

The Ribbon Quilt Crafter

Sarah Boudreau crafts a tapestry of memories from treasured horse show ribbons.

By Cindy Hale

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The horse show is over, your horse is put away and the trailer is unhitched. Now you're left with an armful of ribbons. What can you do with that bunch of glossy satin? It should be something special, because they will always evoke memories of your eventful day. Rather than just tacking them haphazardly to your bedroom wall with pushpins, why not give them a permanent place of honor? There are many different ideas for recycling your horse show ribbons, but one popular choice is to weave the streamers into a criss-crossed quilt pattern. If you're not particularly gifted with a needle and thread, there are polished crafters who are willing to create a quality keepsake just for you.

Sarah Boudreau is perhaps the queen of the ribbon quilters. Her finished product is actually more comparable to a patterned tapestry, designed to serve as a wall hanging. Although always handy with needlework, it was a riding pal who inadvertently gave her the idea for making ribbon quilts.

"I had this dear friend tell me she had a ton of ribbons and she wanted to make some kind of wall hanging with them. She said she thought she'd just glue gun them together," Boudreau says with horror. "That just appalled me! So I had her put them all in baskets and give them to me so I could play with them."

After consulting her quilting books, Boudreau came up with a pattern she could tweak to fit the demands of working with the stiff ribbon material. "There are limits in working with the ribbons as opposed to regular fabric," she explains.

That original ribbon quilt pattern included a prominent position for a treasured blue ribbon from the Devon horse show. Boudreau still continues that concept, asking each client to designate the ribbons or rosettes that deserve special placement. Still, every ribbon quilt is unique and the design of the final product depends on the collection of ribbons that Boudreau receives.

"Opening each box is like opening a box of chocolates," she says. "I have no idea what's inside." Yet after she organizes the ribbons into categories according to color and nostalgic importance, "it just takes on a life of its own."

The sentimental value of the ribbons isn't lost on Boudreau. "Some people apologize for sending me old, tattered ribbons," she says, "but I think those are the best ones." She's well aware that often she's immortalizing remnants from a veteran rider's first horse show, or a memento from the last competition someone enjoyed on a dearly departed horse. "That's all great memory stuff. And that's what the quilts are meant to show."

These days, most of Boudreau's business comes through her website, (www.ribbonquilts.com). She also promotes her craft at horse shows and by donating her services for charitable auctions supporting horse rescue organizations. The visibility helps with word of mouth, which in turn helps with Boudreau's horsekeeping bills. She recently purchased a young hunter that's just beginning his show career. Very soon Sarah Boudreau could be making a ribbon quilt for herself.