Beautiful Memory Quilts

Designing with photos

by Mary Ellen Kranz

JULIA'S QUILT, 45½" x 45½", by Mary Ellen Kranz. Quilted by Linda Wightman.
Calligraphy and poem by Carol Devries.

Instructions for making this quilt begin on page 54.

"A memory quilt should be

as beautiful as any other quilt —

with or without pictures."

Designing the quilt

Memory quilts hold special meaning to both the quilt-maker and the lucky recipient. Made to commemorate weddings, graduations, anniversaries, travel, or just about any special occasion, memory quilts often include pictures of loved ones and friends, printed on fabric sheets. Pictures are solicited from family members, taken out of old photo albums or new digital cameras, or removed from frames to provide the perfect selection of photo memories for the quilt. But the wide mix of photo size and quality can also present a real design challenge.

The photographic elements should always add to, not detract from, the design and overall aesthetic of the quilt. Lay the selected photos out on a table and notice the array of colors and tones. How do you come up with a pretty color scheme for the quilt from this mix?

Several years ago I agreed to make a commissioned quilt to commemorate a year-long learning experience by a group of corporate managers. Their wish was to include over 50 snapshots, taken over many seasons, which incorporated a full spectrum of colors. I had an idea about the quilt setting, but I did not see how I could put all the pictures together with a coherent fabric palette. I loaded all of the images into the computer and began to work on them just a bit with the Corel® Paint Shop Pro® X2 photo-editing software. (If you use a different program the concepts are the same.) As I was editing, I came across a color adjustment to convert a color picture to gray scale. Voila! One click of the mouse for each snapshot resulted in consistent, color-neutral images to work with. I chose one of the original color photos as a focal point for the quilt; this also provided an overall color palette.

Julia's Quilt was made to commemorate the birth of a friend's first grandchild. A photo of this baby's sweet rosebud face set the tone for the quilt's fabric palette. Her color picture is the quilt's center, with photos from the extended family surrounding her in love. Because of the warm, pastel color plan, I decided to convert the rest of the photos to a soft brown sepia tone before they were printed on fabric sheets. In this way, the photographs became a warm neutral accent and could be used in the same way as any other fabric in the quilt. As a special touch, a text border surrounds the entire family, adding the same special personal touch that might be found in a diary or scrapbook inscription.

Preparing the images

Converting a picture to gray or sepia tones is a very straightforward process–often a one-button click in your photo-editing program. Here is how to do this using Corel Paint Shop Pro Photo X2 software. The concepts are applicable to other digital-imaging software.

Edit the photos

1. Open your picture using your photo-editing software.
2. Create a working copy.

Tip: You want to keep your original untouched. Under the File menu, select Save As. Give your picture a new name. It's a good idea to change the file type at this point from whatever it was (usually jpeg) to tif. The tif format keeps your picture from losing detail as you make further changes.

3. Make any needed adjustments such as cropping or sharpening.
4. Convert the picture to sepia.

In Corel Paint Shop Pro Photo X2, this is done by clicking on Effects and then on Sepia Toning. The menu that appears allows you to adjust the amount of aging to apply to your picture. More aging produces a more yellow tone and less a more gray tone. This feature allows you to convert all your pictures consistently.

Print the photos

The key to printing good photos on paper-backed inkjet fabric sheets is accessing the Properties screen on the Print menu. This will allow you to select settings such as Best Photo and the appropriate media type for the fabric sheets. Some experimentation will probably be necessary.

Select photos and print, following instructions from the manufacturer of both your inkjet printer and the chosen prepared paper-backed fabric sheets. ◆

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Families are like quilts...created for the present and the future

Details, Julia's Quilt