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## Fat Quarter Cut-Ups Basics

# Basic/nformation 

Introduction

This book was written with the use of Hoffman Fabrics Fat Quarter Bundles in mind. Each Fat Quarter Bundle contains 14 fat quarters. A fat quarter is a piece of fabric that is cut 18 " $\times 21-22$ " wide.

While all of the quilts in this book were made using the Fat Quarter bundles, you can easily substitute 14 $18 " \times 21 "$ fat quarters from your own fabric stash. If you wish to achieve similar results, take a few minutes to study the fabrics in the quilt you plan to make to determine how to select fabrics.

When Hoffman Fabrics presented Fat Quarter bundles, I immediately knew what I wanted to do with all of that cottony goodness - cut it into little pieces! WooHoo! I wanted an approach that was fast, fun and would allow freedom when piecing. I have long been fascinated by the attractive quilts that have been made using crazy quilt construction, but I practice avoidance of hand stitched projects. The natural solution was to search for a machine pieced approach to constructing the quilt tops.

The Cut-Up approach that I have used to construct the quilts found in this book is a speedy, fun and liberating way to piece quilts. I give myself permission to be imprecise and free. The blocks can be cut very freely or with measured precision. Either way, the resulting blocks will be trimmed to a uniform size before constructing the quilt top.

## Basics

Yardage is calculated on 42 " wide fabric. Binding and inside border strips are cut the width of fabric WOF. Final borders are cut the length of the fabric.

All of the quilts in this book consist of 56 blocks. The construction of the quilt tops is consistent throughout and will be addressed only once.

Additional basic piecing directions can be found on my website: www.bearpawproductions.com.

## Fabric Preparation

## Do you pre-wash your fabric?

Yes, I am asking a very personal question. My long term stash fabric is all pre-washed. That allows me to cut off the bit that I need for a project and begin immediately. If it has reached my stashed, it has passed by the laundry room first, but

## I DO NOT WASH FAT QUARTERS!!

If the fat quarters are cut precisely 18 " wide, washing may cause the fabrics to shrink and not allow you to cut the four 9 " squares necessary to construct each quilt.

Because my fat quarters are not washed, I complete the quilt with unwashed border and backing fabric. The fabrics will all shrink together and not stress the seams between the body of the quilt and borders.

## Starch

Repeat after me "Starch is my friend!" These blocks are constructed from pieces that have many bias edges. The best way to control bias is with a liberal application of spray starch.

Not being a fan of aerosol sprays, I use a concentrated liquid starch that I purchase at the grocery or discount store - the brand
 I use is Sta-Flo Liquid Starch. I mix one part water to 2 parts starch in a spray bottle.

I drape the fat quarter over an extra shower curtain rod that is suspended over my bath tub, this prevents sticky over-spray in my sewing room. The starch is liberally applied to all of the fat quarters, allowing time for the liquid to be absorbed into the fabric more evenly. The fat quarters are then pressed until they are dry with a hot steam iron. The resulting fabric pieces are crisp (not board stiff) and behave beautifully. Only the fabrics required for a project are starched. Starched yardage is not stored for fear of attracting bugs.

## Tools and Supplies

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Rotary Cutter - because this technique prescribes cutting through multiple layers of fabric - up to 14 I prefer to work with a 60 mm rotary cutter. A new sharp blade is most helpful. I also have my trusty 45 mm Olfa rotary cutter at hand as well for trimming and block squaring as I work.


Cutting Mat - two mat sizes are used for this project: 1 - an 18 " x 24 " or larger mat is used when cutting the fat quarters into 9 " squares. This size mat will easily accommodate the fat quarter.
2 - a 12" x 18 " or a rotating 12 " Olfa mat are great when sub-cutting the 9 " fabric stacks. This will allow you to rotate the cutting mat as you cut the fabric pieces.


Rulers - three ruler sizes are helpful:
$1-\mathrm{a} 6 " \times 24$ " for cutting the fat quarters
2 - a 4 " x 14" ruler for sub-cutting the 9 " squares
3 - an $81 / 2 "$ ruler for squaring up the blocks.


Thread - 100\% cotton 50 wt thread such as Masterpiece by Superior Thread. Masterpiece is a high quality, extra-long staple cotton. I use this particular thread because it is a fine thread that will not add bulk at the seam.

The thread colors that I use when piecing are likely darker than most people would consider. My current favorite Masterpiece colors are \#135 Da Vinci and \#155 Greystone. I only use a light colored thread when working with very light or pastel fabrics. These darker threads are more likely to hide in the seam than the silvery gray that many quilters believe to be neutral.

Sewing Machine - clean in good working condition.

Design Wall - is an invaluable tool when arranging the Cut-Up quilt blocks. A design wall can be as simple as a piece of batting tacked to the wall or the backside of a flannel backed tablecloth. The flannel or batting is "sticky" and will allow the blocks to be arrange without the need to pin them in place.

A design wall lets you arrange the blocks you've constructed on a neutral background and see how they work together-or don't work together-before you sew. It's the best way to really see what your quilt will look like before you make the huge commitment of assembling the pieces.

Reducing Glass - aka door peep hole - is available from a hardware store. The cost is about $\$ 5$. When I am preparing to assemble the quilt top, I arrange the blocks on a design wall and examine the arrangement through the viewer. The viewer allows me to see the quilt as a whole. In a reduced view you may see a design problem such as color balance, that might not otherwise be apparent when viewing the quilt top up close.


CUT the 14 fat quarters into four $9 "$ squares as diagramed below. All patterns in this book start with 9 " squares. I personally layer all 14 fat quarters and cut only once. If you wish, you may cut fewer layers. A 60 mm rotary cutter is helpful when cutting many layers. The remnant strip at the right may be saved for another project.


LAYER the 9 " squares RIGHT SIDE UP into stacks of 4,6 or 8 squares deep, according to your ability and hand strength to cut multiple fabric layers. The blocks in this book are constructed from 2 or 4 different fabrics so the smallest stack could be 2 fabrics deep. I would recommend 4 or 8 layers.

Alternate light and dark as you assemble the stacks. Each fabric must contrast with the fabric squares that appear on either side of them in the stack.

The top fabric in the stack must contrast with the bottom fabric in the stack because they will be sewn together as well.

Cut-Up the layered squares as diagramed in your chosen pattern. Each block is diagramed with a measured cutting guide. It is your choice when constructing the quilt whether you follow the diagram exactly, or use it simply as a suggestion. If you use the diagram merely as a suggestion, the resulting blocks will be much more spontaneous. Many of the sample quilts were cut using the measured diagram exactly which results in more precise block construction.

## The cuts may be made in one of three ways:

Freehand - using the cutting diagram only as a rough guide. This approach will produce the greatest variety of blocks. The piecing of each stack will be slightly different. The resulting quilt will have more movement and visual interest.

Template - with the cutting lines drawn onto 9 " squares of freezer paper that will be cut as the stack is Cut-Up. This is the most precise method allowing you to accurately duplicate the original diagram. The shiny side of the freezer paper square is lightly pressed to the top layer of fabric after the cutting lines are drawn in place. The cutting template is cut as the fabric stack is cut-up. After you have cut the fabric stacks, gently remove the freezer paper. Make one freezer paper template for each fabric stack.

Modified Template - the cutting lines are drawn directly onto the top fabric in each stack using a quilt pencil. The cutting lines maybe drawn precisely as indicated by the cutting diagram, or with the diagram as a rough guide.


Choose your method and sub-cut the fabric stacks using firm pressure on your rotary cutter to ensure you cut through all the layers.

Master Diagram Draw a full-sized paper template of the cutting diagram. As you cut the 9 " stacks, arrange the cut pieces on the master diagram to prevent confusion as you stitch the units together.

REARRANGE the fabric stacks.
Stack \#1 - leave undisturbed.
Stack \#2 - move the top piece of fabric to the bottom of the stack.

Stack \#3 - move the top 2 pieces of fabric to the bottom of the stack.


Stack \#4 - move the top 3 pieces of fabric to the bottom of the stack.

Rearranging the fabrics in this manner will prevent the same fabric from appearing in a block more than once.

STITCH the block units together. Chain piece units \#1 and \#2 together in the order that they appear in the stack. You may wish to mark the first pair stitched as a reminder that this is the pair that is on top of the stack. Separate the units - always keeping them in order - and press all seams open. Place the stack of sewn units back in position on the master cutting diagram.

In the same manner, stitch units \#3 and \#4 together in the order that they appear in the stack. Again, mark the first pair stitched to help you remember that they will return to the top of the pile after the units are chain pieced, snipped apart and the seams pressed open. Place the sewn \#3/\#4 units back in place on the master cutting diagram.

NOTE: in the diagram above the raw edge that will be on the interior of the block is pieced in such a way as to remain straight. The excess fabric is on the outer edge of the block.

After piecing units \#1 and \#2 together, this edge will be trimmed and straightened as necessary. Trimming should remove just a sliver of fabric.


Trim the edge as necessary to straighten.
Stitch the block halves together. Press the seams open. The seam in the center may be matched, or not, it is up to your discretion.

PRESS FINGER PRESS!!! All seams within the Cut-Up blocks are finger pressed open. After the blocks are complete finger press the final seam and then press them using a steam iron. Press the blocks from the wrong side to ensure the seam allowances are not flipped in the wrong direction.

## SQUARE UP

Trim the pieced blocks using a square ruler. The individual pattern will specify what size to trim the block. In most cases the blocks were trimmed the smallest amount necessary to square them up. You may need to trim your blocks to a different
 size if you have taken a larger seam or trimmed fabric from the interior edge when piecing.

