

Sandra Tobin

Hand engraving on precious metal. Calligraphy. Accounting. Are these really the former pursuits of fabric queen Sandy Tobin? They sound so cold and hard, so opposite of what one thinks of when facing Sandy's plethora of Heirloom Gifts made by hand in her home workshop in New Salem, Ma. Warm color and vibrant patterns spill from her fabric stocked shelves, the stuff from which many aprons, hot pads, check book covers, pot holders, and bowls are made. A drafting table attests to life as a calligrapher, but Sandy has been fatally seduced into the tactile wonderland of textiles.

In her downstairs workshop, a large 4x8 cutting table is available for large projects such as table runners, wall hangings and quilts. A roll of black felt is poised to unfurl from a hand-made storage bracket, functioning as a design wall when let down. Much easier than crawling around on the living room floor to lay out designs--the fabric pieces will stick to the vertical surface, and Sandy can compose her color scheme and view it from a distance--comfortably upright.

A professional sewer since 2002, she maintains several workshops in and around her house that are dedicated to various crafting activities. Her sewing machine, drafting table (now used for cutting) and second fabric stash are in a tidy room on the main floor. Law and order are maintained with regular cleaning, and she also tries to keep regular work hours. Her husband suggested she work from 9-5 since she was doing "freaky hours" when she first went into production. This has worked fairly well, but "It's very hard. Working at home isn't what other people think it is. It's very difficult, you don't get to walk away and leave whatever is at home behind you. You're walking through the house and constantly seeing things that need doing." She also notes that it is important for one's mental and physical health to get OUT of the house at least once a day.

Her current favorite project is her fabric bowls. She was inspired by examples she saw online, but when she got the instructions she found them less than helpful. Since she has made almost every mistake in the book during her years of sewing she developed her own method over time. Strips of cloth are cut on the bias and wrapped around clothesline rope, then the coils are sewn together on the machine to form a bowl. Sandy's enthused about how fabric is transformed when wrapped this way. "I find it interesting, sometimes fabric that I don't really like after I buy it, if I wrap it it can be stunning. Sometimes if you use fabric that has a stripe to it the stripes line up which is really cool! and polka dots look cool when you do this too."

Hot pads are another favorite to make. "I take my scraps from everything that I have saved and they are sort of little 8 inch quilts. For the energy and effort I put in them, I probably don't charge enough, but hours of fun and entertainment and design went into that. I have always felt that I like the idea of going back to where quilting came from: women, this was their creative outlet. Women don't really have time to do that nowadays but that doesn't mean they don't want to surround themselves with beautiful things in their home, they still do, that's the whole idea of my line of heirloom gifts, here is something practical that is also beautiful.

Sandy consigned at the Greenfield Visitor Center craft shop when co-op member Christine Conniff was manager around 2006 or so. Christine encouraged her to apply to SAC and Sandy has been a working member

ever since. She enjoys her hours spent at the store and finds the feedback she gets from customers very valuable. She also appreciates the camaraderie of the group.