

STAINED GLASS CHALLENGE

The first challenge for this year is to do a stained glass type of quilt. In stained glass windows, panes of colored glass are held together by glazing; in stained glass window quilts, the same effect is achieved by bias tape (usually black or gray) in place of the glazing. Almost any quilt could be done as a stained glass quilt, by sewing bias tape over the seams (which as it happens will hide mismatched corners), but designs with curved lines (whether pieced or appliquéd) can make particular use of this technique because it is possible for the bias tape to cover the raw edge of the curve without the need to sew curved seams.

Aside from religious themes, the most common types of stained glass designs include floral (such as some of the Tiffany stained glass), giant dahlia (think rose window), and Celtic, but plenty of art nouveau, landscape, mosaic, and oriental designs have also been published. If you have a certain quilt you've always wanted to do but couldn't face the piecing, this may be your chance!

Suggested resources:

There are a LOT of free patterns available on the internet. Try www.freepatternsforstainedglass.com.

For Celtic patterns, Philomena Durcan has a series of books, especially Celtic Spirals, which may give ideas as well as instructions for laying bias tape.

Dover Publications has a few books devoted to stained glass patterns.

Tips (from me):

If you want to recreate the effect of stained glass windows, I'd suggest jewel tone solids.

Try not to pick a pattern with a lot of lines meeting at one point (usually the center). You are likely to end up with a small mountain of bias tape as the strips overlap each other, creating a raised lump.

You really do need to lay the entire quilt top out (aside from the bias) before you start sewing; for one thing, to make sure your fabrics work together, and for another, to be able to plan how your bias strips will be laid out and in what order you should affix them.

The ends of pieces of bias tape have to go under whatever bias they are intersecting, so that the junction is hidden. (Don't permanently affix tape until whatever has to go under it has been laid.) A given piece of bias tape has to be long enough for its segment; if it isn't, you have to cut a new longer strip and recycle the short one for something else. So lay the longer pieces first, to avoid waste.

You can't have bias strips ending in nowhere land, unless it's the edge of the quilt which will be covered by binding. Think about how a window is held together. You can have your tape turn sharp corners, in which case you have to miter the tape. If the corner forms an angle of less than 90 degrees, you're going to have to trim the underside of the miter so it doesn't show or present too much bulk. Actually, it's best just to plan your design without such acute angles.

You can, of course, make your own bias tape, but it is a lot less trouble to use a roll of Clover Quick Bias Fusible Tape, which in 11-yard rolls can be found at www.anniescatalog.com. While the adhesive can't be trusted to last very long, it will at least hold its shape when ironed so that with assistance from a few pins you can then sew it down. You can reposition this tape if you lift it while still warm from the iron. Another option is to buy ordinary bias tape and trim the width to the desired thickness, press the new raw edge under, then pin and sew. With wider bias, you have more room for error in its placement, but you will also have more trouble turning corners and following along curves. I'd recommend bias not less than 1/8" and not more than 1/4" wide. One further way you could do such a quilt is to incorporate extra pattern pieces, representing the glazing, into the sewing of your top – but I suspect that this will be a lot harder than using bias tape over the seams.

Although the bias tape can cover the raw edge of appliqué, I think it best to sew the appliqué pieces together as much as possible, then lay the bias tape over the seam – all the more so if you are using very narrow bias. Alternatively, you could fuse the pieces to a background before laying the tape. If you fuse, I'd recommend a very slight overlap of the pieces so you have only one raw edge to worry about hiding. And if you must lay the tape over a raw edge, BE SURE to sew first the edge of the bias which is next to the appliqué fabric with the raw edge, to be certain the appliqué will hold. Then sew the outside edge of the bias (and not before you insert any bias coming to meet it). I've had too much trouble with appliqué fabric working out from under the bias tape, no matter how carefully I thought I had stitched it.

It may save you some work if you are able to sew only the inside edges of the bias tape while assembling the top, and sew the outside edges in the course of quilting. You probably would want to quilt along the tape lines anyway, and this could save a step. But it does require some preplanning.

There is no size restriction on this challenge, but unless you are either planning a very intricate design or intending for people to view it from a distance I would recommend keeping it fairly small. Large pieces of the same fabric (especially if solid) can become monotonous, and this is a situation in which it's the design rather than the fabric which you want to feature. (But pieces which are very small can be a real pain to work with, and they do need to be large enough so that after the bias is applied they can still be visible. If your chosen design has some very small pieces, consider either enlarging the intended quilt size or consolidating these tiny pieces with their neighbors.)

This challenge is due at the December meeting.