere in the neighborhood and all across the quilt, green hearts symbolize solidarity and remembrance for the victims and survivors of the Grenfell Tower fire.

A quilt in the dark

Tuesday Greenidge has lived in her two-story flat in Notting Hill for 25 years. In the main living space, fabric, beads, rulers, and thread cover the table. Thick bags of scraps squat in the corner and everywhere, stacked or in process, are sections of a quilt that shouldn't have to exist. Greenidge's living room is the nerve center for the *Grenfell Memorial Quilt* project she started in October 2017. The quilt serves as a memorial to honor those who died in the terrible fire that year.

On June 14, 2017, a malfunctioning refrigerator caught fire in Grenfell Tower, a 24-story apartment building in the Ladbroke Grove neighborhood near posh Notting Hill in North Kensington. For several years before the tragedy, residents and concerned neighbors had filed complaints about the building's condition. They had cited safety hazards such as blocked fire exits and packed garbage chutes, but management largely ignored residents' concerns. When the fire broke out on the fourth floor that spring day, Grenfell became an inferno.

In her living room, Greenidge pieces strips on a second-hand Brother sewing machine.

Within four hours, the whole building was engulfed with more than 100 flats on fire. The tower burned for over 24 hours. In the end, 72 residents died and 70 more were injured in the worst residential fire in England since World War II. Those who survived the blaze and those who lost loved ones sustain emotional distress and post-traumatic suffering. Some victims have access to mental health services; many do not.

The quilt that Greenidge is constructing exists as a community healing project too. The professional artist believes making a quilt together can help people process their grief in a supportive, creative environment. At the very least, the project can offer a powerful distraction from unattended sorrows.

The quilt has yet another purpose: to keep the event of the fire present in the minds of people without a personal connection to it. Beyond the fear of another disaster occurring in their neighborhood (or anyone else's), the Grenfell community fears that without persistence a 24/7 news cycle will leave their story behind entirely.

Portions of the quilt shown near the memorial garden. **L-R:** Damien Jones, Brown, Laura Sothern, Marianne Alapini, Hannah MacDonald, Greenidge, Jones's daughters Shola and Latifah.

In Greenidge's view, a positive, ongoing art project open to all within the community is a beneficial — and highly visible — path toward feeling whole again as a neighborhood. Greenidge is a mixed-media artist whose work has been featured at such prestigious institutions as the Tate Modern and Christie's auction house.

Directing a successful community quilt project did not fit in her realm of experience, however. Greenidge's strategy was to organize bees where those with sewing skills could facilitate her rather ingenious way to go about the quilt's construction: Jelly roll strips are sewn together to form a "base block" measuring 12 square feet. Individual contributions are then sewn onto the base by members of the bee, frequently Greenidge herself. The goal is to create 18 of these "blocks," lace them together, and find a place for the quilt's display. (Greenidge has been in discussions with the Victoria and Albert Museum about a future exhibit of the *Grenfell Memorial Quilt*.)

ABOVE: Fabric donations sorted and prepared for sewing. **RIGHT:** Greenidge in her backyard garden with a completed “base block.”

With each block, Greenidge can point out the different pieces that have been contributed and the name of each maker.

Contributions are as unique as the hands that make them. Some volunteers cut letters to spell out a name or message. Others create panels of various sizes that may include pictures, sentiments, mementos, or prayers for the dead as well as the living. Across the quilt are hundreds of hearts too, a good deal of them bright green — the word “Grenfell” is an adaptation of the words “green” and “field.” Greenidge is working on a series of panels of her own.

“There were 17 children that perished,” she said, examining pieces in progress. “So they’re all going to get a star. Because I believe we’re all just made out of stardust.” She paused. “I do believe that.”

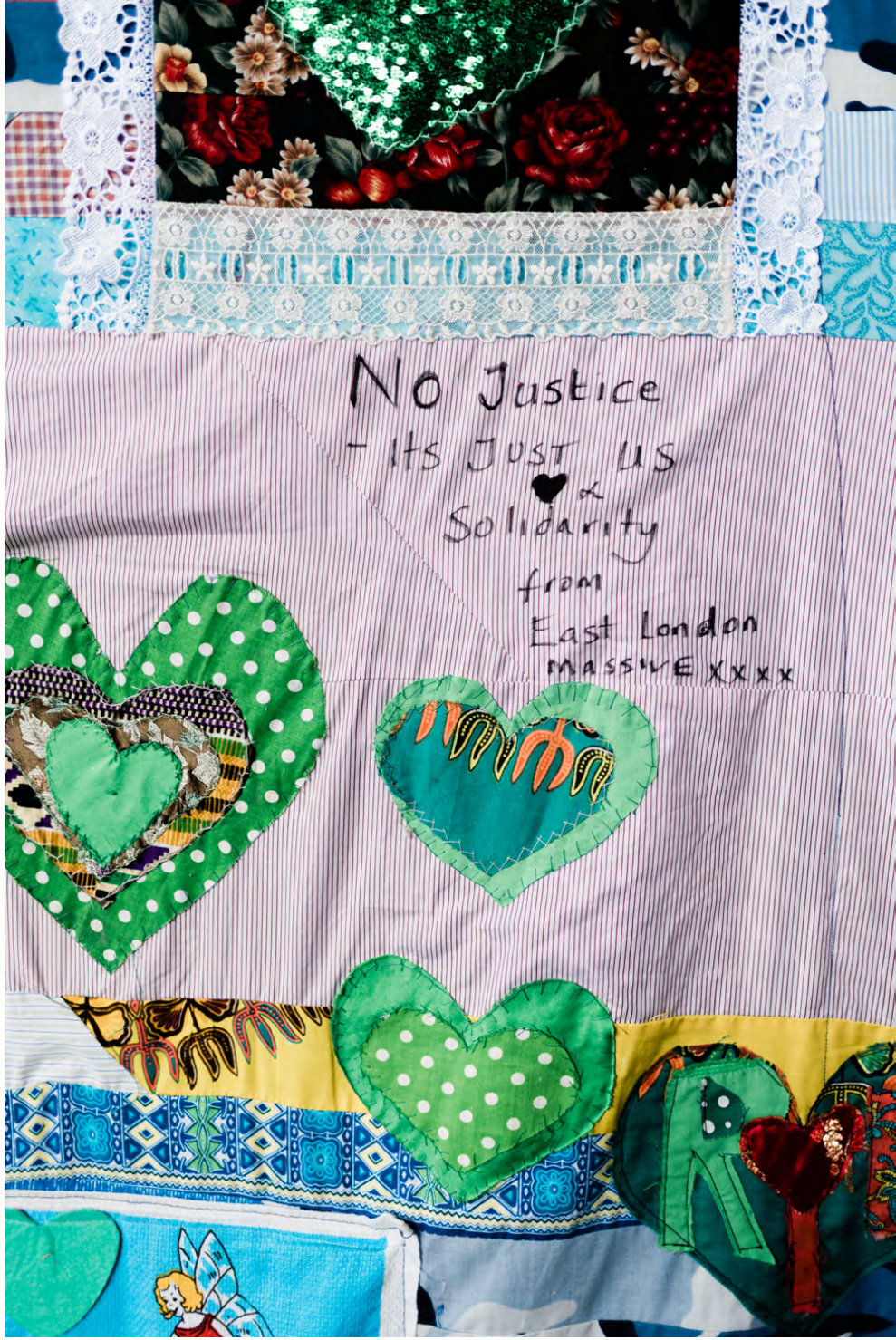
Greenidge’s squares begin here at her studio, and so do the base blocks. “This is where we do our work,” Greenidge said, pulling a strip of shiny material from a plastic bag near a window of her flat. Collaborator and friend “Allie [Brown] brings us remnants from Savile Row. She’s a tailor, and she brings us these lovely silks.”

The fabrics in the quilt don’t match. The stitches wander. There is no pattern for this kind of quilt. Piece by piece, it simply becomes.

The quilt comes together with each scrap of lace, each felt-marker message, every green heart.

For the first time, a portion of the quilt is to be hung for a memorial celebration that takes place each month. The site: beneath the Westway overpass at what locals call the "Wall of Truth" — and that celebration would be held this very night. Greenidge said she'd walk the *Quiltfolk* crew from her house to the Wall. She smiled. "You'd never find it, otherwise."

We headed out into the London drizzle with Brown and Hannah MacDonald, another collaborator and friend. Greenidge prepped us on what to expect. Marion usually comes to play the piano, she said, and Laura serves tea and cookies, and some people may be sewing for the quilt or making posters, and at sundown, the silent walk begins. Greenidge's excitement to finally see the quilt hung at the Wall was contagious. It was clear why this willowy woman is so respected and loved by her community. Her remarkable ability to inspire others in her orbit — and then mobilize them to positive action — is matched only by her tremendous compassion for them all.



As highway traffic thunders overhead, The Wall of Truth provides space for public art and a backdrop for community gatherings.

The Wall

The Westway is a major roadway that connects London to the suburbs. This four-lane highway, raised up on a massive overpass, runs through Ladbroke Grove. There, as trucks and cars thunder overhead, the roadway's enormous cement ballasts have been covered with mosaics, graffiti, and a 20-foot-tall mural that proclaims "The Truth Will Not Be Hidden."

As we came upon the site, 30 or 40 people mingled, sipping hot tea from paper cups. Children ran to and fro, and Grenfell community chaplain Marianne Alapini was indeed sewing.

"The Wall of Truth came about as a result of local people administering to each other," Alapini said. "At 3 o'clock in the morning we'd be there, just offering support and guidance, because a lot of families couldn't sleep at night. That's how the name 'The Wall of Truth' came out, because we came and talked with each other, like one family supporting each other. In the Grove, we consider each other our brother's keeper."

FROM LEFT: Marianne Alapini sews a panel for the quilt; doves of peace, calls for justice, and simple words of love — all embellishments are welcome.

Mourners' messages and mementos line a memorial wall near the still-standing, burned-out tower.

And there, hung against the flat stone wall of the overpass, the quilt seemed to glow from within. People milled around, snapping selfies with the quilt as their backdrop; they peered at details then stood back to see it all at once. The children in particular seemed drawn to it, admiring its colors and embellishments.

"We've learned so much from the young people," Alapini said. "Just the innocence, the compassion [they] have taught us has just been incredible. [...] They brought us back to what really mattered. The children have brought out the magic and the truth of the community."

She gestured to Greenidge, who was nearby, surrounded by friends. "Tuesday has given us a focus," Alapini said. "The pain and anguish have gone into all these different pieces, and [the quilt] has really helped with the healing." She turned to speak to Greenidge. "You've provided a sanctuary for people to come to, which is very important. Well done."

Under a London overpass, a community comes together.

The women hugged, Greenidge visibly emotional. She thanked her friend, but gestured to those at the celebration that night and said they were the ones who deserved the real credit.

Grenfell Tower still stands. The fire hollowed but did not topple the building. Until a potential demolition, white plastic sheeting has been wrapped around it, a green heart printed across the top with the words “Forever in Our Hearts.” The tower stands as a reminder to the rest of London of what happened two years ago. But for the locals at the party that night, no reminder was needed. Rather than focus on the pain, they know to look more often at each other, at the children, and at a remarkable quilt hung under an overpass.

HISTORY

Give Me Liberty

... OF LONDON

Classic Liberty prints combine pastels and primary colors to glorious effect. **PREVIOUS PAGE:** The Liberty crest announces the year Sir Arthur Lasenby Liberty opened his doors to the world.

Liberty love

The iconic Tudor Revival facade was constructed with boards from a Royal Navy ship. Blooming flowers spill from hanging baskets, and English roses are for sale by the stem. The British flag over the entrance announces to the world that this department store, established in 1875, is pure England, and inside, a world of retail wonder awaits. There is no place on earth like Liberty.

If you're a quilter, surrender now. Even the most reserved and budget-conscious among us get a dreamy look in their eye and reach for their wallet when they hear the magic words: *Liberty prints*. Liberty of London fabric can be found in some local and online fabric retailers in the United States, but the mother lode is on the third floor here, at this massive London landmark.

Originally a fabric importer, Liberty founder Arthur Lasenby Liberty began printing fabric under his own label in the 1880s. Liberty hired in-house designers and commissioned prominent artists like William Morris to create original prints. Within a few short years, Liberty built a retail empire around that now-timeless Liberty look: tiny, densely drawn florals; lacy, ditzy motifs; color palettes rich and sophisticated when they aren't just a lot of fun.

FROM LEFT: If you want a Liberty fix without having to sew, pick up a flowery shirt or a pajama set; on the shelves, bolts of archival prints, classics, and the latest Liberty lines tempt fabric lovers.

FROM LEFT: Fresh flowers welcome you to the famous store; when shopping for your fabric, remember to order in meters, not yards.

A sweet orange-and-pink reproduction print from a vintage Liberty collection, on the cutting table.

As beloved as the prints themselves is the material they're printed on: a cotton substrate called Tana Lawn. Named after Lake Tana in Ethiopia where the material's superior cotton is grown, Tana Lawn feels like silky air — so light, it's almost sheer. American quilters are used to working with thicker cotton broadcloth, so working with Tana Lawn takes some practice and adjustments to thread weight and stitch length. But fear not: With so many Liberty fans out there, plenty of books and blogs can help you embrace your new obsession.

If the Liberty store on Regent Street is not on your bucket list yet, revise your bucket list. Leave plenty of time for your visit; there's far more than fabric to explore. The 120,000-square-foot emporium is a warren of designer clothes, quirky housewares, chic makeup counters, and cafés serving (what else?) scones and tea. We suggest making your way to the third floor first. There, you'll find the "haberdashery" — serving all your knitting, sewing, and embroidery needs — and its sunlit annex, where bolts upon bolts of Liberty fabrics, primed for the cutting table, are waiting for you, madam.

QUILTFOLK Q&A

Bridget Long

American quilts have deep roots in England, and textile historian Bridget Long is an expert on this family tree.

This Oxford-educated scholar has spent a lifetime exploring 18th-century and early 19th-century domestic needlework in England. She's particularly interested in patchwork from the period, which made her a person of interest on our trip abroad. There was no better place to meet for a chat than the mighty Victoria and Albert Museum (V&A), a haven for British textiles and heaven for those who love them.

Long, born in London and raised in Wales, is a walking encyclopedia. She's also quite funny, adding a droll comment here and there when speaking about a topic some might find a bit stodgy. The story of early quilts in Britain is anything but: There's intrigue, romance, family disputes, politics, and emotion for days. Long has a PhD in history, and her second exhibition as a curator at the International Quilt Museum in Lincoln, Nebraska, will open in 2020.

For Bridget Long, 18th-century British quilts offer a window to the past.

The mighty Victoria and Albert Museum in London.

MARY FONS: It's great to be here at the V&A with you, Bridget. I suspect you have a fondness for this museum. How has the V&A played a part in your study of early British quilts?

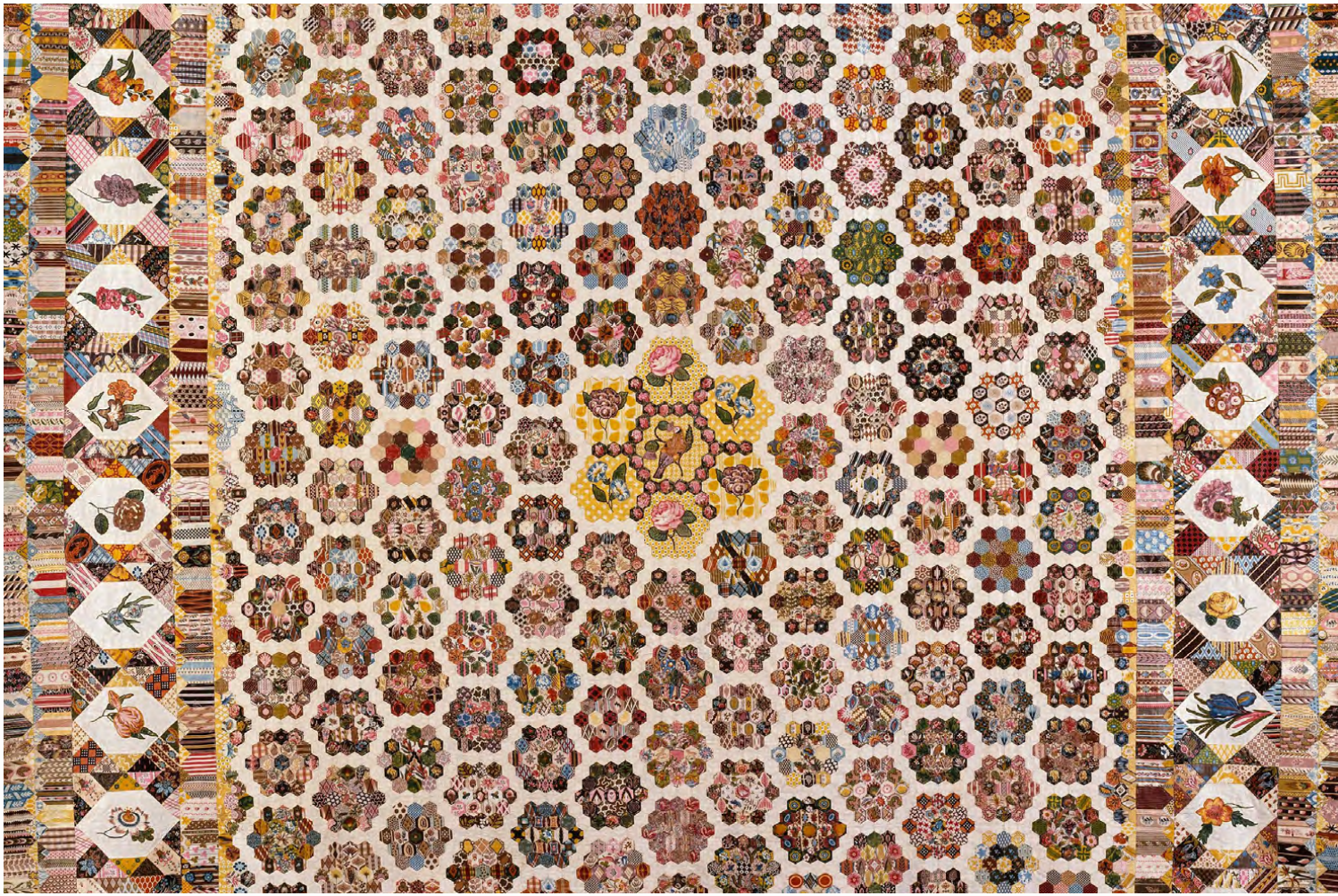
BRIDGET LONG: Living in North Wales, I did not grow up visiting the V&A. I would have been in my 20s when I first went and the first really memorable exhibition I saw was *Textiles of the Arts and Crafts Movement*. I have been very lucky to see so many of the patchwork and quilts at the museum when they were still tucked away in [storage] at the top of the museum building. [...] The early silk pieces at the V&A helped focus my research.

MF: What's the most surprising bit of history you've discovered in your research on quilts in Britain?

BL: My most surprising discovery was how much patchwork was made in the 18th century at all levels of society. Documentary records were the best source for me. I found crimes involving patchwork at the Old Bailey court. I also found that wealthy ladies made patchwork not only because it was fashionable but also because it symbolized desirable attributes of household economy and diligence.

MF: Let's back up. Did you say "patchwork crimes"?

BL: Because comparatively few objects have survived, I relied on documentary evidence to uncover more. One source was reports of trials at the Old Bailey court in London. Patchwork and fabric pieces for patchwork were often stolen to sell secondhand or to pawn for instant cash.



FROM LEFT: More than 4 million people visit the V&A each year; although most people would call this 18th-century British quilt "English paper piecing," Long says a more accurate term is "Mosaic patchwork."

MF: What are some major misconceptions out there about early quilts in Britain?

BL: Many assume that early patchwork and quilts were all made using recycled cloth in the manner of "making do." While there were always needlewomen who stitched using what they could scavenge from old clothes and other textiles, there were also women who could afford to source extra fabric from outside the home and to actually buy new fabric for their projects.

MF: There's this romance about scrimping and saving, but I love that some women were saying, "I want two meters of that red for my quilt." Did anything ever go on sale?

BL: By the end of the 18th century, printworks in Britain and in Europe had fabric of second quality available because of production problems in the printing, and such was often sold as new fabric but at cheaper prices. I have also come across diary records of people buying patchwork pieces at that time. Many surviving examples contain glazed cotton pieces with the glazed shine remaining showing the cotton has never been washed.

MF: That sounds a lot like a quilt kit, actually. Any other myths you'd like to bust?

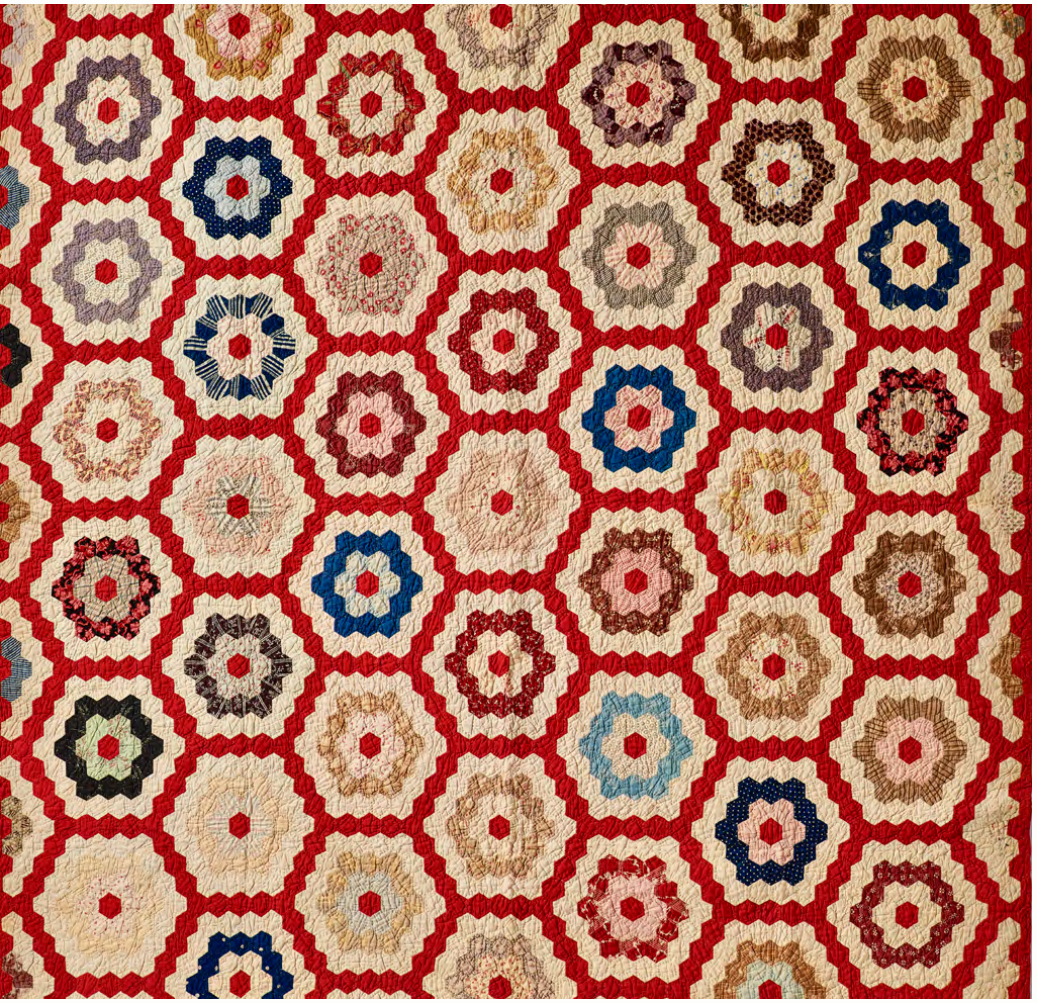
BL: Another myth is the assumption that the equal-sided hexagon shape has always been the preferred British patchwork shape. No early patchwork contains that shape, a fact I put down to the limited education of girls for most of the 17th and 18th centuries. It was only at the end of the 18th century, when education widened and more practical geometry primers became available, that the hexagon appears.

MF: To get a proper-looking hexagon, you do need a basic understanding of drafting and math. But "hexies" did show up in early British patchwork, didn't they?

BL: The Levens Hall quilt, circa 1708, has long hexagons in it. But this is a shape which is related to the square and right-angled (or isosceles) triangles — not to equal-sided hexagons.

MF: American patchwork traditions owe pretty much everything to quilters in Britain. Is that accurate?

BL: If we accept that before 1776, America was dominated by British social and cultural influences, it would seem very likely that British needlework traditions would have migrated across the Atlantic. I would suggest that British patchwork practice would have continued to influence needlewomen in the United States into the following century because links back to Europe still would have existed.



FROM LEFT: The Mosaic patchwork so fashionable in 18th-century Britain continued to be popular, as evidenced in this stylish example, circa 1880 (image courtesy of Christopher Wilson-Tate); at "the world's leading museum of art and design," it's a pleasure to wander the halls.

FROM LEFT: In traditional British quilts from the 18th century, many textile designs have a central focus, and panels like these were ideal additions to enhance a sewing project; detail, chintz fabric at the V&A.

This panel features roses, crowns, sequins, and Latin mottos (like “I serve” and “God and my right”) hand-painted with astonishing attention to detail.

Detail, *The Luton Regency Quilt*. This rare quilt from the early 1800s was made by Mary Gibbs of Sussex and features a central "medallion." (Image courtesy of Christopher Wilson-Tate.)

MF: So it's true: We'd be nowhere without you. I'm okay with that.

BL: All the British patchwork techniques would have appeared in the US, but styles and methods would have evolved in the 19th century.

Appliqué was not a technique commonly seen on domestic needlework in 18th-century Britain but it became more popular in the 19th century. While appliqué was used in Britain, there is no British equivalent of your Baltimore Album style, for example.

MF: Bridget, please tell me about the pieces you've brought along with you. They're exquisite.

BL: I brought two block-printed panels which were sold to use for the center of a frame patchwork design. [This is called a medallion in American patchwork.] The panels were printed on lengths of cotton and the purchaser could buy one or more off the length.

Canny textile printers saw an opportunity to print both decorative or commemorative panels. The commemorative panels included themes to celebrate Wellington's battle victories. This one commemorates George IV's daughter Charlotte's marriage to Prince Leopold in 1816.

MF: I'll bet there are panels of Meghan Markle and Prince Harry. Bridget, thank you so much for bringing us a slice of British quilt history.

In the Company of Quilts

CHRISTOPHER WILSON-TATE

Stacked, hung on hooks, or wedged onto shelves, the quilts at the Antique Textile Company are all unique. **PREVIOUS PAGE:** Christopher Wilson-Tate in his element.

Heavenly quilts

You're not dreaming. When you step into the shop at 1 Village Mount, Perrin's Court, London, you really are where you've always wanted to be: antique quilt heaven.

At the gates of the Antique Textiles Company, a tiny shop with a big name and an even bigger inventory, stands proprietor Christopher Wilson-Tate and he is smiling. (You'd be smiling too, if you lived in antique quilt heaven.)

Since 2009, the quilt dealer has based his operation out of this one-and-a-half-room shop on the north side of London. That's impressive, but that stretch of time is peanuts when you consider how long Wilson-Tate's been in the game.

This is a man who started selling quilts at the tender age of 16, which means he's been romping around in broderie perse masterpieces, appliqué triumphs, and pieced patchwork brilliance for close to three decades. He's had a hand in real estate and various other projects too, but according to his calculations, he's managed to sell some 15,000 quilts to date. And that's just what he's *sold*. After a lifetime of picking, sourcing, swapping, and plain stumbling upon quilts, Wilson-Tate figures he's handled three times that number. Fashion designers, interior decorators, magazine editors, and rabid fans of beautiful vintage quilts come through Wilson-Tate's doors to to marvel at his stock and potentially walk out toting a quilt-sized shopping bag.

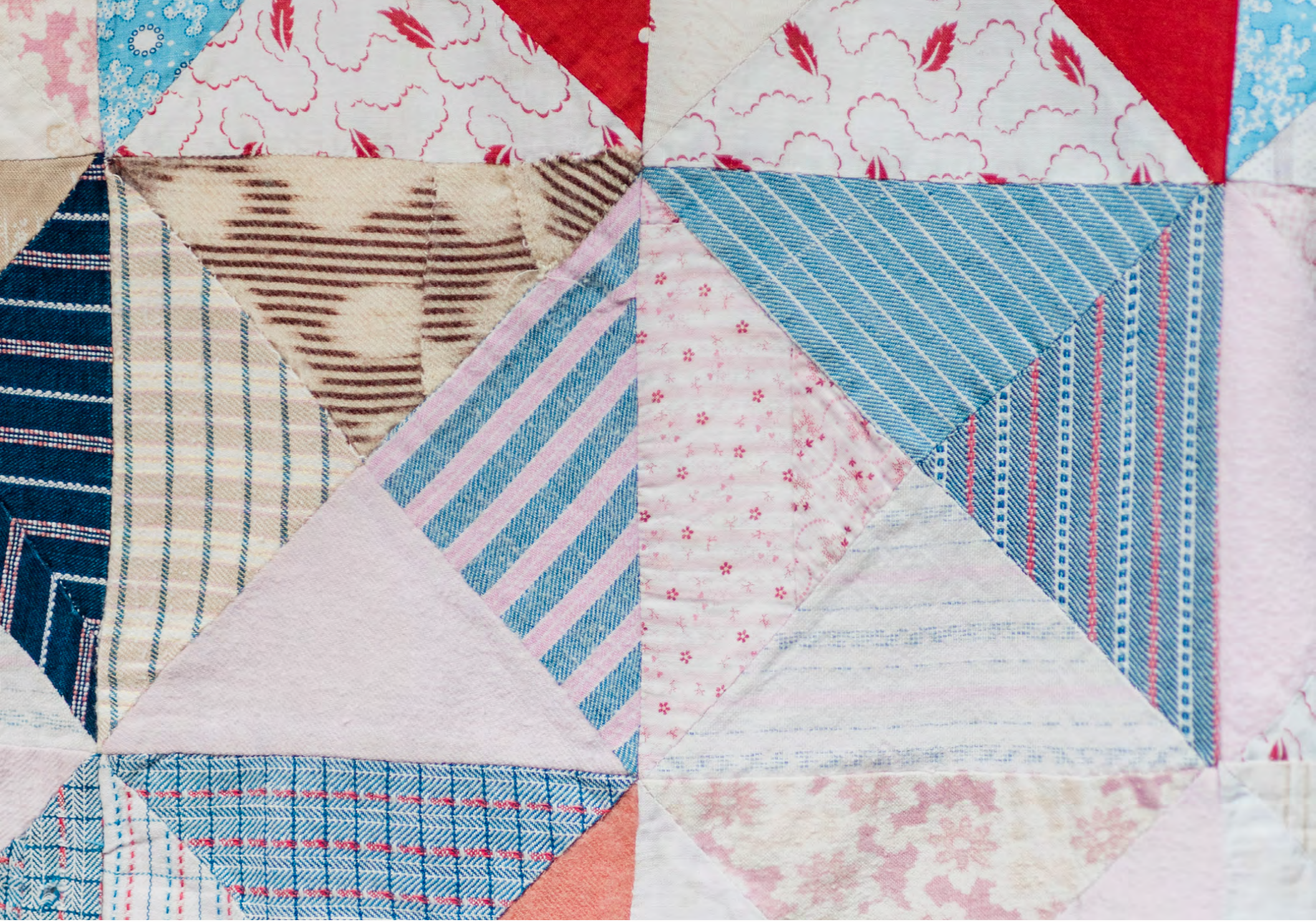
FROM LEFT: Quilts spill out of the shop and into the street; Wilson-Tate's inventory is vast, but he seems to have a fondness for bright, chipper patchwork quilts.

FROM LEFT: The collector's network of friends and dealers across the UK tip him off to great quilts; detail, *The Luton Regency Quilt*, which inspired Wilson-Tate's "Regency Blues" fabric line with Moda Fabrics.

It's not just the quilts that draw people in: Wilson-Tate's generous smile and boundless enthusiasm are part of the experience.

Wilson-Tate showed us a few choice pieces from his personal collection, including a most unusual chintz appliqué frame quilt that he says is one of the most extraordinary quilts he's ever seen. We saw drool-worthy Cheddar quilts, feather-light Log Cabins, Victorian Mosaics, Welsh white-work coverlets, and quilts that have no discernable pattern but still announce their maker's quirky personality. It is impossible for anyone, quilter or not, to leave the place uninspired.

Remarkably savvy at managing his social media presence, Wilson-Tate has built an online following primarily through Facebook. His frequent posts allow his inventory and his exuberance to reach people beyond the shores of England. Pictures of the shop and its contents draw a quilt-loving crowd, but Wilson-Tate's passion for timeless quilts and his toothy grin ensure his followers stay loyal. Come on in, his smile says, the quilts are more than fine: They're heavenly.



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