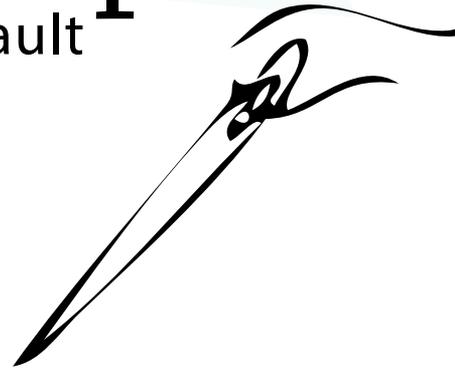
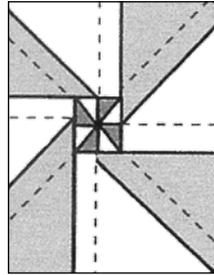


# Elaine's Tech Tips™

Quilting with Elaine Theriault



all you need to know about

NEEDLES AND THREADS

$\frac{1}{4}$ " SEAM ALLOWANCE

ROTARY CUTTING

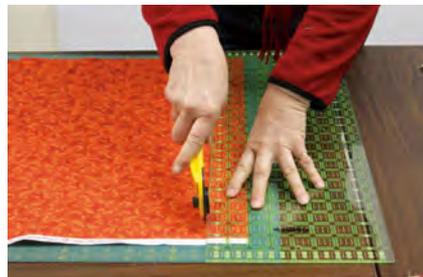
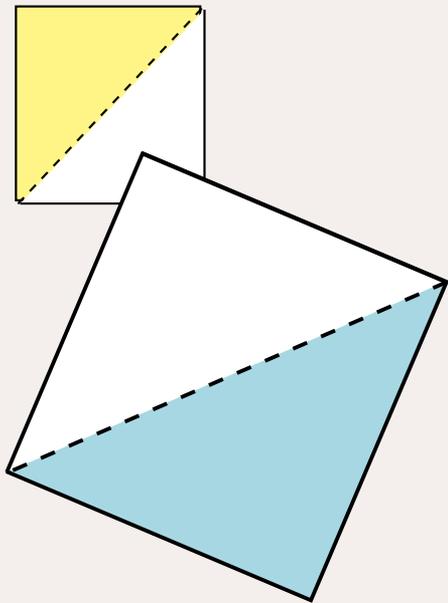
PRESSING

HALF SQUARE TRIANGLES

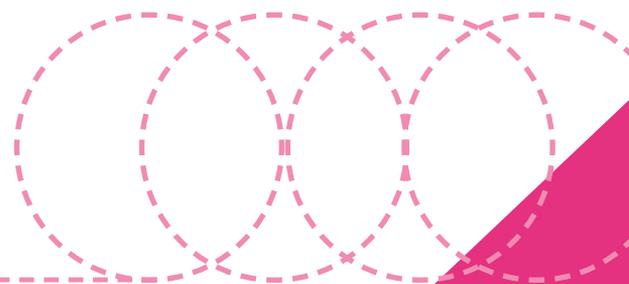
QUILT LABELS

DE-CLUTTERING YOUR STUDIO

PASSION FOR PURPLE



 **QuiltSocial** 'essentials' edition





# forward

Elaine made her first quilt at the tender age of 13. The urge to quilt resurfaced when her daughter moved from a crib. Since then she has been teaching several days a week, making quilts on commission and quilts for others on the long-arm.

In between quilts and classes, she's managed to put to paper her vast quilting knowledge and experiences in a collection of quilting technical tips, hence, Elaine's Tech Tips.

First published in the quilting chapter of *A Needle Pulling Thread* magazine, now collected in this special book for quick reference. Learning in detail about such things as needles, threads, and pressing, may seem redundant, but Elaine describes in detail the importance to know quilting tools and skills necessary to produce fine quilts, whether or not one is to become a professional quilter. Learning it correctly from the start is Elaine's goal for every student.

Elaine's idea of technical tips goes even beyond the skills required to produce fine quilting, reaching into topics that touch the quilter's environment, such as valuable organizing tips for a quilter's studio or proper behaviour in a quilting classroom. Elaine has shared it all, from the small  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance to quilting with passion.

In this book, are the first 7 tips to start with, and 1 project idea to get you inspired by stash and colour to produce a quilt you'll be passionate about.

Elaine is one of the most knowledgeable quilters I know, and most certainly one of the most **passionate**.

Carla A. Canonico  
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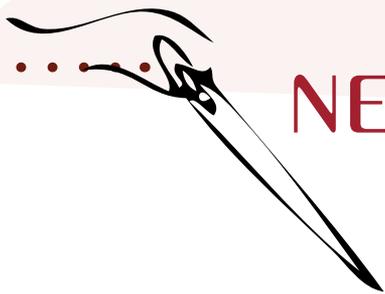
# Elaine's Tech Tips™

Quilting with Elaine Theriault

 *social* 'essentials' edition

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# NEEDLES & Threads

**A** lot of time, care and money go into choosing fabrics for a new project. Equal care should be given to choosing the right needles and thread for assembling and quilting the project. An incorrect combination may result in frustration from broken or shredded threads and a project that doesn't look its best. While the sewing machine is often blamed, more than likely it is an incorrect combination of needle and thread that is causing the problem. Here are some of the key points to watch for next time you are having issues with your piecing or quilting.

There are two things to consider when purchasing needles – the type of needle and the size. While there are many different types and sizes of needles these are the basic ones that are used for piecing, appliqué and/or quilting.

## needle types

**Universal needles** – This is a great, general purpose needle that can be used for piecing and quilting.

**Microtext Sharp** – The point is very thin and very sharp which makes it a great needle for top stitching, precision piecing and quilting.

**Topstitch** – These needles have a large eye and can accommodate thicker threads. Used for topstitching and quilting.

**Metallica** – The eye and the groove in the back of the needle are larger to accommodate metallic threads.

**Quilting** – The point is specially designed to allow easy penetration of the quilting layer which will help decrease skipped stitches.

**Denim/Jeans** – The blade (shaft) of this needle is very strong and there is very little flex on the needle which can help reduce needle breakage and skipped stitches. It's great for making rag quilts, topstitching and quilting.



*Keep your needles organized in a box, together with a screwdriver.*

## needle sizes

(The smaller the number on the package, the smaller the needle)

- 60/8** – use with monofilament, silk or lightweight bobbin threads for appliqué or quilting
- 70/10** – use with lighter weight threads for appliqué, piecing and quilting
- 80/12** – use with regular piecing thread, for appliqué, piecing or quilting
- 90/14** – use with heavier threads for topstitching, appliqué, quilting
- 100/16** – use for heavier threads for topstitching, appliqué, quilting



## Different needle sizes.

Some tips to help get the most of your needles:

- Buy quality needles.
- Make sure you are using a brand name that is appropriate for your sewing machine.
- Needles dull quickly. Therefore you must change the needle often. How often? Approximately every 8 hours of sewing. How does one estimate 8 hours of sewing? Prewind 4 bobbins and when they are empty – change the needle. This would also be a good time to clean the lint out of the bobbin area of the sewing machine.
- If you run over a pin, change the needle. The needle will likely have developed a burr which can snag your fabric and cause damage. The needle may even be bent ever so slightly from hitting a pin and will not sew a proper stitch.
- To dispose of your needles in a safe way use a small container like a film canister or pill bottle. Keep the container until it's full. Then tape the cap shut and dispose of the container.

- Keep all your sewing machine needles in one box, along with a screw driver (needed to change the needle) and the disposal container. When you do need to change the needle, there will be no excuse for not finding the right tool.
- Make sure you are using the right needle for the right job. Evaluate the type of the fabric you are using and the thickness (weight) of thread – it doesn't make sense to use a fine needle on denim – the needle will simply bend and break. On the other hand, you don't want to be using a 100/16 for piecing with regular 50 weight thread. The needle is simply too big for the job.
- It is possible to interchange the needles and their original purpose (yes – you can quilt with the 60/8), but you must be careful of drag on the quilt top or the needle will flex and result in broken or bent needles.
- Slow down! Sometimes there is no other way than reduce speed to prevent shredding or breakage on some of the specialty threads.



*Different types of needles are available for different needs and thread weights.*

While it is possible to use the universal or Microtext Sharp for most everything you do, it's important to be aware of the other needles and to change to the specialty needles when you have problems. Sometimes changing to the next size larger needle (of the same type) will solve the problem. Shredding mostly occurs when the hole punched by the needle is too small for the thread and the friction this creates will cause the thread to shred.

To keep things simple, I mostly use a Microtext Sharp 80/12 for all my piecing and quilting. Should I run into problems like thread breakage or shredding, then I change to a more appropriate needle type and size. I am more apt to be concerned with the size of the needle than the type of needle.

### Thread Quality

Thread quality significantly impacts the quality of the finished product. Ensure that you are using quality threads for every aspect of the project. The “three spools for \$1.00” deal is not a good purchase and may end up in costly repairs to your sewing machine or repairs to the project.



*A variety of thread weights.*

### Thread Weight

Thread weight is an indication of the size of the thread. The larger the number, the finer the thread. This number is indicated on the spool and may or may not also indicate how many ply the thread is made of. If you see 50/3 on a spool, this means the thread is a 50 weight 3-ply thread. A 50/3 is a stronger thread than 50/2 ply thread and thus better for construction. Use the 50/2 for decorative purposes.

### Thread for piecing

Choose a 50/3 ply thread for all your piecing. Do not use Hand Quilting thread in the sewing machine. There is a special coating on this thread which can cause issues with the tension on the sewing machine. Do not use thread which is labeled Machine Quilting for piecing. This is a thicker thread meant for QUILTING, not piecing.

My preference is to match the type of thread to the type of fabric in the quilt. If the quilt is made of cotton fabrics, then I use cotton thread for the construction. If the fabric in the quilt is mixed, then I can use polyester thread. To keep things simple – I only purchase cotton thread since most of my projects are made with cotton fabrics.

### Colour of Threads

While we might buy different colours of thread for every project when we sew clothing, this is not necessary for quilting. If the tension of the machine is properly set, the stitches will not show from the front and therefore the colour of thread will not matter. You should be able to piece a dark quilt with light thread and no one will be the wiser. My preference is to use a neutral colour, light grey or beige for all my piecing. Using one colour also allows you to buy larger, more economical spools of thread. A word of caution – make sure you and your machine like the type of thread before you make an investment in that brand/colour.

The exception to this one colour for all projects is a white quilt. The beiges and greys will shadow through the white so I will choose a white thread for a white project.

## Thread for quilting

You can quilt your quilt with the same thread that you pieced the quilt with if you choose, or use thick threads, thin threads, metallic threads, invisible, nylon, rayon – the choices are endless. However what you choose should be based on the style of quilting, the skill of the quilter, and the desired effect. These factors all influence the thread type and weight. Cost can also be a factor as some of the more decorative threads are significantly more expensive than others.

Here are a few quick guidelines on styles of quilting and thread to use for each:

- **Stitch in the ditch:** use a lightweight thread such as monofilament (available in nylon or polyester), silk or bobbin threads (top and bobbin) to make the stitches disappear.
- **Feathers, micro stippling or any place where you will have to retrace your quilting stitches:** use the same type of threads as for **Stitch in the ditch**.
- **Quilting that will blend in with the quilt:** use medium weight threads that match the fabric will conceal a lot of sins for the beginner. Variegated threads that change colour often are also good for concealing the quilting stitches.
- **Quilting that is meant to show up:** use medium weight threads in contrasting colours or heavier weight threads.

- Always stitch a sample before you start your project to work out the tension, thread colour and type, and ensure you have no shredding or breaking issues.

### *Does the bobbin thread need to match the top thread in type and size?*

No. It's quite common to use a lighter weight in the bobbin than the top thread. One reason is to reduce bulk in seams, particularly in appliqué such as satin stitch or other decorative stitching. For piecing, use a similar weight in the top and bottom. You can also mix thread type (cotton on top, poly in the bobbin for instance). If you are going to use heavier threads in the bobbin, the purchase of a second bobbin case which allows you to play with the bobbin tension would be a wise investment. Just be sure to mark which bobbin case is which to avoid problems.

### **Some pitfalls to watch out for**

- **Vertical versus horizontal spool position:** Most sewing machines come with both vertical and horizontal spool holders. The majority of thread types work well in either position. Metallic thread, however, requires that the spool be placed in a vertical position with the thread coming off the spool in a counter clockwise direction. This ensures there is no twisting of the thread, which can cause the thread to stretch and break. If you don't have a vertical spool holder, you can substitute by purchasing a thread stand. If you

purchase the large cones of thread, you will need to purchase a thread stand. If you are having problems with your spool in one position, try it in the other. Also try the thread in a counter clockwise or clockwise direction to see which works best for your machine.

- Watch how the spool is placed on the spool holder. Make sure there are no rough edges on the spool. It's very common for the thread to get caught in the small slit in the spool end which then tightens up the thread and usually ends up with a broken needle.
- Thread, especially when we are quilting has a tendency to jump out of the take up lever on your sewing machine. If the machine is not stitching properly then unthread both the bobbin and the top and rethread them both.
- Listen to your sewing machine. The second you hear a different sound – stop. Look at the spool of thread – is the thread coming into the machine caught somewhere? Fix that and continue on.
- I've also found that my sewing machine does not like certain brands of thread. If you are having difficulty with a particular thread, try a different thread and even a completely different brand to see if that improves the situation.



*Piecing a dark quilt with light thread allows you to see your work.*



*Light coloured stitches do not show from the front.*

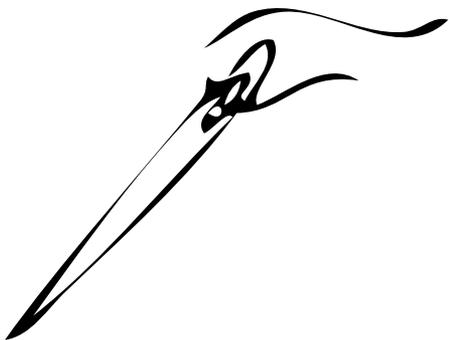
### Tension

The tension on most sewing machines is factory set for 40 or 50 weight thread. Even if your machine has auto-tension on it, you should learn how to override this feature and set the tension for the thread type you are using. For instance, using monofilament may require loosening the top tension to prevent the monofilament from stretching. If you are using a heavier thread, the tension will likely have to be loosened as well, otherwise the tight squeeze through the tension disks causes the thread to flatten and shred as it hits the eye of the needle. A simple top tension adjustment can often solve a multitude of problems. Remember the lower the number on the tension dial, the looser the tension, the higher the number, the tighter the tensions.

Watch the tension for piecing as well. Many people believe that if their machine comes with auto-tension that they don't have to worry. This is not true. Check from time to time that your tension on your piecing stitch is solid. The stitching on the top and bobbin should be smooth, not bumpy.

Ensure the bobbin thread is seated properly in the bobbin tension disk. If not, this can cause all sorts of problems whether you are quilting or piecing.

Whatever your project, spend some time choosing the thread and needles that you will use and adjust the tension accordingly. Making a sample or two can be a huge time saver (no ripping to do) and will ensure that your project ends up well constructed and beautiful. ✂



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# 1/4" Seam Allowance

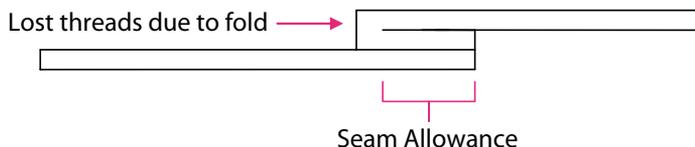
The standard seam allowance (SA) for piecing quilts is 1/4". If you are having trouble making your points/seams match or your blocks don't end up the right size, it is likely that your SA is not accurate. When sewing a simple four patch, any variances in the SA is not that apparent because there are only 3 seams in the entire block, but imagine what would happen with a complex block that has many seams. Each time you sew a seam, the variance multiplies. Even a small variance of 1/16" can cause big problems. Take that 1/16" and multiply it by 8 and all of a sudden, your block is too small or too big by 1/2". It will be very difficult to match points and seams, especially if you are sewing a simple block to a complex block.

Yes – you have a 1/4" foot and therefore all your problems are solved. If only it were that easy. Some sewing machine manufacturers have designed their feet to give us an EXACT 1/4" seam allowance and others have allowed a scant 1/4". Take a look at these FOUR different 1/4" feet by the same manufacturer.



## What does a scant 1/4" mean?

Literally you should be sewing a slightly smaller seam than 1/4". If you look at the exaggerated side view of a pressed seam below, you can see that several threads are lost in the fold. The scant 1/4" seam allowance offsets these lost threads.



While the seam allowance looks too small at a scant 1/4" seam allowance, if you measure from the front, the piece will be the right size.

If using the 1/4" foot for your sewing machine does not guarantee scant seams, what should you do? I recommend that everyone do the following exercise to determine the appropriate fabric placement for your machine.

## The Test

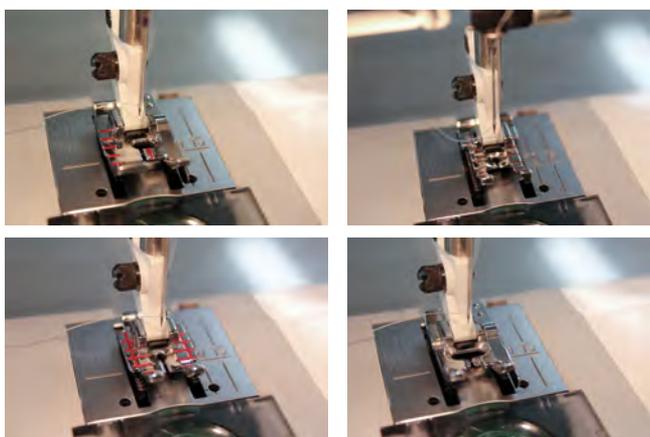
Cut 3 strips of fabric 1 1/2" by 6" (width is more important than length here). Sew them together side by side with what you think is your normal (scant) 1/4" SA. It doesn't matter which way you press your seams, but press them as you would normally. Place your ruler on the right side of the three strips. The resulting block should measure 3 1/2" wide and the centre strip should measure 1". If the block is too narrow, this means that your SA is too big. If the piece measures more than 3 1/2", it means that your SA is too small. Adjust the SA accordingly and make the sample again.



## How to make a guide for the 1/4" SA

There are many ways to provide a guide for the 1/4" SA. The easiest is the 1/4" foot with the flange on the right hand side. You need to test whether you can butt your fabric right up to the flange or whether you need to sew with the edge of the fabric 2 thread widths to the left of the flange. If you prefer to sew with your fabric against the flange and you can move your needle right or left, play with the needle position until you are able to sew with your fabric butted to the flange and still get a scant 1/4" SA. Make sure you record this setting and use it for all future sewing where a scant 1/4" is required. This means you may end up not using the built-in setting for the 1/4" on your machine.

You can also get a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " foot where the right hand side of the foot is a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the needle and you line up your fabric with this edge. *Caution here* – make sure that the foot is actually lined up with the feed dogs below. Often the feed dogs are wider than these narrow feet and the foot has reduced contact with the feed dogs. This will cause your fabric to shift and will not result in an accurate, consistent SA. See the photos below to see how much or how little the feed dogs are covered by these four feet shown earlier.



If you do not have a  $\frac{1}{4}$ " foot, you may place a marker on the throat plate of your sewing machine to indicate the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " SA. You may use a ruler to find the quarter inch, but I find that a sheet of  $\frac{1}{4}$ " graph paper works better. Simply insert the needle into the paper, lining it up with one of the lines. Then line up your marker just to the left of the next line on the graph paper so the marker is sitting a scant  $\frac{1}{4}$ " away from the needle. Use a small enough piece of graph paper, so you can see the  $\frac{1}{4}$ " line, but still allows you to place the marker on the throat plate.

Things that can be used as a marker include tape, a marking pen, or a sticky note. Other items include the moleskin products (for foot care). This has an adhesive on one side, yet is thick, so you can butt your fabric up against it, which may be easier than just following a line as with the tape. Putting tape on the throat plate can be cumbersome for those sewing machine models with the bobbin case opening on top. If you are looking for a more elegant marker, a new product called a Tacky Seam Guide can be adhered to the throat plate.

There are also magnetic sewing guides that you place on the throat plate in the appropriate spot. Use the graph paper to line it up. Please check with your sewing machine dealer before using this guide, as some of the newer electronic machines do not react well with magnets.

Even the thickness of thread that you use to sew with can affect the SA. If you change to a new brand – you should recheck your SA. Some threads are thinner than others and can cause a variance in the number of threads lost when the SA is pressed to one side.

While it is important to have  $\frac{1}{4}$ " SA – it is equally important to have a consistent SA. Make sure that you start and end the seam with  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance and keep it consistent throughout. Look at these two examples – see the difference – look at the beginning, the middle and the end of each. You will get better results in your blocks with consistency. I use a stiletto (quilter's awl) to ensure consistency with my seams. Never take your hands off your fabric – that is a disaster waiting to happen.

Take a few minutes and get to know what feet you have. Cut some scraps of fabric and play around with the seam allowances. Should you butt your fabric right to the edge or should you shift it to the left of the foot/flange a bit? Can your needle position be moved to accommodate for the foot? Many consider it a waste of time to test seam allowances and a hassle to search out a proper foot. However if you are looking for better results in your piecing then it is critical to take the time. You will be very happy that you did! ❄️



# Rotary Cutting

The rotary cutter was introduced to the quilt world by the Olfa® Corporation in 1979 and it didn't take long for quilters to adopt this revolutionary cutting tool. Proper care and use of this tool is important to ensure accuracy and to prevent accidents as the blade is razor sharp.

Over the years a number of different styles have emerged, some are strictly cosmetic – a different handle colour, while others are specifically right or left handed, some have built in safety features and let's not forget the ergonomic handles for standing or sitting! A comfortable grip on the rotary cutter is essential. *If possible* try a few different brands and styles until you find one that works best for you. *Photo 1.*



The cutters range from 18mm to 60mm. Here is a listing of the sizes and what they were intended to be used for:

- Ultra Small (18mm): patterns with curves, appliqué, trimming seams
- Small (28mm): templates, curved seams, trimming seams, 1-2 layers of fabric
- Medium (45mm): 1-4 layers of fabric (this is the most common size)

- Large (60mm): trimming quilts in preparation for binding, multiple layers of fabric (maximum 8), batting

The quality of some of the no-name cutters is sketchy. Since this is an *essential* tool for quilting, it is highly recommended that you buy a *name brand*. Don't go by the colour of the handle – look at the brand name. If the cutter doesn't work properly you will be frustrated by its lack of functionality and the decrease in accuracy.

## care and storage

- DO NOT run over pins or other metal objects – this will put a nick in the blade which results in that frustrating one thread that doesn't get cut. Clear your cutting mat before you cut.
- Take the cutter apart periodically and clean the lint from around the centre screw and on the front and back of the blade.
- REPLACE the blade when it is dull or has a nick. You will wish you had replaced it sooner. How do you know it is dull? When you have to start putting a LOT of pressure on the blade to cut – the blade is likely dull.
- Make or buy a carrying case JUST for the rotary cutter. This will protect the blade from nicks and prevent your fabric or other supplies from getting accidentally cut if the blade opens in transit. *Photo 2*



- Make sure the screw that holds the blade to the handle is NOT too tight. The blade should rotate easily. Too many people have the screw so tight, the blade is dragging through the fabric and not cutting properly and too much pressure is required to make a cut.

## safety

- *Always* close the rotary cutter when you are not using it. If you have pets, children or anyone else for that matter and even for your own safety – the cutter can fall off the table or you can accidentally grab it and if the blade is open – you or someone else can suffer a nasty cut.

## tips for successful rotary cutting

- If you are right handed, *always* cut with the *excess* fabric to your right. If you are left handed, cut with the *excess* fabric to your left.
- Always cut on the appropriate side of the ruler – if you are right handed – cut only on the right hand side of the ruler, left handed – cut on the left side of the ruler.
- Always cut yardage with the fold close to your body rather than away from your body, *never* the selvedge.
- Always square up the fabric before cutting your strips. You need a 90 degree angle with the edge of the fabric and the fold.
- Cut strips first, then sub cut in squares, rectangles or other shapes.
- Try to fold the fabric only once (if possible). The more folds, the more chances of having strips that resemble a **W** or a **V**.

### squaring up the end of the yardage

There are several ways to square up the edge, but this is the most versatile. It requires TWO rulers, one long ruler [24"] and one other ruler or square.

- Position the fabric on the table (with the premise of cutting the fabric right handed) with the excess fabric on the right hand side and the fold is toward you. *Photo 3*



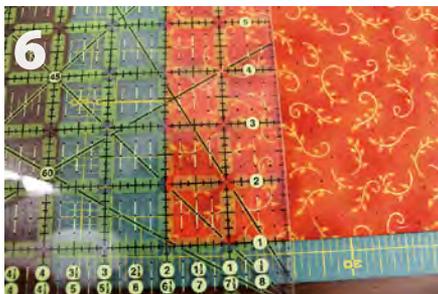
- Take the long ruler and lay the right hand edge just on the edge of the fabric.
- Place the small ruler beside the long ruler so that it forms an "L" – similar to a carpenter's square. Moving the two rulers as one, align one of the LINES of the square along the fold of the fabric. Ensure that the right hand side of the long ruler is completely on the fabric so when you make the cut you will get a clean edge all the way across the width of fabric. *Photo 4*



- Once this is lined up, remove the small ruler and cut alongside the right hand edge of the long ruler. DO NOT move the fabric on the right hand side. This has just been squared up and you do not want to disturb the ninety degree corner. Lift the ruler up and remove the scrap edge under the ruler. *Photo 5*

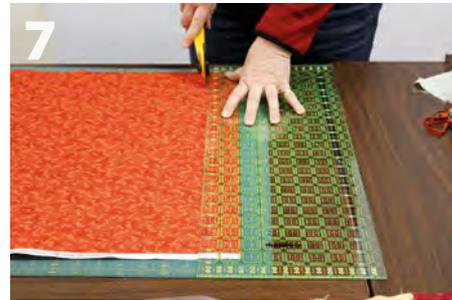


- Move the long ruler on top of the fabric to the width of strip that you require. Cut that strip. NEVER touch the excess fabric on the right hand side once the edge has been squared to the fold. Because that fold of the fabric is very fluid and technically has only been squared for the width of the long ruler, you may find that after 3 or 4 cuts that it is necessary to square up the edge again. This is perfectly normal and is NECESSARY to prevent the W or V strips. *Photo 6*



### stopping the ruler from slipping

If you keep one hand at the bottom of the ruler while your cutting hand moves up alongside the ruler, you are creating a pivot point and the pressure from your cutting hand will pivot the ruler. It is a matter of physics. A couple of things can prevent this – lighten up the pressure on the cutting hand – a sharp blade will help and you do not need the 'death grip' on the cutter in order to cut. Or you can try "walking" up the long ruler to keep equal pressure with both hands. Cut about 12", then without lifting your hand off the ruler or removing the rotary cutter, walk your ruler holding the hand up the ruler so it is parallel to the cutter. Cut another 12" and repeat this process until you have reached the end of the fabric. *Photos 7, 8, 9*



If you are having a lot of problems getting the hang of cutting with a rotary cutter, try taking some scraps of fabric – a very ugly fat quarter. Try cutting strips –  $\frac{1}{4}$ " wide. Get the feel of the cutter – how much pressure is required, how to walk your hand up the ruler. Learning how to properly use the cutter will be well worth the price of the chopped up fat quarter.

If you are still having trouble with slipping rulers, there are a number of products that you can place on the bottom surface of the ruler to help it from slipping.

Proper use and care of the rotary cutter will ensure the handle and the blade will last a long time and you will have accurate cuts every time. ☘

# PRESSING

Although the terms ironing and pressing are used interchangeably, the two techniques are quite different. Ironing can be a rather vigorous motion with the goal of eliminating wrinkles and creases, such as ironing clothing or yardage. Pressing is a very deliberate movement of the iron and if done properly will not stretch seam allowances out of shape.

Some patterns will provide a pressing plan. If the pattern has one, it is best to follow it but if there is no pressing plan, some thought should be given as to how the seams will lie. This includes the blocks, sashing, corner stones, and borders. The object of the pressing plan is to reduce lumps and bumps and improve accuracy by having seam allowances butt to each other to ensure better matching of intersections.

The pressing job is less daunting if the pressing takes place while sewing – don't leave it until the end.

Avoid twisted seams on the back. This can create a visual bump on the right side of the quilt and will also cause some difficulties if stitching in the ditch since the stitching will be on the “low” side of the seam and if the seam is twisted, it will be necessary to switch sides which can cause both the piecing thread and quilting thread to show.

## Ironing a seam

1. Place the seam on the ironing surface right sides together with the fabric that the seam allowance will go towards on top. “Set” the seam by pressing along the length of the stitches.
2. By pressing, simply place the iron on all or part of the seam (depending on its length), then lift the iron and place on a new section of seam until the entire seam has been set. This helps to relax the fibres and allows the thread to nestle into the fibres as well as ease out any fullness that occurred during the sewing process.
3. Roll back the top layer of fabric and on the right side of this top layer place the iron and gently nudge the top fabric away from the bottom fabric. The seam allowances are now lying underneath the fabric that is on top.
4. Remember to press a section, then lift the iron and move to the next part of the seam. This will prevent any distortion, especially on long seams. Pressing in this manner also eliminates any tucks in the seam allowance that could occur if the block was pressed from the back.

## Which side do I press to?

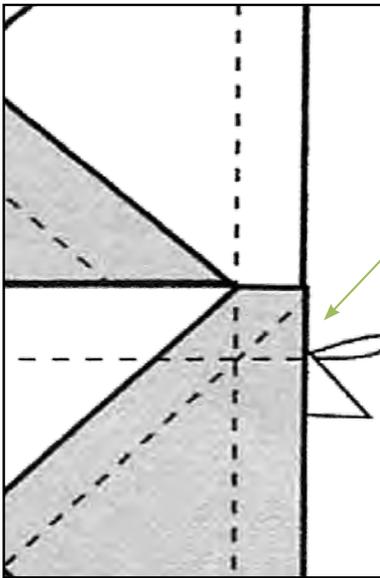
Many quilters are taught to always press to the dark. While this works most of the time, it often results in bulky ridges in a quilt and the seams do not always butt up to each other. Consider the following tips when preparing a pressing plan.

1. Press in the direction that allows seams to butt to each other. This helps to provide crisp matching intersections on the front.
2. Press in the direction the fabric “wants” to go to reduce bulk. Be careful to avoid twisted seams and aim to have seams go in opposing directions.
3. When making half square triangles, it may be necessary to press some of them to the dark and some to the light in order to eliminate bulk when joining many of the half square triangles.
4. Press to the dark if the above situations don't apply.

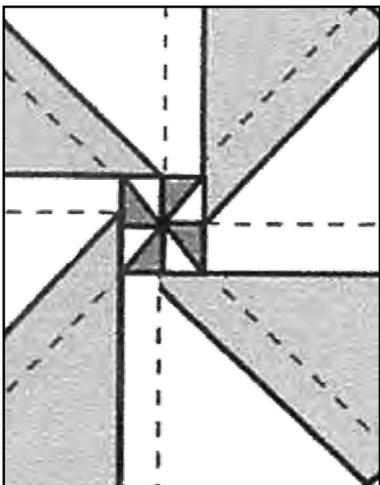
Photo © A Needle Pulling Thread Magazine

## Spin the seams

When there is a lot of bulk in the centre of four intersecting seams (for example: making pinwheels with half square triangles) it is a good idea to “spin” the seams on the back to reduce bulk. Remove the two stitches in the seam allowance and push the seams in a pinwheel style on the back. It is very important to be consistent when doing this. Make sure the seams are all going in the same direction or it will be difficult matching up the seams when putting the blocks together.



Use a seam ripper to remove these two stitches on both sides of the seam allowance.



Spin the seams so they rotate either clockwise or counter clockwise.

## Can I press my seams open?

There is nothing wrong with pressing seams open and sometimes it is necessary to reduce bulk. This occurs when there are a lot of seams coming into a point. The one problem with pressing all seams open is you lose the ability to butt seam allowances and that makes those nice intersections harder to achieve. Also, if the plan is to stitch in the ditch, there is no fabric left in the seam allowance and so the stitching would be through thread not fabric.

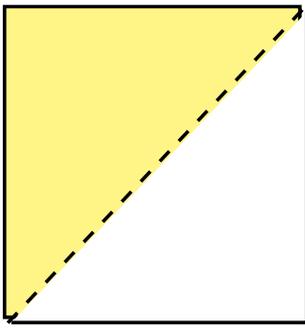
### Should I use steam?

The use of steam produces very crisp sharp seams. Steam itself does not distort the seams, but rather the vigorous ironing that often accompanies steam is what causes the distortion. Use steam, but be careful and make sure to press not iron.

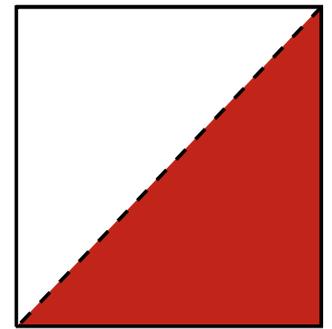
### Should I press the seams open on my quilt backing?

Use a ½" [1.3cm] seam allowance for quilt backings and press the seam to one side. Do not press it open as this will put more stress on the stitches in that seam, especially if the seam ends up in the middle of the quilt which is usually where it gets folded. It also leaves room for the batting to bead through.

A good reference for pressing is *Press for Success* by Myrna Giesbrecht, That Patchwork Place, (B253). ☘



**T**he Half Square Triangle (HST) unit consists of two right angle triangles sewn together to make a square. It is utilized in many quilt block patterns and exciting quilts can be designed using only the HST unit. Contrast (colour or value) between the two halves is essential to make the HST unit work.

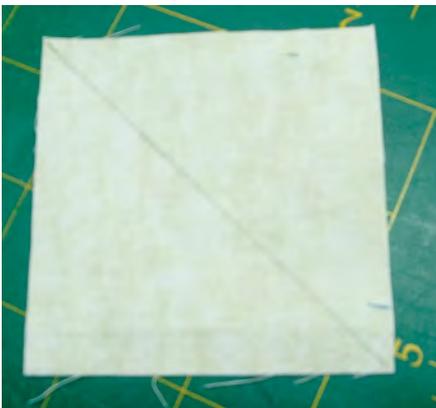


Although there are many ways to make the HST unit, there are essentially two different methods – one with squares and the other with strips. Within each of these methods there are numerous techniques. This article looks at the pros and cons of each method and a quick review of some of the most popular techniques.

### METHOD 1: Half Square Triangles made from squares

The rule of thumb for this method is to cut squares that are  $\frac{7}{8}$ " larger than the desired *finished* size of the half square triangle. Whenever I add just the  $\frac{7}{8}$ ", my HST units are always on the skimpy side and are never square. At least one side or corner is always misshapen and I still have to trim off the dog ears (those little points that are created by the long angled points on the triangles). To alleviate both problems, I started adding 1" instead of the  $\frac{7}{8}$ ". This requires trimming and is more work, but results in much more accurate HST units.

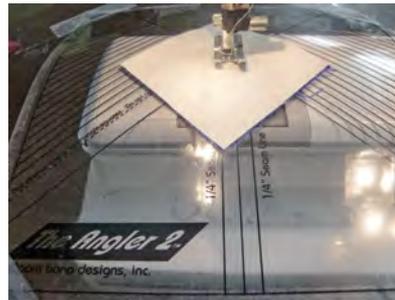
1. Cut squares 1" larger than the finished unit size.
2. Draw a diagonal line (cutting line) on the wrong side of the light squares. It is usually easier to mark the light fabric, but the dark fabric can be marked with the appropriate marking tool.
3. Place two contrasting squares right sides together.
4. Sew a scant  $\frac{1}{4}$ " on either side of the drawn diagonal line and cut apart on the diagonal drawn line.



Some quilters like to mark the sewing lines instead of the cutting line. Use a tool called The Quick Quarter to make this process go faster.



Instead of marking any lines, use The Angler 2™ which is a template that is taped to the bed of the sewing machine and line up the corners of the squares with the guide lines for sewing the two diagonal seams.



### Pros of Method 1

- works great with scraps and charm squares (5" squares)
- bias seam is contained within the square during the sewing process
- units are perfect every time (after trimming)
- any size HST unit is possible
- no special tools are required.

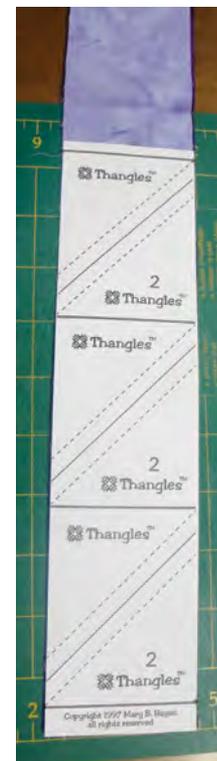
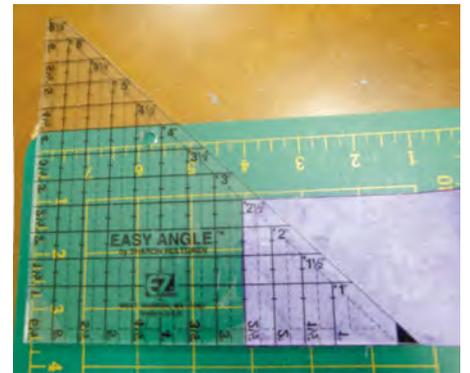
### Cons of Method 1

- marking the cutting/sewing line can be tedious
- it is sometimes difficult to find the right marking tool that will show up on the fabric
- trimming up the squares is tedious

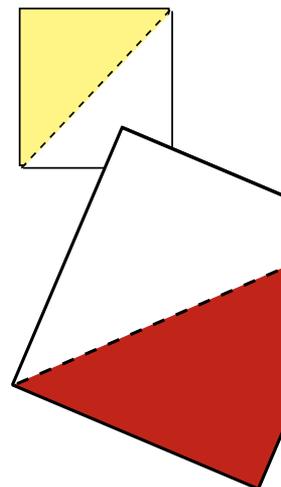
### METHOD 2: Half Square Triangles made from strips

When making HST units from a strip, there are several tools to choose from. These tools help to make HST units from fabric strips that are  $\frac{1}{2}$ " larger than the *finished* size.

Easy Angle™ is a ruler that cuts triangles and eliminates one of the dog ears created with Method 1.



Thangles™ also work with strips and come in 16 different sizes.



# Half Square Triangles

Perfect Patchwork Templates has a number of different template sizes that can be used to pre-cut the triangles.



1. Cut the strips  $\frac{1}{2}$ " larger than the finished unit size.
2. Layer a strip of light and dark fabric right sides together. Using the Easy Angle™ ruler or the Perfect Patchwork Templates, cut the number of triangles required.
3. Sew the triangle pairs together. If using Thangles™, cut the layers in the length necessary to make the required number of triangles.
4. Sew on the dashed line.
5. Cut apart on the solid lines.

## Pros of Method 2

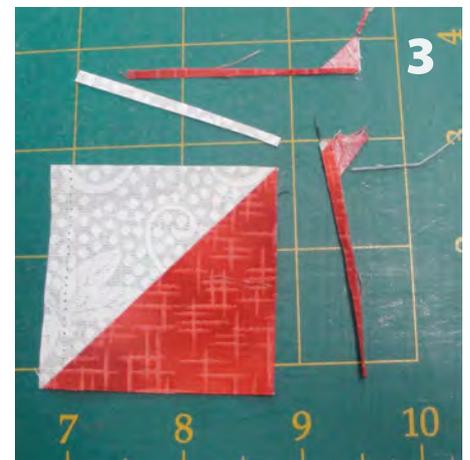
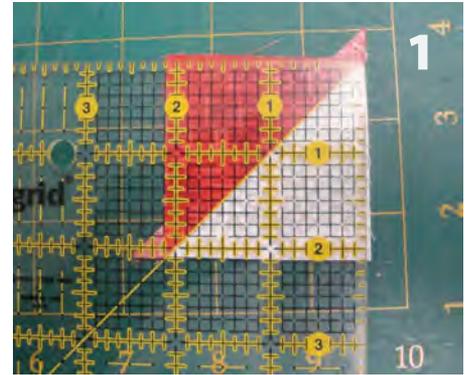
- works great with jelly rolls ( $2\frac{1}{2}$ " strips)
- no marking necessary

## Cons of Method 2

- each of these methods requires that you purchase an additional tool
- pressing the units can cause distortion.
- Thangles™: can only be used once as the paper guide has to be removed after the units are cut apart.
- Perfect Patchwork Templates
  - » you must be careful with the bias edge which can stretch during sewing
  - » need to use a small cutting mat or a rotating one to be able to properly cut around the templates
  - » templates have to be stabilized to prevent slipping
- Easy Angle™: you must be careful with the bias edge which can stretch during sewing

## Trimming the units

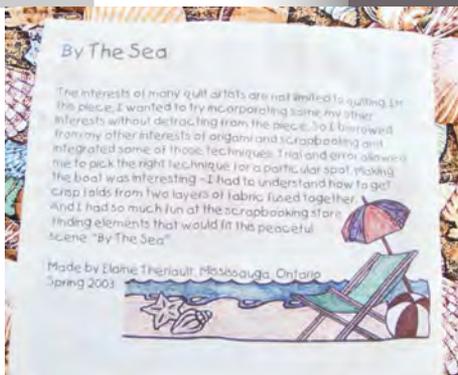
1. Regardless of which method is used, always square up the units or at least remove the dog ears. Trimming the HST unit to the appropriate size means a correct sized HST unit that is perfectly square with the diagonal seam running exactly from corner to corner. This is more work, but when all points match up and blocks fit together without any problem, it is worth the extra effort. Making the units slightly larger (Method 1) makes this process easier and more accurate.
2. Once the unit is sewn, press the seam allowance to one side. Typically the unit is pressed towards the dark colour side *Photo 1*, but there are instances where some of the seams will have to be pressed towards the light colour in order to reduce bulk.
3. Place a square ruler over the triangle with the 1" markings in the top right hand corner (top left hand if you are left handed). Ensure the diagonal line of the ruler is lined up with the diagonal seam *Photo 2*. If the stitching line has a bow in it, line the ruler up with the seam at the points and don't worry about the bowed seam. People will notice if the points are off before they will notice a bowed seam.
4. Trim the right hand side and the top. Rotate the HST unit 180 degrees and match up the fresh cut edges to the appropriate lines for the size of the HST unit. Then trim the last two edges. This completes a perfect half square triangle unit *Photo 3*.



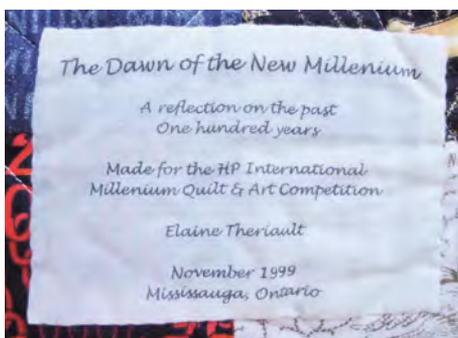
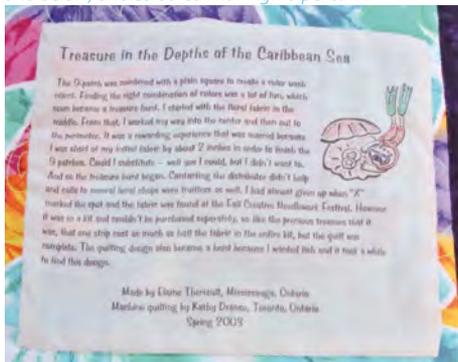
Regardless of which method you choose, making HST units can be a boring process, especially if you need hundreds. To ease this tedious process, I alternate the cutting, pressing and trimming. The HST units are a good project to sew when you need mindless sewing, or sewing with friends.

While I have my preferred method, I still use all of the methods mentioned depending on the situation which is dictated by the fabric I am using and the quantity required. ☘

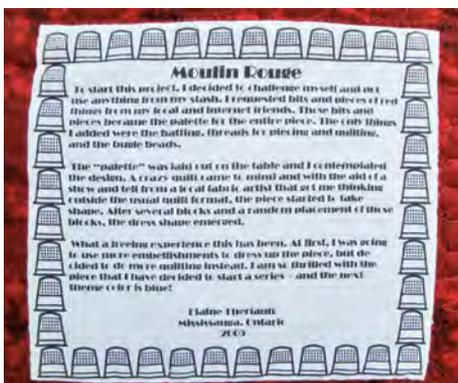
# Quilt Labels



Clip art was used to create these two labels (above and below) and coloured with Pigma pens.



Label describes why this quilt was made.



This label describes the creative process of this quilt construction.

In the excitement of finally finishing a quilt and usually working to strict deadlines, the label often gets forgotten. Yet the label is what makes an ordinary quilt very special as the purpose of the label is to tell the story of the quilt. As quilts get passed down in families, given as gifts and the makers pass on, these stories get lost.

## information to be included on the label

- The title of the quilt (if you name your quilts)
- The name of the pattern or the name of the block
- The name of the designer
- The name of the person (s) who pieced the quilt
- The name of the person (s) who quilted the quilt
- Why was it made (special occasion, gift, sample, just for fun)
- Who was it made for and what is the relation between the maker and the recipient
- Where was it made (city and province of the quilter)
- When was it made (the finish date and dare we say – the start date)
- Any other information you feel is relevant to the quilt. Write a small story explaining the symbolism of certain aspects of the design. Did something funny happen when you were shopping or making the quilt?

Not all the above information needs to be on each label. Modify the list to suit the situation. As a minimum, the name of the maker (and quilter), the designer, the date and the location where it was made should be on every quilt.

Labels can be as simple as using a fabric pen and writing the required information on a piece of fabric (or pre-printed label panel) or they can be as elaborate as a custom made label created by hand or computer. The choice depends on your skill level, time and access to resources.

## creating a hand written label

If your handwriting is less than perfect or you are afraid of messing up the spacing, create the label using a word processing program and print the "label" on a piece of paper. There are many fonts and font sizes available, but you are looking for one that you can easily trace. Place the computer printout under the label fabric and using an archival pen, trace the writing. A light table makes it much easier to trace the lines.

Archival pens work best and remain colour fast through washings. Check the label to ensure the ink is permanent. They come in various nib sizes ranging from .01 to 1 with 1 being the largest. The larger the nib, the easier it is to write on fabric. The smaller the nib, the more it "scratches" the fabric, making it difficult to write smoothly. Pre-test the pen as some pens will bleed into the fabric.

While the archival pens with the nibs are wonderful for writing or outlining clip art, they do not cover large areas very well. That's where the brush tips come in handy. They are available in lots of colours and fill in larger areas quickly and smoothly. Crayons can also be used – just be sure to heat set them by placing a paper towel over the crayoned area (to absorb the wax) and press with a hot, dry iron.

## creating a label on the computer

I prefer to create my labels on the computer because I can tell a story about the quilt more easily than if I do the label by hand.

Purchase fabric sheets that are colourfast and are ready to use out of the package in your printer. If you want to make your own fabric sheets, you can use Avery Shipping Labels (8½" x 11") or iron freezer paper to the back of the fabric to stabilize the fabric so it will fit in your printer. If you are going to add colour using the printer, be sure to pre-treat the fabric with BubbleJet Set 2000 to ensure



Quilt with second label as part of quilt history.

that the colour remains fast during washings. Import clip art, use different fonts and let your creativity soar. If you do not want to pre-treat your fabric, you can print the label in black and white (most black inkjet inks are permanent, but test first!!!) and then colour it in with your Pigma® pens or crayons.

Clip art can also be added to your label in the same method mentioned above. The internet, label and clip art books and clip art software provides an almost endless supply of clip art images.

Create the label in your favourite word processing program and print on fabric following manufacturer's instructions for heat set if necessary. Cut to the shape and sew on.

### creating an embroidered label

If you are fortunate enough to own an embroidery sewing machine why not embroider the label right into the backing fabric? This does require a bit of planning as to the placement of the embroidery. Or simply embroider the label and sew it on the back. Be careful of the density of the stitches especially if you have to quilt through the label. A label that is too large and too dense will make for a stiff corner of the quilt.

### sewing the label on

The danger in sewing the label on after the quilt has been quilted is that it is easy for someone to remove the label. Sadly, quilts get stolen or misplaced and once the label is gone, it is much harder to recover them. You can sew the label into the binding. This makes it harder to remove without causing some damage to the quilt. Alternately the label can be sewn to the back *before* the quilt is quilted. This would make it next to impossible to remove the label without serious damage to the quilt. Consider making the label part of the backing, which again would not allow for its removal without serious damage.

To stitch the label directly to the backing before the quilting, machine or hand appliqué the label in your favourite stitch. This process requires some planning to ensure the label is in the correct spot and requires a bit of fussing when layering the quilt. If the label is being sewn on after the quilting simply turn the edges under and whip stitch it in place.

As an added precaution, write the important information along the raw edge of the quilt before the binding is attached to the quilt. No one else will know it is there, but if the label goes missing, you will still be able to identify your quilt.

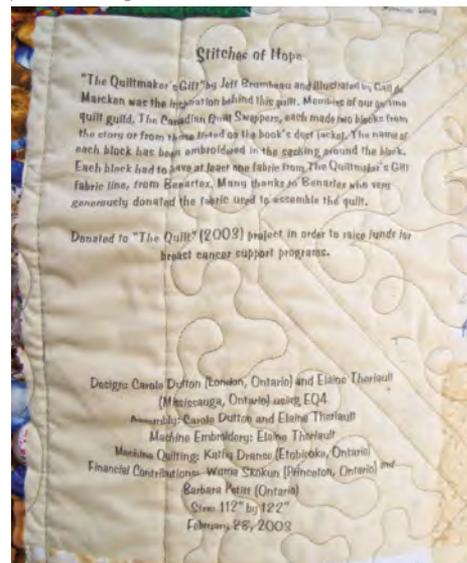
### other points to consider

- As a quilt is passed on to a new owner or is displayed/entered into a show, an additional label should be made to document the life of that quilt. It is very interesting to see where some quilts have been and why.
- If the quilt has been displayed in a quilt show add a label to that effect. If the quilt won a prize, attach a label (maybe include a picture of the ribbon or the quilt on display) on the label or on the back.
- If you are fortunate to meet the designer of the quilt or fabric line, get them to sign a piece of the fabric and incorporate that into the label.
- Attach poems or extra pictures to the back.
- Sign the label to make it more personal and document your hand writing.
- For group quilts, have each member make a small signature block and sew them together to make one large label that can become part of the back of the quilt.

Many old quilts in existence today have no history of who made them, when or why. Although educated guesses can be made, it is really exciting to find an old quilt with its history attached. Make a label for every quilt no matter how "ordinary" it is or how long you expect it to last. Reading labels on my quilts brings back many fond memories of making them. ✂



Label for group quilt where individual contributors made a signature block and a larger label contains the pertinent design information (above and below).



Pictures, poems, and a label adorn the back of this quilt.



Label was signed by Jinny Beyer – appropriate as the quilt was her design and her fabric line was used. This label was also sewn into the binding on two sides.

# De-cluttering YOUR Studio

Everyone's sewing space is different. Some work on the kitchen table, some have taken over a bedroom vacated by a child, while others have the luxury of a larger studio space. Whatever size space you have, the same issues exist, the space quickly becomes cluttered and it is next to impossible to find anything.

I am fortunate enough to have a large studio space, but it was difficult to work on anything as the cutting table, ironing board and sewing table were so cluttered that I could barely see them. There was a path leading to each work space through the stuff on the floor. Several years ago, I decided that I had enough of this clutter and it was time to clean sweep.

As you work through your clutter, here are some things to keep in mind:

- Enlist a friend to help you. Trust me, the clean-up is going to be a tough task and it will be easy to go astray.
- Be ruthless, do you really need/want that extra book? What about that project that has been unfinished for 10 years, will you really finish it? Do you really need 100 meters of backing fabric that just doesn't seem to work with any of your quilts?
- *Do not* buy any storage containers yet.
- If you have the room to store the stuff, keep it. If you don't have storage, think twice!

## Take inventory of what you have

The ideal way to start is by emptying the room. Yes it is painful. Yes it means your family could see all that you own. And yes it will take time, but it is easier to work this way. While you are emptying the room, sort the stuff into groups. Put all the fabric in one spot and don't worry at this point if you are dealing with scraps, fat quarters or yardage. Books, magazines, thread, patterns, supplies,

notions, gadgets, and projects should just about cover the major groups. Now it is time to evaluate each group. Put things in the discard pile if at this point you know you do not want them.

## Books

How many books do you have? Do you need/want all of them? Do you have duplicates? Once you know how many books you have you will know how much storage you need. Of course if you don't have enough room to store all the books then it is time to cull! Be sure to leave room for new books or make a rule that when you buy a new book an old one goes out. Placing the books haphazardly on the shelf will not help you find them. Sort them by category: piecing, appliqué, landscape, etc.

## Magazines



If you are like me – you *love* magazines. How often have you looked for a particular pattern or article and can't remember what issue it was in? There are several ways to deal with this. There are some magazines which I won't part with and I *will not* rip up. These get stored in magazine holders, sorted by magazine title and by date. Other magazines may contain only one article or one pattern that you want to keep. Rip the article out and place it in a page protector. Remember to take the pattern insert or whatever else is required to complete the project. Take the page

protectors and set up a filing system in a binder. Create categories such as baby patterns, appliqué patterns, historical articles, and technical articles. When you want to find a quilt or need some inspiration, it will be easy to find what you are looking for.

## Patterns



Sort the patterns by theme, style or technique. Think about how you will search for the patterns. If you have a large quantity of one type, then give them their own category. Buy pattern boxes - I use the ones that were made for clothing patterns and throw away the lids as the plastic bag of quilting patterns are too tall for the lids to fit properly.

## Threads

Sort threads into categories; embroidery threads, quilting threads, piecing thread, etc.

## Notions



These are literally show stoppers. Looking for a new needle and not finding one is a major disruption. I have sorted all my notions into groups and each group is stored in a small container, I put

sewing machine feet in one, sewing machine needles in another, etc. It's not a bad idea to include all the tools you need in this container as well. For example, I need a screwdriver to change the needle in my machine, so a small screwdriver is included in the box, as is a small container to put used/bent needles. I never have to search for a needle again!

### Projects



There is nothing like trying to finish a project only to find that an essential part is missing. Find some kind of container that works for you to store the *entire* project including the book, pattern, thread, fabric, embellishments. I use clean pizza boxes that I purchase directly from a packaging company. I like the 14" [36cm] boxes because you can store a lot in them. I also scrounge metal tins to use for storage and besides looking pretty, they can hold larger items. Plastic bags work well and come in a variety of sizes but they don't stack as easily as the boxes.



### Fabric

Sort the fabric into categories. Yardage for backings goes in one spot, scraps sorted by colour go in plastic shoeboxes, the rest of the fabric is sorted by colour or style ('30s, Asian, flannel, etc.). I lump my fat quarters into the appropriate bin. I use open baskets to store the fabric so it

is easy to see and I don't spend time trying to keep it pretty because when I want something I dump the basket out and rummage through to find what I want.

### Now what?

Knowing what you have will help you decide what type of storage shelves/bins you will need for your space. Remember, the cutting table, ironing board and sewing table *are not* storage spaces, they are *work* spaces.

Start putting things back in a logical manner. The items you need most often should be kept handy. Make sure *everything* is labelled!

If you do not have enough room for all that you want to keep, perhaps you need to re-think what you are keeping. Be ruthless and be realistic. Have a garage sale, give it to another quilter, donate it to a senior centre or a school, check with your guild – they may use some for community projects. Someone else can put your excess to good use.

### Pitfalls

Now that you have spent all that time tidying things up, *don't* let it get cluttered. Here are some major pitfalls to watch out for:

- Buying things on sale. Just because an item is on sale doesn't mean it is a good deal. I would much rather purchase exactly what I need and use it up (with something left for my scrap bin) than purchase yards of something that I will never use. I wish someone would have told me that when I started!
- Don't save your fabrics. Use them *now*! There will always be something new that will be even nicer than what you have.
- Print only that information from the internet that you are going to use. If you do print something, put it in a page protector and find a home for it. Don't leave it lying around.
- Photocopying patterns to share is illegal.
- If you go on a shopping trip and you decide that you need/want something and you have the space to store it, put your purchases away when you get home. Don't leave them lying around. If you don't have a place for these purchases, where will you put the next ones?



- If you have a dedicated space to work, there is no need to tidy up every night, but it is important to keep the space uncluttered. I know that as we get busy and switch from one project to another that things tend to get out of hand. I try to take a few minutes every day and at least keep things organized in their project box/bag. When I go to work in the morning, it is refreshing to see a nice tidy space. It helps to clear the clutter in my head and allows me to focus more, get more done and then I'm a happier person.

This de-cluttering process is not easy which is why I recommend you have a friend help you. Then you can help them. The benefits of finding things right away and spending my precious time being productive rather than hunting is reward enough for me to continue to keep my room tidy. It's been several years now and I'm very happy with the results. ✂

# A Passion for Purple

This pattern is a great way to use up scraps. I like to look at what I have for scraps and keep making the blocks until I run out of fabric. The finished size of the quilt depends on the amount of scraps and strips that you have in your stash. Instructions are for a 36" x 36" [91.5 x 91.5cm] quilt.

**skill level** beginner

**finished measurements**

36" x 36" [91.5 x 91.5cm]

**finished block size** 6" [15cm]

**materials**

a variety of scraps in varying values of the same colour totalling 2yd [2m]

¼ yd [0.25m] total contrasting scraps for circles

½ yd [0.4m] binding

1¼ yd [1.15m] backing

42" x 42" [107 x 107cm] batting

**thread**

100% cotton thread for piecing

variegated machine quilting thread

variegated machine embroidery thread

**incidentals**

½ yd [0.5m] light weight fusible web

6½" [16.5cm] acrylic square

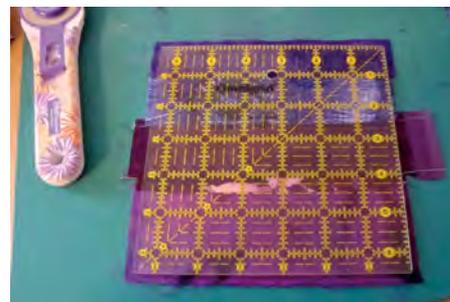
## instructions

1. Choose a colour scheme. If you do not have enough scraps of one colour, this is a great opportunity to swap scraps with your friends or you can create scraps by cutting strips of varied widths from your stash. Begin by cutting strips of varying widths from 1¼" to 2½" [3 to 6cm] and at least 7¼" [18.5cm] long. Choose one colour and cut strips in as many values that you have in that colour. I have chosen one colour family

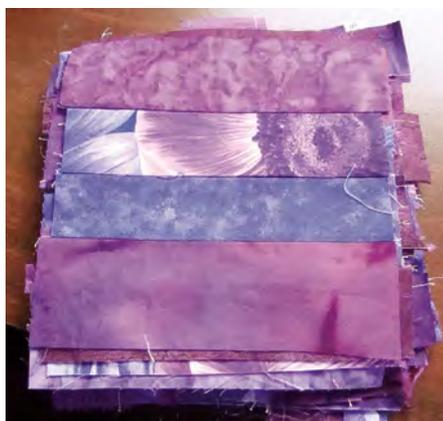
for the samples, but you could choose two or more colour families where each block is a specific colour or each block could be totally random. Choose a variety of values to give the finished piece some depth.

2. Lay out the strips to make sure that you can live with your preliminary colour choices. If any fabrics don't seem to work, now is the time to take them out. Notice the variety of widths, colour and values.
3. Cut the strips into 7¼" [18.5cm] lengths. Join enough of the strips together along the long side until you have a square approximately 7¼" square. Don't worry if the long edges are slightly angled – this adds interest. I randomly chose each piece (put them in a paper bag if necessary) with the only criteria that I did not want to join two of the same fabrics side by side.

5. Using a 6½" square, trim the blocks to 6½" or 3½" square.



6. Make a total of thirty six 6½" blocks to complete this wall hanging. Make more blocks to create a larger quilt.
7. Sew one row of six 6½" blocks together, alternating the direction of the strips to make them look woven. See photograph of quilt. Repeat to make six rows in total. Press the seams in the first row in one direction. Press the seams in the second row in the opposite direction. Alternate pressing in all six rows.



4. Smaller pieces can be joined in the same manner to form 3½" [9cm] blocks. Sew four of these blocks together to create one 6½" [16.5cm] block. Alternate the direction of the strips to make them look woven. Sew as many of these blocks as desired.





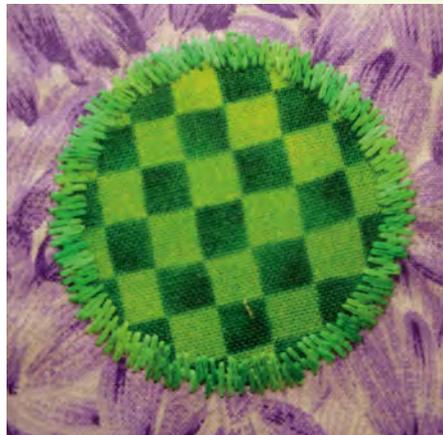
Photo © A Needle Pulling Thread Magazine

# Elaine's tips

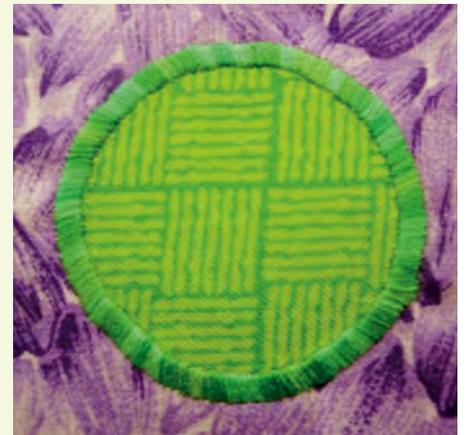
8. Sew rows together. Press seams to one side.
9. Trace thirty or more circles on to the fusible web. Cut out leaving ¼" [6mm] around the drawn line. Follow manufacturer's directions for using fusible web.
10. Iron circles to the back of the assorted green fabric. Cut out along drawn line. Peel off paper backing.
11. Randomly place the circles on top of the quilt. Press to hold in place.

## quilting

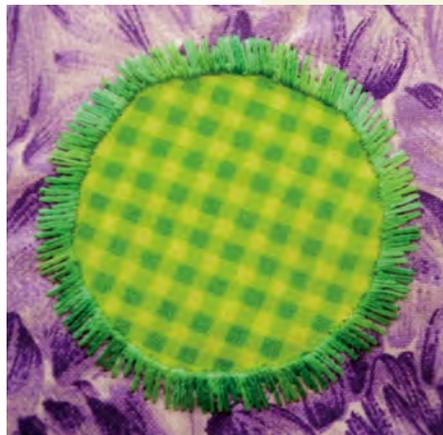
1. Layer backing, batting and quilt. Baste all three layers together.
2. Free motion quilt or hand quilt beginning in the centre to avoid puckers.
3. Cut five strips of binding 2½" [6cm x WOF]. Sew binding end to end using a mitred seam. Press binding in half along the long side.
4. Trim quilt and apply binding. ✂



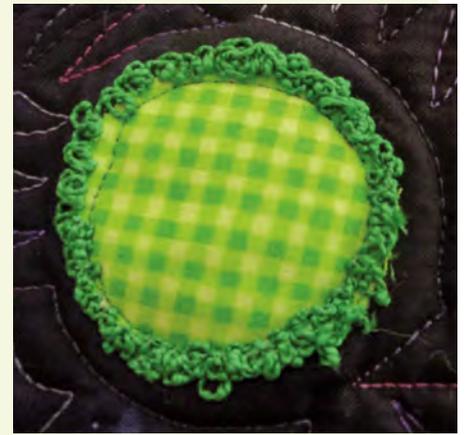
Traditional zig zag stitch with variegated thread



Traditional satin stitch with smooth edges



Satin stitch with uneven edge on the outside and even edge on the inside



Perle cotton in the bobbin and worked from the wrong side

Photos this page

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1. You can leave the quilt as is or it makes a good base for appliqué, especially if you have used a monochromatic colour scheme. I used a fusible web on the wrong side of my appliqué fabric and cut out circles. I auditioned the circles on the quilt and when I was happy with the placement, I fused them to the background.
2. Instead of using the same old appliqué stitches on your sewing machine, opt for something different, but make a sample first. Here are some examples that I explored. You may need to use a stabilizer for the machine appliqué if puckering occurs.



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