

At our recent ASI Show in San Diego, I met comedian Wayne Brady (he said he liked my shoes) and watched him perform an hour of improv. When I say it was amazing to watch the man work, I mean really amazing: To open, he asked the audience for a list of random words (seriously: oatmeal, bugs, dog poo, etc.) and then sang a coherent and hysterical song using all the words. Brady is what you'd call an innovator, someone who has a spark (a talent, an idea or a dream) and then makes it live and breathe.

Speaking of innovation (and lots of business sense), the gorgeous reverse appliqué tiger on lush leather on this month's cover is only 5,557 stitches. Say what? Dreamed up and decorated by Erica Young, co-owner with her husband Danny of Los Angeles-based DLT Designs and Production, this large (12-inch-by-8-inch) jacketback design was embroidered and laser cut on a flat-bed embroidery machine in one continuous process.

With decorators looking to turn out beautiful, retail-inspired work, but still be productive, more are turning to specialty appliqué created by lasers to reduce stitches. In the tiger example, the laser-cut portions of the reverse appliqué equal about 3,500 stitches (again, consider that this design, if embroidered, would have been almost 10,000 stitches). In addition to adding appliqué to customers' designs, smaller embroidery shops now can bring the beauty of laser-guided work into their shops by using a singlehead integrated laser. "This small machine is mounted to the first needle of a singlehead embroidery machine," says Ed Balady, president of Bito USA (one of the company's Proel LaserBridges was used to create the cover design). "Essentially the laser follows the machine head's movement to dictate where to cut, so the cut lines are digitized much the same as the embroidery stitches."

In this issue, we've got some great tools to help you get on the road to serious decoration innovation: Get an introduction to affordable laser technology (page 36), check out six types of specialty appliqué (page 38), and peruse our big software guide, where users review 18 decoration-specific packages, including for laser art (page 39). Plus, don't miss Staff Writer Christopher Ruvo's article, "Top Trailblazers," where he profiles seven innovative industry companies that are turning out some amazing decoration.

According to Balady, "Laser technology is still so new, so designers have only begun to scratch the surface of all its possibilities. We'll be seeing cutting-edge innovation and techniques being created with embroidery lasers." So, start innovating!



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We Asked You ...

What's the most innovative way you've found a new client?



Don Stover, SEW YOUUnique Custom Embroidery, Newcastle, WY; sewy@rtconnect.net

"While attending a local trade association meeting, I wore my name badge upside down. It wasn't long before someone approached me to inform me of this 'error.' After I explained that it was intentional 'so I could meet you,' she invited me to join her and her husband at their table. They've been customers and friends since 1997."



Michael Savoia, Villa Savoia Inc., West Hollywood, CA; villasavoiainc@gmail.com

"Social media, and remember that each of us uses social media in our own way. I have to say that Facebook has really helped me establish relationships across the country with my core clientele, interior designers. The relationships I've developed as a result of this unique, free tool are enhancing my business and also creating friendships with top professionals who I've admired for many, many years. Also, I feel like social media is so demonized by so many in our industry - but if you establish clear goals and stay away from distraction, the benefits can be huge both personally as well as professionally."

Gayle Zreljak, founder and president,

EnMart; www.myenmart.com: "The best way to find new clients through social media is to approach it with the idea of becoming part of a community, not just as a new venue where you can sell your products or services. People who participate in social media are bombarded all the time with messages that try to sell them something. The messages that succeed in selling are the ones that come from people who are truly members of the social media community. To be a member you have to participate, comment on other people's comments, help spread the word about other businesses' sales and put out content that's useful and helpful. If you do all that, you can also make the occasional comment that promotes your product or your business, and you'll find other members of the community will be as willing to help you spread the word as you were to help them."