

On the Road with Vacilando Quilting Company

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Modern quilter Laura Preston, runs [Vacilando Quilting Company](#) out of a 200-square-foot room on wheels that doubles as her kitchen, living room, and bedroom. Preston, her husband, John, and their two dogs left New York City in 2013 to travel America in an Airstream trailer, and their nomadic existence has led them to the farthest corners of the country.

From the giant redwoods of Big Sur to the vast emptiness and desert mountains of Western Texas, Preston finds creative inspiration in the many landscapes she inhabits. “Some quilts come to me immediately and kind of make themselves,” she says. “I see a landscape or a sunset or live in a moment that I know right away will be a quilt.... Sometimes the color palette of a landscape really strikes me, like with the Nacimiento Quilt, or the shape of a courthouse door we drove by once sticks in my brain, which inspired the Chimayo Quilt, and I use that inspiration as a starting point.” Preston’s minimalist yet truly Americana style is owed to her invigorating existence of constant change and new experiences.

Her aesthetic, however, is influenced by more than the colors and shapes of American landscapes. Raised in Dallas, both of Preston’s parents are architects and she grew up surrounded by plans and sketches strewn about surfaces in her home. According to Preston, “There was a strong emphasis on aesthetic and good design.”

In addition, there were visits to her mother’s family in Antwerp, Belgium, a city with its own unique style where “historic old buildings and farmhouses meet ultra-minimalist modern architecture,” Preston says. “I think that combination of traditional and modern may have rubbed off on me a bit.”

Her quilt designs are decidedly modern yet fundamentally traditional in their cultural themes, influences, and the medium itself. Her grandfather was another major influence in her love of craft. A tinsmith who lived in Texas Hill Country, she recalls helping him run his booth at craft shows every year. “Watching him make these beautiful objects out of nothing in such a traditional way...made me appreciate the value of craft and making something by hand.”

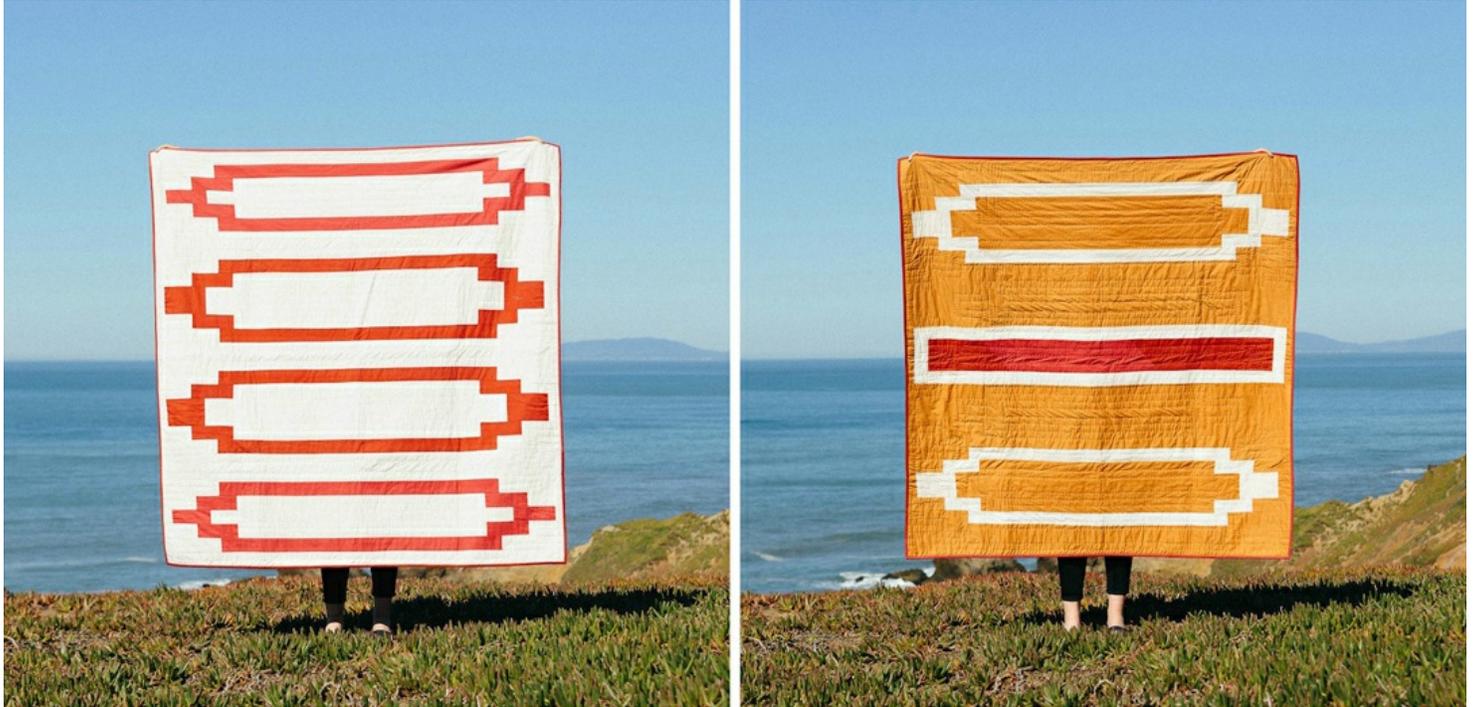
Preston is originally a painter, but when she and her husband first began their travels, she gravitated toward the idea of functional creation. She began to follow modern quilters, such as Maura Ambrose of Folk Fibers, Meg Callahan, and Cortney Heimerl on Instagram, and envisioned paintings in their patterns. She was fascinated by the inherently utilitarian aspect of quilts. “It’s such a practical and useful creative expression,” she says.



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It wasn’t long before she packed up her oil paints and canvases, read a “How to Make a Quilt” tutorial and headed to Joann Fabrics to pick out fabric. Her first quilt was pieced entirely by hand, and as she recalls, “it looked like a five year-old had put it together. But I was really proud that I had made something useful that had the potential to be really beautiful. And I loved the process of making it, so I got a sewing machine and started on my first quilt design. After that, I was totally hooked.” Since then, Preston has honed her skills through a rigorous self-learning process. “I’m completely self-taught as a quilter,” she says, “which feels very free since I don’t have the burden of ‘how things

should be made,' but it also breeds imposter syndrome on a regular basis. I'm always reminding myself that I do know what I'm doing."



When she started [Vacilando Quilting Company](#) in 2015, two years after making her first quilt, Preston didn't consider herself entrepreneurial. Her last two years in business, however, have taught her a lot, and she is adamant about not giving up. "There have been so many times I've wanted to throw in the towel because it felt like things just weren't working or it was too hard or I hadn't made any sales in weeks, sometimes months," she stresses, "but I kept going, got creative, tried some new approaches and am constantly trying to make it work. Because if you quit, then it's just over. And that's completely unsatisfying to me."

Preston's newfound entrepreneurial spirit is no more evident than in her decision to make quilts in an Airstream. The craft of quilting has many steps, from sketching the design to cutting and piecing the fabric to securing and binding all of the layers together. It requires specific tools, experience, and a lot of space to spread out.







In describing her process, Preston says, “Working in such a small space means there’s lots of shuffling. I basically only have one 26” x 36” surface to do everything on, which also doubles as our dinner table, so when I need to iron something after sewing it, I have to put the sewing machine away, take out my tiny tabletop ironing board and iron, set it up and put it away when I’m finished. It can be exasperating and inefficient, but it’s do-able.”

The extra effort of such a small studio is worth it to Preston. She loves living on the road, and generally plans her life out only one month in advance, creating an itinerary for what place they will explore next. Since her husband works full-time as well (remotely for a tech startup, a common industry of those they meet on the road), their weekdays are relatively stationary. They’ll land in an area with internet and cell service, attend to their weekly work and spend their weekends exploring.

“Two weeks in place is ideal,” she says. “We have a full weekend to explore and don’t feel rushed to cram everything into one day. But the best part about the lifestyle is that if you don’t like where you are, you can just move on down the road.”



Preston documents their travels and her inspired quilts on Vacilando Quilting Company's [Instagram account](#), which has led to a steady source of business and networking connections for her. "I don't think I'd have nearly the success I do without Instagram," she says. "It's the perfect tool for putting your work out there, finding other talented creative people, sharing who you are and what your business is about on a regular basis. It gives your customers and followers a behind-the-scenes look at what you normally wouldn't get from just a website or Etsy shop. And getting instant feedback and being able to interact with customers and people in the community really personalizes the whole experience, which I feel is so important." For those starting a creative business, she recommends posting regularly and using relevant hashtags.

Through her adventures, Preston has shaped an identity for [Vacilando Quilting Company](#). Her quilts have a distinct style that translates her travels into simple traditional elements evocative of place and culture, while also conveying the energy of her intrepid spirit. Each design suggests that warmth and belonging are subjective, existing anywhere you find yourself if only you are open to embracing them.



Recently, Preston and John were forced to plant temporary roots with Preston's parents in Dallas while they remodel a newer, larger Airstream. They hope to be on the road again by late 2017, and have no plans of giving up their adventurous lifestyle anytime soon.

"There's still so much to see, and the lifestyle, while not always easy, is just so invigorating," Preston says. "It feels like you're really, truly living and experiencing the world."

Word of mouth was once one of the main sources of business for Preston, but as she grew, so did the many ways she discovered for amplifying her visibility. In addition to social media, she's had a lot of recent success in collaborations and partnerships with like-minded creatives, and with craft shows, such as West Coast Craft. She believes that the key to starting a successful creative business lies in having a clearly defined identity. "Having [a] clear definition of your business makes how you spend your time and the decisions you make much easier," she explains.



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