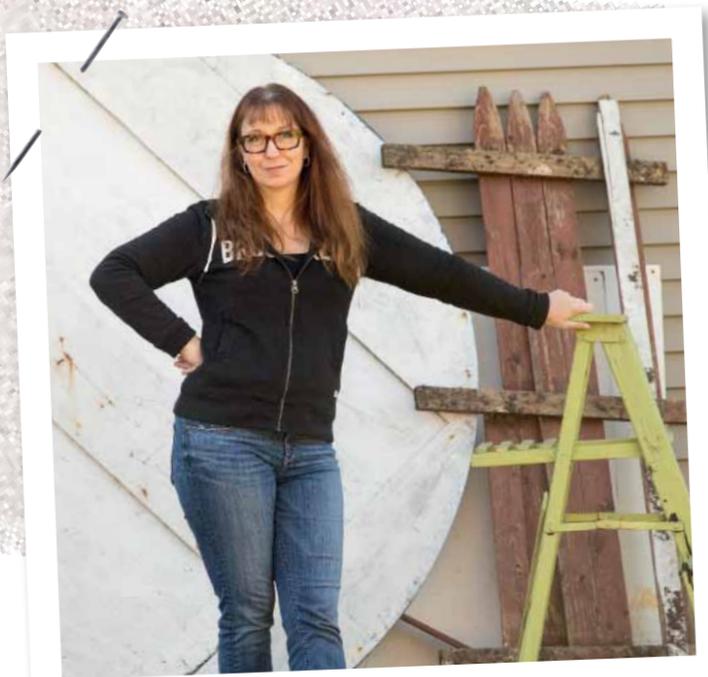


# Selvedge

## DESIGNER EDGE



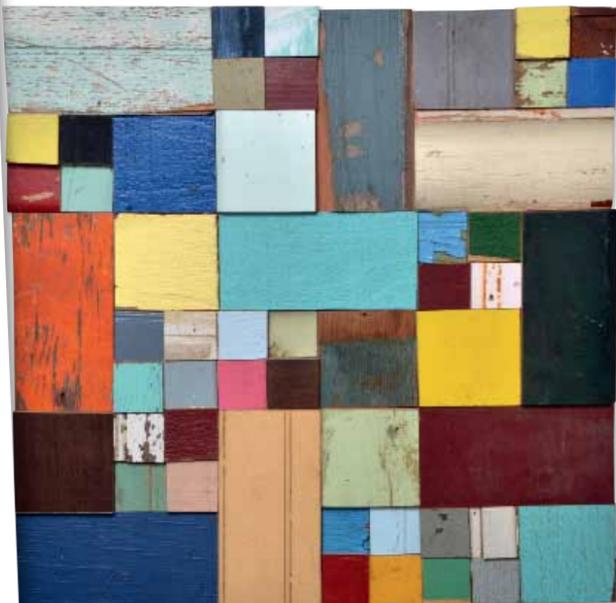
LAURA PETROVICH-CHENEY

Laura Petrovich-Cheney's sculptures are just like patchwork quilts, except she swaps fabric for wood, rotary cutters for power tools and stitches for glue. Using salvaged wood pieces as her raw material, she makes art from what would otherwise end up as landfill.

It all began with a couple of wooden boats. In 2010, a winter nor'easter damaged and tossed vessels onto the shoreline. Laura saw them and couldn't resist their vibrant orange and blue paintwork, so off they went in her pick-up truck. About two years later, she came across a picture of a quilt in a magazine, made in the same colours as those wooden boats that sat in her studio. "It was a really exciting 'aha' moment for me when I realised that I could make a 'quilt' from those boat pieces," she says. "Soon, I was chopping up that wood like it was a yard of fabric."

Laura describes finding those boats as a gift from the universe. "I had no intentions of painting wood or anything like that. I was ready to let the series of timber quilts go when the wood ran out." However, in October 2012, disaster struck. Hurricane Sandy hit the US north-east coast and destroyed much of Laura's New Jersey childhood neighbourhood.

Amongst the rubble, Laura saw an opportunity to preserve the pieces of homes in her wooden quilts and create some beauty from the destruction. "To see so much of your home



destroyed is devastating," she says. "When I was collecting wood after the storm, so many homeowners were curious about my activity. When I explained to them what I did, the homeowners were quite thrilled to know that their home and their memories were not going into landfill."

And so, Laura continues to collect timbers after environmental disasters, including wildfires and tornadoes, to use in her work.

When selecting the wood, she is drawn to colourful, imperfect pieces. The faded and chipped paint, graffiti, nail holes, stickers and even 'For Sale' signs are all cherished features. Laura is often surprised by people's bold paint choices. "Who would have imagined orange kitchen cabinets? A purple and pink dresser? Bright blue window trim?" She never changes the colour or texture of the wood in her finished artworks.

An experienced sewer, Laura chooses timber the same way she does fabric. "The process of selecting, arranging and piecing colour and textures for the wood and fabric quilts is similar – it comes from the heart. I guess I *feel* the colour instead of thinking about it," she says. "The colours of my wood are like the solid colours on fabric. The wood textures mimic the patterns on the cloth. But the timber quilts are different because they have a depth and thickness that undulates."

Working from her garage attached to her Boston home, Laura cuts down her gathered pieces to the shapes and sizes she needs. On a backing board, she draws her design and glues the



wooden shapes on. "I use antique irons to hold the glued pieces in place and to add weight to secure them while they dry. Most woodworkers use clamps, but I like the irons better. It comes from my days as a fashion designer, when I needed weights to keep the fabric in place while cutting," she says. "When I work, I try to keep the process fluid, because nothing is ever perfect and everything needs readjusting."

With every new tool she learns how to use, Laura builds confidence and quilts that are ever more ambitious. "I feel so comfortable with many different saws now – the bandsaw, the scroll saw, the mitre saw. The more proficient I become with the equipment I use, the more I can discover what I can do. That is thrilling!"

**Find out more about Laura Petrovich-Cheney Studio by visiting the artist's website: [www.lauracheney.com](http://www.lauracheney.com) and following on Instagram: @laurapetrovichcheney and Facebook: [www.facebook.com/lpetrovichcheney](https://www.facebook.com/lpetrovichcheney).**

– Janai Velez



Photography: Wayne Hollendonner (quilts) and Dina Kantor (portrait)