



Star Quilts

Timeless Stitches — Quilt Capital of Kansas

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Through the ages quilters have been inspired by things around them and events in their lives. It could be something as simple as “Broken Dishes,” “Trip Around the World,” or “Kansas Dugout.” One theme that appears and reappears many times over is stars. Sometimes it is a star block and sometimes the whole quilt features one big star—it may be with or without other smaller stars. I like to make quilts that have a different star in each block.

The simplest of stars is the four-pointed “Friendship Star.” It is a nine-patch variation with a square in the center, with four star points made from half-square triangles with the points pointing out placed on each side of the square, and four corner squares. It may be one of the blocks in the quilt, or it may be used as a cornerstone in the sashing.

Six-pointed stars come together with certain arrangements of hexagons and equilateral triangles. My favorite quilt made from equilateral or 60-degree triangles is the “Seven Sisters” quilt. Each block has a six-pointed star in the center that is surrounded by six more six-pointed stars and finishes out to be a large hexagon. Blocks are set together with equilateral triangles.

Eight-pointed stars come in a variety of shapes and styles. The “Le Moyne Star” is formed with six sixty-degree diamonds with squares and triangles around the edges to square out the block. It is pieced more easily by hand than on the sewing machine. The “Le Moyne Star” block was named for two brothers who founded New Orleans in 1718 (ref: Yvonne Khin’s *Collector’s Dictionary of Quilt Names and Patterns*). Some English-speaking settlers renamed the “Le Moyne Star” block the “Lemon Star” block.

The “Sawtooth Star” is a nine-patch variation that has a square in the center surrounded by four “Flying Geese” units that are as wide as the square and half as tall, plus four squares the height of the “Flying Geese” units in the corners. My favorite eight-pointed star is the “Fifty-Four Forty or Fight” star (inspired by an historical event!). It is a nine-patch variation, also, with a center square surrounded by triangle-in-a-square units made up of two half-rectangles on either side of an isosceles triangle that form the two star points. Four squares in the corners finish the blocks. There are countless variations of these block patterns.

Occasionally a quilter will include some “Mariner’s Compass” blocks with star blocks. These “stars” will have sixteen or more points, some as many as thirty-six points. The preferred technique for making these blocks is foundation or freezer paper piecing. When I make a



“Mariner’s Compass” block, I start by drafting the star on the dull side of freezer paper. I label each piece and cut the drawing apart. Then I iron the slick side of the freezer paper to the wrong side of the fabric that will be used for that piece in the block. I cut the shape out larger than the fabric, leaving at least ¼” beyond the paper for a seam allowance. Using the edge of the freezer as the stitching line, I sew the block pieces together and carefully press it. The block will be round so background fabric needs to be added to make a square or rectangular block. The paper is removed when the quilt is assembled.



In some quilts the star covers the main body of the quilt top. One of these patterns is the “Texas Star” or “Lone Star” quilt. It is not unusual for quilt patterns to have multiple names. This pattern is also known as “The Star of Bethlehem” inspired by the star in the Bible that led the shepherds to baby Jesus. This star pattern is also very popular with the Lakota (Sioux) people. The star is said to represent honor and generosity. I remember helping make a “Lone Star” quilt using templates cut from a cardboard cereal box for each individual diamond. The quilt starts with an eight-pointed star in the center, similar to the “Le Moyne Star”, that is surrounded by diamonds of another color. More rows of different colors are added around the

star until it reaches its maximum width of the diamonds. The rows that follow decrease to make eight diamonds composed of diamond-shaped pieces.

A strip-piecing technique has revolutionized the making of a “Lone Star” quilt! The quilter makes eight strip sets of the colors in the stars and crosscut them on a 45-degree angle. The colors are staggered so when they are sewn together the result is the same as the original plan of surrounding the star with a different color each round. Smaller versions of this pattern can be sized to make individual blocks rather than a large center medallion. “Broken Star” quilts start with the “Lone Star” pattern with 24 pieced diamonds identical to those in the star that form a border around the outside of the central star with three diamonds radiating from the tip of each star diamond.

Another all-over star pattern is made with “Log Cabin” blocks. The center of the star is made of colored “Log Cabin” blocks. The star points are formed with “Log Cabin” blocks that are half colored and half background fabric and the background blocks are made of all background fabric. They are positioned to make a large star similar to the “Sawtooth Star.”

As you can see, stars are an extremely popular motif for quilters and have an amazing variability to match the personality of each individual maker.

