



## Adapting to Make it Your Own

Timeless Stitches – Quilt Capital of Kansas

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Last time Sharon shared where her inspiration comes from when making quilts. Each person draws inspiration from their own experiences. My interest in adapting patterns to my preferences comes from a deep history of adapting patterns to make them my own back in my early days sewing clothes.

My mother was a master seamstress who could take a sleeve from one pattern, a neckline from another, and a skirt & waistline from a third and meld them all together into a unique dress that no one else would have. Certainly not like the “cookie cutter” dresses that were available in the local dress shops. At that time in the 1960s and early 1970s, it actually cost less to make clothes than to buy them since fabric and patterns were quite reasonably priced. Getting nice quality yardage at a local fabric shop allowed you to pick the fabric and color you wanted to make your dress unique. Plus, it was before the era of Wal-Mart filled with clothes that cost less than a single pattern today.

A favorite dress was one Mom made for one of my high school dances in 1970. We had seen an ecru lace dress with a chocolate brown georgette bow on the front at a shop in the mall. I begged her to buy it for me, but, no, instead she pulled out her little tablet and sketched a picture of it and wrote a few notes. We then went to New York Fabrics, an amazing fashion fabric store not far from the mall. If we could find similar lace and a pattern close to the dress I'd seen, she would make it for me. If not, she might buy the one from the shop. I knew where this was headed right away. As it turns out, we found a higher quality lace, two patterns that were melded together to include both the neckline (a Simplicity pattern) and the sleeve and ruffled cuff (a McCall's pattern) from the original shop dress, and I got to pick the color of georgette for the bow myself—a lovely moss green. I wore that dress to the dance and then to several other semi-formal events and loved that it really was unique to me and not, as Mom called them, “just another copy off the rack” from the shop at the mall.



Growing up with this knowledge and learning Mom's tricks, I was always doing something to make my homemade outfits or those for my children or others special. Once I switched to quilting in 2006, I almost immediately did the same, changing out blocks, turning them to a different orientation, or swapping out fabrics to include colors more to my personal liking. I find using patterns to be handy, but even more I see them as a

guideline—a plan to work from to make something unique to me. I’m forever taking quilt patterns and giving them a twist. Doing so makes the whole process more fun for me. It adds an element of surprise as I switch things up, not knowing for sure what the final outcome will look like.

Many quilters take a pattern and make it exactly as it looks on the cover photo. This is wonderful! For them, this works. For me, I immediately pick out a new palette of colors and find ways to personalize the design. For those who love Block of the Month programs that come as kits with the same fabrics going to everyone doing that particular quilt, that’s great! I’ve only done a couple of BOM programs because, although I love the original design, I really don’t want my quilt to look like everyone else’s. If five of quilters make the same BOM quilt and hang them at the county fair, they would all look exactly the same as far as color and pattern. However, if I’d done the same one, it would have some sort of twist—a different block, a change of background or focus fabric, a new colorway completely. It would have turned out different enough that you might not know it’s the same pattern. To me, that’s what makes quilting so much fun. We can personalize our designs and color choices to make each of our quilts unique.

If you’re a “young” quilter who is still learning, following the patterns exactly with the same fabrics might be the way to go until you gain more experience. However, as you gain confidence and learn the techniques, don’t be afraid to branch out and make some changes. Start swapping out one color for one of your favorites. Change the background color from light to dark. If you have a favorite block, trade it out somewhere in the quilt. Over time you may come to find you enjoy adapting your skills to make your quilt creations as unique as you.