

RIBBON QUILTS: COLOR AND FABRIC FUSION

Instructor: Sarah Bond

This is a workshop style class. Using solid fabrics as a starter, students will explore the power of strip piecing and experimentation with color gradations, size gradations and alternations of solid fabrics with other fabrics. Working with solids is a great way to really experiment with color without the interference of textures or patterns. The quilt shown is made almost exclusively with solids. We will incorporate some patterned fabric as the class progresses. Students can use their own ideas or instructor's "recipes" for fabric constructions. Those constructions will then be cut and assembled into quilt tops. The title of the course refers to the ribbons of light and color that can be achieved with this technique.

- ❖ Students should bring basic sewing supplies and their sewing machine in good working order.
- ❖ Students should bring a variety of fabrics to work with. Detailed materials list is can be found on the reverse.
- ❖ Notebook or paper for taking notes.
- ❖ Digital camera or phone camera



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- ❖ **Fabrics** – the following list of fabrics is designed to fit with the exercises we will be doing. Some, like the selection of solid fabrics, are fairly integral to class activities. Others, like the batiks and prints should be brought if you have them or feel inclined to get them because you love them anyway. Bring what you have and purchase what you can afford or have time to buy. Remember that we can share back and forth and that we will be in a fabric store if you suddenly find you need or want something. Whatever you end up bringing, you will be able to work with the concept and get something out of the exercise.



- **Solid fabrics** – Selvedge to selvedge cuts or fat quarters. Solids will be our first resort because the plain colors will give us the opportunity to experiment with color only and build combinations independent of patterns.
 - ½ yard (or more) of black
 - ¼ to ½ yard cuts of white or off-white, and at least 3 to 4 grays in between so you have a good gradation from white to black.
 - ¼ to ½ yard cuts of 5 to 8 solids *in 2 or more other color families* so that you have a good gradation. This could be brown to red, blue to green, or whatever colors you like best. Fat quarter bundles are great. Jellyrolls can be awkward if you are precision cutting, but great if you're going more free form.
- **Batiks** – Selvedge to selvedge cuts or fat quarters. These are great to use because they offer a little more visual texture and pattern than the solids, but the patterns are not overpowering and the colors are true and available in great variety
- **Graphic or Geometric Prints** – Selvedge to selvedge cuts or fat quarters. A selection of commercial fabrics from your stash. Stripes, polka dots, graphic black and white prints are good choices to blend with your color studies. It would be good to have at least one of these fabrics in mind when you choose your color families of solid fabrics. This will help guide your choice of solids.



Ribbon Quilts - Color and Fabric Fusion

This is your prep sheet for the Ribbon Quilt class. In order to make the most of the time we have, I'm offering this OPTIONAL bit of pre-class preparation to help us kick start the process. I want to stress that this is OPTIONAL and you shouldn't stress yourself out if you don't find the time to do any prep. But if you do have a bit of time to do these strip sets prior to class, you will have more knowledge to start with.

This class is about fabric and color and composition. One of the most frequent questions I get from other quilters is "How do you know how to combine colors and fabrics?" Part of the answer to that question is instinct. I can't really explain it. But some of it is practice and some of it is logic. I've been quilting for over 30 years and I've internalized a lot of information about how colors and fabrics go together. Some of my riskier choices have ended up as potholders. My better choices have been inspirational. Both kinds of experiences have taught me about color. In developing this class, I wanted to come up with a way for students to audition fabrics side by side to see what happens. This process helps every quilter build their own knowledge about color. Sometimes it's about how one fabric speaks to another. Other times, there is magic created by a sequence of color and pattern combining to create that spectacular effect that we are all yearning for.

We are going to be strip piecing fabrics in this class to create new fabric constructions. Then we will cut them up and put them back together to make our quilts. It is about strip piecing solid colors and patterns to see how the colors and patterns combine and work off of each other. We are going to concentrate on developing fabrics that are stacked in gradations of color, size and value. This will create a progression or movement from light to dark, from red to blue or from narrow to wide. Once we make these fabrics and then cut them into ribbons and combine them, we'll be able to create columns of color and pattern that move within and around the quilt. The visual interest of your finished quilt will depend on how effectively you combine your strips and create visual interest with your gradations.



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Sometimes when we get into class, folks want to swap bits of strip sets with one another. You make number of selvage to selvage (width of fabric) strip sets according to your own color sense or according to one of the recipes below. Bring those strips to class where we will share about them and then cut them into portions. For those who want to swap, you will bring your strip sets, cut them up in class, share and swap, and leave with many pieces of fabric delight that you can use in your composition. Don't cut them until we come to class in case some of us don't have a chance to do the sets before class or some of us love our pieces too much to give them up!

Choosing Fabric

So, we will be working a lot with solid fabrics in a lot of color gradations. I was resistant to only using solids, and I'll bet some of you might feel that way as well. I do think it is useful to work with solids to really get a feel for the effect of color alone, without the interference of multiple colors and patterns in one piece of fabric. But if you don't have a lot of solids or you just can't bring yourself to restrict your fabric choices, low pattern batiks and blenders work too.

Once you cluster these fabrics together, and after you get your grays and blacks and whites, then choose some color families in solids that work well with the patterns that you've chosen. As you build your fabrics and see the colors and patterns playing off each other, you may decide that you want to introduce another color family into your mix. You can always do this as we move along in the fabric making process and you can go back and remake early fabrics in new color ways. The free form method of assembling the ribbon quilts allows for lots of last minute substitutions.



Making Fabric

When I talk about making fabric, all I mean is sewing strips of fabric together. What we will vary as we do this is the size and color of the strips and the gradation of color or value (light to dark) in the order that the strips are joined. I happen to favor narrower strips because I like a lot of color and pattern in a smaller area. But one of the things I learned from my class is that a composition is supported by variety and my results were actually better when they included some

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fabrics made with larger strips. So go with your artistic instincts, but allow yourself to do something counter to your aesthetic norm from time to time. This will only serve to broaden your artistic repertoire.

There are some guidelines to construction of your fabrics that will help you create great results that will lend themselves well to the creation of your ribbon quilt masterpiece. Strip piecing is conceptually simple, but it takes longer to do than you think it will, and it takes just a bit longer still to do it well. Craftsmanship is important to having a good finished product. While I'm not a perfectionist by any means, taking a bit more time along the road will provide you with a superior end product. You might find all this strip piecing a bit tedious, but by the end of this class you will be the master of the ¼ inch seam!

- Cut strips selvage to selvage, the entire width of the fabric, if you can. This will give you big strip sets, easier to share. If you're working with fat quarters, cut for the longest strips.
- I'm a measurer and straight cutter. You might prefer ruler-free cutting and a less regimented attention to symmetry. Whatever you are doing, make sure your pieces are well constructed with consistent seam allowance so they are sturdy and secure.
- Each gradation should contain a minimum of five to seven strips but may include up to fifteen or more strips
- No matter the number of strips, strive to make each gradation strip rich in color, value and proportion

Fabric Recipes

Below are three recipes for strip sets. I'm providing these recipes as a guideline, because sometimes it's easier to proceed with something new when you have some instructions to follow. If you find the recipes restricting, by all means make up your own combinations. These guidelines will provide you with a variety of made fabrics and patterns from which to build your quilt composition.

Fabric Recipes – Combining Solids

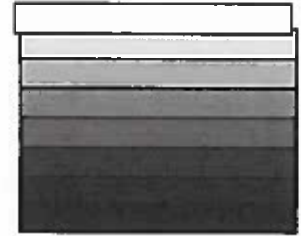
We are going to start with combining solid fabrics. I used almost exclusively solid fabrics in my first composition. I was amazed how much depth and interest I could create with just solid fabrics. But you can use fabrics that have a subtle pattern, batiks with a mottled or subtle pattern or whatever you have in your stash. You can add stripes and other prints later, but try to stick with solids/near solids at first.

Here are some fabric recipes to begin with. You can use these or come up with your own combinations. If you have an idea in mind that drives you, or you feel constricted by the recipes here, go with your gut. These first three constructions will include neutral solids, from black to white. When cutting strips for the first construction, if you want to do more than one, you might want to consider cutting two extra sets for the next two constructions.

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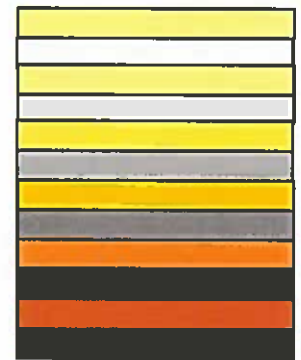
Fabric Construction # 1

Cut strips of your solid fabrics from white to black with the grays in between. For our purposes, we are going to call this color family “neutrals”. Choose a width of 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches. You will get a different effect with your finished construction depending on the width of strips you choose. You can use strips that are all the same size, or vary the sizes. Cut your strips selvedge to selvedge if you are using whole lengths of fabric, or long ways if you are using fat quarters. You want all of your strips to be approximately the same length. Sew the strips together from lightest to darkest. Use a consistent ¼ inch seam allowance. Press your seams open or to one side, as is your preference.



Fabric Construction # 2

Cut strips of your solid fabrics from white to black with the grays in between. Choose another color family of solids graded from light to dark. In this example I chose a gradation from light yellow to dark gold. Choose a width of 1 ½ to 2 ½ inches. Intersperse strips from this color family with the neutrals. You can use strips that are all the same size, or vary the sizes. Cut your strips selvedge to selvedge if you are using whole lengths of fabric, or long ways if you are using fat quarters. You want all of your strips to be approximately the same length. Sew the strips together from lightest to darkest. Use a consistent ¼ inch seam allowance. Press your seams open or to one side, as is your preference.



Fabric Construction # 3: Use the same set of neutrals and the same second color family from your first two fabrics. Choose another color that contrasts well with your second color family above. In this example I chose blue to contrast with the yellows and the golds. Cut narrow strips of this contrasting color and alternate these strips with the strips from Fabric Construction # 2. You can continue your gradation from light to dark or mix up the values any way you wish. Cut your strips selvedge to selvedge if you are using whole lengths of fabric, or long ways if you are using fat quarters. You want all of your strips to be approximately the same length. Use a consistent ¼ inch seam allowance. Press your seams open or to one side, as is your preference.



Have fun and don't stress over this. There are no wrong answers to this creative question. Can't wait to see you in class!