

# Craft is the key

From tapestry to paper tole, no artform is off limits for Joyce Ugainis

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Joyce Ugainis has always relied on the deftness of her hands to get by. As the 87-year-old Penrith resident recounts, she's worked with her hands in every job she's had, beginning at 15 with a job packing peanuts.

Joyce, her parents and her brother arrived in Australia from England, after leaving their Yorkshire home in 1947 to settle in Enmore, Sydney, with her paternal grandparents, who had come out before the war.

After moving to Punchbowl, Joyce took on a new job with the quintessentially English soap and perfumery brand, Yardley London. "It was really nice," Joyce says. "I was putting perfume in bottles and then wrapping them up in cartons. We hand-wrapped everything in those days: soaps, lipsticks and all kinds of makeup."

Joyce stayed on at Yardley until she met her husband Johnny and they started a family – raising two children, a boy and a girl, in a house they built in Liverpool. "Everyone said: 'What are you going out into the sticks for?' But look at it now!" she laughs.

Her growing family gave Joyce's hard-working hands a new purpose. "You couldn't buy clothes as cheap as you can now, so I made all the kids' clothes," she says, adding that she taught herself to sew. "Even when the kids went to school, I made my daughter's and her girlfriends' uniforms."

As her children grew older, Joyce continued to work intermittently – by this point for electronics manufacturer Standard Telephones and Cables (STC) in Liverpool. It was around this time that she sought out a creative outlet for her talents. "I've always done a craft," she says. "Even when I was a kid I used to knit."

First, Joyce took up tapestry; then, about 10 years ago, she moved on to paper tole, enrolling in a class to learn the craft. "It was something that was in at the time and I thought: 'I'm going to learn that,'" she says.

While tapestry relies on finely tuned weaving techniques and an eye for colour, Joyce says paper tole requires a different set of skills.

The aim of the craft, which is derived from the 17th century artform decoupage, is to construct »



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CARE CUSTOMER



**PICTURED**

Joyce's paper tole and tapestry pieces are proudly on display in her home.

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realistic three-dimensional pictures by cutting and shaping certain parts of identical two-dimensional prints, and then layering them on top of one another. Nimble fingers are a must, as are attention to detail and precision – not to mention copious amounts of patience.

Joyce explains that the more layers you add, the more difficult and time-consuming the project becomes. After all, you’re not just cutting out each image and gluing them together, waiting for each layer to dry before attempting the next one; you’re also sculpting each cut-out piece to create the perception of depth.

For Joyce, one project could take more than a week to complete. “You buy a picture and then copy it four, five or six times, however many layers you want to use,” she says. “How long it takes really depends on how many bits you’ve got to cut out and stick on.”

Though Joyce no longer practises paper tole, her finished pieces can be found inside the homes of family and friends – and even further afield, with many people having bought her work. She eventually hung up her scissors and glue, replacing craft with line dancing three days a week. Since then she has taken up quilting.

“I got into it a while back, even though I’d always said I’d never do quilting!” Joyce laughs.

“I’ve been off it for a couple of months, but I went through some books yesterday and picked a pattern out. It gives me something to do, rather than watching TV or doing puzzles.”

Having lived alone since her husband died in 1988, Joyce has appreciated the sense of purpose that handiwork has brought to her life. “You’ve got to have something to do and I think that’s why I’ve always done a craft,” she says.

Over the years, Joyce believes her artistic hobbies have worked her mind as much as her creative spirit. “It makes you think, whether it’s about following the pattern or cutting,” she says. “You’ve got to be pretty good with measuring as well; you can’t be a quarter of an inch out; you’ve got to do it right.”

Another pastime Joyce enjoys is rummy, a game she plays each week with her Australian Unity Care Worker. As a Home Care Service customer, Joyce also receives household cleaning support, explaining: “I get breathless even doing small jobs.”

Coupled with regular visits from her children, four grandchildren and four great-grandchildren, Joyce is happy to remain in the villa she’s called home for nearly three decades.

As her family expands, her craftsmanship continues to be put to good use. Her quilts will be cherished by her descendants for years to come. ●