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Peter Byrne is a design professional and newcomer in our quilting world. This year he burst onto our radar by winning two major awards: Best in Show at QuiltCon and Best Machine Quilting Frameless at QuiltCon 2020. His creative interests are diverse. We just couldn't fit it all onto this issue, so you must visit his website for details: Peter Byrne Quilts – Quilter/Designer/Teacher (peterbquilts.com). The more you learn about Peter, the more astounded you will be at his seemingly rapid success in the quilt arena, or is it his patience and method? You decide.

There are a lot of juicy life nuggets in Rita Farro's profile. I know that Peter has inspired me personally. Even in this era of virtual workshops, Peter has found an audience and fans eager to learn his new quilt techniques overlay quilting and hover-quilting. Enjoy!

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#### In this Issue:

Sewing Star: Peter Byrne

Page 3

Needle Points: NEW SCHMETZ Combo Packs

Page 12

**Cover: Cityscape** by Peter Byrne

Story by: Rita Farro

https://ritassewfun.blogspot.com/

**Pictures:** Provided by **Peter Byrne** 

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# What Inspires YOU to Sew?









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## Peter Byrne





#### **Peter Byrne**

Imagine this unlikely scenario; a man in Toronto, Canada, (who, in 2009 didn't even know there was such a thing as batting), enters his first competition quilt at the gigantic, prestigious 2020 Modern Quilt Guild Show (QuiltCon), and walks away with TWO of the top four prizes.

Peter Byrne hit the modern quilting world like a meteorite. How did this happen? What's so special about his quilts? Did he really, overnight, become an international award winning, published modern quilter and teacher?

To understand the secret sauce that is Peter Byrne, we have to go back to his childhood. (Isn't that always the way?)

Raised in a family of five children by a very creative mother and a hard-working father, Peter was four when he started to exhibit an artistic talent. The next door neighbor taught him how to draw and paint. They spent countless hours creating in his garage.

When Peter was 8, he took a leatherwork class, and the instructor encouraged his parents to supply him with the best tools because he had never seen such talent in a student. Peter went on to teach leatherwork at his local Boys Club.

At age 11, Peter learned how to macramé. He turned that passion into his first business and supplied the local gardening store and department store with macramé plant hangers. He took custom orders and made plant hangers that hung in 20-foot foyers.





Hair dressing was Peter's first passion, but this did not fill 24 hours a day.

I don't think creativity is something you study and master. I believe creativity is a gift that you are born with and if nurtured can grow in any chosen direction.

Peter Byrne

Throughout his life, he has loved creating and learning in equal measure. After high school, he enrolled in hairdressing school. He finished his apprenticeship and opened his first hair salon at the age of 20. He enjoyed his work and opened several successful salons over the next 25 years. Although hair dressing was his first passion, it could not fill 24 hours of his day.

In his 30's, he developed a passion for gardening. His specialty was designing and installing perennial gardens. He and his team of landscapers planted growing beds throughout Toronto. Every spring he would harvest 50 percent of the plant material, pot, and sell them. Eventually, Peter Byrne Gardens decorated every neighborhood in the city.

However, gardening was seasonal, so in the winter, he would change hats and move into construction. Over the years, he enjoyed learning new trades and became very good at designing and installing bathrooms and kitchens.

Throughout his adult life, he had his fingers in many pies, but there was always a common theme. Design and Installation. In 2009, he was dealing with serious health concerns and decided it was time to retire.

He was only 45 years old, and he had to reimagine his life. He decided to simplify his lifestyle. He sold his house in the East End, the cars, the businesses, and moved to an apartment in the heart of downtown Toronto, Canada.

It was during this time that quilting stole his heart. My Aunt Marg lives a couple of hours from the city and she is an avid





This quilt, titled Keida Rayne, was made for Peters daughter.

quilter. Every summer I would visit and look forward to seeing her latest quilts. When I mentioned I was interested in making a quilt, she sent me home with a bundle of fabric, a rotary cutter, and a few well loved, quilting magazines.

Peter purchased a small sewing machine and emailed his friends asking them to donate an old cotton shirt or two. He used the hardcovers from a couple of novels and made templates he could use to cut the fabric to size and set out to make his first quilt. He sewed the squares and rectangles together into strips and then sewed the strips into a patchwork quilt top.

At that time, I knew nothing about quilt making, so there was no batting, binding, or quilting, but that didn't matter. It was the process of making that first quilt that spoke to me in a comforting way. I didn't understand why I felt so moved by sewing together old shirts, but I did, and this quickly lead to making a quilt for my daughter, Keida, and a quilt for my son, Jairus, and then I made quilts for all my friends and family.

The part of the quilt making process I enjoyed the most had nothing to do with quilting. It was my stream of thoughts while making a quilt that brought me so much joy. At the beginning of every quilt I made, I knew in advance who I was making it for, and I would reflect on my relationship with the recipient. It takes weeks or even months to make a quilt, and in my mind, this time was for celebrating my relationship with the quilt owner.

From 2009 until 2017, Peter did not want nor seek any outside influences on his quilt making. He only wanted to create what





Peter with friend and mentor, Stephanie Rose.

was in his own thoughts. He never went online to watch howto videos, he never looked in any quilting books or magazines, or took any courses. He just wanted to create what was in his heart.

All of that changed in 2017, when he joined the Toronto Modern Quilt Guild. When he walked into that first guild meeting, he had never quilted a quilt. After joining, he became a full-time student of the craft and has since taken well over a hundred classes and workshops on most aspects of quilt making.

What has kept him engaged in quilting over the years has been that old childhood drive to master any trade.

I would not be the quilter I am today without the mentoring I received after joining my local Modern Quilt Guild. Stephanie Rose

befriended me. Steph taught quilting at a local sewing school and invited me to join her. Little did I know what a profound impact this would have on my life.

Every Monday evening for four months Peter joined Steff and took all four of her classes. He was taught how to quilt and how to teach quilting at the same time. The sewing school was expanding and opening a new location and he was hired to be the quilting instructor. He taught three days a week for 2018 and became a confident guide for his students.

At the beginning of 2019, he redirected his time back to his own quilt making, and that's when the lightning struck. Now armed with knowledge of all-things-quilting, Peter Byrne developed an entirely new quilt technique.





"Pathways" was Peter's first Hover-Quilt. The Hover-Quilting Inspiration Workshop is designed around this quilt.

I wanted to make a half square triangle quilt and make it uniquely mine. To do this, I developed a new technique called Hover-Quilting. Hover-Quilting is a new approach to raw edge appliqué absent of fusible web. This technique not only produces a beautifully controlled frayed edge, but also makes your piecing appear to float above the quilt top. I have continued to challenge myself with different ways to apply this new technique and have completed eight quilts using the Hover-Quilting techniques which I now teach virtually.

When I set out with my ambitious quilting plan for my quilt titled **Starring You** that won 'Best in Show' at QuiltCon 2020, I had practiced a variety of quilting motifs for two months before hopping on this quilt and quilting it. Practice is the only thing that will eventually make you feel comfortable and confident when you are staring at a quilt top wondering what to do. Quilters are

very giving people, so when you need a little help getting started, the quilting community is there for you!

QuiltCon is the largest modern quilt show in the world and is hosted each year by The Modern Quilt Guild. In 2020, there were quilts in the show from 15 countries, including 149 Modern Quilt Guilds and 868 independent members. Applications for almost 1700 quilts from around the world were sent in, and out of the 1700, 400 were juried into the show and put on display in Austin, Texas in February 2020.

His quilt **Starring You** won *Best in Show* and his quilt **Cityscape** won *Best Machine Quilting Frameless*. Entering quilts into QuiltCon was the first time Peter entered anything into a juried show, so winning two of the top four awards was a spectacular outcome.



Five Hover-Quilting close-up samples.

Peter was not planning to attend QuiltCon, but on February 6th he received two emails. The first email read, Congratulations! Your quilt **Cityscape** has won an award at QuiltCon. He quickly opened the second email and it said, Congratulations! Your quilt **Starring You** has won an award at QuiltCon.

A few days went by and on February 13th, QuiltCon's, event coordinator, Elizabeth Dackson, called to personally invite Peter to the awards ceremony that kicks off the show on Wednesday evening.

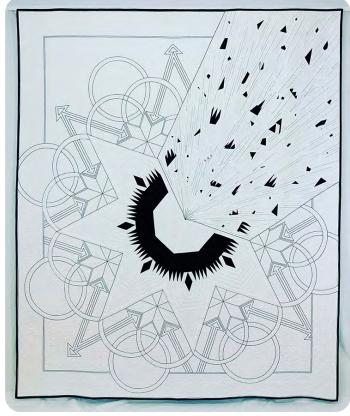
The next day my complimentary flight was booked and it was official, I'm going to QuiltCon 2020. A few days later I'm in Austin, Texas, and when I arrived for check-in, there was an awesome VIP suite waiting for me. The accommodations were beautiful. I arrived Tuesday evening, 24 hours before the Awards Ceremony,

so I would have a day to chill out and collect my thoughts. I wrote out statements for Press Releases and just reflected on my good fortune.

Before the awards ceremony, I went to the meet and greet at 5:00. This was my first time entering the building, so I got in line to register, and when I was asked my name, I replied I'm Peter Byrne. Well, as soon as I said that, the security guard grabbed me and spoke very loudly into her radio and said, Peter Byrne is in the house, I repeat, Peter Byrne is standing in front of me, I repeat, Peter Byrne is in the house. This was so funny; we both just looked at each other and broke out laughing!

There was a group of members from the TMQG attending, so we all went to the awards ceremony together. I quietly told them I





Starring You QuiltCon 2020 Best in Show

had a reserved seat in the front row because I was winning two awards. I asked them, when I went up on stage, to make some noise, and they sure did! I was very thankful to have some quilting friends in the room with me.

So I'm sitting in the front row and the two categories I had entered my quilts into came and went and I was not called up on stage. We were down to the final four awards and my name was called and **Cityscape** wins 'Best Machine Quilting Frameless'.

As I made my way up on stage, I can hear the room erupt in applause, I was so excited. I was congratulated, given an envelope, my picture was taken, and I returned to my seat.

We were now down to the last award. I could feel a bead of sweat rolling down my lower back. The MC starts to describe the

winning quilt and as she spoke, I knew **Starring You** had just won Best in Show!

I stood up and I was so excited, I started clapping for myself as I made my way back up on stage to receive my award. The room erupts even louder this time as I took the stage and humbly accept the top prize of 'Best in Show' at QuiltCon 2020. I was given an envelope and a beautiful custom made bag by 'Vera Bradley' and gifted \$8,000 in prizes.

I can proudly say, Quilting Dreams do come true!

After his unbelievable double win at QuiltCon 2020, Peter's schedule for teaching workshops and presenting trunk shows quickly filled up for 2020 and 2021.





**Cityscape**QuiltCon 2020 Best Machine Quilting Frameless

Unfortunately, Covid hit and shut everything down.

Of course, in usual Peter Byrne fashion, he started to reimagine how he could continue to virtually teach his classes. He reworked two of his workshops and offered them monthly on Instagram. The testimonials are exceptional. In the morning students focus on preparing their quilt sandwich and make 42 HST's and in the afternoon they will complete a 16-inch square mini hover-quilt. Peter emails a detailed workshop guide to his students in advance, and during the class, he communicates with them individually via Direct Messaging on Instagram and text messaging as well.

Besides his hands-on workshops, Peter also developed a lecture called *Behind the Seams*, with Peter Byrne. It is 45-minutes of non-stop talking, 350 pictures, telling Peter's quilt journey and sharing a trunk show of his work.

Now that he has mastered the skill of teaching virtual classes via Instagram and Zoom, Peter is planning a US tour for 2021, hoping to teach his workshops (via quilt guilds or shops) and present his trunk show in every state. For further details, here is Peter's contact information:

Email: petersquilts@gmail.com

Instagram: @petersquilts & @hoverquilting

Facebook: Peter Byrne

His website: www.peterbquilts.com









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