

Short talk on *What Makes It Modern?*

Tuesday, May 9, 2017

As you know, our guild welcomes everyone and we encourage everyone to find her (or his) own style and have fun with wherever our quilting mood takes us. There are no rules and this is *your* hobby, *your* passion, so do what you love, what you enjoy.

But several guild members have asked for more info about what kinds of things tend to make a quilt more modern.

So, in an interest of trying new things, experimenting, and developing our personal styles, we threw together a short presentation on a few techniques and aesthetics.

I am a beginner in Modern Quilting, so I may get some of these things wrong. Also, which quilts are examples of which aesthetic or technique can be a judgment call. But I think it gives us a place to start to get some discussion going.

Which characteristics, aesthetic choices, and techniques you want to experiment with are always up to you. I like to take them as a Chinese Menu approach.

If you see any particular technique or aesthetic you like and would like to know more about, we can all try to find more resources and examples that might make things clearer.

A list of online resources that were used in making this presentation will be uploaded to our website for easy clicking. We're also experimenting with using our guild Pinterest board for quilt pictures that are examples of some of the techniques/aesthetics.

<https://www.pinterest.com/rocketcitymqg/what-makes-it-modern-presentation/>

History of Modern quilting:

The only thing I want to say about the “history” presented by the national quilt guild is to point out that they say, “Modern quilters are not the first to do many of the things they are doing.”¹ There were groups doing all these things before our national guild was formed, but every discovery is new and exciting to each of us no matter when we run into it, so it’s understandable that the guild founders felt like they were doing something new and different. Many references speak to the influence of the Gee’s Bend quilters and Amish style quilt design, especially.^{1,4}

Characteristics of Modern Quilting (or “the Modern Quilting Design Aesthetic”)

Again – view these things as a Chinese Menu. Every quilt that’s modern does not include every aspect described below.

And if one did try to use every single modern characteristic, it would be a challenge to make it look nice!

Every item listed below has exceptions and creative workarounds. These are not rules and we are not judges. They are only things we might want to consider, learn from, and experiment with as we try new projects and figure out how our personal styles are growing.

Modern Quilting has been “influenced by the modernist and post-modernist movements in art, architecture and interior design.”¹ A lot of modern quilters use principles taught in art and graphic design curriculums. There are of course ways traditional quilts can be designed using the same principles, but they crop up more in modern quilts.

- **wide use of “negative space”** – also called “white space” except that other colors, usually solid colors, can be used instead of white. Gray seems to be trending right now.

Negative space is “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”¹ One

technique is to semi-randomly sprinkle elements across the wide negative space of the quilt.

- **minimalism**, includes use of lots of negative space, “Distilling down the most basic parts of quilt construction to their fundamental aspects... In general, the more negative space, the more minimalist a quilt becomes.”¹ Often incorporates geometrical shapes.⁴

- **asymmetry** – using off-center, non-standard angles, shifting the focal point of a quilt, fighting the urge to make everything symmetrical.

Free Robert Kaufman asymmetrical diamond pattern:

http://www.robertkaufman.com/quilting/quilts_patterns/Asymmetrical_Diamond/#color:1

- **different 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”¹

- **“Made to be used”** – A lot of modern quilters want to assume the quilts can be washed and handled roughly¹, contrasted with the heirloom tradition where handmade items are packed away and saved for future generations.

- **improvisation** – “Construction rules go out the window”¹ Which pieces to sew to which other pieces can be driven by whim, what fits, or what looks good during assembly.

- **“cropping”** – using a partial block or partial motif, as if the edge of the quilt “crops” off the rest of the item. Increasing scale dramatically, then blocking out a small segment of a traditional quilt block to turn into a cropped modern quilt.

- **“modern traditionalism”** – Take a traditional quilt block and change it up: cut it up and sew it back together, play with scale, make something off center/asymmetrical, distribute the pieces in a new way, etc. “Applies other

modern quilt design elements (negative space, scale, grid work and more) to traditional quilt blocks in a restrained, impactful way.”¹

Updating traditional blocks to make them look more modern:

<https://www.craftsy.com/blog/modern-quilting-blocks/>

A visual list of many quilt blocks, many of which have a modern bent:

<http://www.genxquilters.com/p/quilt-block-library.html>

- **absence of borders** – “There are rarely borders in modern quilting unless the borders are part of the negative space.”¹ Many quilt designs that make dramatic use of negative space would be completely changed if borders were added.

- **use of modern colors/fabrics**, bright colors, high contrast, graphic design color palettes, pixelization, texture, using elements of graphic design. Fabrics are showcased, larger pieces of fabric used so that the fabric “shines” or comes through dramatically. (I am no judge of which colors are “modern” so someone else will have to speak to that. Amanda and Rachel are both good with knowing which colors are more modern than others.) For texture, straight line quilting, and “extremely dense quilting, like a tight stipple or pebble.”⁶

- **“alternate [or alternative²] gridwork”¹ or “breaking the grid”²** where the traditional block structure is jazzed up, adapted, and altered. This can include unusual, creative, unconventional block structure, setting within the quilt, and arrangements of blocks.⁵ Examples of traditional block structure are:

- 1) row/column of repeating, same-sized blocks,
- 2) on point,
- 3) medallion.

Examples of block structure adaptations: increase negative space, using an atypical angle for on point,² variable framing” or floating blocks in negative space.²

“Alternate gridwork [can be used] to incorporate asymmetry, negative space and [variable] scale within a different layout other than traditional columns and rows.

- **Pieced backings, mixed textiles, use of gray.** Some online sources I skimmed listed pieced backings as an element of modern quilts,^{5,6} “heavy use of white and gray backgrounds,”⁶ and mixture of different types and weights of fabrics, especially with respect to upcycling or reusing thrift store fabric.^{5,6}

References:

¹https://community.themodernquiltguild.com/sites/default/files/What%20is%20Modern%20Quilting_0.pdf, “What is Modern Quilting?” from our national guild: MQG.

²<https://themodernquiltguild.wordpress.com/2014/08/25/6885/> – “QuiltCon Charity Quilt: Alternative Gridwork,” August 25, 2014.

³<https://www.themodernquiltguild.com/content/about-mqg>, MQG home page.

⁴http://www.marcusfabrics.com/features/articles/modern_quilt_movement.shtml, Marcus Fabrics article on the modern quilt movement.

⁵<https://nonniequiltingdreams.wordpress.com/2013/05/09/2114/>

⁶<http://www.agfblog.com/2016/09/traditional-quilts-vs-modern-quilts.html>

Three MQG webinars. Note that I have not watched these because my home internet bandwidth is so slow they won't play.

<https://community.themodernquiltguild.com/resources/creative-webinar-definiton-modern-quilt>, MQG webinar by Mary Fons (1 hr and 26 minutes).

<https://community.themodernquiltguild.com/resources/modern-quilting-know-it-when-you-see-it-93014>

<https://community.themodernquiltguild.com/resources/creative-webinar-making-traditional-modern>