

## FROM KITS TO CUSTOM – YOU CAN CREATE AMAZING ONE-OF-A-KIND QUILTS EASILY

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**\*\*\*NOTE: While I try to verify internet links regularly, sometimes sites do go down**

It doesn't matter if you have never designed a quilt before or do it regularly. A fresh perspective can help to jump start your creativity. This is why so many of us read quilt books, magazines, internet blogs and television shows.

*DISCLAIMER:* There is absolutely nothing wrong with using pre-cut kits or patterns. My goal today is simply to give you options and the license to break free and create your own vision if you like - you can do this!

### WHAT MAKES A CUSTOM QUILT?

I will be totally honest here and say that I use the term "custom" loosely.

- Can a panel be used to create a custom design?
- Can you add applique, borders or other elements to create a custom design?
- Can you gather different blocks to put together in your own way?
- Can you sit down with pencil, paper and a calculator to design everything from scratch?

The answer to every one of these is YES! Designing for yourself is simply the act of making something your own, no matter how much or little you care to do.

### INSPIRATION:

Before you can use any of the tools we will discuss later on, there needs to be inspiration. Where can you find this inspiration?

- Specific need
  - Baby quilt with colors and theme pre-chosen

- By accident? I had some holiday fabric that I simply cut into strips and started sewing together. Unlike a traditional jelly roll race, my calculations were off so the pattern was less than random. But I didn't let that stop me, oh no! Instead I decided that a pot of gold would make the quilt come alive and
- Yours or the giftee's décor
- You saw something on Pinterest, Facebook, on a show or in a magazine but you want to change things to suit your needs and taste.
- You purchased some fabric that you fell in love with (focal fabric)
- You saw someone wearing a shirt that screamed QUILT!!! (this actually happened to me the other day at the doctor's office)
- I once created a quilt all off of one block and a set of colors (paper pieced)
- Sometimes the fabric is what speaks to you – my prize for Row by Row in 2015 was 25 fat quarters. I chose to gather 25 different batiks in rainbow colors. I then used these to create a double hourglass with custom borders (which are actually scraps put together)

### MATH

Ok, this is the part that most people come to and then run away screaming. They want to enjoy the process, not spend hours with a quilting calculator only to ruin yards of fabric. It is just less stressful to go off someone else's pattern.

Don't let this discourage you because there are many ways to get around the math issue if the mere thought makes you break out in hives.

- Decide on the size of your blocks ahead of time and then design them to this size throughout
- it's easy to make a gorgeous quilt on just 2 blocks!!!
- make a quilt from a pattern but then:
  - Change up the fabrics
  - add applique
  - how about funky borders?
  - ---these changes and additions can create a custom look
- Utilize a program that does the math for you

## LET'S DESIGN!!

### THE MECHANICS OF A QUILT:

Stand back - FAR BACK from a quilt you like and try to figure out where the blocks are. Sometimes it is very difficult. Until you come up to it and see the piecing, many beautiful quilts view as a whole instead of their parts.

But that is just the thing, it is their parts that are important if we want to design our own. So, what are the parts of a quilt?

- Blocks (consisting of different pieces)
  - Pieced Blocks
  - English paper piecing
  - Templates
  - etc.
  - Fussy Cut?
- Sashing
- Corner Stones
- Borders
- Applique
- Embellishments
- Etc.
- Quilting
- Binding

It's like cooking dinner. The different aspects come together to form a meal. Will your meal include bread? (sashing?). Will you have dessert? (applique and embellishments?)

Put a variety of these together and VOILA! you now have a custom quilt!

### START SIMPLE - Pencil and paper

- Using grid paper can be an amazing source of inspiration but caution must be used
  - If the blocks you choose are unfamiliar, then take special care to work out the cutting and sewing process before you make a final decision
  - Easiest way to avoid this is to use existing blocks from the internet or books. As long as the finished blocks are the same size (or come together to make the same size) then you can't go wrong.

- Colored pencils help to get colors right but unlike using a computer, do-overs can be messy and time-consuming
- Easy project to take on vacation, camping or for road trips

\*\*\*BUT I am so afraid that I will not like it! Ok, this is true, you may not - but someone will, even if you give it away to charity. A good quilt is warm and soft; the rest is icing on the cake for someone in need.

I won't go into the whole concept of finishing because I believe our speaker next month will totally have that covered!

If you truly want to be the captain of your own ship and design quilts that are unlike any other, then you will learn by doing. I honestly have not made a quilt I hated yet - sometimes half way through I am losing my mind, but then the magic of quilting and binding occurs and I am back in love again.

### ONLINE and COMPUTER PROGRAMS:

I admit that I use these resources almost entirely when it comes to the design process

### FREE ONLINE RESOURCES:

[www.quiltingassistant.com](http://www.quiltingassistant.com)

This great little site not only shows you examples of dozens of the most popular blocks, it also shows you cutting/sewing diagrams.

<http://www.craftsy.com/blog/2013/09/diy-quilt-pattern-writing-tips/>

DIY Quilt Patterns: Tips for Writing your Own

### PAID RESOURCES:

[www.electricquilt.com](http://www.electricquilt.com)

This is my go-to company for quilting software. Whether you are a beginner or advanced program user, there is a version that will probably work for you. I used other means for a very long time before I took the plunge and bought the program. I have not regretted it one time.

The beginner program EQ Mini (\$89.95)  
EQ8 - the full version (\$189.95)

<https://www.quiltcanvas.com/>

Like others, you need to sign in with Facebook or create a free account  
Unfortunately, there is virtually no useful functionality without a paid subscription which can cost as much as \$99 per year.

<http://www.quiltingstudio.com/>

This online tool can be used in the free version; however, your options are limited and you cannot save your project to be used another day. As far as programs go, this one is relatively inexpensive at \$9.99 per year. Here are the features for subscribers:

- Subscribers can:
  - \* Design new quilt blocks
  - \* Access many more pre-made quilt blocks
  - \* Choose non-standard dimensions for the quilt
  - \* Put the blocks anywhere at any size on the quilt
  - \* Save their work

After playing with the free version, I noticed that this program does not assist with cutting and piecing instructions.

#### **NOT SURE WHAT CATEGORY THIS GOES IN:**

[www.patternjam.com](http://www.patternjam.com)

This site (which you have to either register for, or use your Facebook login) allows you to play with blocks, fabrics and layout; however, it also has limitations and encourages you to purchase your quilt digitally printed like the site below.

#### **MORE TIPS and RESOURCES:**

- DESIGN WALL - as exhibited by our own wall for JCQG, it does not take an expensive pre-made wall system to audition your blocks. Something as simple as this can be hung up and used to try out different placements. This is especially fun with blocks like Log Cabin!
- START SIMPLE - nothing is more discouraging than taking on too much but then quitting in the middle because the project was just too complicated.
- EAT THE ELEPHANT! - How do you eat an elephant? One bite at a time. The same is true for any quilting project. When

designing, break out the project into steps and before you know it, you will be designing like a pro.

- BLOG SPOT – Feel free to visit my blog page to see how I custom design many of the quilts I make. Maybe seeing my process will help you to discover your own!  
[www.gotch.co](http://www.gotch.co)
- Facebook groups:
  - Quilts and Everything Quilting
    - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/quiltsandeverythingquilting/>
  - Gotta Love Quilting
    - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/680245582062511/>
  - Texas Quilters Group
    - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/297139257103926/>
  - Quilt Along with Pat Sloan
    - <https://www.facebook.com/groups/QuiltWithPatSloan/>
- FABRIC LIBRARIES – when using a program to design, I have found it is much more productive to choose “similar” fabrics from the programs own library. The reason for this is that it is very difficult to scan your own stash accurately to reflect color, scale and the fabric’s repeat value.
- ORPHAN BLOCKS – new designs can come alive by using orphan blocks as inspiration – or for the whole quilt!

**Electric Quilt 8 – Sample Images –**

Showing concept, a concept block and a true image

