



*Dawn and Patrick Farrier, owners of The Creation Station,  
in front of their original design "League Night."*

# The Creation Station

*by Ann Logue*

Buellton, Calif., is a very small town. It's not exactly exciting or picturesque either. And yet, across from Sears and right by the Jack in the Box™, is an eclectic quilt shop with a riot of color and display, right down to the pink-haired co-proprietor.

Dawn Farrier didn't choose Buellton; it chose her. When her husband's job relocated the family to Buellton in 1997, she shut down her party business in busy Orange County, packed up the household, and tried to find a way to make friends. She had always been a sewer and had even developed a line of clothing for entertainers who made balloon animals. In Buellton, she took up quilting to keep busy and make friends through the local guild. Through her clothing business, she was in touch with fabric distributors who occasionally had closeouts of quilt cottons. She would buy the material, and then hold sales parties at her house. "I didn't have the budget to buy standard lines," she said. As Buellton didn't have a quilt shop at the time, she found a lot of interested customers, and she made new friends.

As the business grew, Dawn named it The Creation Station and started to vend at quilt shows. She and her husband, Patrick, would take their inventory to different shows in California on weekends, something they still do. Eventually, the business grew enough

*Continued on page 2, see "The Creation Station"*

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*Colorful flowers in front of The Creation Station, housed in a former bowling alley, only hint at the explosive color yet to come inside the store!*

## **an eclectic quilt shop with a crazy ambience — a winning combination for all**

*“The Creation Station,” continued from page 1*

to justify its own space. The current store is located in a former bowling alley. It has 3,800 square feet of retail and office space, with another 2,400 square feet used for classes and retreats. The classroom holds 25 quilters working at tables or up to 100 for lectures and presentations. The space is rented and the landlord owns a tire store across the parking lot. Dawn reported that some customers will have their tires rotated while they are attending a retreat.

Patrick joined the company in 2001. His employer was sold and shut down, leaving him looking for work at the same time that Dawn decided to move the business out of the house and into retail space. At that time, The Creation Station revenues were sufficient to cover the costs of operations, and Dawn needed help with the expansion. Patrick became a partner in the business. “He brought to the business computer skills and knowledge of contracts and forms, while I was the creative force,” Dawn said. Patrick is a self-taught quilter. He started with the book *Kids Start Quilting with Alex Anderson* one weekend when Dawn was at a quilt show and he was working in the store. “I came home from the show, and it was done,” Dawn said. Although he usually works in the store office, he sometimes helps on the sales floor. “He is amazing with color selection.”

The Creation Station still specializes in closeout fabric, but the draw — even at the quilt show booth — is the variety of fabrics and the crazy ambience.

*Continued on page 3, see “The Creation Station”*



*Fabric cuts and trims for embellishment are neatly sorted in wooden display units. Notice the wealth of samples and unique displays hanging from the ceiling.*

*“The Creation Station,” continued from page 2*

### Inside the store

The store mostly carries cotton quilt (and flannel) fabrics pre-cut into one-half-yard and one-yard pieces. It also has some fabric still on the bolt, which can be cut in one-half-yard increments. Most items are closeouts, supplemented with open-line solids. Everything is priced at \$7 per yard. The low-priced, eclectic collection sets the store apart from more traditional quilt shops in the region, but The Creation Station is not a discount outlet. Other products are sold at regular retail price.

People come for the decor as much as the fabric. “There’s so much to look at and so much that’s engaging,” Dawn said. “Even the husbands like it.” Samples are on display, as are the Farriers’ collections of vintage sewing machines, patterns, photographs and lawn sprinklers. Many displays are centered on items that Dawn and Patrick have built from recycled materials that are designed to add interest and inspire customers to put their own ingenuity into their creations. For example, the holiday section is decorated with a Christmas tree made of reclaimed tomato cages tied with strips of green fabric.

In addition to fabric, The Creation Station has a few unique product lines. One is pet screen, a plastic fiberglass mesh material available in colors that is good for purse construction. The store also has patterns by Nancy Ota, a San Diego designer who specializes in the material. Another is a selection of patterns designed by Dawn’s mother for items knitted and crocheted from fabric strips.

Books and patterns are a big seller, and the store has a full line of notions and accessories for quilting and other projects. Dawn said that customers are leery of garment sewing, but they are excited about sewing projects that push them beyond quilting. And The Creation Station promotes that. The Farriers find that it is easier to make and display samples of smaller accessory and home decor items, but the patterns carry the same margins as patterns for king-size quilts. Her investment in supplies is smaller. And, smaller projects help customers work through their stashes faster, which helps generate demand for more fabric. The samples and other finished projects are available for sale.

Because a store in a rural area has plenty of slow periods, Dawn and Patrick keep boxes of projects on hand for the staff to do as they have time during the day. They range from folding flyers to making samples. Each box has a pouch in it with detailed instructions and room for those who work on it to make notes so that the next person can pick it up at the next step. As part of that, Dawn insists that anyone making samples adhere to the pattern instructions, although fabric selection can be altered.

*Continued on page 4, see “The Creation Station”*

*“The Creation Station,” continued from page 3*

## Retreats, classes and shows

One way to get people to come to Buellton is holding retreats. The Creation Station’s brown-bag retreats are held approximately once a month, accommodate 25 sewers, and usually sell out. Attendees bring their own food to share, their own machines and their own projects. They have large tables with plenty of room to work and plenty of time to share ideas. Dawn said that retreat sewers get excited and line up before the doors open at 8:00 a.m., fortified with coffee and treats from the doughnut shop next door.

The Creation Station now offers an annual men’s quilting retreat. While working at the quilt shows, Patrick met a few other men who quilt. One joined the company to help at shows; his ex-wife had taught him to sew. Other men were excited to find that they weren’t the only ones of their kind who liked to quilt. The men’s retreat does not sell out, but Dawn said that there are usually 10 to 12 men who show up and work. The mix includes a fashion designer who likes the switch from garment sewing, and some retired people who like making blankets for their grandchildren. Dawn and Patrick have found that men don’t like taking classes, but do appreciate the opportunity to work on their projects with other men at the retreats.

The Creation Station has one full-time employee in addition to Dawn and Patrick, rounded out with three part-time workers and two folks who help with the quilt shows. Dawn hires outside teachers for classes, which cover such topics as embroidered purses to beginning quilting. A few times a month, the retreat center hosts open sewing days and guild meetings.

For quilt shows, The Creation Station works from a four-booth island that’s bright, shiny, and recognizable. It stocks pre-cut fabrics and patterns, and customers line up to get into it. “We have it down to a science,” Dawn said. They have room in their classroom area for a show mockup when she and Patrick want to experiment with new layouts.

The Creation Station participates in shop hops and organizes one special event, Saddlebag Saturday, held each August. It’s a combination motorcycle rally and quilt show that raises money for the local Meals on Wheels program. The day’s events include lunch served by a local barbecue restaurant, a Texas Hold’em tournament and a special men’s quilt exhibit. Very different groups in the

*Continued on page 5, see “The Creation Station”*

*Top: Look closely and you'll see the notions wall is made up of old ironing boards. Patrick said it is easy to extend by just adding more boards! Center: A custom “shadow box” table holds vintage sewing patterns, tools and notions. Bottom: Patterns in the baby corner are hung on vintage crib mattress springs. An antique crib displays samples and still more patterns.*





*More reuse and recycling in display: four vintage ironing boards form a pattern display "rounder." An old washer and stove complete the kitchen area.*

*"The Creation Station," continued from page 4*

community come together at The Creation Station for the day, and that's what Dawn and Patrick want.

## Getting and keeping customers

Buellton has a population of 4,500. It sits in a region with a population of about 22,000. The nearest large towns are Santa Barbara and Santa Maria, and they are a drive. "My customer base is not nearly enough for my location," Dawn said. She works hard to serve those who drive in for the day or the long weekend, encouraging those making a road trip to have lunch at one of the neighboring restaurants. Buellton is near Solvang, a town settled by Danish immigrants and built in the style of towns in Denmark. It's a popular tourist destination, and the Farriers market to visitors through a scrapbook service that creates books on things to do in the area for the many small hotels in town. They have also built referral relationships with the Quilt Shoppe of Solvang, which sells finished quilts rather than quilting supplies, and with a local yarn store.

Dawn and Patrick believe that staff members need to help customers, even if they walk in for help with a project using fabric purchased elsewhere. After all, The Creation Station is a destination for most customers. "People drive 100 miles to a quilt store that is 'nice' because we will help them," Dawn said. "Yes, we need to pay our rent, but we need to think like a human being and not like a cash register."

Part of the Farriers' philosophy is to welcome every customer who walks through the door, and to thank everyone who leaves even if they don't buy anything. If Dawn recognizes a customer, she asks her to remind her of her name and where she lives. "You can tell the people who don't want to be chatty," she said, and she tells them to just look around. If a customer is new to the store, Dawn will offer a tour to help

her find what she wants among the pre-cut yardage. If she is new to town, Dawn will tell her about the local guild and the store's retreats to help her meet people. After all, that's how she got started herself.

Dawn and Patrick have found that when they lose customers, it's because of life events like a job transfer or illness rather than dissatisfaction with the service at The Creation Station.

## Building a business on reuse and recycling

The Creation Station's philosophy is to promote reuse and repurposing as part of the overall creative process. It goes far beyond the decor. For example, the staff regularly sorts through the scrap bin, kept beneath the cutting table, to find material in saleable proportions. Strips that are six inches wide are rolled, bundled, and sold as "Stash Stix." Narrower strips are packaged for use in fabric knitting and crochet projects. Dawn said that customers love that technique, but they don't want to cut up their own stash and often lack the patience to make strips. Using shop scraps for this meets a customer need, brings in revenue and keeps fabric out of a landfill.

It's a challenge to make money selling new fabrics and materials while promoting the idea of reducing, reusing and recycling. Dawn acknowledges as much. "It's gut-wrenching every time someone tells me that they aren't buying fabric because they are working through their stash," she said. Her sales have shifted more toward books and patterns; at the International Quilt Festival/Long Beach, 30 percent of The Creation Station's sales were patterns and books. She found a distributor that has a one-pattern minimum order, which allows her to stock a wide variety.

Dawn creates patterns for non-quilt sewing projects; she does not like the word "crafts." "My brain works very differently from other people. I see things spatially," she said, so she likes designing in three dimensions. Writing and selling patterns, she said, helps support the creative process and makes it easy for customers to create something wonderful.

And ultimately, that's the goal, no matter what fabric or technique people use, or whether they show at the store or a quilt show booth. "Go with what you know. Use what's you've got," Dawn said. It's a philosophy that has kept her business growing for over a decade.

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