



Do it yourself:

THE QUILT STJÄRNA

by Kerstin Neumüller

Photos: Ellinor Hall

When making patch work quilts, we usually sew lots of little squares together with straight seams, forming larger blocks which are then joined in the same way. But that's not the only way to quilt! Before sewing machines became common, quilters often used a technique called paper piecing – shaping fabric around paper templates. It allows you a little bit more freedom when creating your compositions.

My pattern was inspired by Moroccan tiles and traditional sashiko stitching. My pattern consists only of straight lines, which makes it easy to align the pieces and sew them together on a sewing machine.

The pattern that emerges is a little magical: it consists of small four-pointed stars with diamonds in between, but if you squint, you'll see that it also contains larger, eight-pointed stars. The yellow star and the blue background are not different shapes – they're made up of the same basic pieces but colored differently (see picture of the finished quilt).

The yellow star in the center is made up of four diamonds and four »star arms«.

You can start by sewing the yellow star in the center and work your way outward, or do as I did – begin in one corner and sew all the blue pieces together first, then make the yellow center star, and finally put the center star in place and sew the last seam at the junction between the yellow and the blue.

Let's get started!

WHAT YOU'LL NEED

Sewing machine

Thread

Iron

Cardboard matching the size of your intended quilt (milk carton type works perfectly)

Pencil and pen

Ruler

Scissors

Pins

Safety pins

Fabric for the quilt top and backing (i used a few different blues and one yellow for the top)

Batting for the filling



INSTRUCTIONS

Step 1: Draw Your Pattern

Start by sketching your quilt design on paper. I used thin but sturdy laminated cardboard similar to the kind used for milk cartons (available at hardware stores).

The design looks complex but it is actually constructed in a fairly simple way: Using your pencil, draw a square. Now divide it into four triangles by drawing two diagonal lines through the center of the square, from corner to corner. Switch to your pen. Mark a dot in the middle of each triangle. Then connect the dots with lines passing through the center of the square. The final step is to draw lines from each dot out to the corners of the square, still using your pen.

You now have a four-pointed star inside a square. Repeat this pattern (the star within its square) as many times as you need to match the desired width and length of your quilt. Remember to alternate between pen and pencil in the same way as before.

You can now erase all pencil lines.

Step 2: Wrap the Paper Pieces

Now it's time to cut out each paper piece and wrap them in fabric. To make the process manageable, it's a good idea to cut out a few pieces at a time and sew those together before continuing to cut more. So don't cut out all the pieces at once. See image 2.

Cut along the pen lines. You will now have paper pieces in the shape of kite-like star points, diamonds, and triangles in front of you. Place one paper piece on the wrong side of your fabric. Trace around the edge with tailor's chalk, then cut the fabric leaving about a 1 cm seam allowance. Place the paper piece back on the wrong side of the fabric, fold the edges over one by one, and press them flat with an iron.

Traditionally, quilters basted or lightly glued the edges to the paper – but I discovered that the thin plastic coating on my cardboard melted slightly with heat, holding the fabric neatly in place!



1.



2.



3.



4.

Step 3: Stitch the Pieces Together

When you've covered all the paper templates in fabric it's time to sew them together. This next bit might feel strange if you're used to traditional patchwork, because here you're going to sew with as little seam allowance as possible! Place the pieces edge to edge and right sides together, set your machine to a short stitch length (about 1.5), and sew as close to the edge as you can without going off. The folded fabric is already

secured to the paper, so it's perfectly safe to sew right along the edge.

Step 4: Remove the Paper

Once your sections are all stitched together, you get the satisfaction of peeling off the paper pieces. Because you sewed with such short stitches, the paper is perforated along the edges, and should tear away cleanly when you pull gently. If the »glue« is sticking too much, you can warm it again with the iron.

DO IT YOURSELF



Step 5: Layer and Pin

For the filling, I like using organic cotton batting – it makes them warm and fluffy, and even if the quilt is only meant to hang on a wall, it's nice if it has a bit of weight to it. Cut a piece of batting slightly larger than your quilt top, and a piece of backing fabric the same size as the batting. Lay all three layers together and smooth them out so there are no wrinkles. To keep everything in place during the next step, I usually pin all three layers

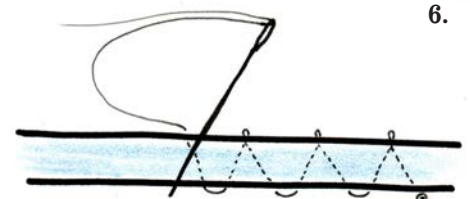


together across the surface of the quilt using safety pins – one pin per roughly 20 square centimeters is about right.

Step 6: Quilt the Layers

To hold them together, stitch through all three layers across the quilt's surface. I chose to sew along the seam lines using a backstitch. It is done by insert your needle just behind the point where it came up (see illustration!). This creates a continuous, dotted line on the front

and longer stitches on the back. If you prefer, you can use simple running stitches instead – they'll work just as well. I chose a thick cotton thread to make the pattern stand out nicely on the quilt's reverse side.



You can quilt by machine, but unless your machine has a walking foot attachment it can be tricky to get neat results – and honestly, I think hand stitching looks the most charming.

Step 7: Add the Binding

I wanted a 1.5 cm wide border on my quilt, so I cut a strip of fabric a little longer than the quilt's perimeter and 6 cm wide. Align it along one edge of the quilt, right sides together and sew with a 1.5 cm seam allowance. At the start of the strip, fold the end under by about a centimeter to hide the raw edge. To form neat corners, sew up to 1.5 cm from the quilt's corner, secure your thread, then fold the strip down along the next side and continue sewing. It will form a nice diagonal fold when you turn the strip to the back of the quilt later. When you reach the beginning, overlap the ends of the strip slightly and stitch them down.

Step 8: Finish the Back

Fold the binding over to the quilt's back, tuck in the raw edge, pin it, and stitch it down by hand. Use small invisible stitches that catch only the backing and the binding fabric – not the quilt front. Finally, I folded the strip over to the back of the quilt, tucked in its raw edge, pinned it down, and sewed it with small stitches that didn't go through to the quilt front but only caught the backing and the strip fabric.

And you're done!

