

The Fabric of Her Life



PHOTOGRAPHS: MARK SANDLIN



top: Flavin Glover expertly creates landscape quilts from the log cabin pattern. **above:** Flavin works by hand on road trips. "It's so therapeutic for me," she says of picking up needle and thread.

Flavin Glover travels the world to teach quilting.

She sits in a block within the larger square of her living room in Auburn and quilts by hand and sewing machine for hours each day. Tall windows light this room, with its brick floor and mission-style furniture, as Flavin Glover creates landscape quilts in the log cabin pattern.

She bends over fabric in the block formed by her desk, sewing machine table, work surface, and ironing board—a space about the size of, well, a small log cabin. National Public Radio or a book on tape murmurs in the background. Three felines curl up nearby—Oreo, Gracie, and one with the perfect name for a quilter's cat, Patch.

Flavin, whose husband, Glenn,

teaches at Auburn University, works until late afternoon. Then, on most days, she puts away her fabrics and heads outside for her 3-mile walk.

On other days, she gets up and flies to an island in Denmark. "I never dreamed I'd be going there to see quilts," Flavin remarks with a chuckle.

A World of Quilting

She made the trip as a board member of the International Quilt Association, just one of a dozen or so yearly journeys she takes to teach at workshops and conferences from Alabama to Texas to California, as well as to other countries. "What is coming out of Australia, Japan, South Africa, Korea just blows me away," she says. ▶



above: Ship, sea, and sun all form from log cabin blocks. **left:** “Having *Row Houses* in the show of 100 best quilts in the 20th century is my biggest reward,” says Flavin.



You might say the quilting world beat a path to Flavin’s log cabin block door when it recognized how she revolutionized the pattern. Back in the 1970s, she began experimenting with that traditional 19th-century design, which is comprised of simple rectangular strips, or logs, set in a square. Many needle artists considered a quilt in that pattern as old-fashioned as a doily on a wing chair.

Flavin, however, opened the log cabin door and freed the block of its confines. She used log strips like a painter’s brush by choosing colors and cutting fabrics to create landscapes out of whole cloth.

On one quilt the sun rises over hills. On another, migrating Canada geese honk from high above, while sheep graze on a green pasture of yet another. Sails snap above the whisper of salt spray on a quilted blue sea, while a hot-air balloon ascends silently above a forest.

Perhaps soon she’ll quilt a scene of cross-country skiing, a sport she and Glenn pursue on their travels. Another could portray a kitchen. Twice Flavin has cooked her way to a finalist spot in the Pillsbury Bake-Off Contest.

***Row Houses* and the 100**

“My quilts tell stories of places I love,” she writes in the introduction of her book, *A New Look at Log*

Where To Join

If you’re a new quilter or new to Alabama, you’ll find quilting groups in towns and cities around the state. Some include Azalea City Quilters Guild in Mobile, Birmingham Quilters Guild, Covington County Quilters Guild in Andalusia, Heritage Quilters of Huntsville, and Kudzu Quilt Guild in Montgomery.

“My quilts tell stories of places I love.”

Flavin Glover



above: Husband Glenn helps Flavin in many endeavors, including the publication of her book, *A New Look at Log Cabin Quilts*.

Cabin Quilts (C&T Publishing, \$26.95). *Row Houses*, a work she finished in 1985, adorns its cover. After admiring San Francisco's "Painted Ladies" while attending a conference in 1979, she doodled designs on sketch pads until she could build row houses with log cabins.

In the late 1990s, an august panel was selecting 100 works to represent the art of quilting in the 20th century. "They reviewed 17,500 works," Flavin recalls. "I never in my wildest imagination thought they would consider a log cabin."

They did. *Row Houses* hung at the 1999 International Quilt Festival in Houston. The panel selected it, Flavin recalls, "because it turned the corner in how the log cabin pattern was seen. It took the pattern in a different direction. That's why a little humble log cabin was among all those masterpieces."

Threading the Needle in Cullman County

Quilts warmed Flavin's childhood on a farm in her native Cullman County. As the youngest of nine children, she remembers playing beneath the frame while her mother quilted with friends to raise money for PTA projects.

Her older sisters taught her how to sew—a skill she brought

Methodist Women to produce quilts for that denomination's children's home in Selma.

So does Flavin. "The most exciting thing is when a quilt is such a part of a child's life that

the only time it can be washed is when the youngster is sleeping." Flavin pauses and laughs before adding, "Now that is when a quiltmaker has scored a point."

GARY D. FORD

Did You Know?

The Birmingham Public Library Department of Archives and Manuscripts houses papers of the Alabama Decorative Arts survey, including the findings of 15 quilt documentation days held in towns and cities around the state between 1988 and 1993. They include an inventory and findings on vintage quilts and their makers.

to Auburn University, where she studied textiles. After graduation, she taught arts and crafts as an occupational therapist at East Alabama Mental Health Center.

There she began classes in quilting, a work that served as a building block to her second career after retirement. She began teaching in 1980, traveling the world, as well as down the road, to lead workshops and seminars.

"This state holds a distinctive niche in quilting," Flavin says. It's the only place where the log cabin pattern goes by a different name—"Housetop."

Love warms quilting in Alabama, where many donate their work to those who need coverings for cold nights. Flavin belongs to the Cotton Boll Quilters Guild, a group that also functions as a service organization. "These are busy women scheduling this into their love for quilting," she says. "They're making quilts for other people and don't have a clue who'll get them. They just give them to the cause."

They lend their time and talent for several causes. Regardless of their religious preference, many join in with the United