

History of the South African Quilters' Guild

The modern history of the South African Quilters' Guild's can be traced to the middle 1970's which coincided with the revival of quilting arts in the USA and other parts of the world.

One of the pioneers of the modern Patchwork and Quilting movement in South Africa was Kaffie Pretorius, who in 1976 travelled to the USA. She is an artist and as such is interested in colour and form. She therefore enrolled for a patchwork class at an Art Academy in Los Angeles and brought back something 'new': it was a handmade "Sampler quilt" and this quilt and the quilt classes she offered inspired people like Maretha Fourie and Suzette Ehlers to start quilting.

Maretha Fourie can rightly also be called one of the pioneers of modern-day quilting in SA, as she and a group of friends founded the "Protea Quilters" in Johannesburg as early as 1979, a group which still exists today. In 1984 the Protea Quilters made a quilt for the Pope; invitations to exhibit South African quilts in Peru, where SA quilts were shown alongside antique textiles and quilts, and an exhibition in Canberra, Australia, followed where predominantly indigenous Protea-design quilts were shown.

In these years, the political situation in South Africa caused possible international teaching and judging opportunities to be extremely limited and only a few South African quilters could enjoy exposure to what was evolving, particularly in the USA.

In 1986 the Protea Quilters in Johannesburg decided to make a commemorative quilt for the city of Johannesburg which was celebrating its centenary. Twenty-seven ladies co-operated and a 3,66 x 2,85 m wall quilt, was made by hand and presented to the Mayoral council. The background of the quilt consisted of multicoloured solid triangles, depicting the varietal and cosmopolitan character of Johannesburg in all its brightness and vitality, with the stacked gold bars representing the Fine Gold production through the past ten decades.

The South African Quilters' Guild was founded in 1989 at the Bloemfontein National Quilt Festival and has been the coordinating body of quilting in South Africa since then. The SAQG is the National Guild of South Africa, a non-profit association with 11 Regional Guilds represented and other quilting groups affiliated with the SAQG.

The SAQG's main purpose remains the fostering of a structured environment where all South Africans can reach their full potential in quilt-making and related textile art, nationally and internationally.

The First SAQG Committee 1989:

Name and Guild Affiliation

Rosalie Dace: President (Natal)
Dee Oxborrow: Secretary (Natal)
Louise Rheeder (Eastern Free State)
Marie Grimbeek (Bloemfontein)
Lucy Steyn (Oranje)
Hazelmay Duncan (Good Hope)
Jenny Hermans (Good Hope)
Jenny Whitehead (Dias)
Barbara Charlton (Kaffrarian)
Maretha Fourie (GRG)
Jess van Niekerk (GRG)
Trudie Nel (Northern Transvaal & GRG)
Marianne Niemandt (Far Northern Transvaal)
Yvonne Badenhorst (Far Northern Transvaal)
Hettie Schwellnus (Western Transvaal)
Francis Deacon (George)
Paul Schutte (SA Quilt Teachers' Association)

The South African Quilters Guild has the following aims:

- To promote South African Quilters, nationally and internationally.
- To establish basic rules and regulations and categories for National Competitions.
- To support the Regional Guilds by:
 - o promoting the art of quilt-making in South Africa,
 - o educating the quilter and the public, and
 - o encouraging high standards of design and workmanship.

SAQG has several objectives:

1. To promote South African Quilting, nationally and internationally, by any means at its disposal. Annual participation in the World Quilt Competition, curated by Odette Tolksdorf was a good example.
2. To organize Exhibitions from time to time, i.e. the Biennial Travelling Exhibitions with which we try to reach and inspire as many quilters countrywide as possible.
3. One of the aims of SAQG is to promote quilting, and by sending these exhibitions to smaller rural areas, our quilters' base will be broadened.
4. To conduct a Quilt Judge Certificate Programme for Learner Judges and the Quilt Teachers Accreditation Course for aspiring quilt teachers.

5. One of the aims of SAQG is to encourage high standards of design and workmanship; using the knowledge and expertise of accredited quilt judges and teachers is one way of doing just that.
6. To educate and assist disadvantaged South African communities where possible through community projects for the purpose of self-development, mastering of skills and creating a source of income.
7. To coordinate a search for Heritage Quilts and related articles, presently in South Africa, 30 years and older, and to maintain records of such Heritage Quilts.
8. To support National Quilt Day on the third Saturday in March each year.
9. To maintain a history of quilt-making in South Africa.
10. To assist and help coordinate National Quilt Festivals:
 - Revising the list of core categories for all NQFs regularly and the Rules for entry into any National competition.
 - SAQG has the honour of bestowing Master Quilter status on quilters who comply with the criteria as laid down in the Rules for NQFs.
 - Biennially, at National Quilt Festivals, SAQG bestows a Service Award and the title of Pro Dedicate on a quilter whom his/her peers feel has promoted quilting in South Africa and Internationally beyond the norm.

Suzette Ehlers, another pioneer of modern quilting in South Africa, did an intensive 3-day judging course with NQA in America in 1983 and was one of SA's first accredited quilt judges. Under the auspices of SAQG she, together with Paul Schutte and Rosalie Dace, developed the first quilt judge's accreditation course in SA in 1994. Another judges' accreditation course followed in 2002 which was tutored by Sue Prins, Rosalie Dace and Hazel-May Duncan. In 2011, yet another group of qualified quilt judges who studied under the tutelage of Sue Prins, Jenny Hermans, Odette Tolksdorf and Elsa Brits, received accreditation. This brought the number of qualified quilt judges to 30 of which 5 reside in either Kenya or Zimbabwe. In 2015 SAQG again offered a Guild Judges Accreditation Course which enabled successful students to judge quilt competitions on Guild level, four of which have also received accreditation to judge nationally and internationally.

SAQG started Travelling Exhibitions in 1995 to give people who could not attend Festivals as well as non-quilters, the opportunity to view excellent quilts and textile art. Each exhibition travels for 2 years to large and small venues all over South Africa. There have been 12 Travelling collections to date. The first 7 collections had a theme and in the 8th to 11th, quilts were chosen from quilts exhibited at the NQ Festivals 2013, 2015, 2017 and 2019. In 2023 the 12th Travelling collection had a theme again and will end at the NQF in KZN in 2024.

Guilds under the auspices of SAQG:

- 1986: **Dias Quilters' Guild**, Port Elizabeth and surrounds
- 1986: Loerie Quilters Guild, changed to George Quilters' Guild, changed to **Outeniqua Quilters' Guild** in 1993
- 1987: **Good Hope Quilters' Guild**, Cape Town and surrounds
- 1987: **Golden Rand Guild for Quilters**, Johannesburg and surrounds
- 1989: Kaffrarian Quilters' Guild. In 2000 the guild was renamed **East Coast Quilters' Guild**. East London and surrounds
- 1989: **North West Quilters' Guild**, changed to Golden West Quilters' Guild Potchefstroom and surrounds
- 1989: Natal Quilters' Guild, changed to **Kwa Zulu-Natal Quilters' Guild** Durban and surrounds
- 1989: **Oranje Quilters' Guild**: Bloemfontein and surrounds
- 1991: **Flamboyant Quilters' Guild**, changed to Lowveld Quilters' Guild
- 1995: **Vaal Triangle Quilters' Guild**, Sasolburg and surrounds
- 1998: **Jacaranda Quilters' Guild**, Pretoria and surrounds, was founded on 7 Nov 1998.

Terms of Office for SAQG Presidents

1. 1989 – 1992 Rosalie Dace (KZN Quilters' Guild)
2. 1992 – 1994 Hazelmay Duncan (Good Hope Quilters' Guild)
3. 1994 – 1996 Jenny Whitehead (Dias Quilters' Guild)
4. 1996 – 1999 Paul Schutte (Golden West Quilters' Guild)
5. 1999 – 2002 Carolyn Kode (Good Hope Quilters' Guild)
6. 2002 – 2004 Marilyn Pretorius (Dias Quilters' Guild)
7. 2004 – 2008 Elsa Brits (Vaal Triangle)
8. 2008 – 2011 Jeanette Botha (Jacaranda Quilters' Guild)
9. 2011 - 2015 Elsa Brits (Vaal Triangle)
10. 2015 –2017 Sue Prins (Good Hope Quilters' Guild)
11. 2017 - 2022 Jenny Hermans (Good Hope Quilters' Guild)
12. 2022 - Antoinette Kriel (Dias Quilters' Guild)

National Quilt Festivals:

In 1986, the first quilt festival in Southern Africa was held in Swakopmund. The main organiser behind the festival was Valmai Osborn. Maretha Fourie and Barbara Malan, amongst others, were invited to teach at the festival.

To date 21 National Quilt Festivals have been presented by different hosting Guilds but all under the protection of SAQG. The 22nd Festival will be held in Pietermaritzburg in 2024.

Other projects under the auspices of SAQG:

- In October 1993, a group of South African quilters browsed through a book by Cuesta Benberry entitled “Always There: the African-American Presence in American quilts” and happened upon a quilt called “Freedom Quilt” which sparked the idea for the huge “Peace Quilt” project. This collection of 26 panels measuring 26 meters is made up of quilted “bricks” contributed by 779 quilters worldwide, all blue and white and measuring 6” x 12”. The rectangular fabric “bricks” (as they were called) were stitched together into panels, twenty-six panels in all, to make up a “Wall of Peace” and are permanently exhibited in Durban, Kwa Zulu-Natal.

[Click to go to “Peace Quilt”.](#)



- In 2002, GRG for Quilters embarked on a huge project for the first World Summit on Sustained Development (WSSD) to be held in South Africa. Four panels measuring 3m x 1.5m were designed to depict the different aspects of sustainable development. Bettie van Zyl was the co-coordinator of this huge project which was made using English piecing with appliqué. The panels depicted the following:

Panel 1: Tourism and Industry, designed by Celia de Villiers Panel 2: Natural resources, designed by Kim Tedder

Panel 3: Sustainable solutions (Poverty, Housing, Education, Women and Health), designed by Jenny Hearn

Panel 4: Tools: (First world cities, Technology, Judiciary and Financial), designed by Ezet van Zyl

The panels were sold to M O'Brien (UNESCO CID Member Phd.c. MPhil BA Drama), in 2013



- In February 2003 Nanette Diab, representative for the Golden Rand Guild for Quilters in Johannesburg, Gauteng, on the SAQG committee was approached by Merle O'Brien of Black Rock Promotions who commissioned GRG to make a quilt for the enthronement of the 36th King of the Bafokeng. This was to take place on 16 August 2003 at the Royal Bafokeng stadium, Phokeng near Rustenburg.

GRG and Protea members pitched in and the squares forming the background were assembled in 180 hours. There were 3 weeks left in which to do the appliqué and embellishments. On 20 June, the quilt was taken to be quilted by Petro v Rooyen who did so in a record time of 60 hours. On 15 July, the quilt was fetched for binding and finishing which took 22 hours to do. It was delivered on 20 July 2003, as requested!

Community work

All the different Guilds in South Africa are actively busy with upliftment of historically disadvantaged people. They are taught to make saleable quilted items and are encouraged to become active members in the Guilds.

All the different forms of textile art are extremely popular in the country and the South African quilt has progressed from the bed to the wall. South African quilters, like their peers, travel extensively, they teach, exhibit, and produce world class books. They take part in and win prizes on international exhibitions: a few examples of which are the Val d'Argent Quilt Festival in France, The Festival of Quilts in Birmingham, the Tokyo Exhibition which is the largest in the world, the Nagoya Quilt Carnival, and different festivals in Australasia and in the old East European countries.

The very 'plain' activity of piecing and appliquéing small pieces of fabric has made all South African quilters part of a unique world in which truly South African masterpieces are now created.

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The SAQG Logo:



South African Quilters' Guild

The original SAQG logo was designed in 1989 - 91 or 92 by Jenny Hermans when Hazelmay Duncan was the President. It had a Ndebele feel or design, also with zigzags and a 'link' shape in the middle.

None of the originals is available as it was designed way before computers etc.

SAQG did want to have an African feel and strong design elements with pure colours. The colours are red, green, blue and white, black and yellow.

Later the logo was redesigned - adapted by Celia Cvevli with a definite link or chain to represent the regions and quilting guilds. See the 'link' in blue and yellow on a white background, with the triangle shapes above and below. The SAQG representative in each region acts as a link to the main South African Quilters' Guild.

In later years, then-President Carolyn Kode (deceased) also made some small alterations, and the SAQG letters were inserted about 12 or 15 years ago.

The SAQG badge pin was originally cast in metal with enamel colours and later produced with the resin top method.

It just so happens that the colours are also on the new SA flag designed in 1994 by Fred Brownell, who was the State Herald between 1982 and 2002. He was inspired by the design on the chasuble worn by the chaplain at St Andrews School in Bloemfontein: the Y is on the garment when the priest raises his arms in blessing. In 1999, Nelson Mandela awarded him the Order of Meritorious Service, and Brownell received the Vexillon Award twice (vexillology is the study of the history of symbolism and the use of flags). Brownell passed away in 2018.