

Beautifully Embellished
Landscapes



125 Tips & Techniques to Create Stunning Quilts
JOYCE R. BECKER

Joyce R. Becker

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Dedication

To my twin sister, Jan White—through it all, you continue to inspire everyone who knows and loves you, especially me!

To Patti, Rosy, and Denise—the best friends in the whole wide world!

To my parents, Ima Jo and Bill Burgreen—for believing in me.

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Introduction

I firmly believe that God creates each of us with a special purpose in mind. I discovered that my purpose is making landscape quilts and sharing my techniques with others. Who would have thought that a freckle-faced adolescent struggling to pass “gathered skirts” in home economics would one day be traveling around the world teaching others to quilt? As a student of journalism, I figured I’d one day write smutty novels. But quilting books? What a hoot!

In my travels, I’ve noticed many students filled with anticipation, seeking more information and direction on how to make their magnificent landscape quilts shine with realism. Although my previous book about landscape quilting, *Luscious Landscapes*, provided the basics, this book dives into the really juicy stuff: the special effects and embellishments that make landscapes zing with realism. When it comes right down to it, creating realistic landscape quilts is more about problem solving than it is an artistic endeavor. I find myself asking, “How can I make a fence or barn look weathered or impart the mood of fog in the distance or create dancing sunbeams on the water?” Or “How can I transform or make the fabrics I have on hand mimic what I see in nature?”

Making Fabrics Your Own

Using my quilts and those of my students and peers as examples, I share insights with you on manipulating commercial fabrics, which I refer to as *making the fabrics your own*. Whether you transform fabrics using surface-design techniques, such as cutting, painting, machine embroidery, overlays, or shading, or you incorporate computer-generated clip art, the goal is the same: to recreate what you see in nature, using fabric as the medium.

There Are No Rules!

Traditional quilters often say that they find landscape quilting intimidating. As a quilter whose roots are steeped in traditionalism, I am here to tell you that creating landscape quilts is nonthreatening, freeing, and downright fun!

There are few rules, no seam allowances, and no pesky edges to turn. You don’t need an art degree or any quilting experience. Some of my best students are beginning quilters! My landscape quilts are created purely from a love of nature, not from a background in art. I have no formal art background. In fact, the only real disagreement my husband and I ever had occurred while we were playing Pictionary: My drawing was so darn bad that he couldn’t tell what I drew, and we lost the game!

I hope you’ll enjoy the techniques and tips, the gorgeous landscape quilts, and the exceptional scenic photography by Valori Wells. After you learn new techniques and tricks to create landscape quilts, perhaps you’ll jump in and try one of the projects. My ultimate wish for you is that you will be able to create an original landscape that sings with special effects and embellishments and that brings joy and happiness first to you and then to others.



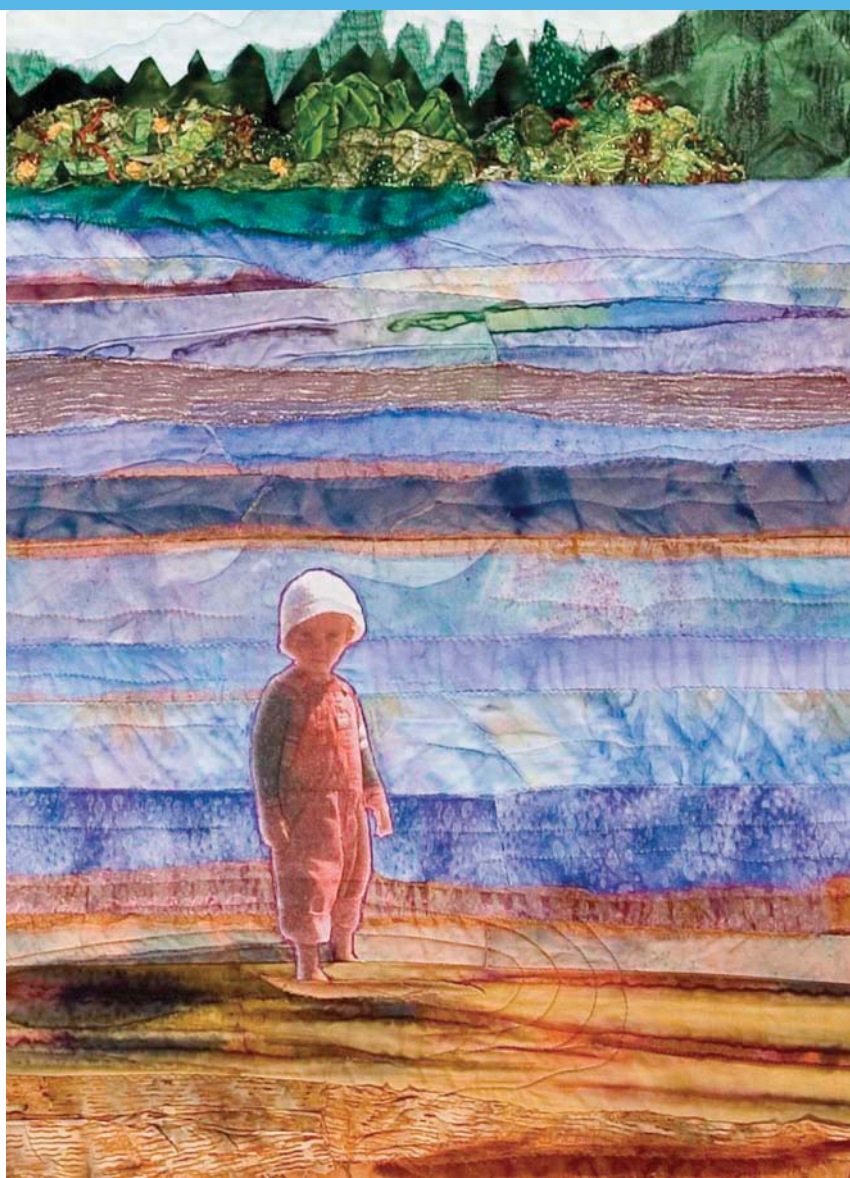
Building Blocks

Why do landscape quilts evoke such feelings of calmness, well-being, and serenity? Nature-inspired landscape quilts remind us of places we've been, special memories, places we want to visit, or just places that take our breath away because they are so incredibly beautiful. Perhaps the tranquility of a peaceful landscape quilt offers us a momentary escape from the pressures of daily life.

Creating a successful landscape quilt is not difficult. With a good source of design inspiration and fabrics that do most of the work for you, you're well on your way. Using my surefire methods of "cut and glue" in combination with raw-edge appliqué, you can complete your quilt top in a matter of days, not weeks or months! You will be creating a landscape quilt with fabric as your medium, cutting and gluing fabrics to a stabilized muslin base, or "canvas." When your design is complete, you will baste the entire composition with invisible thread and then add the special effects and embellishments that will make your landscape come alive.



This photo provides good visual inspiration. (Photograph by Joyce R. Becker)



Detail of *Zack at Great Pond*, Cyndy Rymer, Danville, California, 46" × 31", 2005. Full quilt on page 65.

Where to Begin

With landscape quilts, your starting place is a visual inspiration. Original photographs, greeting cards, calendars, photography books, and even rough sketches are all suitable inspirations. Look for visual inspirations that have interest in the distance, the middle ground, and the foreground.

Once you have found your inspiration image, enlarge it to at least 8½" × 11".



Photograph by Joyce R. Becker

Simplify

Look carefully at your visual inspiration. Can you eliminate something that seems unessential—what I refer to as “extra stuff”? Eliminating the trees on the right side of the photograph simplifies the design.

Copyright laws require that you obtain written permission from an artist before copying his or her work. It is appropriate to acknowledge or credit an artist who has inspired your work, particularly when you are entering your work into a competition.

Creating a Canvas

When designing a landscape quilt, you first need to create a “canvas.” Cut a piece of muslin at least 4” larger on all sides than the desired finished size (without borders) of your landscape quilt. The extra fabric around the perimeter allows for shrinkage from stitching and for squaring your quilt later on. Stabilize the back of your muslin canvas with Pellon fusible lightweight interfacing cut to the exact size of the muslin. To fuse the interfacing to the muslin, preheat your iron to a medium setting with steam. Place the fusible interfacing on a protected ironing surface, bumpy side up. Place the muslin on top of the interfacing and press.



Stabilizer and muslin. Press with steam on medium setting.

It truly makes a huge difference which brand of fusible interfacing you use. Because of the weight and hand, Pellon brand is the only fusible interfacing that works with machine embroidery. An interfacing that is too dense will drag in your machine.

If the fusible interfacing bubbles, your iron is too hot. You can reuse the interfacing, though. Simply wait for it to cool, peel it back, and reposition it. If the interfacing doesn't stick to the muslin, your iron is too cool.

Design Wall

A design wall is invaluable when you are designing your landscape quilt. Choose a spot in your studio or sewing room that will allow you to stand back and view your quilt as it progresses. If you don't have a design wall, there are inexpensive options. For example, a flannel-backed tablecloth or a piece of flannel or batting taped to a closet or blank wall can serve as a temporary design wall.

Designing on a flat surface such as a table will not provide the necessary perspective. Your quilt will be static or one-dimensional, and the finished product will never look quite right. If you are working on a foam-core board or another smaller surface, prop it up on a chair.

Selecting Fabrics

When you shop for fabrics for your landscape quilt, throw out all the “rules.” Instead, begin thinking about what is most important—value and scale. Although color is always important in landscape quilts, value and scale are more important.

Value

Focus on and think about all that you see in nature. I know I do. When you see rows of mountains in the distance, for example, what do you notice?

The lightest-value mountains are always in the distance, with medium-value mountains in the center, and the darkest mountains



Value is key when designing landscape quilts.

in the foreground. Creating this perspective in your landscapes is easy once you understand the logic. Think of yourself as a watercolor artist, painting a picturesque scene on your canvas. Your goal is to accomplish the same effect but with fabric as your medium. When you create rows of mountains on your canvas, color isn't as important as value. *The value of the fabrics, light to dark, creates the perspective.*

Scale

After value, the next most important consideration when selecting fabrics is scale. I positively love shopping for landscape fabrics for my quilts. I am constantly asking myself things like, “How can I use this fabric for tree bark? Does this fabric look like clusters of tree leaves? Does this fabric look like a thatched roof on a cottage?” Our job when selecting landscape fabrics is to *mimic what we see in our inspiration*. Keep in mind that the rule for scale is that objects in the foreground appear larger than objects in the distance. Once we select fabrics in the correct value and scale, we can manipulate them with surface-design and cutting techniques that make them resemble a variety of natural elements.

Fabrics love to be cut into! If you find a wonderful meadow fabric, but it has panda bears throughout, buy it anyway. You can cut away the panda bears and use them for another project.

It’s All About the Fabric

I am often asked, “How do you know what will work and what won’t work when shopping for appropriate landscape fabrics?” There is no magic formula for selecting landscape fabrics, but certain types of fabrics work well. Hand-dyed (see Resources) and hand-painted fabrics are heavenly and always blend well in landscape quilts, often doing half the work for you. Batiks look natural, but avoid those with large-scale directional motifs. Commercial fabrics printed with elements from nature such as pebbles and rocks, grasses and flowers, water and clouds, and so on are absolutely terrific.

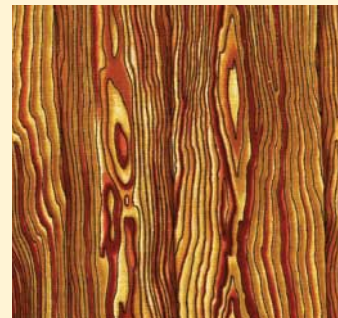
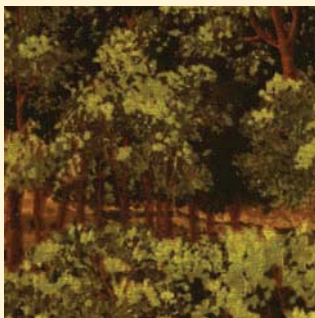
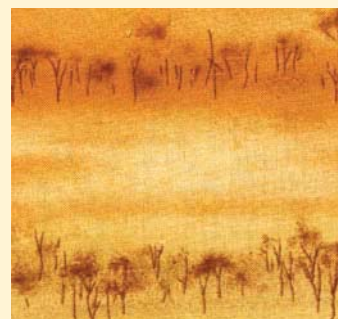
When shopping for landscape fabrics, remember that you might be able to alter the fabric, or some element of it, either by cutting it smaller or by manipulating the value or color. Perhaps you are searching for a commercial print with bright red roses, but all that’s available in the right scale is a print with bright pink roses. Buy it anyway! (See Chapter 3.)



Recolor commercial fabrics with inks or cut the motifs smaller.

Look at both sides of the fabric. Sometimes the “wrong” side of the fabric works better than the “right” side. Sometimes you will get lucky and be able to use both the front and the back of a fabric to create perspective.

Great Landscape Fabrics



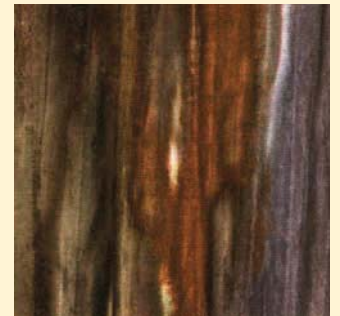
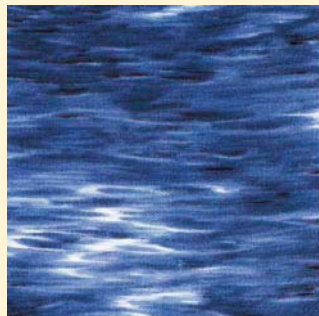
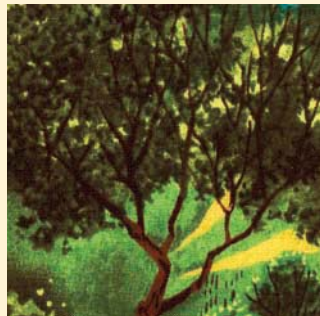
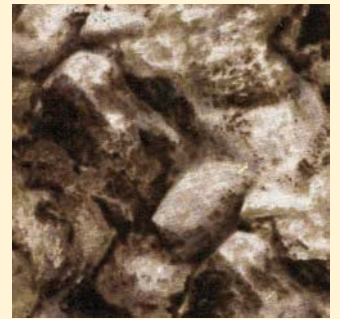
Auditioning Your Fabrics

Once you've selected the fabrics for your landscape, it's time for the final test. Pin the fabrics you've selected onto your design wall. How do they look together? Does one fabric stick out like a sore thumb? Perhaps one fabric is too bright, or its value is too strong. Consider eliminating that fabric and substituting another. I find that following this simple formula helps when selecting fabrics for landscape quilts: *Put muddy colors with other muddy colors, and put clear colors with other clear colors.*

Let your fabrics hang on your design wall for a few days to "percolate." You might find yourself thinking about additional ways to use each fabric in your landscape. Sometimes, I think the fabrics actually speak to me if I let them hang around for a while on the design wall before I use them.



Audition fabrics on a design wall.



Tools

Today, most quilters have on hand almost everything they need to create landscape quilts. However, there are some specific products that I recommend.

Sewing Machine and Darning Feet

The most important piece of equipment you need for creating a landscape quilt is a sewing machine that allows you to lower the feed dogs so you can do free-motion work. If you are new to or apprehensive about free-motion stitching and in the market for a new sewing machine, investigate Bernina's Aurora 440QE sewing machine, which has a stitch regulator for free-motion quilting (see Resources). In addition to the sewing machine, you will need a free-motion, darning, or spring-loaded foot.



Free-motion feet

Scissors, Glue, and Starch

Next in importance is a good pair of razor-sharp scissors. I prefer large Fiskars Softouch scissors (see Resources). They are ergonomically correct and incredibly sharp, and they take a large bite of fabric when you cut, making cutting easier and more efficient. Of equal importance is a good-quality, repositionable spray adhesive, such as 505 Spray and Fix (see Resources), which you should be able to find at most sewing machine and quilt shops. If you wish, you may also use other types of spray adhesives, basting glues, or fabric glue sticks.

Another necessity is heavy-duty spray starch, which is available at grocery stores and drugstores. You can also mix up your own starch and place it in a spray bottle. Unfortunately, spray sizing just doesn't measure up to starch.

Threads and Rotary-Cutting Equipment

Other tools of importance include invisible thread; neutral or matching bobbin threads; rotary mats, rulers, and cutters; and lightweight Pellon fusible interfacing. Another helpful tool is a reducing glass or keyhole. When you stand back and look at your design through the reducing glass, it pulls all the elements together (see Resources).



Essential tools for landscape quilting