

Preparing For Class and Creating Your Strata

Designing with Strips 'n Curves

Please read completely at least once before starting

I like to work with one-patch and two-patch designs, and one of my most successful experiments started when I married my favorite two-patch pattern – Drunkard's Path – with my love of strip piecing. I was mesmerized by the combination of linear and circular patterns that emerged...I was enchanted by these unexpected successes, but what hooked me on their usefulness in quilting was the fact that my students had such great success with them.

~Louisa L. Smith

Award Winning Quilter, Author

& Designer of the Strips 'n Curves templates

The Strips 'n Curves technique involves piecing fabric into strip sets, or **strata**, and cutting the strata into curved shapes. The curved shapes are then assembled in a variety of ways, resulting in one-of-a-kind creations.

We've all had the experience of being drawn to a quilt but on closer examination discover the workmanship leaves much to be desired. Yet we still like the quilt. What we are drawn to is the color! Color is one of the most important, if not the most important, elements to consider when making a Strips 'n Curves quilt.

Think of your fabrics as paints. With the Strips 'n Curves method you are creating your own fabric by cutting and then sewing many strips together. Ideally, the strips and the resulting strata should flow together creating washes of color. The key to making this a successful process is having many strips in lots of colors and prints (or visual textures) to work with – I recommend you choose a minimum of 18 to 20 fabrics for your strata. Go for 30! In this case more is more. The idea is not to have the strata go from light → medium → dark value (although you can certainly go that route if you want), but to have changes in value in many places so that waves of color appear to flow across the surface of your quilt top.

Here are some strategies and tips to help make your fabric selection and preparing your strata stress-free.



FINDING A FOCUS

Getting started is as simple as picking a focus fabric. I suggest you select a heavily patterned focus fabric with a lot of color in it. This focus fabric will guide you to your other color choices. Don't choose a tone-on-tone print; instead choose an interesting multicolored, geometric, large-scale, or otherwise exciting print. I find it most helpful to choose a fabric that **contains at least three colors**. Then audition it with fabrics that color coordinate with your focus fabric. Keep a sample with you at all times (see Creating A Mock-Up on page 5).

After selecting the large-scale floral focus fabric in the picture above, I started by pulling two bolts – one predominantly blue and the other predominantly green. Then selected light and dark values in each color family, as well as transition fabrics in blue-green.

Tips for selecting a focus fabric:

- Shop your stash first!
- Choose a heavily patterned, large-scale, or geometric fabric that you really like with at least three colors in it.
- Remember that crazy print you fell in love with but haven't used yet? It's time!
- Let your focus fabric guide you to your fabric choices for your strip set strata.
- You might not want to use the focus fabric in your piece, but let it be the inspiration for selecting a color palette and fabrics for your strata.

COLOR MAKES THE QUILT

Deciding which colors to use is the one thing every quilting project has in common. Color is an extremely important design element of any quilt – perhaps the most important. Many books have been written about color theory – the systematic relationship colors have with one another – and there's no shortage of information on the internet. Reading about and applying the principles of color theory can help you obtain harmony, contrast, and depth in your quilts. Using color, visual texture, and patterns in your fabrics can create a feeling of movement and achieve visual effects.

Once you've selected a focus fabric, here are some color strategies for picking fabrics for your strata:

A color wheel is an indispensable and inexpensive tool for learning which colors harmonize best. If you are new to color theory, stick to the basics and explore using these color schemes:

- **Complementary** colors are across from each other on the color wheel (e.g. red & green or yellow-orange & blue-violet)
- A **Triad** combines every fourth color on the wheel (e.g. yellow-orange → violet → blue or yellow → blue → red) and often gives sophisticated results
- **Analogous** colors are adjacent to each other on the color wheel (e.g. green → blue-green → blue or yellow → yellow-orange → orange)
- **Monochromatic** is many values (shades and tints) of one hue like deep red → pale pink



Rhythm of the Islands focus fabric and strata choices

If you are a color theory pro or were blessed with natural "color sense," flex your creativity [with more advanced color schemes](#). To capitalize on the visual effects created by the use of strip set strata, also give some thought to how warm and cool colors work with each other to give dimension to your design. Warm colors (yellow, orange, red) are bold and come to the front. Cool colors (blue, green, violet) are calming and tend to recede.

An example:

- ① Selected a focus fabric → decided to work with the complementary colors orange & blue → picked a few predominantly orange fabrics ② and blue fabrics ③ → then filled in with different values of orange and blue → then added more fabrics in values of yellow and green (analogous to orange). See next page for the completed quilt.



Rhythm of the Islands (made with the Basic Set templates) is the perfect example of a complementary color scheme. The cool blues and warm oranges in this quilt really make the curves stand out.

Note the use of the focus fabric as a “solid” in some shapes – a “solid” in the Strips ‘n Curves world means “not cut from a strip set” – and the appliqued flowers cut from the focus fabric.

Mango Sunset (made with the Basic Set templates) is a beautiful example of a monochromatic color scheme (no focus fabric included in this piece) and mastery of color value.

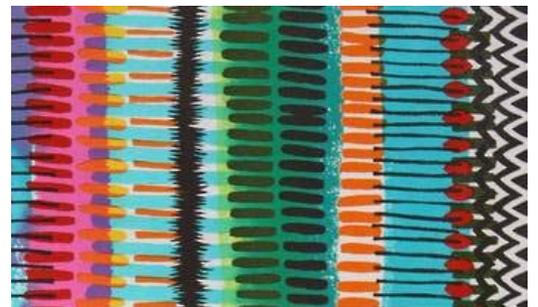
This is outstanding play of light against medium/dark value to accentuate the squares and circles. The lines of the strata give an impression of continuous movement while the minimal use of “solids” and the darkest value shapes gives the eye a place to rest.



The Long and Winding Road (made with the Basic + Basic II templates) has a colorful graphic print for the focus fabric and it was used in the strata. The focus fabric was cut into vertical strips and alternated with coordinating hand-dyed fabrics to create the strata.



This quilt is loaded with color, visual interest, and movement with the hand-dyed solids giving the eye a few places to rest.



“Matchsticks” by Alexander Henry Fabrics



Batiks (and hand-dyed) fabrics work especially well for the Strips 'n Curves technique. Made with the Basic Set templates, *Citrus Flavor's* focus fabric is a batik with analogous colors orange, yellow & green. A secondary focus fabric with a citrus fruit graphic was chosen for the appliqué. Then a pleasing array of about 20 batiks were chosen for the strata and put into color and value order.

Another way to use this focus fabric is to cut it in 1 1/2" strips and add 1 1/2" strips of a second fabric in between each strip of the focus fabric. A hand dyed, batik or tone on tone of one of the dominant colors in the focus fabric works well here.

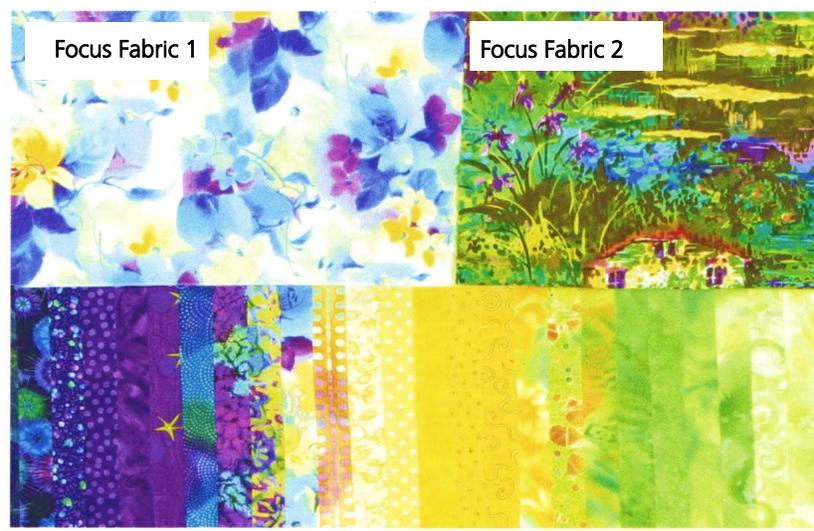
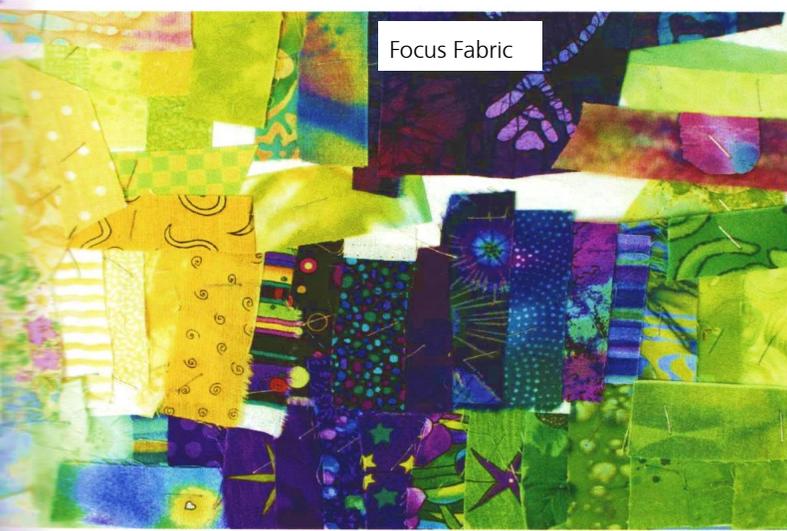
With or without a focus fabric, nothing is easier than making a Strips 'n Curves quilt with a striped fabric! Louisa Smith made *Ode to Michael* from all the colorways of the "Colorstripes" collection by Michael James (Free Spirit). This quilt was made with the Half Clamshell template set, but striped fabric will work with any of our template sets if you want to simulate the look of the strip sets without all the work. You'll want to look for fabrics with a 3/4" – 1 1/2" stripe.



Creating A Fabric Mock-Up

Once you've selected a focus fabric, cut a piece large enough to see the color and design and staple it to a plain sheet of 8½" x 11" paper. Pull fabrics from your stash that could work in your strata, cut small swatches and use a glue stick to tack them to the paper. Keep the swatches in some kind of order (e.g. by color or by value). The glue stick will allow you to rearrange and remove fabrics. Take the mock-up to the store if you need to shop for fabrics. Continue to add, remove and rearrange your swatches until you've settled on 18 to 20 fabrics at a minimum.

Your mock-up does not have to be picture perfect to be an effective tool for choosing your strata fabrics!



Tips for selecting fabrics for your strata:

- Shop your stash first!
- Use a color wheel.
- Let your focus fabric guide you. If you have trouble starting, just pick just two colors from your focus fabric. Then select a range of values and textures for both those colors, then fill in any additional colors and values.
- Use the color dots on the selvedge of your focus fabric as a jumping off point.



- Make a mock-up to help you evaluate your fabric selections and carry it with you if/when you shop.

An easy option is a "jelly roll" (bundle of 2½" x WOF strips) because they were cut from a line of fabric designed to go together. Keep an eye out for 1½" x WOF bundles – some manufacturers are now offering them. You can add more fabrics to what comes in the bundle to increase variety of color and value. In most cases you will not want a 2" strip in your strata because the scale will be off in relation to the size of the quilt blocks, so 2½" "jelly roll" strips will need to be subcut. **Read the "Subcutting and Sewing a Jelly Roll" section on the last page for more on using jellyrolls.**

INTO THE *STRATA*-SPHERE: CREATING YOUR STRATA

To Wash Or Not To Wash?

My rule of thumb is to wash all fabrics that will go into a piece that will be washed to prevent shrinkage and draw up. I also wash hand-dyed fabrics just to be sure – I live in a very humid climate and the moisture in the air can cause bleeding. For wall hangings, class, or color/technique samples, I don't prewash.

Preparing The Fabric

Whether you prewashed your fabric or not, take the time to starch and press your fabrics well. For yardage I use Sta-Flo liquid starch at 50/50 with water. I put it in a tub large enough that the fabric is not crowded. Starching stabilizes the fabric and prevents stretching and distortion during the cutting and sewing processes. **PRESS** your fabrics (up and down motion with your iron), don't iron (back and forth motion).

Arranging Your Strips

At this point, it's helpful to play with your fabric choices before you begin cutting strips in case you decide to eliminate a few. Try laying them out light to dark (e.g. if working with a monochromatic color scheme). If you are working with several colors, try laying the fabric out by color & value range (e.g. yellow to green to blue). A design wall/board is very valuable at this point. Pin fabrics or drape them over the edge, moving them around until it is pleasing to your eye. Step away and look from a distance. Take a picture with your phone. This will give you a better vision of what your strata will ultimately look like. Spend some time doing this because you are somewhat committed once those strips are sewn together.



If you are taking a **ONE DAY WORKSHOP**, you need to **complete the steps below prior to class** and have your strata pieced and ready to cut when you arrive for the workshop in order to not fall behind.

If you are taking a **TWO DAY WORKSHOP**, you should prep your fabric/strips and begin laying them out in order prior to class. We can refine the order on Day 1 if you are hesitant. Sewing the strips together can be done in class on Day 1.

Cutting The Strips (if you are using a jellyroll, skip to the last section "**Subcutting and Sewing a Jelly Roll**")

After you have starched and pressed your fabrics, cut strips 1½" x WOF. If you selected 18-20 fabrics, cut 3 strips from each fabric. When cutting from yardage be sure the fabric is folded straight so you don't end up with a "V" or "S" shaped strip. Keep a horizontal line on your ruler exactly on the fold of the fabric.

Cut slowly and carefully! Your final results depend on precise cuts and pattern matching.

Sewing Strips Together For Your Strata

Once you have your strips cut and arranged in the order you like, begin sewing them together:

1. Take the first two strips, right sides together, and sew them together on one side. Place this pair back on your design wall. Sew the next two strips together and place this pair back on your design wall. Continue this way until you have paired up all your strips.
2. Take the first two pairs and sew them together into a set of four. Then the next two pairs and so on.
3. Now take the sets of four and sew them together.
4. Continue sewing until all strips are sewn together.
5. Lightly starch and press all seams open.

Piecing the strata together this way will help avoid your strata turning out wonky.

Subcutting and Sewing a Jelly Roll

If you are working with a “jelly roll” of 2½”x WOF strips, they need to be cut down. Once you have your strips arranged in the order you like, begin sewing them together:

1. Take the first two strips, put right sides together, and sew them **on both sides**.
2. Cut the strip in half -- now you have Pair 1 A and Pair 1 B – you’ll be making two identical pieces of strata.
3. Take the next two strips, put right sides together, and sew them on both sides.
4. Cut the strip in half -- now you have Pair 2 A and Pair 2 B.
5. Continue this way until you have paired up all your strips, sewn and subcut them into A and B pairs, and being sure to keep them in the order you’d originally arranged.
6. Take the first two pairs and sew them together into a set of four. Then the next two pairs and so on.
7. Now take the sets of four and sew them together.
8. Continue sewing until all strips are sewn together.
9. Lightly starch and press all seams open.
10. You can sew the two identical sets of strata together or keep them separate

Piecing the strata together this way will help avoid your strata turning out wonky.