leisure

Keeping you up to date on your local theatre, music and movies

When threads meet tannins

Quilting and sipping your way to a fresh decoding experience

Kathryn Kimberley

In the small Karoo town of Nieu-Bethesda, where stoep culture runs deep and creativity flows as easily as a good glass of red, an unusual sensory experience is quietly stitching its way into the hearts of art and wine lovers alike.

Quilt and wine pairing is the imaginative brainchild of Antoinette Kriel, president of the SA Quilters Guild and longtime lover of textiles, tradition and innovation.

The concept, now in its third year, fuses fine wine with the art of quilting in a collaboration that has captivated audiences and celebrated artists from across the country.

"The idea came from a cancelled event," Kriel recalled.

A planned quilt and wine pairing at the 2022 National Quilt Festival in Stellenbosch never materialised, but the seed was planted.

"It stuck with me," she said, "so I approached Riëtte Eggink, brand ambassador for Montpellier du Tulbagh, to see if we could bring it to life during the Stoeptasting weekend in Nieu-Bethesda."

Eggink, who already represented Montpellier wines at The Bethesda Guesthouse, saw the potential in pairing her portfolio with the country's top textile artists.

What began as a novel idea has since become an anticipated fixture on the creative calendar.

Each year, six new artists are invited from across SA.

They receive a bottle of wine — selected by Eggink — along with its tasting notes.

Their challenge?

To translate the wine's essence into a textile art piece measuring 90cm x 70cm.

At the event, the finished artworks hang anonymously in a wine cellar while guests sip, swirl and sniff their way through the wines, trying to match each one to its visual interpretation.

"It's such fun watching people debate and decode each piece," Kriel said.

"They're using different senses — taste, smell, sight — but it's all art. There's colour, texture, balance, harmony."

The first quilt-and-wine pairing event took place in 2023.

While met initially with a touch of scepticism, the idea has grown steadily in popularity, with more attendees returning each year.

The 18 pieces created to date were most recently on display at the Outeniqua Quilters Guild Show in George.

Though the 2026 Stoeptasting weekend in Graaff-Reinet is still months away, anticipation is already building.

The six participating artists haven't been invited yet — that happens in November — but if past names are anything to go by, the line-up promises to be impressive.

Previous contributors included renowned fibre artists such as Marilyn Pretorius, Mariss Stevens, Macky Cilliers, Joy Clark and Catherine Knox.

"The diversity of interpretations is what makes the event so rich," Kriel said.

"Some artists use hand-dyeing, some paint with thread, some layer vintage lace or repurpose old fabrics. It's a celebration of both heritage and innovation."

This year's winning quilts also made a surprise appearance at a house in Walmer last month, where the SA Quilters Guild committee gathered for a farewell dinner.

Two committee members — artists themselves — had requested to see the quilts in person, and Kriel and Eggink delivered a mini encore performance, complete with a tasting session.

"It was a lovely surprise," Kriel said.

"Riëtte was even there to give a short lesson on how to taste wine and to share some insight into Montpellier's Méthode Cap Classique. The group loved it!"

As president of the SA Quilters Guild, Kriel wears many hats. Her main role, she explained, was to maintain connections between the guild's various affiliated groups and to support national initiatives that nurture and grow quilt-making as an art form in SA.

Several events still lie ahead in 2025, including regional retreats and the annual Dias Guild Spring Show in Gqeberha during the October school holidays.

That show will feature the SA Quilters Guild's current travelling exhibition — a themed, size-specific collection of quilts that tours the country for 18 months.

Looking ahead, excitement is already building for July 2026 when the National Quilt Festival returns to Gqeberha, with the local Dias Quilters Guild as host.

Kriel's own quilting journey began in 1992, shortly after she moved to St Francis Bay.

Drawn by a love of history and all things vintage, she joined a local quilt group and later the Dias Quilters Guild.

Over the years, she has developed her own distinct voice as a textile artist, often working on multiple pieces simultaneously.

Currently, she's preparing for a fibre art exhibition titled Shapes, set to open at Quilts in the Church in Nieu-Bethesda in December.

Asked about her favourite creation to date, she painstakingly narrowed it down to two — a traditional hand-stitched quilt made for her 25th wedding anniversary, and a scroll-shaped textile artwork for a show called Stories, composed of quilt blocks discovered in a barn.

She said the pieces were both so different, but deeply personal.

In merging wine and quilt art, the event has opened up a multisensory conversation between two distinct worlds.

Whether you're there for the cabernet or the creativity, you're bound to leave with something new stitched into your soul.

QUILT AND SIP: Jenny Hermans with her quilt titled 'Celebrate' on show at a home in Walmer recently. Several events still lie ahead in 2025 Picture: WERNER HILLS