

DESIGN

Definition of *Design*: The term has different connotations in different fields. Informally, “a design” refers to a plan for the construction of an object (as in architectural blueprints and sewing or quilting patterns) and “to design” refers to making a plan. However, one can also design by directly constructing an object (as in sewing garments).

ELEMENTS OF DESIGN

Line

Refers to a specific term used in three different ways:

- A line defines the edge or contour of a shape.
- A very thin shape
- That which denotes or suggests direction

Also: *Line Quality* - Refers to any one of a number of characteristics of line determined by its weight, direction, uniformity or other features.

A line may be straight, curved or diagonal - a line is what the eye follows.

In quilting we observe a number of lines:

- There is the suggestive line when objects are presented in vertical, horizontal, curved or diagonal directions.
- Another way to determine line is when, for example, the hand of a figure points into the direction of another object, connecting the two invisibly.
- There is the quilting line that supports the overall composition with stitching lines. Echo lines emphasize specific shapes, stitching in the sky portion of a landscape-themed quilt may suggest the movement of clouds and wind direction.

Shape refers to an enclosed object in a design. The edges are defined by either a line or by colour and value changes. One or more shapes arranged into a grouping is considered a **composition**. When it comes to shapes and their arrangement, it is important to evaluate the balance of positive and negative space. (*see positive and negative space in Principles of Design*)

Pattern refers to the placement of repeated colours, shapes or value in a design/composition.

- The repetition of a shape may be regular or irregular.
- Special considerations;
 - Varied scale of shapes increases interest.
 - An uneven number of shapes should be used when repeating shapes.
- In a pieced quilt, shapes can be represented in individual blocks. Repeating these shapes in the quilting lines may support the design.

Texture refers to the tactile/real and visual/IMPLIED texture of a surface.

- Texture may be real or implied. It creates the illusion of depth.
- One effect of texture is to raise the surface.
- Quilting, couching threads, beads, twin-needle work, collage and raw edge appliqué are ways to add tactile/real texture.
- Special consideration: When adding texture on bed quilts it must withstand daily use. Washing is part of this consideration (**form follows function**).

- Texture can be added to appliquéd shapes with stitching and/or beading.
- Caution must be exercised when adding a highly (visually) textured background fabric to an already textured focal point. The background texture has a tendency to confuse the viewer. It will result in the loss of focal point or make the primary pattern in a traditional patchwork block virtually disappear.



Colour refers to the visual perceptual property corresponding in humans to the categories called *red*, *green*, *blue* and others.

- Colour is the most important element of design. We notice it first when looking at a design and we remember colour when we recall the piece at a later time.
- Another descriptive word for colour is hue. “Colour” and “hue” are interchangeable.
- Primary Colours - The three colours from which all other colours can theoretically be mixed. The primaries are traditionally presented as red, yellow, and blue.

Colour Schemes:

- **Achromatic colour scheme** - Refers to a lack of colour; a composition that uses black, gray and/or white
- **Monochromatic colour scheme** - The monochromatic colour scheme uses variations in value and saturation of a single colour. This scheme looks clean and elegant. Monochromatic colours go well together, producing a soothing effect. The monochromatic scheme is very “easy on the eyes”, especially with blue or green hues. The successful use of a monochromatic colour scheme is achieved by using a great variety of light and dark and bright and dull hues.
- **Analogous Colour Schemes** - Analogous colours are hues that are adjacent to each other on the colour wheel. Some examples are green, yellow green, and yellow or red, orange and yellow. Analogous colour schemes are often found in nature and are pleasing to the eye. They are able to accommodate many changing moods. When using the analogous colour scheme, it is important that one hue has been determined as the main colour.

- **Complementary Colour Scheme** is made up of two colours that are directly opposite to each other on the colour wheel. This scheme looks best when you put a warm colour against a cool colour, for example, red versus green. The complementary scheme is intrinsically high-contrast.
 - When using the complementary scheme, it is important to choose a dominant colour and use its complementary colour for accents. Using one colour for the background and its complementary colour to highlight important elements, you will get colour dominance combined with sharp colour contrast.
 - If using complimentary colours in equal amounts colours will counteract each other resulting in a “muddy” appearance.
- **Split Complementary Colour Scheme** is a variation of the standard complementary scheme. It uses a colour and the two colours adjacent to its complementary. This provides high contrast without the strong tension of the complementary scheme.
- **Tetradic Colour Scheme = Double Complementary Colour Scheme** which is a combination of any two pairs of complementary colours.
- **Triadic Colour Scheme** uses three colours equally spaced around the colour wheel. This scheme is popular among artists because it offers strong visual contrast while retaining balance, and colour richness. The triadic scheme is not as contrasting as the complementary scheme, but it looks more balanced and harmonious. Colour combination examples: yellow, red & blue; violet, orange & green; red-orange, blue-violet & yellow-green.
- Using all colours of the colour wheel is a challenge and may result in confusion for the viewer unless the colours are kept in the order of the colour wheel on a neutral palette background. This is also known as “Rainbow Colour Scheme”.

Additional Colour Terminology:

- **Colour Intensity** is the degree of purity or brightness of a colour. Grayed down (tones) backgrounds show off bright colours more successfully.
- **Colour Value** is the degree of lightness and darkness of a colour. Balancing light, medium and dark values in a composition can support an overall pattern and lead to a successful outcome.
 - **Tints** - The light value of a colour; in painting white is mixed with pure pigment colour; in dyeing the amount of dye colour is reduced to achieve a paler result.
 - **Shades** - The medium to dark value of a colour; when mixing paint adding black to the pure colour will result in a shade.
 - **Tones** - A colour modified by gray or a complementary colour, which may result in a neutral tone.
- **Colour Transparency** refers to the situation where an object or form allows light to pass through it. In two-dimensional art, two forms overlap, but they are both seen in their entirety. When using fabric this may be achieved by layering transparent fabrics over specific areas of a design or with opaque fabrics by overlapping two shapes, e.g., red and yellow: in the area where the fabrics overlap a third colour of equal value will be placed (in this case orange) thereby providing the illusion of transparency.

PRINCIPLES OF DESIGN

Balance refers to the distribution of elements across a background. Balance is a visual interpretation of gravity in a design. Large, dense elements appear to be heavier while smaller elements appear to be lighter. You can balance designs in three ways:

- **Symmetrical** balance vs. **asymmetrical** balance
- **Vertical** vs. **horizontal** balance
- **Radial balance**
- **Crystallographic** balance (each piece becomes part of the design/balance of light and dark/traditional quilts)
- **Positive space*** is the area occupied with shapes and motifs constituting the subject matter in support of the focal point(s).
- **Negative space*** refers to the background area(s). Too much or too little negative space is detrimental to a successful composition. Too much negative space can make a design “float” in space. Too little negative space will make the composition appear crowded and unimportant.

**Also see shape in Elements of Design*

Rhythm arranges the elements of design for the eye to find a path to follow

- Rhythm successfully integrates the repetition of a shape, pattern, line, texture and colour.

Harmony refers to a pleasing result of relationships between design elements or principles.

Some elements to consider are:

- The use of harmonious fabrics - colours complement each other while providing enough contrast to present a cohesive composition.
- It is important to observe that fabric choices support the overall theme.
- Ensure that the orientation of the subject matter/motif is supported by the horizontal or vertical orientation of the quilt. e.g., Landscape quilts generally benefit from a horizontal orientation. There are always exceptions that have to be evaluated on an individual basis.
- While colour harmony is important the danger exists that colours selected that are too harmonious which may result in a boring outcome. This is often the case in the unsuccessful application of monochromatic or achromatic colour schemes.
- Sashings and borders can support the overall harmony. This is very important when it comes to traditional bed quilts. Individual blocks often benefit from a sashing that defines and expands the overall design. In turn, successfully placed borders will frame the quilt and complete the patchwork design.
- When using curves in piecing it is important to consider curved settings as well as curved quilting lines. Equally, curved edges may support the overall design.

Emphasis / Focal Point refers to the part of a design that attracts more attention than the rest of the composition. Some form of contrast often creates it. It is a common error to place the focal point in an unsuitable position, thus leading the viewer’s attention away from the most important or interesting part instead of enticing the attention towards it. Another common error is to have serial focal points resulting in confusion.

Simply put: A focal point results when one element differs from the other(s).

Examples are:

- A light from which a pattern of dark elements will break, creating a focal point.
- All shapes, dark or light, are for example, vertically arranged so a diagonal element is emphasized.

- In an overall design of expressionistic forms, the sudden introduction of a naturalistic image will draw the eye to its very different style.
- A similar but unexpectedly smaller shape becomes visually more important among many elements of the same size.
- Round shapes will stand out when the majority of shapes are rectilinear and angular parallelograms.
- If lacking emphasis/focal point the overall piece may appear boring and the viewer quickly loses interest.
- When it comes to the placement of the focal point make sure not to cut off parts of the main motif with the border or binding. An outside border may be required to ensure that the emphasized motif remains the focal point.

Important: Not all designs or patterns have (or require) a focal point! When striving toward a certain mood in an art quilt, the entire quilt may constitute the focal point. In traditional bed quilts a definite focal point is also often lacking which in no way has to weaken the overall design.

Proportion refers to scale and in turn both terms refer to size. Scale is synonymous for size, whereas proportion refers to *relative* size, size measured against other elements or against some mental norm or standard.

For example: In judging quilt entries we often use the term proportion when evaluating quilts with sashing and borders. Sashing that is too wide will be “out of proportion” and does not support the successful outcome of the quilt design. The same can be said for borders.

Sashing between spaces may be subdivided to balance the overall design. It must support the integrity of the overall design/pattern.

- Observing the division of space in landscape quilts is important. Selecting the exact half-way point is not desirable. It is too predictable! Dividing the space into equal thirds is better.
- Borders may be multiple or single borders. They must support the theme/subject matter of the quilt. Note: Not all quilts require borders. Borders may be constructed from one piece, one colour, several pieces and colours, or they may be straight or curved.
- When measuring borders for innovative and representational quilts evenness on all four sides is not necessary. A border can be a bit heavier at the bottom to balance the overall composition.
- Borders of slightly different widths may work well. It is important to watch for a border that is too wide, drawing the eye away from the subject matter.
- Borders can be applied on two, three or all four sides.
- Individual blocks or units in innovative quilts may be joined in a variety of ways. When straight, curved, and/or pieced sashing is too predictable, triangles, beads, tabs, yo-yos, or gathered fabric offer exciting options and support the overall innovative approach.
- Corners must match up with the design. Mitres must be used to support a print repeat most successfully. e.g., Medallion quilts are traditionally comprised of a center block with multiple surrounding borders to support and highlight the block. Mitred corners on such a quilt will support the overall design and provide continuity for each successive border.