

Friday

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Big on style

Kids have a high fashion quotient 62



Love is no square!



SUPPLIED PHOTOS

Mala Ramakrishnan likes traditional patchwork and translating it into various design formats.

are made by hand. Patchwork quilts are an expression of love. (A quilt) is very personal and is made with the highest value of life – which is love. That is what prompted me to choose quilting to express myself creatively. Now, who wouldn't want to buy such a quilt?

Quilting for charity

Normally quilters around the world make quilts for charity. I contribute part of my quilting time for the Charity Quilt Guilds.

I have donated quilts for charity, one example was for the tsunami victims in Chennai, India. Recently the Muscat Quilting Guild undertook to make quilts for terminally-ill children in the Project Linus in Anglesey, North Wales, UK. While the quilts were prepared by the members of the Guild, I provided them with free quilting service. The Project Linus sent me a touching thank you note mentioning how much joy the quilts brought to these highly traumatised children and their parents. I am happy to contribute to society in this way for the betterment of someone's life somewhere.

I am going to participate in the forthcoming International Quilting Show which will be held on February 21-25 at the Dhow Palace Hotel, Dubai. The proceeds from this charity event will be donated to the Emirates Arthritis Foundation. ■

– As told to Preethi Janice D'Sa

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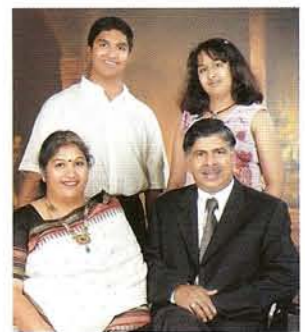
SNAPSHOTS

Recent achievement: I won the first prize in the Dubai Quilt Show in 2005 in the Traditional Category.

Favourite colour: Green

The book on my bedside is ...
The Vedanta Treatise by Professor Parthasarthy.

Favourite quote: Love Rules. And yes it surely rules in my family. I love my husband, Shanker, and our children Aditya



and Aishwarya (photo above).

My latest adventure was ...
Going on a desert safari organised by Gulf News.

“ PATCHWORK QUILTS ARE AN EXPRESSION OF LOVE. That is what prompted me to choose quilting to express myself.

When I moved to Abu Dhabi 10 years ago, my aim was to find my creative expression. I took up quilting lessons as a pastime. My enthusiasm for quilting didn't go unnoticed by my husband, Shanker. By 2004, I had invested in a long-arm quilting machine and soon, my friends started commissioning me to make quilts for them.

Realising that we had a good thing going, Shanker and I began to earnestly consider how we could turn my pastime into a business. Thus on June 4, 2005, Classic Quilts & Quilting LLC was born.

Setting up the business wasn't easy. The word 'quilting' was not available in the Dubai Economic Department's files as a business activity and we had to choose the closest activity to quilting. We ended up paying Dh2,000 per annum to use the word "quilting" in our company name, since it is treated as a foreign name. But it was worth it.

Finding a good location for the business was another hurdle. We were

still living in Abu Dhabi in early 2005. That meant driving down to Dubai from Abu Dhabi to visit potential locations through the agents. Once we found a suitable location, we obtained our licence within two weeks of signing the lease agreement.

Family support

I married Shanker in 1986 and have two children, Aditya, 20, and Aishwarya, 16. Shanker is a chartered accountant who works for a leading group in Dubai but he still finds time in his busy schedule to help me run the business.

While I take care of the production and shop sales, Shanker is involved in the procurement, finance and marketing aspects of the business. I am really grateful for having such an understanding and encouraging husband who is always by my side.

A typical day for me starts ...

... at 5am. I cook lunch and see Shanker and the kids off to work and school (respectively) after breakfast.

I then leave for the shop at around 9am. I return home at around 6pm. It is sheer bliss having the shop so close to my home (in Bur Dubai). It cuts down on all the travel time and enables us to have quality family time!

What's on offer?

Classic Quilts specialises in American Patchwork and Block of the Month projects.

American patchwork and quilting is special because it has a heritage. All traditional patchwork blocks are named and remembered. Through various techniques, patchworks are made in various patterns.

Personally, I like doing traditional patchwork and translating it into a design format so that it can ultimately be quilted into a bed-size quilt with a professional quilting machine.

I also love working with natural fibres and do not throw away any remaining fabric. Instead I recycle them to make pin cushions, thread bins and other small items.

Promoting quilting

I am a member of the International Quilt Association – USA, Dubai Quilter's Guild, Abu Dhabi Quilter's Guild as well as the Doha Quilting Guild. Apart from that, I participate in the ARTE Soukhs (www.arte.ae), which offers me a very good platform to explain to people who visit my stand what quilting is all about.

Also, I give quilting lessons for beginners at my shop in Bur Dubai as well as at the Dubai International Art Centre in Jumeirah. I give quilt demonstrations at the Guild meetings in Muscat, Abu Dhabi, Dubai, Doha and Kuwait.

I also put together starter kits for beginners to enable them to jumpstart their quilting hobby. I do not use any computer programs to design the quilts or put together starter kits and the Block of the Month, I prefer doing these manually. I like preparing material for the Block of the Month.

Basically, the concept involves writing a set of instructions for each block which is handed to the quilter

each month for a period of 10 months. It's a good way for a quilter to become confident in patchwork quilting. While I use long-arm quilting machines for my machine quilting work, I usually recommend Bernina Aurora 440 Quilters Edition Machine for people looking at quilting as a hobby.

The sale is supported by free lessons and is backed by service at the customers' premises by qualified technicians.

Handmade vs readymade

I've been asked many times why make quilts by hand when there are readymade ones available in the market. All I can say is that you don't get these kinds of patchwork quilts in the market. Also, while many of the quilts are done by machine, sometimes, following a client's requirements, they