



INSPIRING READS

Patchwork AND petals

Becca Parker digs into the quilting community's endless infatuation with all things floral...

Painter and notorious garden lover Claude Monet once said: "I must have flowers, always, and always". His sentiment is echoed by botanical dreamers the world over, particularly within the sewing community. Try to picture a fabric stash or a quilt collection without any florals in it all. Not so easy. Flowers are universally beloved, it seems. They are bright and beautiful, adding variety and a welcome sense of the organic to any textile creation. But why are artists and makers drawn to floral themes so endlessly?

For Hawaiian quilter Patricia Gorelangton, it comes down to one simple question: "What's more beautiful than a flower?" Her bold designs exemplify the Hawaiian quilting style, celebrating native plant life with curving symmetrical appliqué. "I've been quilting for 38 years and have exclusively made Hawaiian quilts for the past 17 years," she says. "I'm so fortunate that I can walk out my door, or take a drive down the street, and see a myriad of local flowers and plants that are the basis of the vast majority of Hawaiian quilting patterns." The environment around her is the inspiration, and so this distinctive quilting style reflects the natural beauty of the islands. Each piece is imbued with identity. "The meaning of inspire is to fill someone with the urge to do something creative, and the native flora here in Hawaii have inspired old and new designers alike."

Sowing the seeds

Designer Lindsey from Paper + Pen Patterns leaned into depicting florals as a reaction to her environment, but in quite a different way. "Growing up in Arizona, where the landscape is predominantly brown, has contributed to my deep appreciation for flowers and lush greenery." She adores including them in her modern quilt designs. "I have eight years of experience as a pattern designer with many of my patterns revolving around nature-inspired themes," Lindsey explains. "Out of them, my greatest passion lies in depicting flowers."

The connection between fabric and flowers goes beyond mere aesthetics. "I'm drawn to flowers because of their beauty, vibrant colours, and feelings of happiness and love that they evoke," admits Lindsey. Did you know that petals were pulling on your heartstrings? Think about it: flowers are present in the milestones of life and the hills and valleys of the everyday. They are used to mark everything from joy, gratitude and celebration, to illness, love and loss. And to plant a garden or to spot the first brave green shoots ahead of springtime is to hope. Imagine encountering, to borrow a phrase, a host of golden daffodils quite



Cover page: Lindsey designed her Hello Spring quilt pattern in honour of her best friend of 35 years that she would nickname Bug, which is short for ladybug

Below left: The Fresh as a Daisy pattern stands out as one of Lindsey's favourite floral quilt designs

All images: Pen + Paper Patterns





"MY PRIMARY FOCUS IS TO ELICIT THE SAME EMOTIONAL RESPONSE AS ENCOUNTERING A FLOWER IN REAL LIFE"
LINDSEY NEILL

unexpectedly, or being handed a surprise bouquet just because – the heart stirs without fail. Flowers and feelings are inextricably linked, and so the ribbon around this whole bouquet is emotion.

Floriography, or the language of flowers, is the use of flowers to express emotion. It's a coded practice that was particularly popular in the Victorian era, when attributing specific meanings to particular blooms or their colours was a subtle means of communication. A red rose, for example, can convey passion, while bluebells symbolise constancy and daisies represent innocence. To this day, flowers are often used to share feelings and express what words may fail to. That's what we like to call flower power. And in textile terms, it can definitely be just as effective.

In the same way that an artist may reach for their paintbrush or a photographer their camera when encountering a stop-you-in-your-tracks bloom, sewists use the language most familiar to them. They take up fabric and thread, carefully choosing the perfect shape, colour and stitch to capture nature's ephemeral beauty and share something of the emotion connected with it. "My primary focus is to elicit the same emotional response as encountering the actual flower in real life," Lindsey confirms.

The skill lies in translating that botanical beauty into textiles with the mood intact – it's where the emotional meets the practical. There's more than one way to go about it, and for Lindsey it hinges on simplicity. "My patterns primarily use traditional piecing techniques," she says, describing her approach, "so capturing new or distinctive aspects of a flower solely with straight lines and 45-degree angles can be challenging. I opt for a simplified or generic appearance in the block design. This not only makes the block easier to piece, but also broadens the appeal of the design while ensuring clear recognition of the flower motif."

There's one quilt that stands out among Lindsey's eight floral patterns for its emotive nature. "Fresh as a



Daisy makes me just as happy to look at as actual daisies in real life," she says. Patricia is particularly fond of a quilt she made to hold precious memories. "The yellow hibiscus is the official state flower of Hawaii, and the pikake, or jasmine, is a favourite of lei makers here because of its lovely scent," she explains. "This pattern was a commission for a man who wanted to be reminded every day of the flowers he grew up with. I love the idea that with this quilt he now has those flowers with him, whether the actual flowers are in bloom or not."

"I was walking on a beach one day with my friends and saw this large shrub growing near the sand," continues Patricia. "It had green, grape-like fruit and the veins in its leaves were red, and unbelievably, I'd never seen it before." She began designing a new pattern immediately to immortalise the plant, in the Hawaiian style. "Remember that a Hawaiian pattern is designed on the eighth (like a paper snowflake), so keep that complexity in mind." She advises trying an existing pattern in the style before designing one, and

Top: Find Pat's Hawaiian cushion pattern in our Etsy store: [TQandLPQPatternShop.etsy.com](https://www.etsy.com/shop/TQandLPQPattern)

Above: Pat quilts for 8-10 hours a day everyday. She says there is a lot of love, or *aloha*, that comes with making a quilt, from the design to the quilter and the process

Left: Pen + Paper Patterns' Best Buds quilt

Far left: Bossy in Evening from the Bright Eyes collection by Anna Maria for FreeSpirit Fabrics



her own quilting group has plenty of resources. "I would suggest going to the Poakalani website and checking out their pattern store."

Growing a garden

Working with botanical prints is a wonderful way to embrace flower power. Anna Maria Parry knows this all too well. She's a textile designer and quilter with almost 20 years of experience behind her, drawing on emotion, memory and location in her use of flowers, too. "The entire collection of Bright Eyes was mostly inspired by my first trip to New Zealand," she says, "and waking up to a stunning garden outside my window at a residence that I only arrived to in the dark the night before. It was like waking to a dream, and I could not grab my camera and robe fast enough to go outside and take photos." For her, drawing from her own primary resources is fundamental. "I like for the point of view to be personal and be attached to the memory of a place."

In her floral fabric designs, Anna Maria aims to either faithfully depict a bloom with realism or use artistic licence for a more stylised look. She navigates the believable and the imaginary, always referring to her original photography and a close study of real plants. "In both categories I play around with different pattern ideas like explosive bouquets, trailing vines, single species portraits, and more graphic simplicity at a smaller scale. The excitement for me is playing with all of these design structures and combining them for a little symphony of colour and form. I might be representing a flower accurately, but maybe I am colouring it with something completely imaginative."

Whichever path is chosen to best represent floral feelings in quilts, the fabric choice is key and there is an art to picking the best bunch. Anna Maria likens it to planting a flower bed. "You need smaller ground cover," she says, "medium blooms that provide consistent colour, and then some focal points that show off their glory." Balance is the goal. "While mixing several styles and scales can be exciting, it is a good idea to let the combination of fabrics feel as though they have been painted together. They don't need to match exactly, but perhaps you would avoid using florals with a hard dark outline alongside those that are softer and more painterly in nature. Make sure to include florals that have a nice packed repeat as well as some that have air and open background. And adding a few simple fabrics without flowers but only texture or stripes or plaid also develops balance."

"Sometimes floral prints can distract from the overall design of the quilt," warns Lindsey. "Incorporating a small-scale print provides just the right amount of floraly goodness. Alternatively, "Start with a floral print and then pull the additional fabrics based on the colours within the print. If you're interested in incorporating large-scale floral prints



into a quilt but feel daunted by the idea, consider using one as the quilt backing."

A sewist's appetite for botanical inspiration seems inexhaustible. There is something in the creative spirit that keeps reaching for petals again and again. Perhaps it's a human urge to reconnect with nature, or maybe it's more of a compulsion to express emotion and reflect joy and beauty.

"Flowers seem to look back at us as we gaze at them, so it is natural to feel a relationship with them," muses Anna Maria. "As for putting them into repeat in textiles, I have a theory that we like repetition because everything about our lives repeats itself. Days, weeks, years, seasons and lifespans. Reliably blossoming flowers in fabrics that never fade are a celebration of the natural world that we can imagine will be going on forever."

Above: Anna Maria's floral designs show her love for bright and colourful flowers

Above middle left: Anna Maria was born in a family of crafters and artists. When she was younger, she would spend hours in fabric shops with her mother and sister on the weekend. Photo credit: Callan Downing



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FOR MORE FLORAL GOODNESS...

Find beautiful Hawaiian quilts by Pat Gorelangton and her Poakalani quilting group at Oxford's Pitt Rivers Museum from 11 June 2024, prm.ox.ac.uk

Pat Gorelangton

📷 [hawaiianquiltsbypat](https://www.instagram.com/hawaiianquiltsbypat)

Lindsey Neill, Pen + Paper Patterns

➤ penandpaperpatterns.com

📷 [penandpaperpatterns](https://www.instagram.com/penandpaperpatterns)

Anna Maria Parry

➤ annamariahorne.com

📷 [annamariahorne](https://www.instagram.com/annamariahorne)