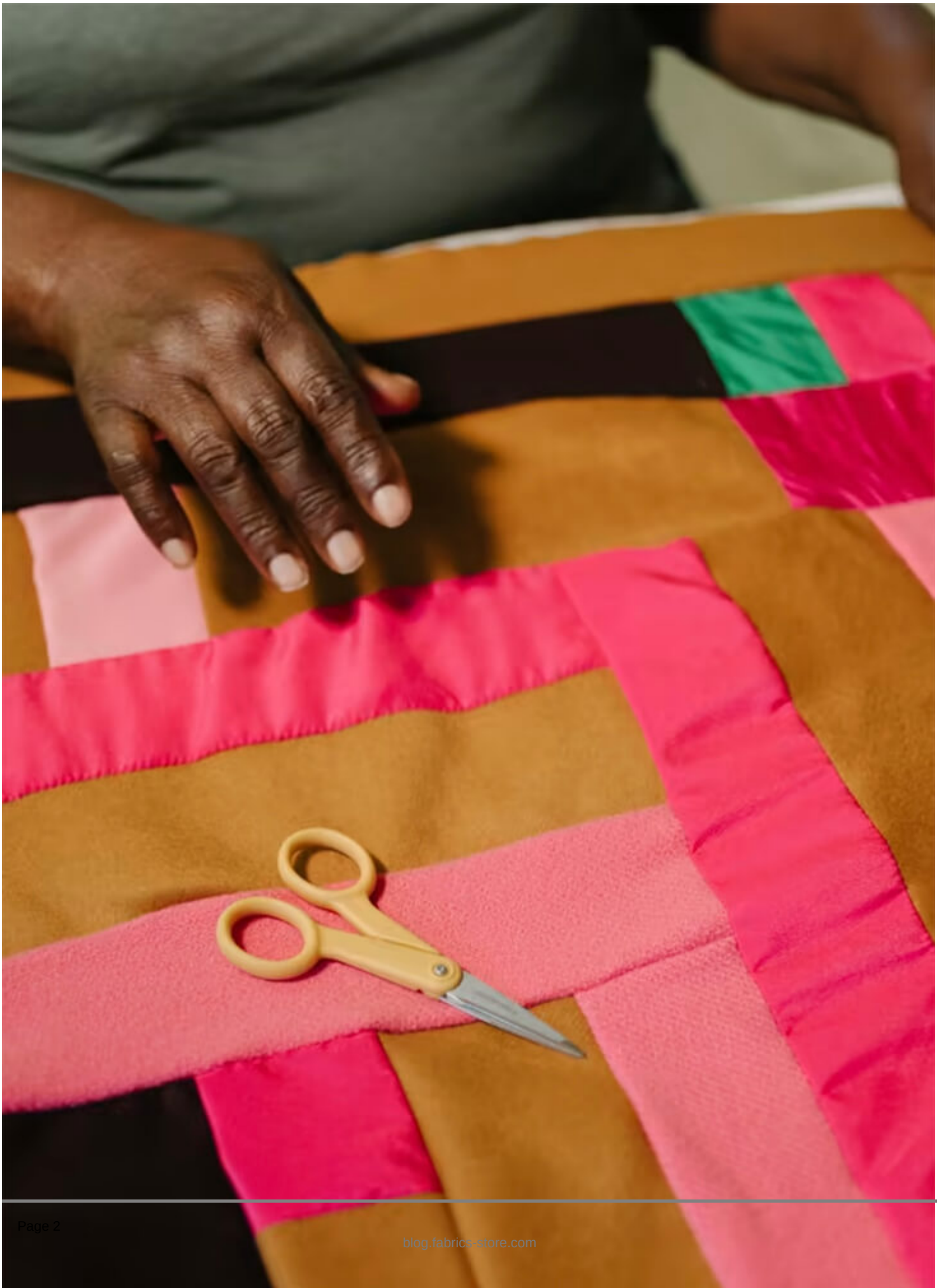
Form Meets Function: Marfa Stance x the Quilters of Gees Bend

Description



A geometric Geeâs Bend quilt pattern

The quilters of Geeâs Bend have achieved worldwide recognition for transforming the act of quilting into an artform, one which they have passed from generation to generation over the past 200 years. Their work is now held in museums worldwide, including the Metropolitan Museum and the Smithsonian. But it is only in recent years, thanks to a non-profit artisan guild called Nest, that these deeply skilled artisans are earning a decent income from their craft. In 2022, Nest initiated what might be the most profitable Geeâs Bend collaboration yet, linking them with British sustainable fashion brand Marfa Stance, which has been steadily growing a reputation for its quilted, buildable garments since 2019. Georgia Dant, founder of Marfa Stance is fascinated by the work of the Geeâs Bend quilters and has relished the chance to collaborate on a unique collection of garments and quilts. She says, âThe quilts are abstract, geometric, modern and unique. They are formed out of a need but they are also art, and I love that juxtaposition of creativity and function.â

Geeâs Bend quilters Francesca Charley (left) and Claudia Pettway Charley

Nest has been playing a significant role in the Geeâs Bend community since 2016, and through their involvement, the quilters have gained greater financial freedom than ever before. Ashia Sheikh Dearwester, leader of Nestâs global and domestic partnerships, says, âTwo of the things we heard from the quilters was they had a lack of market access, and they wanted to test their creativity through brand collaborations.â In recent years many quilters have established their own Esty shops where they can sell their hand-crafted wares direct to buyers. But Nest have also played a significant role in introducing the Geeâs Bend quilters to the larger fashion industry â through them, Geeâs Bend successfully completed collaborations with American fashion designer Greg Lauren and French luxury fashion house Chloe. Working with Marfa Stance in 2022 is the next step towards greater recognition and creative freedom.

Marfa Stance x Geeâs Bend quilt, from $2,500

Marfa Stance gave the Geeâs Bend quilters the bulk of the fabric for their collaborative enterprise, but it was markedly different from what the quilters were used to. Instead of their usual cottons, Marfa Stance provided a series of cashmeres, wools and nylons left over from their production line in Italy. Claudia Pettway Charley, the community manager of Geeâs Bend says, âWeâve never worked with these types of fabrics beforeâ¦ we usually use cottons. The first day we were just busy rubbing and feeling the fabrics, trying to form a relationship with it so it would work right for us.â In the end, quilters integrated elements of their own fabric pieces with the luxury reams, to create a truly unique blend of textures, surfaces and colours.

Cropped Aviator, Unique quilted front panel created by Gees Bend artisan (Â£6,000); Quilted Vest, Unique quilted front panel created by Gees Bend artisan Cassandra Hall (Â£2,250)

38 artisans came together to create the unique, one-off garments for the collaboration, aged from 19 to 86. They created 14 oversize, reversible hand-quilted blankets, 16 jackets with hand-quilted panel inserts and 10 framed hand-stitched mini-quilts, all completed in the Geeâs Bend quiltersâ trademark quirky, brilliantly bold language of geometry. Artisans finished each item in their traditional quilt piecing and sewing techniques, which they then overlaid with Marfa Stanceâs signature âonionâ topstitch. Each quilted item bears the stitched moniker of the maker (or makers) in one corner, a reminder of the many hours of labour that went into making these striking one-off works of art.

Doris Hackett (Â£6,000)

While the Geeâs Bend quilters have a long history of working collaboratively, in recent years they have tended to lean towards working individually on signature pieces. But for the collaboration with Marfa Stance, makers grouped together, sometimes spending an entire week working side-by-side on the same project. Charley notes, âOne of the things Marfa Stance brought back to our remembrance is the times when our grandmothers and great-grandmothers would get together around a quilting frame and work together on a piece.â

Blanket, Doris Mosely And Monica Waller (Â£20,000)

The work they produced went on display at Project C Gallery in LA in October 2022, and is now for sale via Marfa Stance. In order to finance the project, Marfa Stance paid the Geeâs Bend quilters for their work up front. Meanwhile, profits from the enterprise, which are already substantial, will go on to fund a Geeâs Bend community manager, who can continue to encourage similar fruitful partnerships to keep this thriving creative community going for many more generations to come.

CATEGORY

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3. SUSTAINABILITY

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