

I'm a Typaholic! and a Textile Designer

by **Lonni Rossi**

Two things attracted me to quilting and surface design – the tactile pleasures of working with textiles, and the endless choices of texture and color. My desire to explore the never-ending possibilities of form and design in both mediums keep me passionate about my work.

After I received a degree in advertising and graphic design, I worked in a design studio for eight years before starting my own advertising agency. While growing that business, I also taught typography, production and design part-time.

Sewing was part of my upbringing and in addition to myself, my mother, grandmother, and great aunt all sewed and even did elaborate embroidery.

In art school I found that sewing skills came in handy in different assigned projects involving book design and hand-binding, and even when designing and producing a flag for an
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country. After the birth of my son 17 years ago, I really began to explore art quilting and discovered surface design. The rest, as they say, is history. My love of design, color, typography, and textiles combined and I became a fabric designer. For the past three years I've been designing fabrics for Andover Fabrics, a division of Concord Fabrics, and have designed four collections, *Typographical Elements*, *Typographic Textures*, *Lonni's Odyssey*, and *Typospheres* (released in Fall 2003).

If there is a common theme to my fabric designs, it is an obsession with letters, numbers, punctuation, handwriting, calligraphy, typography, and fonts of all kinds. Words from many languages are included as are images symbolic of language and communication. There is always a hidden message in the cloth.

The

process of devising a "family" of designs or motifs is the first step in creating a new collection. This is the longest and most cerebral part of the exercise. I agonize over many decisions, many of them revolving around whether to "keep it simple" or to make it scream "more is more!" (my personal favorite).

Accomplishing my goal of building layers of meaning with pattern and color requires great attention to several factors: 1) the relationships between the size of each motif or type treatment; 2) the color, hue, and value assigned to each layer; 3) whether the motif or design is positioned in the foreground or background; and 4) the number and positioning of pattern repetitions.

Traditional silk screens are what I use for my work. I construct them from scratch and expose them in the darkroom. I recently started using a Thermofax machine to create instant screens without

the bother of a darkroom, but they have a different kind of look and don't last as long. I cut rubber stamps from eraser material, although sometimes a local company makes them for me from my

MODULES pattern, Typospheres Collection

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original artwork. I cut my own stencils from designs I create on my computer.

I am never happier or more excited about what I'm doing than when I am printing or painting cloth. It's that part of the journey that totally appeals to my inner child and artist.

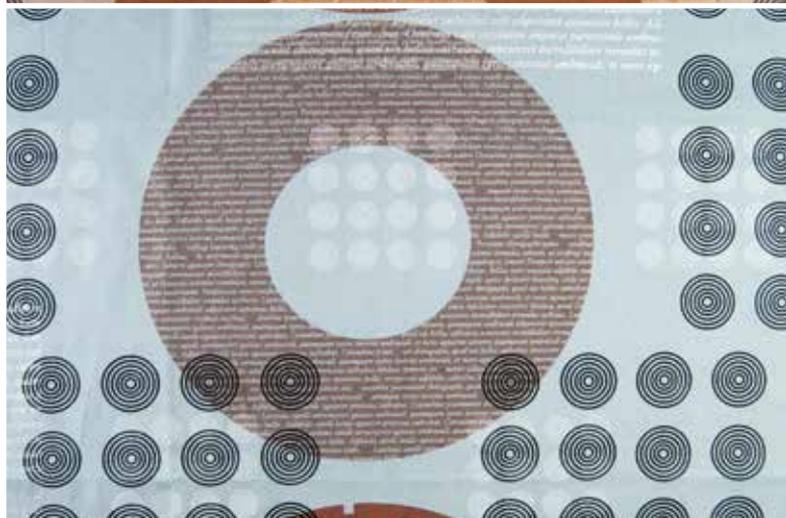
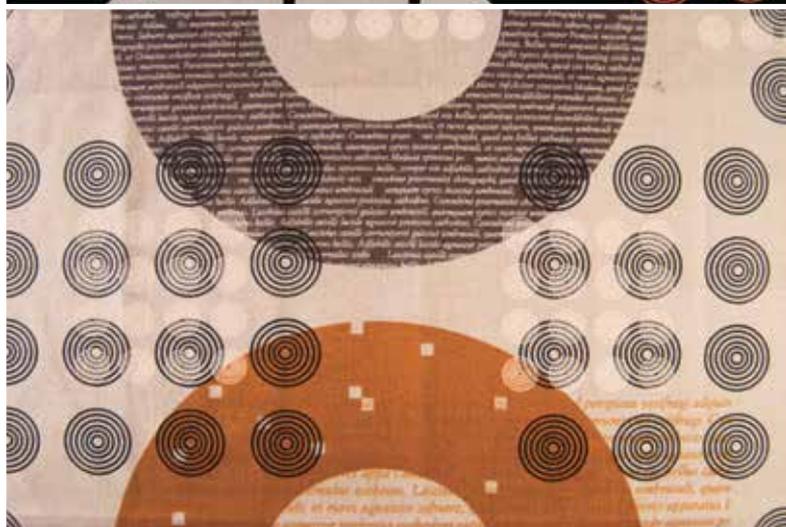
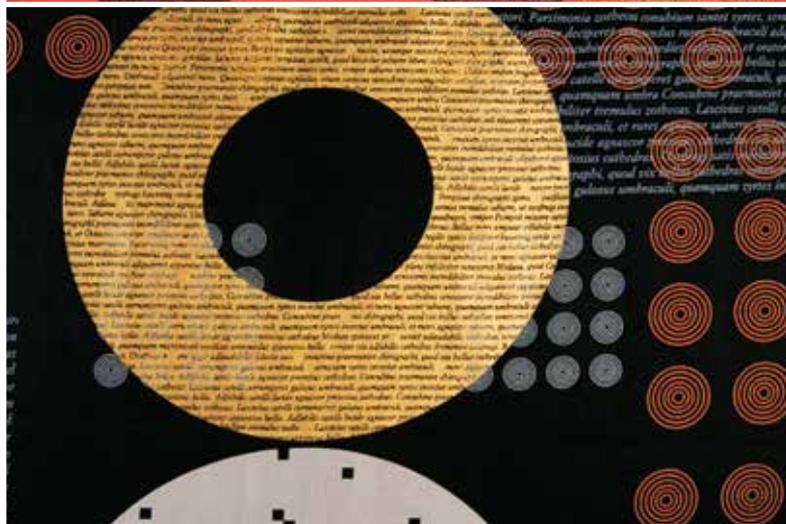
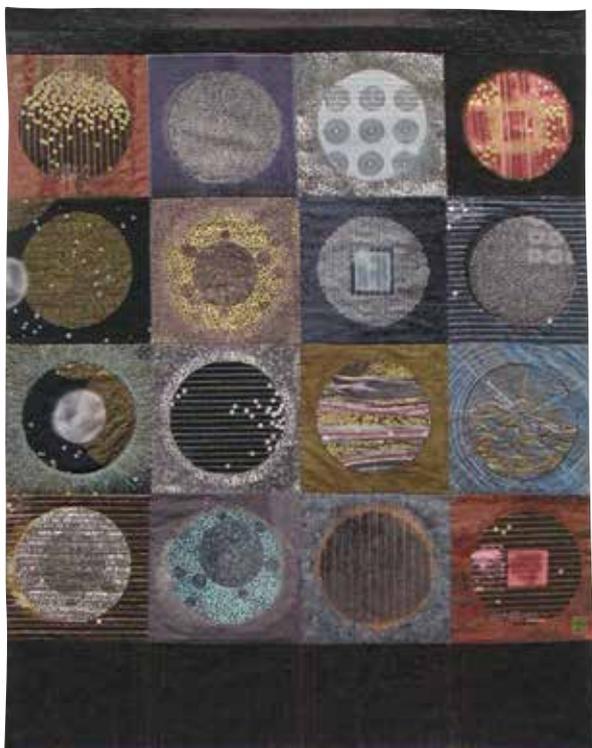
For the first fabric collection Andover placed no constraints on me as a designer. They gave me free reign for everything from concept, to color, to design, and design approvals. It was an incredibly uplifting experience to see how much care they took with my work and how faithfully they reproduced my designs.

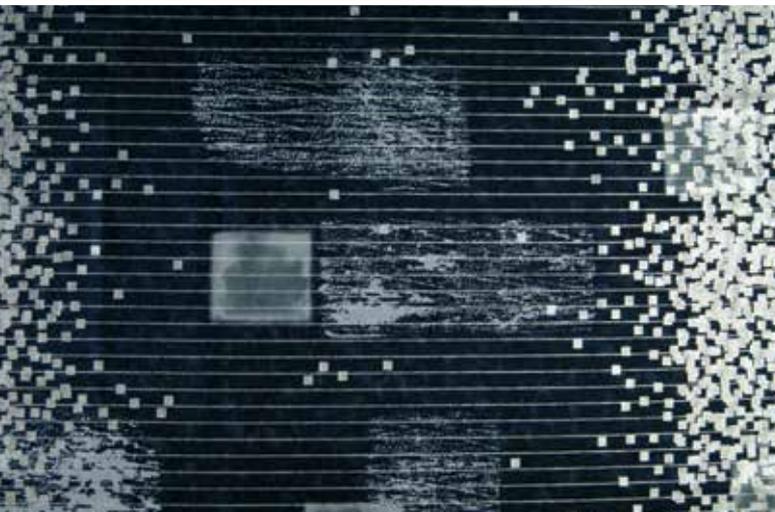
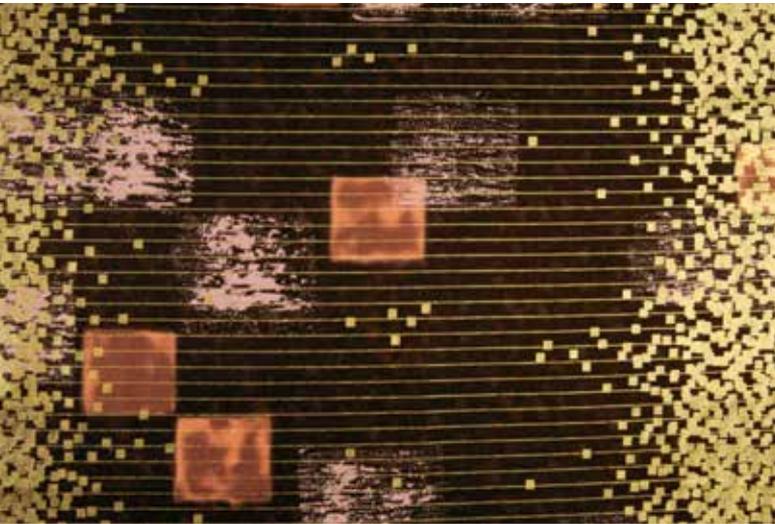
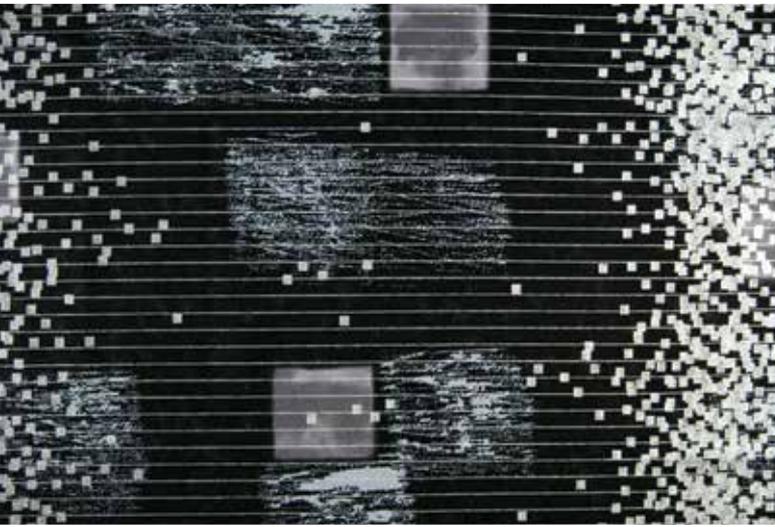
For years, when people bought my one-of-a-kind fabrics they told me, "I just can't cut these up. They are just too beautiful the way they are!" By contrast, I want my commercial collection to be very "cut-up-able" (if that's a word). I use the colors I love – earth tones, metallics, bright colors mixed with pastels and shades of gray, and beautiful gradations of colors that blend the colors in the foreground and gradually morph into the color of the background. Type, numbers, punctuation, and letters combine to create hidden messages in the cloth. Most importantly, I want quilt and wearable artists to feel free to cut up the fabric and make it their own, something they seemed reluctant to do with my original pieces.

Typographical Elements (not shown here), was my first Andover fabric collection. The motifs in each of the five groupings (Earth, Fire, Metal, Water and Air) use typography to evoke the feelings of those "elements," something also

RIGHT: **OZONES, *Typospheres* Collection, all four colorways**

BELOW: **TYPOSPHERES #1, 43" x 60", by Lommi Rossi, 2004; incorporates fabrics from Lommi's *Typospheres* Collection by Andover Fabrics. Machine pieced, appliqued, quilted, and embellished.**





supported by the choice of colors for each. In the art of typography and design, an “element” is one image or motif that is part of the whole, while the term “design” refers to a pleasing arrangement of elements to present a visual idea. So the word “elements” in this case has a double meaning – my design elements also relate to the physical world elements.

In my newest collection (illustrated throughout this article) the word “Typospheres” is one I invented to mean a circle (sphere) constructed from a random listing of Latin words. There is no hidden agenda or message in this group. My inspiration came while viewing images sent back to NASA from the Galileo spacecraft during its successful 14-year journey to Jupiter and beyond. The names of two of the groups – Rings of Io and Sea of Europa – refer to two of the four moons of Jupiter. The other groups, Modules, H₂O Bubbles, and O-Zones continue the somewhat outer-space-like theme, giving hints to the inspiration behind the collection.

The person using fabric is always considered when I am designing commercial fabrics. Since I’m a quiltmaker, I ask myself how each design will look in a quilt. Will it be too busy? too laid back? just right? Or, will it try to steal the show?

While creating Typographical Elements I didn’t consciously plan to make something dramatically new. When it comes to fabric for quilters being different is not necessarily the best thing. However, I did believe that quilters, who naturally love to cut up fabric, would embrace my designs which are really best when sliced and diced and sewn back together. Strippiecing or even paper-piecing projects seemed natural for the wild, floating pieces of type. It seemed that quilt artists wanting to communicate messages would also find something in my work that would allow them to do so in subtle ways.

The great thing about textiles is that they can be made into anything the buyer wishes – a prayer shawl, pillow, garment, tote bag, art quilt, or even a hat! Like experiences in life, the layers of texture, color, form and design tell the story.

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Lonni Rossi is a member of the core committee for the ArtQuilts at the Sedgwick Quilt Show (AQATS), now in its sixth year. Lonni has also opened a new fabric design store and studio, Lonni Rossi Fabrics, in Ardmore, PA, where she paints fabric and makes her own art quilts. Contact Lonni via her Web site: www.LonniRossi.com.



LEFT: *The four colorways of SEA OF EUROPA, from Lonni Rossi's Typospheres Collection by Andover Fabrics*

BELOW: *H₂O BUBBLES, Typospheres Collection*

