

HOT STUFF: IN STITCHES

AS SEEN IN
Baltimore
MAGAZINE
DECEMBER 2004
Photography by Mitro Hood



▼ "WE ARE THE DINOSAURS OF THIS INDUSTRY," ADMITS

Georgina Fries, who co-owns and operates a handmade quilting business, Bellwether Dry Goods, out of a 180-year-old Lothian, Maryland farmhouse. "Everyone is going to machine quilting."

But quilt aficionados know the difference, and are willing to pay for it. Finished handmade quilts range from \$700 to \$2,500, but the bulk of Bellwether's business comes from a "Quilt Service"—customers who don't have the time or inclination to do the appliqué, which set a handmade quilt apart from a machine-made one. Many of these appliqué elements are based on textiles created from the 1840s up to the 1940s, sometimes using genuine fabrics from that latter era.

Since 1981, the Fries (Georgina and her husband Richard) have employed a network of Mennonite and Amish women across the country—from Iowa and Michigan to Kentucky and Missouri—to hand quilt the decorative elements. To ensure consistency of stitching, only one woman works on each project, and it can take her up to six months to complete an appliqué. (Spring is the key harvesting season for the Amish, so orders placed during that season can take longer.)

With knitting in the midst of a revival with a new generation, can quilts be far behind? Surmises Georgina, "Quilts are like comfort food. They're just something that's warm and cuddly and cozy and still a work of art. These are the quilts that your grandmother would have made."

BYJANE MARION