

WHAT IS MODERN QUILTING?

HEATHER GRANT



Modern quilting has a rich history with a foundation in traditional quilt making. Many modern quilters are inspired by art quilting, Amish quilting, the quilters of Gee's Bend, Nancy Crow, Gwen Marston, and Yoshiko Jinzenji, as well as graphic design and the modern and post-modern movements in art, architecture and interior design.

Many art quilters and traditional quilt makers have made "modern" quilts during quilt history. The rise in popularity of these kinds of quilts was a key part in the rise of the movement. It was facilitated by the internet through early social media sites like Flickr and Craftster, as well as the decreasing cost of digital cameras, which enabled quilters to easily share digital images online.

The changing fabric industry also facilitated the movement. As companies began manufacturing modern, graphic prints, they created new fabric palettes for modern quilters that were not previously available.

WHAT IS THE MODERN QUILTING DESIGN AESTHETIC?

- Modern quilts are made to be used. Form and function go hand in hand.
- Modern quilters use traditional quilting techniques.
- Modern quilts have a slightly different approach to design as they use alternate gridwork at a much greater frequency than traditional quilts.
- There are always differences in interpretation to modern design, but all modern quilts have these elements.
- Every modern quilt has at least one of the modern quilting design elements (see below).

MODERN QUILTING DESIGN ELEMENTS

Modern quilting design elements are design tools quilters use to modernize the traditional quilt-making process. You can think of these elements like a salad bar: You don't want to use every design element in one quilt, (you'll have an overloaded salad), but using 2-4 elements at a time creates that perfect quilt salad with a bit of crunch, cream, sweetness and tang.

ALTERNATE GRIDWORK – traditional quilts are commonly laid out in columns and rows in a predictable brick structure.

- Modern quilts can still follow traditional grid structures — for example, using graphic color palettes or an unpredictable orientation of the blocks makes this quilt more modern while maintaining a traditional structure.
- Modern quilts often use alternate gridwork to incorporate asymmetry, negative space and scale within a different layout other than traditional columns and rows.

ASYMMETRY – When the focal point of a quilt is off-center or does not match on both sides.

BLOCK BASED – Quilts based on a similar block throughout the quilt.

NON-BLOCK BASED – Quilts that do not have a repeating block pattern.

GRAPHIC COLORS – Modern quilters often use graphic color palettes.

- The combination of colors and where they are placed can modify traditional designs into modern quilts.
- Color is less important if the other modern quilting design elements are strong.

CROPPING – When a block or focal point has been cut from the edge to end the motif. Often, this looks like the partial block or focal point is running off the edge of the quilt.

IMPROVISATION – Putting fabric together without following a pattern.

- This can be more like following a recipe from your head rather reading it from a cookbook.
- Rules of construction are thrown out the window, and scraps are combined to create organic movement in the quilt.
- Improvised, pieced sections can be recut and combined with more precise piecing to bring more order to improv quilts.



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MINIMALISM – Often, the more negative space a quilt has, the more minimal it becomes.

- Distilling down the most basic parts of quilt construction to their fundamental aspects.

MODERN TRADITIONALISM – Updating a traditional block or quilt layout with modern quilting elements like scale, negative space, modern color palettes or alternate gridwork.

- Modern traditional quilts apply other modern quilt design elements to traditional blocks in a restrained, impactful way.

NEGATIVE SPACE – The area between design elements that modern quilters often use to draw focus to different areas of a quilt.

- Modern quilters often use expansive negative space to organize the subject and capture attention

LACK OF BORDERS - There are rarely borders in modern quilting unless the borders are part of the negative space.

- When borders DO occur, they are usually part of the negative space.

SCALE – Increasing or decreasing the size of a classic quilt block.

- Scale can also be used by mixing scales — jumbo, large or small scales. Often, modern quilters exaggerate scale.

SUPPORTING MATERIALS & LINKS

[Gallery of Modern Quilts](#)

[What is Modern Quilting, MQG website](#)

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