

Sewing in Seattle

Adventures at the Slipcover Summit

When Karen Erickson called to tell me I had been awarded a scholarship to attend the annual Slipcover Summit, I was positively giddy. I'm sure she wondered exactly how blonde this rookie must be. As soon as I hung up the phone, I had to share the news with everyone I knew. I was going to Seattle! I was going to take classes, learn new techniques, meet famous people!

Most of my friends and family were too gracious to tell me I was babbling like an idiot. They just nodded and smiled and commented vaguely, "How exciting..."

But it WAS exciting, to me. I have been sewing slipcovers for several years, but I've never had the opportunity to take a class before. And now I would have a whole week to soak up all kinds of information. I registered for classes on entrepreneurship, double-on-half, and the measurement method of slipcover construction. I bought my plane ticket, sent in my roomie request, and waited impatiently for June.

When the time finally came for the Summit, I was fortunate to have two great roommates who patiently endured my endless chatter, brought on by too little sleep, too much caffeine, and lots of anticipation. I found that they had attended the Summit the year before and had enjoyed it so much that they returned this year. Since we hailed from Canada, Chicago, and Kentucky, we had a good time deciphering one another's accents. I still can't believe they don't say "cattywampus" in Canada.

On Tuesday, the "day before," I took Claudia Buchanan's class on running a slipcover business. She shared a wealth of information about everything from accounting to marketing. The most beneficial part of the class was the section on "Social Networking." I wasn't even sure what that meant, but by the end of the day I was determined to go home and learn how to use Twitter and Plaxo. At lunch, Dede O'Hair shared some amazing ideas for buttons. I didn't even know some of those buttons existed.

Wednesday was our first "official" day of the Summit. Bernice King taught my double-on-half class and was patient when my enthusiasm outstretched my attention to her directions. I won't say that first slipcover turned out exactly right, but I learned so much from my mistakes. Bernice also shared some valuable pointers for boxed cushions and zipper panels. Those tips alone were worth the trip!

On Thursday I took the most challenging of my classes: Angie Knowles' measurement technique. I knew this one might be beyond me, but I was desperate to see Angie in action. I was surprised to find similarities to drapery pattern-drafting classes I had taken in the past. In the end, the class wasn't as difficult as I had imagined. The best part was Angie's skirting technique—a huge time-saver.

On Friday I did some shopping. All of the instructors had brought workroom supplies, videos, and books to share. I was especially excited to get the pricing survey. What a great resource! After lunch on Friday, I headed into downtown Seattle, dragging my duck-taped suitcase, looking for all the world like the tourist I was. Still, this was my first visit to Seattle, and it seemed a shame not to see some of the city. By the time I caught my redeye flight back to Louisville, I was exhausted, but very glad I came.

Once home, I tried to recount all the neat techniques, new friends, and valuable resources to my family, only to encounter that glazed look again. I realized no number of photos of Angie's hands could quite describe the experience. So at the next meeting of my local workroom association, I didn't even break out the camera. I just told everyone I saw, "You've GOT to go next year!"

With the slower economy and lagging housing market, many people in my area are choosing to renovate what they have instead of buying something new. This means there is more demand than ever for custom slipcovers. And even among my experienced workroom colleagues, very few have made slipcovers. I think there is enough business out there for all of us, and education in various techniques makes us all look better. So look out, Slipcover Summit—the Kentucky invasion has begun! And next year, we'll teach you the proper way to say "Y'all."