



It's skilled, soothing and satisfying all at once, so it's no wonder many of us are threading up our needles and stitching once again...

We love SEWING!

'I've discovered the modern quilting movement'



Rachel Mansi, 47, is an operations manager. She lives in Bristol with her husband Frank and sons Max, 16, and Rufus, 12. She sews colourful quilts and believes creativity maintains mental and emotional wellbeing.

I grew up in the 70s, when psychedelic patterns were popular. My mum, a bit of a hippy at the time, would take me to jumble sales in search of fabrics. I loved a patchwork cushion cover my grandmother had sewn, and was fascinated by how colours and textures combined to create patterns.

Later, after having my children, I wanted to explore my interests and creativity. I started collecting vintage fabrics in bold colours, and sewed patchwork cushion covers, drawn by the anticipation of seeing how all the fabrics I'd chosen would work together.

I then taught myself quilting and made a rainbow baby quilt – rainbows are my thing. People might think quilting requires ditsy floral fabric, but it can be whatever you want. I know what I like – and that's bold colours.

Through Instagram, I discovered a modern quilting movement and



Rachel loves crafting quilts using bold colours and patterns



connected with other makers who enjoy 'improv' quilting, basically making it up as you go along. It's exciting – you don't know how it's going to look.

It was invigorating to find something that let me enter a fabulous new world. Having a craft that enables you to explore your creativity is so powerful for your mental health. Whilst working on your project, you are in that state of flow where you can really let go – you aren't worrying about anything else.

Connecting with others who enjoy the same thing led to friendships, and I've enjoyed meeting up face to face with friends I made online. We had a wonderful day out together at The Festival Of Quilts.

My quilts bring back happy memories of particular times and people I love. For

'I'm stitching love into the project'

instance, I've incorporated fabric from my son's trousers and my mum's pink dungarees in a quilt, so I think of them when I see it. I remember what I was listening to or my mood at the time I was working on a quilt, so I never stitch angry! When making a quilt for others, I'm stitching love into the project. There's a new baby in my family and another on the way, so I'll be making many more!

* [instagram.com/playfulquilting/](https://www.instagram.com/playfulquilting/)





'I embroider messages inside my handmade clothes'

Judith Staley, 65, lives in Edinburgh with her husband Robert. She has three grown-up children. Judith helps women over 50 connect through sewing and embroidery.

I enjoy having a needle and thread in my hand and putting it through fabric. I love the process and the creativity. When you make something yourself, it has history and it means so much more to you.

One of my best decisions at school was to drop maths A-level and take up needlework instead. There wasn't as much fast fashion in those days and I sewed clothes for myself at college and university, and later for my children.

But the first series of *The Great British Sewing Bee* in 2013 reignited my interest. I started dressmaking regularly again, even more so when I discovered the sewing community on Instagram, which provides so much inspiration and support.

Dressmaking became my passion, providing me not only with clothes but also an incredible new friendship network. Within a month of setting up



the Instagram account @Sewover50 I met up with a fellow dressmaker who was visiting Edinburgh from Australia, for coffee and a spot of fabric shopping. I now run the account with a very good

friend who I chat with every day, but I have never met her because she lives in Australia. Hopefully one day!

I decided to slow down my sewing by starting embroidery. Using designs I bought online, I embroidered whilst watching TV or on the bus to work.

During the first lockdown, I decided to record our lockdown life through embroidery. I sketched things I saw on my daily walk, such as swans and parks, which I then stitched. Around the outside I added words connected with home at the time, such as Zoom, haircuts, scones and clapping. Working on my embroidery stopped me from picking up my phone and reading bad news. Now it's great to have a record that there were still good times during a difficult period.

I like embroidering words to leave messages in my clothing, like George Eliot's line about 'Delicious autumn', which I stitched onto a coat label. Down the zip of a dress, I embroidered 'Reused Tablecloth', just in case anyone wants to know what it's made of!

* [instagram.com/judithrosalind/](https://www.instagram.com/judithrosalind/)

'My handmade dresses fit me perfectly'

Sam Sahota, 55, is an executive assistant who lives in Buckinghamshire with her husband. She has two grown-up children. A self-taught dressmaker, she has a wardrobe full of beautiful dresses.

Growing up in India, in a small village with no TV, I was surrounded by people sewing. Aged seven, I did embroidery with the other girls around me, and watched my mother making traditional clothing on her manual sewing machine.

My love of crocheting, sewing and knitting stems from that time. These days I have to be making something whilst watching TV, or I feel I'm wasting my time. I sew whilst the dinner is in the oven, in my lunch break, and take my sewing machine outside when the weather is nice.

In the past five years I have been sewing continuously, inspired by *The*

Great British Sewing Bee and makers on Instagram. I like to share my work online with other dressmakers. Like them, I'll often include details about the pattern and modifications I have made. It also serves as a dressmaking diary and is useful to look back on when I follow the pattern again.

I've made coats and trousers but I love wearing dresses, so I mainly sew those. I will put on a dress whether I'm going for a walk, working from home or going to the office. Colleagues will say, 'You've made another one!' and get me to twirl. The benefit of sewing my own version of designer looks, besides the

price, is that the dress fits me perfectly, which a ready-to-wear dress would not.

I only need to buy shoes and underwear, because I make everything else. I might sew underwear one day, but I won't be sharing that on Instagram!

'I take my sewing machine outside when the weather's nice'

When I'm sewing I forget about any worries, so it really is great therapy. Sometimes I can't sleep because I'm planning dresses in my head, but at least I'm not thinking about

anything negative. It has also been great for connecting with people – Mum visits every week and loves seeing what I'm making. Every year my friend and I go to The Knitting & Stitching Show together – we're often the last ones to leave!

* [instagram.com/sams_sew_good/](https://www.instagram.com/sams_sew_good/)

WORDS: MICHELLE ROWLEY. PHOTOS: GETTY, RACHEL IMANSI

'There's so much inspiration and support from others'

