

UP FRONT



NEIGHBORHOOD STORIES

By Bette McDevitt

Teena's Quilt Shop

A few years ago, on a trip through Amish country to the north of Pittsburgh, my colleague, a professional photographer, insisted that we stop every 10 minutes. "Just one more photo," he would plead.

I understood how he felt. It was as if we had entered another world, one without noise and overhead wires, but rather with orange buggies pulled by sleek horses making their way along two-lane roads, past white houses with blue doors and windmills alongside large white barns. Even without a camera, we want to save those images and run that reel, through our mind's eye, repeatedly.

Entering Teena's Quilt Shop west of Volant on Route 208 is a step into that world, if only in a small way. Over the last year, I have made two quilt tops and taken them to



Amish farm behind the quilt shop.



Bette and her quilt.
All photos by Bette McDevitt.

Teena Hostettler to be hand quilted. The shop is a few steps from her home, beside the barn. Behind the quilt shop is a spacious two-story home belonging to Teena's daughter; her family and children move easily between the two homes and the barn.

If Teena is not in the shop, she will come from her house when she hears a car pull into the driveway. But on a recent day, the shop was open, and there was no sign of Teena. I knocked on the open kitchen door, and called her name. I could hear the gasoline-powered washing machine running in the cellar. I went back to the quilt shop and left her a note saying that I had been there. A few days later, I received a note in the mail from Teena, apologizing for not being at home. She had been, she wrote, out chasing cows.

Teena has been quilting for more than 45 years, and operating the quilt shop for more than 20 years. If you wish to make your own quilt top, as I have done, she will send it out to one of the dozen women she calls "my quilters." It will come back to you worthy of hanging on a wall. My first quilt was completed over the winter, and came back to me with the fragrance of a wood stove. I like to think of my quilter working in a cozy, sunlit warm room.

I also like the idea of quilting bees, and Teena acknowledged that they exist, but she is not apt to attend. She prefers designing the quilt, rather than doing the handwork. She has enough to do with the quilt shop and runaway cows. Her quilters also seem to work alone; they are often widows, Teena said, who need a little income. Good quilting is judged, to Teena's way of thinking, by the number of stitches per inch. "Seven to nine is good quilting, and then of course, how the design looks." It can take from two to six months to make a quilt, and things go faster in the winter, when the women are not busy with gardening and canning.

In the shop, the quilts made by these women are discreetly layered on a large bed. When you turn back the top one, another is revealed, then another, one more exquisite than the other. There may be more than a dozen to choose from. There are no labels with the name of the quilt maker sewn in to the border, as we might do. That would go against the Amish way of not drawing attention to oneself.

My favorite Amish quilts use the colors of their clothing, blue, purple, green, deep red, and black. A large diamond in the center often sets off an Amish quilt. The use of these colors, in the hands of such creative women, brings forth dramatic designs, repeated in

Teena's Quilt Shop,

435 Quilt Shop Lane, Volant, PA 16156, can be found between New Wilmington and Volant on PA Route 208. Open Monday through Saturday, 9-5, and no credit cards, just cash or checks.



Inside Teena's Quilt Shop.

pot holders, pillow covers, and wall hangings, always made of cotton fabric. The women also make cloth dolls in Amish clothing, but with no facial features, bearing out the Biblical instruction against graven images. In respect for that restriction, visitors leave their cameras in the car.

This Old Order Amish community of 2,000 members divided into 19 church districts, settled here in the 1840s. Church services are held in the members' homes, and the district must be of a size to fit in the smallest home. If the district grows too large for that home, another church district would be formed. Pride of place is not looked upon kindly. They have remained blessedly free of commercialization, supplementing their farming income with woodworking, carpentry, quilting, and growing flowers in greenhouses. It takes some scouting to find the simple wooden signs at the end of their roads that give a clue to their skills and crafts.

Nothing seems to change in this landscape. The laundry still hangs on the line on Mondays, no matter the season. The orange buggies still brave the highways. The purple martins return to the bird apartments mounted on the same tall poles. They have not sold off their extensive holdings, and in a world where everything seems to turn to concrete, this green landscape has remained unaffected. ☼

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An often-used Amish quilt design.



Bette's quilt.