

# Put an End to UFOs!

## How to Finish What You Start



by Priscilla Bianchi

ABOVE: *NATURA FLORIDA II*, 42½" x 56½", by Priscilla Bianchi. Machine pieced and quilted.

All of Priscilla Bianchi's quilts shown with this article contain Guatemalan hand-woven textiles, Indonesian batiks, U.S. cottons, and hand-dyed cottons.

**M**aking any quilt top requires a lot of time and effort, whether it ultimately becomes a finished quilt or an unfinished object (UFO). Don't trap yourself into doing something you'll hate and never finish just because everyone's doing something similar. Be your own person! Try things that interest you. Experiment. Learn by trial and error. Work only on projects that you really love, and, above all, enjoy the process.

### Color

When I was starting out, a "color expert" advised me to do a quilt using only grayish tones, maintaining I would learn more about color theory that way. My spontaneous reply was, "Oh, but why would I do that?" I couldn't comprehend why I would even embark on such a hideous project. Color is the most noticeable quality about any work of art. How you use it says a lot about you. Forget about color wheels and current fashionable shades. My advice is to use only colors and color schemes that you like. Who cares if the colors "clash" or if someone else doesn't like them? You have to like them, and that's that!

### Working Style

Use techniques and designs that favor your natural way of doing things. Sure, you can work to expand and improve your range, but listen to your inner voice. Are you a spontaneous person who likes to work with innovative, free-form techniques? Do you like the start-cutting-and-see-what-happens approach? Or, are you a logical, planning person who finds great pleasure in calculating every detail first? Do you assemble all your pieces (including the borders) before you begin? Is improvisation uncomfortable or difficult? Or, do you delight in risk-taking, starting out with a general idea, then changing and adapting as you go? It's good to try different working methods to discover your capabilities, but your best work will come when you do what comes naturally.

### Materials

Use only fabric and materials that give you pleasure. Whatever the current craze in quilting fabrics, if you're not drawn to them, don't use them. Go with what excites you, comforts you, or gives you joy, even if your favorites are currently "out of fashion" or have never been used in a quilt before (I'm speaking from experience here!). Are you into embellishing your work? Go ahead, you'll be so happy you did. Your continuing pleasure will keep you going and going and going.

## Format

Do you prefer to work within the logical order of a repetitive grid? Or do you like a more liberated approach, a “blank canvas” so to speak, with no pre-established guidelines? Do you like symmetry or asymmetry? broad strokes or fine details? drama or delicacy? abstract or realistic? traditional or contemporary? Do certain shapes or motifs excite you? Don't fight what you like – use it to your advantage.

## When You Get Stuck

Sometimes you will get stuck, no matter what. My first advice is to accept that you are stuck. The second bit of advice is to “detach.” When I get stuck, after struggling for days, I fold everything neatly and put it in a bag, label the bag, and put it away. It can be stored away from sight and mind for weeks or months until you figure out what can be done to make it work. The answers often come when you least expect them. Maybe you'll see something in a magazine, acquire a new skill, or discover the perfect fabric to finish it up. Don't despair, you'll get there eventually.

Should you continue to pour a lot of time and energy into something that is not working? It depends. Use your common sense, be creative, study the alternatives. Does what you've made have to remain whole, or can you use part of it elsewhere? If all else fails, you can always

1. donate a UFO to charity;
2. use it for the backing of your next quilt;
3. rip it apart and use the blocks or pieces in another project.

What have you got to lose? It's just fabric after all!

In a civilized society, we try to act much like everyone else. In art, though, we try with all our might to be different. In art, innovation, breaking with tradition, and uniqueness are sought after, recognized, and valued. Experiment! Search for your individual “voice,” then express it. Do only projects that you really love and they'll practically finish themselves! ■



*Priscilla Bianchi's work hangs in the American Craft Museum in New York and has appeared in numerous one-woman and collective exhibits and magazines plus several books. She lives and works in Guatemala City, Guatemala. View her work and contact her via her Web site: [www.priscillabianchi.com](http://www.priscillabianchi.com).*



TOP: *A SQUARE IS A SQUARE IS A SQUARE*, 57½" x 60", by the author

BOTTOM: *HOLIDAY IN NEBAJ IV*, 40½" x 41", by the author. Machine pieced, quilted.

