

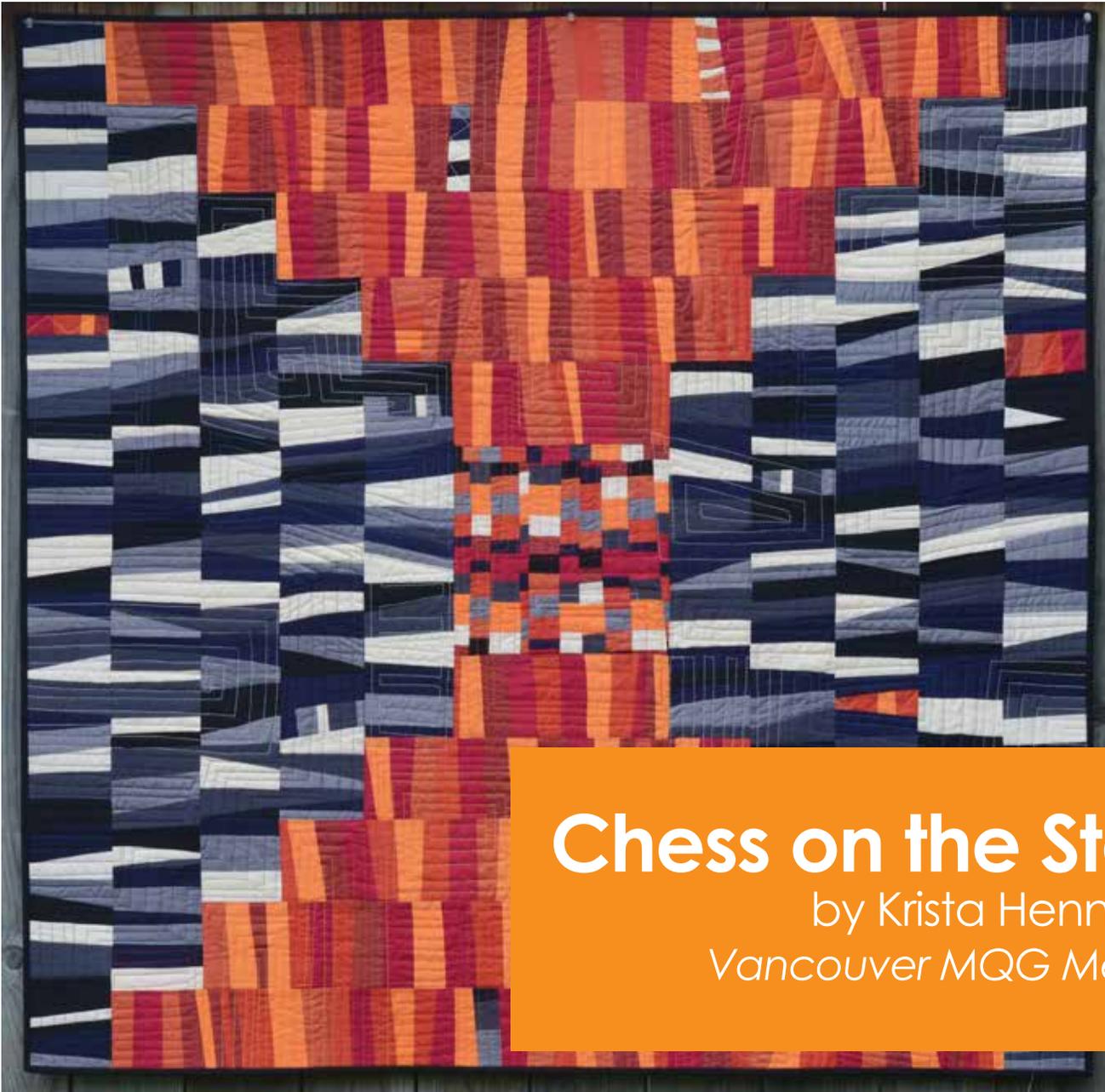
Pattern of the Month

September 2014

For Members of the MQG



MODERN QUILT GUILD



Chess on the Steps

by Krista Hennebury
Vancouver MQG Member

The Modern Quilt Guild's mission is to support and encourage the growth and development of modern quilting through art, education and community. www.modernquiltguild.com

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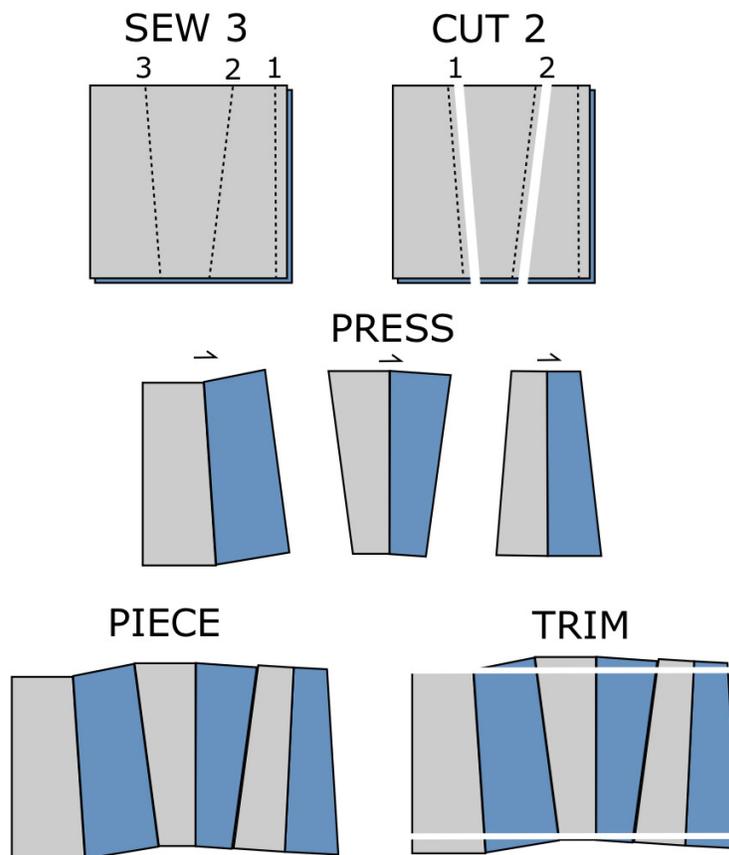
Improv Under the Influence

A Piecing Technique by Krista Hennebury – www.poppyprintcreates.blogspot.com

I often hear from traditional quilters in my workshops and retreats who want to try improvisational piecing and explore modern quilt design, but they are intimidated by the freedom of working without a pattern or plan. Likewise, many modern quilters are looking for a way to use their solid fabrics in improvisational quilts without the use of templates, foundation patterns or pre-cutting of random strips.

Improv Under the Influence is so named because modern results are achieved with traditional chain-piecing, rotary equipment and $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance. It is an exciting improvisational piecing technique influenced by traditional methods. With this technique, you can build improv strip units for creative use in a number of different projects including wallhangings, placemats, table runners, pillow covers and quilts. This is a great method for creating improv piano key borders to add to any quilt. Most importantly, it is really fun to do!

Improv Under the Influence – the basic idea Piecing with 5" charm squares



Chess on the Steps

An “Improv Under the Influence” quilt pattern by Krista Hennebury

www.poppyprintcreates.blogspot.com

This quilt is inspired by an unnamed antique quilt I saw on display in Bellingham, WA in a 2012 showing of *American Quilts – The Democratic Art*. The maker was unknown, but had created a graphic masterpiece of one large Courthouse Steps block using prints and solid scraps of wool, cotton and polyester cloth to create the borders. My interpretation is a color study using five related warm- colored, and five related cool-colored, *Oakshott Colorshott* shot cottons, generously provided by the Oakshott company.

Please read through all of the instructions before you begin creating.

Finished size, approximately 50” x 50”

Seam allowance is ¼” unless otherwise specified

Fabric Requirements

½ yard each of the following Oakshott Colourshott* shot cottons:

WARM: Nectarine, Russett, Champion, Snapdragon, Bizzie Lizzie,

COOL: White Sand, Charcoal, Vintage Silver, Midnight Blue, Black

½ yard of Oakshott Colourshott Black for binding

1 yard print for backing

1 1/4 yard solid for backing borders

52” x 52” piece of batting

Other Supplies

red & medium grey piecing thread

Coordinating quilting thread (see note under “Finishing the Quilt”)

Helpful rulers: 1” x 6”, 6” x 24”, 12 ½” square

Design wall

Cutting

From each of the ten ½ yards, cut:

28 charm squares 5" x 5"

1 strip of arbitrary width between 1 ¼" to 3" x 18"

From the additional black Oakshott ½ yard, cut:

4 binding strips 2 ¼" x WOF**

From the backing print, cut:

1 square 40" x 40"

From the backing border solid, cut:

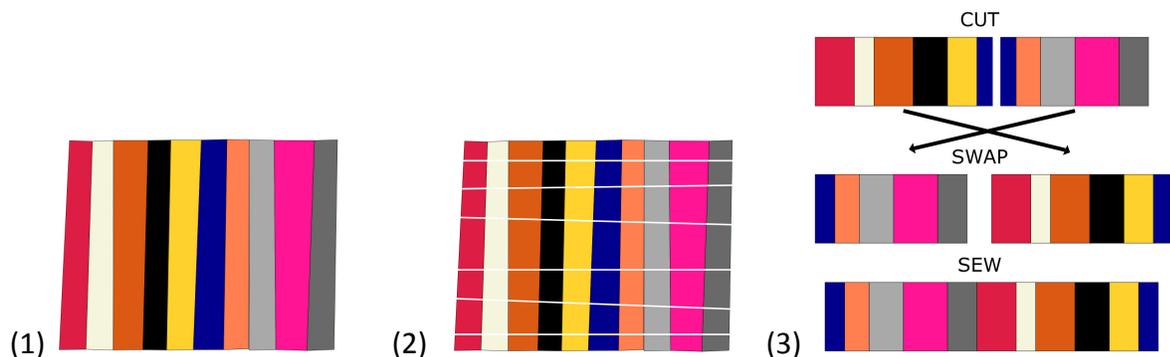
5 strips 8" x WOF

**Oakshott Colourshott shot cottons are produced 54" wide. If you use standard 42" wide quilting cotton, then 2/3 yard cuts of each color will be required to make this quilt.*

*** cut a total of 6 binding strips if using 42" wide quilting cotton.*

Piecing the Improv Checkerboard

1. On your design wall or work surface, lay out the 10 long, skinny strips alternating warm and cool colors. Your final piece will have more interest if the strips are of various widths, and if a few of them are not cut perfectly, but have angled long edges. Sew all of the strips together resulting in one large, striped unit. Press the seam allowances in one direction.
2. Cross cut the unit into strips varying in width from 1" to 3". Angle the cuts slightly.
3. Cut a few of the strips in 1/2 across the middle. Swap the two pieces end to end and sew the strip back together. This will create more randomness in your checkerboard.



4. Lay the strips side by side, flipping some end to end and inserting some of the altered strips from step 3 to create a random checkerboard. Sew the strips together. You may wish to save a strip or two and sew them onto the top or bottom of the resulting checkerboard unit just for added interest. Press the seam allowances open to reduce bulk.

5. With a large square ruler, trim the checkerboard so that all four corners are 90°. A perfect square is not necessary, but having opposite sides with equal length will help keep your quilt “squared up” as you add on the improv borders. The checkerboard in the sample quilt measures 10 ¼” x 10 ½” (unfinished).

Creating the Improv Strips

1. Place the warm colored charm squares into 5 stacks by color. Place the stacks in a row on your work surface. The idea is to pair, then sew together, two different colored squares at a time. To make sure there is an equal distribution of color pairs, take a square from the first stack and pair it with a square from each of the other four stacks. Then take a square from the second stack and pair it with a square from each of the other four stacks, and continue to the third, fourth and fifth stacks in the same manner.

2. Following “**Improv Under the Influence – the Basics**”, sew the pairs together beginning with a standard ¼” seam down the right edge (seam 1). Chain piecing will save a lot of time here, so just keep feeding the pairs into the machine one after the other, leaving a few stitches of thread in between each pair. Once the pairs are all sewn, cut the pairs apart by snipping the joining threads and stack them beside the machine with the seams on the right.

3. Now sew seam 2 through each pair, at least 1” to the left of seam 1. This time, feed the squares into the machine at a slight angle to the top edge of the squares. Let the feed dogs draw the squares through the machine and try to keep the seam as straight as possible. As you work through the stack, vary the distance away from seam 1 and alter the angles slightly for variety. Snip the joining threads and stack the pairs as in step 2.

4. Sew seam 3 through each pair at least 1” to the left of seam 2, again slightly altering the angle and distance from seam 2. *Seams 2 and 3 effectively divide the charm squares into random thirds.*

5. Cut the pairs apart and press each pair (with an up and down vertical pressing motion) to set the seams. Stack the pairs on your cutting mat with seam 1’s all on the right.

6. Place one pair on your cutting mat. Using a 1” x 6” ruler, line up the ¼” line with seam 3. Cut. Slide the ruler over so that the ¼” line is on seam 2. Cut. You now have 3 strip sets. Press the seam allowance toward the darker fabric in each strip set.

8. Repeat this entire process using the cool colored fabrics. **REMEMBER: Sew 3, Cut 2!**

Piecing the Border Rows

1. Now the fun starts! Begin working with the warm colors. On your design wall, arrange groups of about 12 strip sets into rows. Grab random strips, alternating colors and angles. To maximize the width of your borders, find corresponding angles that will result in the straightest rows. Avoid creating a long, curving row that will result in a really narrow border after trimming. In some cases, you may need to trim one side of a strip set to match a sharper angle. Keep your rows less than 24" long for ease of trimming.

ADD SOME INTEREST

Using your trimmings and scraps, piece a random strip of the alternate colorway into a border to provide a little pop of floating color in your quilt!

TRIM TO MATCH ANGLE WHEN NECESSARY



2. Piece the strips together. Press the seam allowance from wrong side, towards the darker fabrics, then flip the border over and press from the right side. Seam allowances will be going in both directions – that is ok! Your quilt will last longer with side-pressed seams.

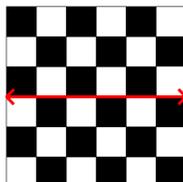
3. Trim the long, irregular edges of each row parallel to each other creating as wide a border as possible (see diagram “**Improv Under the Influence – the Basics**”). Some borders may be as wide as 4 ½”, some as narrow as 3 ¾” depending on the angled seams sewn earlier. As the quilt grows in size, you will have to piece these rows end to end to make them long enough to fit the quilt. Check that rows are the same width before sewing them end to end and trim if necessary.

4. Repeat with the cool colors.

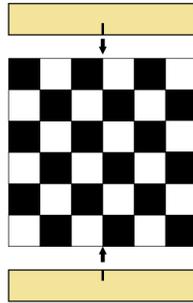
Making “Chess on the Steps”

The border rows are composed of a many seams on angled, or bias, edges. As a result, the borders can stretch out during sewing. To keep your quilt top squared and avoid rippling borders, follow the method below for adding the borders.

1. Measure the width of your checkerboard unit through the middle. Trim two warm-colored borders to this exact measurement.



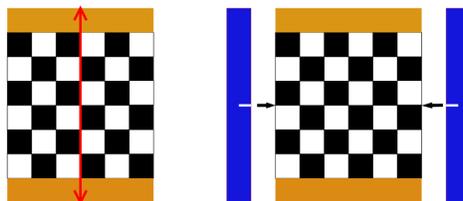
2. Fold the length of one border unit in half, finger pressing the center. Fold the checkerboard until in half, finger pressing the center. Matching the two centers, pin the border to the top of the checkerboard unit right sides together. Match the ends of the border and checkerboard and pin. Ease the remaining fabric between the center and end pins, pinning occasionally.



3. Sew the top border onto the checkerboard. Press the seam allowance toward the border.

4. Sew the bottom border onto the checkerboard repeating step 2. Press the seam allowance toward the border.

5. Repeat this process to add a cool-colored border to the left and right side of the checkerboard unit, except this time measure the height of the quilt top through the middle and cut the cool-colored borders to this measurement.



Continue adding warm-colored border units to the “warm sides” and cool-colored border units to the “cool sides” until the quilt reaches a size you like, or until you run out of strip sets to create more borders. The sample quilt has five borders on each side of the checkerboard; each border measures between 3 ¼” to 4” (finished) and the resulting quilt is about 50” x 50”.

Making the Quilt Back

1. Sew an 8” x 40” border of solid fabric to opposite sides of the print 40” square. Use a ½” seam allowance and backstitch at the beginning and end of each seam. Press the seam allowance open.

2. Sew the remaining three 8” x 40” strips end to end. Sub-cut the long strip into two 8” x 54” borders. Sew a border to the top and bottom of the quilt back in the same manner as step 1.

Finishing the Quilt

1. Layer the backing, batting and quilt top together and baste well using your favorite method.
2. The sample quilt was quilted using a walking foot with free-hand (unmarked) organic, straight-line/rectangular sections and square spirals. The following colors of coordinating Aurifil 28 wt thread were used: 4020, 2135, 2250, 2277, 2311, 2605, 2692.
3. Piece the binding strips end to end using a 45° seam. Fold in half along the length and press. Attach the binding to the edge of the quilt, matching the raw edges and using a 1/4" seam allowance. Mitre each corner (there are many online tutorials that can help with the binding process). Press the folded edge of the binding to the back of the quilt and stitch in place by hand, enclosing all of the raw edges.
4. Attach a label including your name, location and year to the back of your quilt.