# On the Run

*Meet Australia's leading craft talent*

# Annalisa Contos

**Some would say that dealing with a toddler is a full-time occupation in itself, but Annalisa Contos balances the demands of a successful online business with a passion for quilting, too – phew! It's exhausting even to contemplate.**

**By Beck Wise**

She started quilting about five years ago, after spotting a pattern in the pages of this very magazine that captured her imagination. "I had some time in Moruya, on the south coast of New South Wales," she recalls, "and I visited the local patchwork store and bought the fabrics. It was a lap quilt which I gave to my mother," she recalls. "For my second project, I took classes at my local patchwork store and leapt right in, adapting a block with machine-piecing and needleturn-appliqué, and turning it into a king-size quilt. None of the triangles had points but I love it nevertheless," she smiles and adds, "I've learnt a lot since then."

The memory of those early projects is still pretty fresh and Annalisa has plenty of sympathy – and advice – for those just starting out. "As a beginner quilter, I started out loving my project and then I'd get to a point where I got very impatient with it," she admits. "Suddenly it wasn't going together – the blocks didn't fit and the triangle points got lost! But I know I'm not alone in this frustration and I love showing people how to avoid these problems."

It's that same awareness of the challenges her fellow patchwork fans face that led her to start her online business, Busy Thimbles. "I was inspired to set it up after my son was born – I couldn't keep spending my Saturday mornings driving around Sydney trying to track down the right sort of fabric," she explains. "All my projects stalled. While there were a number of Australian patchwork websites, I found them difficult to browse – so I decided to start my own." The business had its first sale in October 2006 and it has grown steadily from there.

Of course, there are certain fringe benefits of running your own patchwork store and Annalisa

the world of science and technology – her bedtime reading is New Scientist magazine – and her interest in the field is reflected in her quilting.

"My parents are both scientists so it was pretty hard not to end up with an interest in the area," she explains. "As a result, I enjoy the mathematics and the creativity that you can express in quilting. I'm really interested in playing with the symmetry in fabric and I love the possibilities when you kaleidoscope it." One of her current projects uses Jinny Beyer border prints. "These fabrics are really fun for exploring symmetry," Annalisa states. "The project has paper-piecing combined with machine-pieced blocks that feature them." Paper-piecing is a favourite technique of hers right now. "I'm really into it because it makes for such portable projects," she says. "I always have some in my handbag and get them out whenever I have a chance – like when my son is playing in the park, or whenever I'm stuck waiting somewhere. I'm an 'anytime' sewer," she continues. "If there's a spare moment, I'll fill it with sewing. I have little projects stashed away everywhere!"

It also works well for her as the mother of a young child. "When hand-sewing, it's easy to stop immediately and deal with the latest toddler disaster," she smiles. Her perspective has definitely changed since the beginning of her patchwork journey. "When I first started quilting I was horrified at the thought that I would have to hand-sew anything. I couldn't believe that bindings were hand-stitched!" she exclaims. "Now I consider the time I have to sit down in front of the machine a luxury. I want to do a 'tumbling blocks' design and I can't work out how I'll finish it faster – by hand-sewing it or by finding an opportunity to machine-piece it." If there's one thing we can count on, though, it's that Annalisa will make the time one way or another.

*Visit www.busythimbles.com.au or email annalisa@busythimbles.com.au for more information.* ■

PROFILE

the world of science and technology – her bedtime reading is New Scientist magazine – and her interest in the field is reflected in her quilting.

"My parents are both scientists so it was pretty hard not to end up with an interest in the area," she explains. "As a result, I enjoy the mathematics and the creativity that you can express in quilting. I'm really interested in playing with the symmetry in fabric and I love the possibilities when you kaleidoscope it." One of her current projects uses Jinny Beyer border prints. "These fabrics are really fun for exploring symmetry," Annalisa states. "The project has paper-piecing combined with machine-pieced blocks that feature them." Paper-piecing is a favourite technique of hers right now. "I'm really into it because it makes for such portable projects," she says. "I always have some in my handbag and get them out whenever I have a chance – like when my son is playing in the park, or whenever I'm stuck waiting somewhere. I'm an 'anytime' sewer," she continues. "If there's a spare moment, I'll fill it with sewing. I have little projects stashed away everywhere!"

It also works well for her as the mother of a young child. "When hand-sewing, it's easy to stop immediately and deal with the latest toddler disaster," she smiles. Her perspective has definitely changed since the beginning of her patchwork journey. "When I first started quilting I was horrified at the thought that I would have to hand-sew anything. I couldn't believe that bindings were hand-stitched!" she exclaims. "Now I consider the time I have to sit down in front of the machine a luxury. I want to do a 'tumbling blocks' design and I can't work out how I'll finish it faster – by hand-sewing it or by finding an opportunity to machine-piece it." If there's one thing we can count on, though, it's that Annalisa will make the time one way or another.

*Visit www.busythimbles.com.au or email annalisa@busythimbles.com.au for more information.* ■