



Mystery Quilts

Timeless Stitches – Quilt Capital of Kansas

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If you really like a good mystery, making a mystery quilt may be just the project for you! A mystery quilt is just what it is called—a mystery. The instructions are dispensed in installments, often one step per month, but no picture of the final quilt is available until the last set of instructions is released.

The Maple Leaf Quilters Guild members recently started a mystery quilt project, receiving a clue at each meeting. Members are using fabrics from their own stashes to make their projects, so each quilt when finished will be unique to that person even though they will all be made from the same pattern. The first set of instructions gave the fabric requirements indicating if one fabric should be a large print, if another should be a blender, if others should be light, medium, or dark, etc. The instructions that follow each month describe cutting the fabric and making units that will ultimately be assembled to make the quilt, step by step.

My first experience with a mystery quilt was disappointing. I chose two fabrics that were directional. As a result I had little angels and Christmas trees standing on their heads and lying on their sides. It bothered me every time I looked at it. Fortunately one of my nieces either didn't notice or didn't care and was delighted to take the quilt home.

My next experience was more successful because I avoided directional fabrics. My current project is still a mystery. I decided to use blue and yellow fabrics from my stash, but the pattern called for several pieces over one yard each and I had only yard or half-yard pieces, so I combined pieces that were similar in color to make up the fabric requirements to make it a bit more scrappy. I purchased one piece of fabric with blue and yellow dots on a white background to pull the others together. The good news is that, so far, I have used up seven pieces out of my stash and I'm only on step 2. I'm hoping that the use of more prints in the quilt will add interest and variety to the blocks. Not knowing how the units from steps 1 and 2 will fit together, this becomes a small mystery within the original mystery.

Another type of mystery quilt involves putting a lot of same-size squares in a brown paper bag, drawing a square from the bag, and sewing it to the previous square until the quilt is finished. I have not made one of these, because I prefer to have more control over my projects. When I use a random fabric placement, I do what I call "controlled random." I prefer to arrange the squares to distribute the colors more evenly and so that I do not have identical pieces placed adjacent to each other. For me that takes some of the mystery out of that kind of mystery quilt.

With the plethora of quilting groups on Facebook, many quilt designers offer mystery quilt-alongs for quilters from anywhere. Some have a nominal fee to join and receive the clues and may include membership in a private online group that shares along the way. Other mysteries are free for a limited time, such as Bonnie Hunter's annual mystery quilt that runs from Black Friday to approximately New Year's Day. Her clues

remain free to download on her website for a couple of months following the final clue and reveal, after which they are taken down and combined into either a stand-alone pattern for purchase or included in a future book.

While mystery quilts aren't for everyone, if you want to try one, there's sure to be one out there for you to find with a quick search on your favorite social media site. Or encourage your guild to have a member create one or get permission to use one by a local quilt pattern designer as the Maple Leaf Quilters Guild did. With any luck, there will be a few examples of this year's mystery completed in time to hang at the Maple Leaf Quilt Show in October.