

# Guys and Dolls, Jen Style

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I began making toys and dolls when I was still a kid in school, at a time when I was young enough to still be playing with them myself. My sensibility as a toy designer was thus formed early, and in that formative period, playability was a key constraint. That meant, among other things, dolls who could be dressed and undressed.

I no longer have the very first doll I ever made. I was 9, and the doll was a simple design, but she had a full wardrobe of removable clothes. (She was very like the one at right, though this one is a later recreation).



The little Angel and Witch are basically the same doll; only the details are different. The dresses and pantaloons are identical except for colouring and trims. (The Witch's colouring was rather obviously influenced by the Wicked Witch of the West). I love the little Witch's Cat. True to my origins, the clothing is removable.

Nowadays, I think I'd stitch the Angel's wings on the embroidery machine, but at the time I was designing this pair, I didn't have that option, so I went with a simple shape trimmed with the same gold rickrack as the dress.

Gwen is an old-fashioned rag doll, 24" tall, with peasant-style outfit, pantaloons, and kerchief. By the time she came along, I had begun publishing my designs in magazines, and I was intent on creating patterns that others could stitch successfully. The Gwen doll pattern is one of these: relatively simple so that she could be reproduced by average sewists with only moderate experience in toymaking.



The Hoser is another such pattern. He's very much a product of his time (the 1980s), inspired by Dave Thomas and Rick Moranis's SCTV sketches featuring Bob and Doug MacKenzie. Like them, the Hoser wears jeans, work boots, t-shirt and plaid shirt, and a toque.

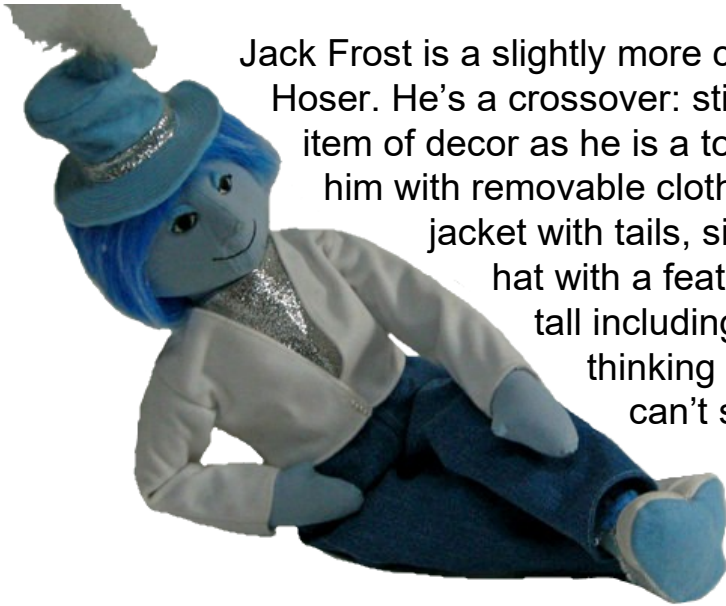


I was at this time still designing toys as playthings for kids; I hadn't yet really begun to think about my dolls as an art form, though that sensibility was beginning to emerge in some of the dolls from my heyday.

Though they are viable as playthings, these Santas are as much decor

items as they are toys. I still have mine, and keep them as Christmas decorations, bringing them out for display at the holidays.





Jack Frost is a slightly more complex design than Gwen or the Hoser. He's a crossover: still playable, but as much an item of decor as he is a toy. Nevertheless, I still provided him with removable clothes, including jeans, white velvet jacket with tails, silver sneakers, and crushed top hat with a feather plume. He stands about 27" tall including the hat, but because I was still thinking of him as a kind of rag doll, he can't stand up without a doll stand.

The Handsome Devil literalizes an old saying. He's made from the same base pattern as Jack Frost, but he wears a completely different outfit. In keeping with my roots, his clothing is also removable, though like Jack he's more of a decor piece than a plaything.



I don't make so many dolls or toys anymore; when I was still working, the demands of my academic career made it difficult to find time for this absorbing hobby. And since I retired, I've been spending more time on the computer than in the sewing room, thanks to the website and the embroidery.

Now that I'm embarking on my second retirement by making the embroidery site more self-sufficient, perhaps I'll find time to return to my toymaking roots.

If so, I think I'd be tempted to pursue a new approach, treating my creations not so much as playthings, but more fully as textile art. If I can do that, I think it will open up a whole new wealth of creativity. Now there's a thought to really retire on!