

modern

13 QUILTS TO MAKE WITH FRIENDS

Bee



LINDSAY CONNER

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Dedication

This book is dedicated to my family. Mom, you bought me my first sewing machine, even when I didn't think I would want one, and dragged me along with you to craft stores nearly every week when I was growing up. I wouldn't be where I am today without your creative influences. Dad, you've always been an example to me of what it means to work hard and put myself toward something. I am forever grateful for the path you've provided and your sacrifices for our family. And my husband, Matt, thank you for allowing me the space to create. I couldn't have a better support system than a spouse who truly believes in me ... and puts up with my reality TV habit.

Acknowledgments

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Introduction

The Need to Create

I was a cubicle dweller who needed a creative outlet for my nights and weekends. Like so many people, I was looking for a way to create. Between days spent staring at a screen and plenty of nights spent looking at some other screen, I was feeling a little ... uninspired.

One afternoon several years ago, I answered a phone call from my mom, who was shopping for deals—something she taught me to do quite well. “Lindsay, I found a Hello Kitty sewing machine on clearance—half off! It’s so cute. Do you want it, maybe for your birthday?” I wasn’t sure, to be honest. I’d never used a sewing machine, and it seemed to fall into the *want* rather than *need* category. But for the cute factor alone, I obliged my mom’s request to buy me the sewing machine as an early birthday gift.

In just a few months, I lived and breathed sewing and quilting. It wasn’t long until I found an online world of people just like me. In one year, I somehow managed to sign up for fifteen craft swaps (an arrangement by two or more people to exchange crafts by mail). Looking back, my postage bill that year was huge. But the act of crafting for others helped me to grow in my sewing skills and connect with others like me. It’s an investment of time and money that I would repeat any day.



Soon after I discovered the online sewing world, I started meeting quilters in person. I joined the Indianapolis Modern Quilt Guild (my local guild at the time) and then convinced my husband to go

away for the weekend so I could host a quilting retreat for a dozen women at our house. It was life-giving to meet other quilters from my area. Would you believe that two of them actually worked right down the hall from me? With Lindsay, my namesake, and Elizabeth at the office, I began to look forward to quilting show-and-tell at work, swaps, and fabric-sale alerts. One day we even ordered 61 yards of Flea Market Fancy and held a fabric-cutting party in a spare conference room.

Meeting with other quilters, whether in person or online, kept me motivated and creatively charged. I soon got to the point where I always had a new project in mind. When I traveled to new places, I started seeing quilt motifs in the sidewalks, on street signs, and in architecture. The ideas wouldn't leave me alone, and I sometimes woke up in the middle of the night with designs for a new sewing project.

When a local friend asked if I'd like to join my first online quilting bee, I asked, "What's that?" She explained that a bee was like a craft swap, with a group of twelve people who make and swap quilt blocks. Each month of the year, one person would choose the block design for everyone to make, and then all members would mail the requested blocks back to that person. At the time, I wasn't sure if I had the quilting prowess to join a bee, but I was curious enough to try it. Overall, it was a great experience to learn some new techniques and also get to know some local quilters.

Over the next few years, I joined several online quilting bees, swapping patchwork blocks with quilters across the country. In 2011, an online friend, Elizabeth, invited me to join a virtual quilting bee she was putting together. I'd first met Elizabeth through reading her blog—we got to know each other better when I made her a messenger bag as part of a swap. Did I have time to join another bee and commit for a whole year? That was debatable, but I decided to join anyway.

We called the bee "Mod Stitches." The talent and creativity within the group was so strong—these were some of the most inspiring quilting bloggers I had met. All the members of the group met first through our blogs or through Flickr, and we organized the bee as a Flickr group so we could share photos, block instructions, and the bee's mailing schedule in one central place.

Thanks to our blogs and social media, we got to share a bit of our lives, too. I am among the first to know when my friends send their little ones off to school or find a mailbox stuffed with "happy mail," including an enviable stack of new fabric. Many of the quilters I've met online are people I get to meet in person at sewing and quilting events across the country. Among them are some of my closest friends—the people I know I can count on to share my greatest joys and biggest disappointments.



The patterns in this book are organized by skill level—beginner, confident beginner, and intermediate. By quilting along with the book from January to December, or following any method that works for you, you will have mastered skills ranging from piecing squares and triangles to sewing more advanced block-in-block designs with tiny piecing. Each of the thirteen projects includes block instructions as well as a pattern to finish a quilt.

The quilts can be completed in sequence or out of order—with a bee or on your own. If you are sewing with a group, the book shares tips on mailing bee blocks ([page 18](#)) and fixing returned blocks ([page 22](#)) as well as giving you the fabric requirements needed for each bee member with each project. At the end of the book, you'll also find some quilting basics to help you finish your quilt—how to baste, assemble, bind, and more.





Bee Keeping

Starting a Bee

Quilting bees began as a way for people to socialize around a common hobby. Of course, there's the added efficiency of sewing together in a group—you can finish an entire quilt in a fraction of the time. But more importantly, sewing with others is a way to creatively stretch yourself. For example, you will sew with fabric and shapes that you would not have chosen, and chances are you will have to learn something that's outside of your comfort zone. On the plus side, you'll have the support of the bee when you have questions.

But how do you find a quilting bee? Where do all of these people hang out? One place to start is to get involved with a local quilt guild and see if any bees exist. To find a quilting bee online, I recommend joining Flickr and visiting the group Quilting Bee Blocks.



If you can't find a quilting bee to join, start your own!

Still, it's a good idea to be a participant in a bee before organizing one yourself. That way, you'll know what to expect and can help the group run smoothly. The point person and organizer will need to do a few things for the bee:

1. CHOOSE A FORUM

Join Flickr ([flickr.com](https://www.flickr.com)), Quilting Board ([quiltingboard.com](https://www.quiltingboard.com)), or Swap-bot ([swap-bot.com](https://www.swap-bot.com)) to find open bees and swaps online. A local quilting group may also be a place to form a bee.

TIP: You can reach out to others who follow or write quilting blogs and see whether they know of any bees accepting new members. Perhaps they'd like to join with you in starting a bee.

2. RECRUIT MEMBERS

Take an email address, phone number, and mailing address for each member. Print out a master list and stay on top of changes like a new address or phone number during the bee.

TIP: When starting a new bee, you may wish to check the bee or swap history of incoming members. For instance, do they have an active blog or Flickr account? Do they tend to over-commit or send late? If you do some research and find that they have caused problems for other online swaps or bees, you can ask them to explain any issues.

3. SET THE RULES

How long will the bee last and how many blocks will each person sew? What types of blocks or fabrics are acceptable?

TIP: Expectations are very important to communicate when starting a bee. Consider taking a break during busy months like midsummer or December, when bee members are likely to have other commitments. This could make it less likely that members will flake or bail out during busy seasons.

4. KEEP TABS

Keep track of those who have sent or received blocks each month. Contact members who are not meeting the deadlines or communicating regularly. Find solutions if blocks are lost in the mail.

TIP: The bee organizer may want to create *angel blocks* for members who do not receive their finished blocks. These are extra blocks in the person's chosen fabric and style that will replace lost or never-received blocks.

Other Types of Bees

For a spin on the traditional twelve-month, twelve-member quilting bee, consider switching up the rules to fit you and your group.

SPECIFIC BLOCK SWAP

Choose one style of block in specified colors, and invite people to make as many as they'd like. They can send the blocks to a central location and will receive back the same number of blocks made by others in the bee. For example, you could ask for Flying Geese blocks in shades of red and blue. This is a great way to maximize the variety of prints in a quilt without shopping for more fabric.

SIX-MONTH BEE

Do you have commitment phobia? Consider a shorter time frame. To organize a six-month bee, invite twelve quilters to double up on assigned months (January through June, for example). Each quilter makes two blocks per month, including one for her own quilt.

SAMPLER BEE

Form a group of four to six bee members, and ask each person to choose a color combination (such as yellow, aqua, and gray) for her quilt blocks. A photo mosaic is a helpful tool for sharing colors. Working from your stash, make the same block for each member of the group in her chosen colors by the end of the swap. Each member can choose the block she'd like to make. It's a good idea to check with the group to make sure two people don't make the same block pattern. Three to six months is a good time frame, and it's easy to repeat for those who'd like to join again for the next session.

At the end of the bee, you'll have a sampler quilt (many styles of blocks) in your chosen colors.

I joined the Flickr group 4x5 Modern Quilt Bee, a modern sampler bee that included about 100 members in more than a dozen different "hives" (smaller groups). In a hive with four to six members, you can repeat the bee until each person has enough blocks to make a full-size quilt. As a part of this bee, I participated in three rounds (organized by seasons of the year) and collected fifty blocks total. Because the bee alternated members each season, it was a great way to collect blocks in a variety of styles while getting to know five new quilters each round.

ROUND-ROBIN BEE

To start a round-robin bee, each quilter comes up with a theme and makes one block or row for her own quilt. She mails this to the next person in the bee, who adds a row or block inspired by that person's design and colors. The next month, that person mails two blocks to the third person on the list (think of *The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants*). At any given point in time, someone else in the bee is adding to your quilt while you are adding to someone else's. When you finally see the finished quilt, it has been out of your hands for a year and comes back to you with a treasury of different designs and styles.

MOD BEGINNINGS

Some people fall into sewing by chance, and others come from a long line of quilters. How did you start quilting?

I started quilting shortly after moving into my first apartment in 2009. I had my heart set on making a quilt, and after that first one, I was completely hooked! —JENI BAKER

I bought my first sewing machine back in 2010. Little did I know I was on a road that would totally change my life. I've absolutely fallen head over heels with quilting over the years, after having taught myself from library books and blogs, and I cannot imagine my life without it. —ELIZABETH DACKSON

I started quilting when I began sewing in 2010. I was pregnant with my second child and came across a tutorial for a patchwork baby quilt and decided to give it a try. It was instant love, and I've been sewing and quilting ever since. —JENNIFER MATHIS

I began sewing when I was about five years old. I watched my mother make all sorts of things on her Kenmore machine, so she showed me how to make dresses for my Barbie dolls. I was allowed to sew only by hand at first, so later when she allowed me to actually sit at her machine, I felt very special. I made the transition to quilting just a few years ago after signing up for a quilt class on a whim. I enjoyed formulating the perfect fabric combination and then watching it come to life. I was quite giddy and actually jumped up and down when I saw my first quilt top completely pieced. —ELENA ROSCOE



Choosing a Block and Fabric

For the Mod Stitches bee, we assigned each person a month to be the host. One of the most fun parts of a quilting bee is choosing a block pattern and fabric for your month. When writing the block instructions and deciding how much fabric to send in the mail, it's a good idea to make a test block yourself and take notes on how much fabric you use. Jot down details, such as which way to press the seams and if the quilters should trim the block. Keep in mind that you'll want to choose a pattern that loosely matches the skill level of the quilters in your group, while still challenging them to try something new.

If you are providing the fabric for your bee, you can cut an assortment for each person that's a little more than you think they'll need. Some quilters suggest sending the equivalent of 1½ fat quarters to each bee member. Let the bee members know if you'd like them to send fabric scraps back to you with the finished block.

If it's a bee where members sew from their own fabric stash, you won't need to send any fabric. But you should still send instructions to specify what colors or fabric designs you like.



Mailing Fabric

TIPS FOR THE HOST

When participating in a quilting bee, each person gets the chance to be both the *host*, who sends fabric and writes the block instructions, and the *recipient*, who makes the requested block and returns it in the mail to the host. Here are some helpful tips for sending fabric and receiving quilt blocks in the mail:



- 1.** Place the fabric in a zipper-sealed plastic bag to be mailed in an envelope (6" × 9" manila envelope work well). The plastic bag is protection in case the envelope gets wet. If you are reusing an envelope, make sure to cross out the previous address thoroughly or cover it with a new mailing label.
- 2.** Insert a note, "If this package is lost or stolen, please return to: [name and address]." Place the note in the plastic bag and make sure it is visible. If the fabric or completed block slips out of the envelope en route, it stands a greater chance of getting safely returned to that month's host.
- 3.** Include printed block instructions or post them online. It doesn't hurt to do both. State the completed block size, how many blocks you'd like the recipients to make if more than one, and if they should send back fabric scraps. Let bee members know if you would like the block to be trimmed or if you'd prefer to do the trimming.
- 4.** Keep a list of blocks you've received and send a thank-you note. Keep your bee organizer in the loop if you don't receive blocks by the deadline.

TIPS FOR THE RECIPIENT

1. Consider including a hand-written note or business card with your sewn bee blocks. You can also j down the name of the bee (in case the recipient is in more than one bee) on the envelope or an index card.
2. Mail blocks by the due date. As a courtesy, let the host know if your block will be late. For extra security and peace of mind when mailing bee blocks, you may wish to add delivery confirmation or insurance.
3. Place the block in a zipper-sealed plastic bag. Include the note the host sent that says where the package should be returned if lost.
4. Let the host know when you've mailed the block to her.



Notes and cards received with completed blocks

WHY DO YOU QUILT?

Any hobby, from running marathons to sustainable gardening, has its champions—the people who truly “get it.” So what’s to love about quilting?

When I first got into the sewing/quilting hobby, it was a way to occupy my time without socializing with other people. I mean, I had a handful of friends and none of them were really into quilting. As more time passed, I began to make more and more friends because of my hobby. My creations inspired not only people around me but others in the sewing community. —SUKIE NEWBOLD

Sewing and quilting has really become my favorite way to express my creativity. I love being able to take fabric and turn it into something completely personalized and unique, whether a quilt, a new bag, or a gift for friends or family. —JESSICA KELLY

Quilting gives me a chance to express myself in a way that helps me to branch out and try new techniques, yet strengthens my ties to the past. It also has been a source of “therapy” through some hard times. —CINDY WIENS

For me, quilting connects me to my family and my past. I come from a long line of sewists, and I love having this connection with them. There’s nothing better than making a handmade gift for a loved one. —KATIE BOWLBY

My sewing and quilting time is my “me time.” It’s the time that I spend where I turn off everything else and really just let myself create, which is a wonderful feeling. —ELIZABETH DACKSON

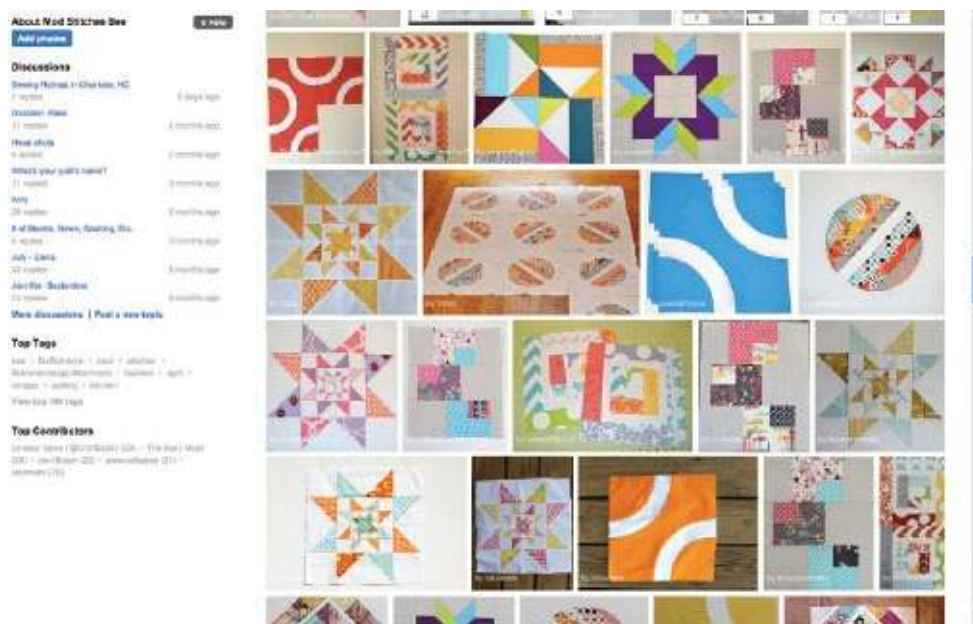


Making a Block:

Tips for the Recipient

It's your turn to make a block for someone else. Here are some details to keep in mind:

1. When opening fabric from a bee member, take a quick note of the pieces the host included and write down the measurements as needed. If you are missing any pieces, contact that month's host and see if you can substitute fabric from your stash or if she'd prefer to mail you the missing fabric.
2. Follow the host's block instructions, asking any questions you have before you start sewing. Be sure you have key information such as the block size (usually the unfinished size, but double-check) and how she prefers the seams to be pressed.
3. Take a photo of your completed block. If you have a group set up online, sharing your block photo is a great way to build camaraderie in the group and to let members know when a block is in the mail.



Bee members share completed blocks online.

Bee Troubleshooting and Common Problems

Even with the most explicit instructions, sometimes sewing with others is a challenge. Though you may have to make some fixes after the fact, many of these issues can be avoided with a little advance planning and clear communication.

1. SOMEONE USED THE WRONG FABRIC

If sewing with fabric from each quilter's own stash, the colors, prints, and quality may be way off from what you asked for. And if you sent bee members fabric to use, there's always the chance that someone will try to sneak in another print—or do so by mistake.



Mod fixes:

- **THE COLORS ARE ALL WRONG.** Before swapping blocks, ask each bee member to create a photo mosaic of fabrics or images that she'd like to use as her color palette (such as yellow, aqua, and gray). You can upload mosaics to a site such as Flickr or post on a central blog. *Aqua* can mean totally different things to different people, so encourage bee members to ask about color preferences before making their blocks, if in doubt.



Color palette

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