

Celebrated artist Pauline Burbidge tells Hazel Reid about *Quiltworks*, her new collection and why she's taking her quilting in a new direction

Quilt when you're ahead

IT'S A BRAVE step, as a textile artist, to turn your back on something successful and branch out into something new. Will your change of direction be welcomed? More importantly, will it help you earn a living?

These are questions that Pauline Burbidge has faced in the last year but she has trusted her instincts and has developed a brand new collection – and style – of quilting.

Pauline has worked with textiles for over 30 years, initially designing and making fashion garments before moving into art quilts and hangings. Her distinctive large art quilts have found their way into textile collections, private and public, in the UK and America. Her most

recent collection, *Quiltworks*, was the subject of a touring exhibition in 2004 and 2005 and won her much acclaim.

But making these quilts was a mammoth task. Each one, from initial idea to finished work, often measuring two metres square, could take up to 18 months and proved to be an intense experience, working in

her studio in the Scottish Borders. By the end of 2004 she felt the need for change and started moving in quite a different direction.

'I wanted more time to explore ideas and draw,' she says, 'so I began to plan a new collection of much smaller quilts – not so much art quilts as interior decoration – bed quilts, throws and small wall hangings. My idea is to produce a collection every year, each one slightly different but still co-ordinating with pieces someone has bought perhaps one or two years previously.'

The new collection, which she calls *Quiltline*, takes less

The American Grace Quilter holds the sewing machine in a cradle and moves it over the fabric. This allows the user to 'draw' with the machine

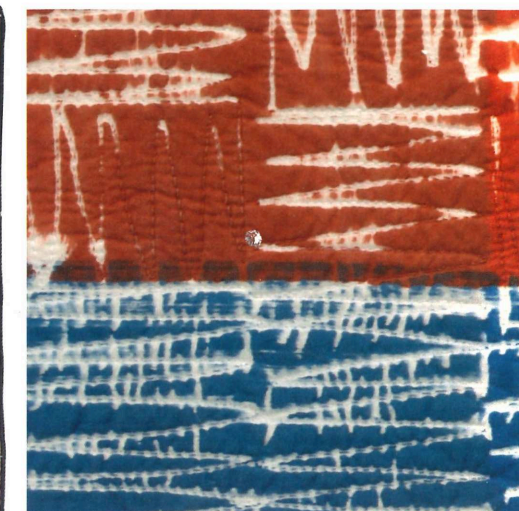
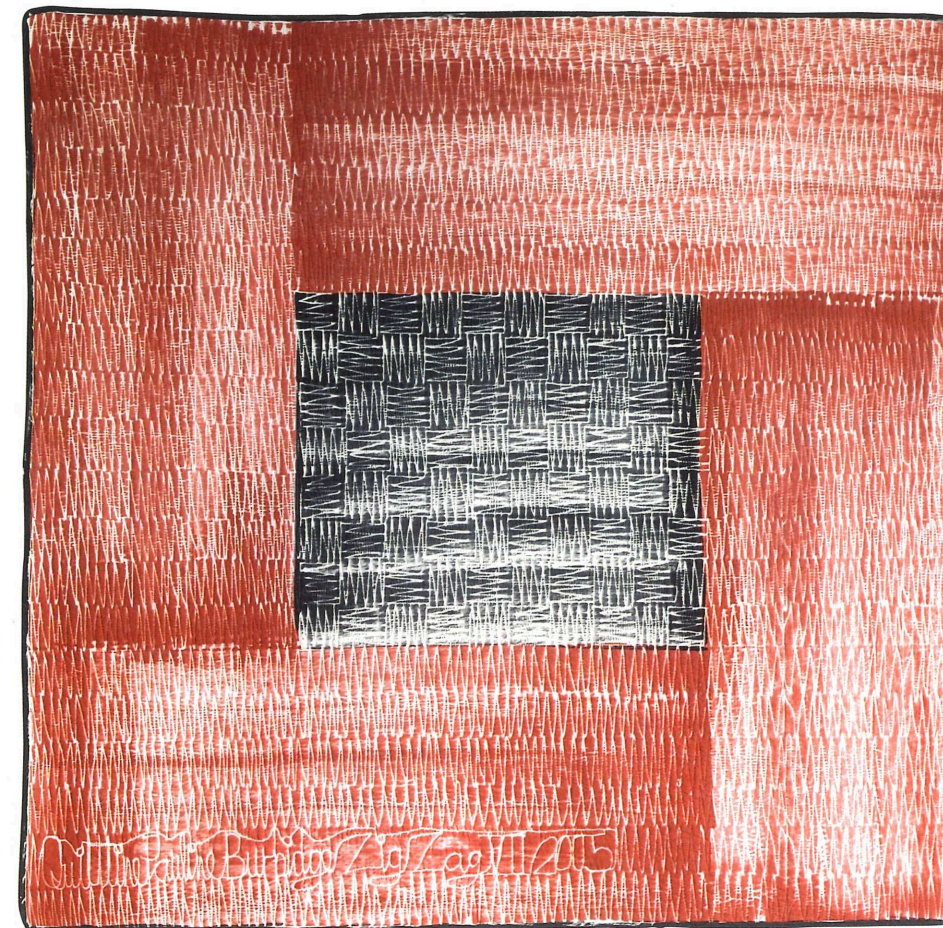
time to put together and she can work on several stages – and pieces – in a day. She also has more time for drawing and last summer went to Orkney on holiday with her sculptor husband, Charles Poulsen, specifically to draw and design.

Contemporary Collectables

The Festival of Quilts 2005, at the NEC in Birmingham, was the first major airing of Pauline's new collection. She had already shown some of it to a local audience at her annual Open Studio Exhibition, which she and Charles run every year, at the beginning of August, in their home



Another of Pauline's three studios houses the Grace Quilter which she uses to 'draw' with her sewing machine over the fabric



One of Pauline's studios – she has three at home – is used for painting


at Allanton, near Berwick. In 2005 they were joined by Clyde Olliver, whose work with stone and stitch perfectly complements Pauline and Charles' work.

Pauline was delighted with the reaction to *Quiltline* at Birmingham. 'It went tremendously well,' she says. 'I had very good feedback and sold six quilts at the Show. People were saying really positive things – that *Quiltline* was really different, and looked contemporary and fresh.' This was reassuring. When you take a new direction you're never sure how your audience will react.

Pauline would like to find other outlets for her work. 'I want to sell direct to customers,' she says, 'I'm not interested in selling to shops and galleries and I won't be taking commissions. I need to explore things like the Chelsea Crafts Fair and the Country Living Fair in London. I'd like my work to be considered part of interior design.'

A New Direction

Pauline's inspiration for *Quiltworks* was the countryside and nearby seaside in Berwickshire. For *Quiltline*, her palette remains the colours and textures from nature that she sees around her although future developments will come out of the drawing she now has more time for. She has not turned her back completely on the larger quilts that have been her trademark but wants to loosen up a bit and, as she freely admits, 'have some fun'.

It looks like the 'fun' that is taking her in this new direction will turn out to be just as successful as the previous large-scale works. For Pauline, the catchphrase 'small is beautiful' may turn out to be very apt. 

Above and top right: One of Pauline's new Quiltline collection. The patterns echo blocks of quilting

The Quiltline Technique

Before she colours it, Pauline quilts the fabric – good quality cotton or silk, with wadding and cotton backing – using an American Grace Quilter. This large structure holds the sewing machine (whatever model you have) in a cradle and moves it over the fabric rather than the fabric being pulled through the machine. This allows the user to 'draw' with the machine on the fabric.

Next, Pauline pins the quilt on the wall in her studio and considers the colours she will use, referring to her sketchbooks and samples. She applies acrylic paint, thinned with water, to the fabric – still pinned to the wall – with a sponge brush. A dry iron over a muslin cloth sets the paint and the quilt is then hand-washed and hung out to dry in the open air. Washing shrinks the fabric slightly, which enhances the quilting.

Bias-cut strips are bound round the edges, painted in the same way, made fast and the quilt is washed and dried again. Once bought, the quilts can be washed (by hand or on a short machine cycle), dried and ironed on the back. The biggest piece in the collection is a double bed quilt, measuring 215cm-square – the smallest is a cot quilt, 71 by 76cm. Prices range from £200 to £800.