

Hand Piecing Strategy for Brilliant Cut by Candy Goff



Brilliant Cut block

Piecing a complex block with set-in seams and pivots is sometimes easier to accomplish by hand than by machine. Here are step-by-step strategies for piecing one Brilliant Cut block. For more information on the benefits of hand piecing, please read "Sewing on the Go" in the Winter 2006 issue of *American Quilter*.

To sew efficiently and reduce the number of knots, plan a piecing strategy that allows you to sew to a pivot point and then continue sewing without cutting the thread.

Cut and mark the patches for your block. Referring to the photograph and diagrams, arrange the patches on a design wall or flat surface.

Making Section 1

To make a half star, join 3 A patches, sewing from dot to dot in a simple V-seam (fig. 1). Sew with the middle patch on top, adding the side

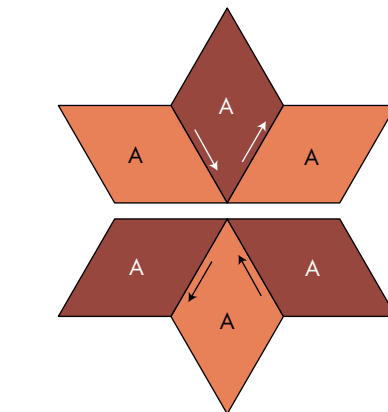


Fig. 1

patches from underneath. Backstitch at the beginning of the seam, on both sides of the pivot point, and at the end of the stitching line. Repeat to make the other half star, sewing dot-to-dot to allow for setting in background pieces. Finger press the seam allowances to one side.

Place the two half stars right sides together. Pin at the dots on each end

and match the center intersection. Seam allowances should "nest" at the seams. At the center intersection, pin straight through the tip of the point and into the corresponding tip on the other half. The point of the pin should poke out the other side.

Making sure that the seams still nest, grasp the intersection tightly. With a second pin, secure the star halves by pinning just to the left of the first pin, about 1/8" away. Remove the first pin. This will allow you to sew up to the intersection and backstitch at the dot before removing the pin and continuing on the other side of the intersection.

Starting at the outside dot, sew toward the center. As you near the center, make sure that the seam allowances on top and underneath are out of the way. You should be able to move them all to one side without removing the pin. Hold the intersection firmly and remove the pin. Pass the needle through all seam allowances with the point of your needle coming out at the dot on the third diamond. Pull the thread tightly for the first stitch and

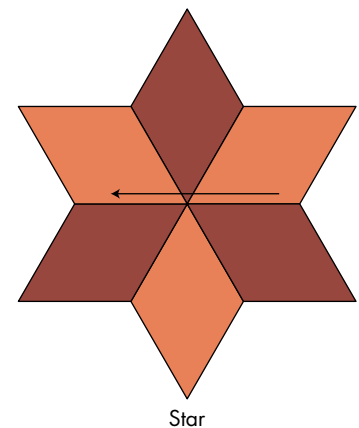


Fig. 2

very tight for the backstitch. Check on the underneath side that the needle is coming through exactly at the dot and not at an angle. The backstitches on either side of this intersection determine whether or not a gap will form in the middle of your star. Continue sewing to the end dot and backstitch to

CUTTING REQUIREMENTS for one block

Skill level: Intermediate

Finished block size: 16½" x 16½"

Light blue background • 12 D, 12 E, 12 Er

Medium blue • 6 B

Dark blue • 6 Br

Gold • 6 A

Orange • 3 A

Rust • 3 A

Orange & blue print • 6 C, 12 F

Dark blue & orange print • 12 G

finish joining the star halves (fig. 2).

Finger press the star with all the seam allowances going in the same direction. (You should be able to move your finger in a circle around the wrong side of the star in either a clockwise or counter-clockwise direction with all the seam allowances lying in that direction.) In doing this, a rosette is formed in the center as the "dog-ears" (pointed seam allowances) fan out or twirl around the center point.

Hint! If you have a small hole in the center of your star or if the seams don't quite line up the way you like, try "twirling" your seam allowances in the opposite direction. To do this, fold the star in half as it was before you opened it. One by one, finger press the seam allowances in the opposite direction. Pay attention to the way the dog-ears overlap in the center and make sure they're in the right order to lie flat. Finger press both sides, and then open the star. This will usually improve the center intersection. If not, fold it in half and press the seam allowances back the way they were. Don't trim the dog-ears around the center rosette until you're happy with the piecing. You'll need the extra fabric if you're going to try again.

To set in the background pieces, work with the star unit on top and add

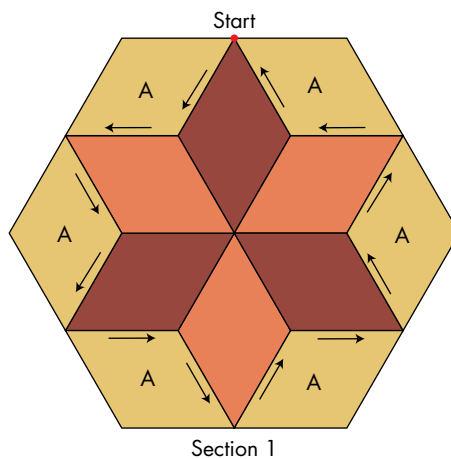


Fig. 3

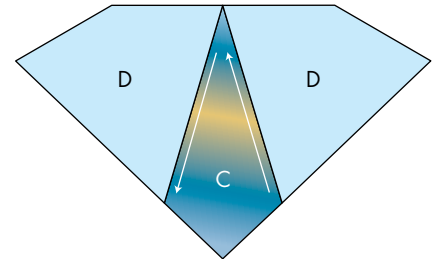
the diamonds from underneath. Starting from an outside edge (fig. 3), sew from dot to dot and pivot at the set-in seam. Align the fabric and pin at the next dot. Continue adding A patches all around the star without cutting your thread. Backstitch on both sides of each pivot point, and pass the needle through the seam allowances.

Making Section 2

Make 6 of unit 1 using V-seam construction (fig. 4). Sew toward the narrow point with the C patch on top. Backstitch on each side of the pivot

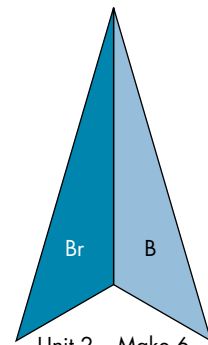
point. Add the second D patch from underneath.

Make 6 of unit 2 (fig. 5), using consistent placement of dark and medium values. As you sew these seams, backstitch approximately at the mid-point to help control the bias stretch along



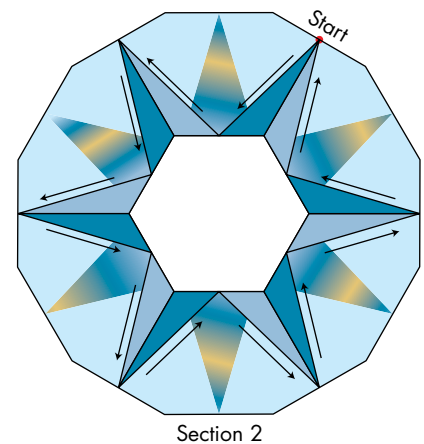
Unit 1 – Make 6

Fig. 4



Unit 2 – Make 6

Fig. 5



Section 2

Fig. 6

the long seams.

To assemble section 2 (fig. 6), alternate unit 1 and unit 2. Match the wide end of unit 1 with the narrow point of unit 2, and continue sewing from point to point without cutting the thread.

Section 2 is complete when all 12

units have been sewn together and the final seam joins the section. The center opening is a hexagon shape. Finger press seam allowances in the opposite direction from the outer point seams in section 1.

To inset the center star hexagon (section 1) into section 2, pin one side of the hexagon to an interior edge of section 2, matching corresponding points. Align the point of the C patch with the star point. With section 2 on top, sew this seam, backstitching on both sides of each intersection and leaving seam allowances free. Continue around the perimeter of the hexagon to complete this seam. Twirl the seam allowances at the intersections where C patches meet star points. Finger press to flatten the block, and then press it with an iron.

Making Section 3

Make 12 of unit 3 (fig. 7). Alternate unit 3 with G patches, sewing with

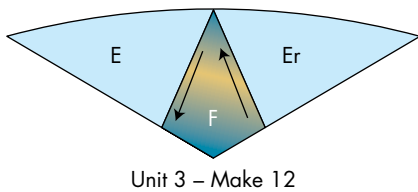


Fig. 7

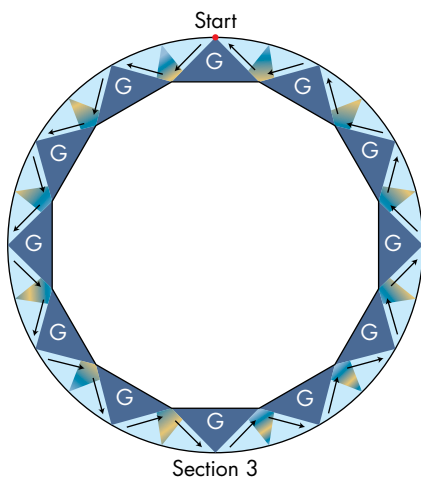


Fig. 8

Z-seam construction until all the units and G patches have been sewn together (fig. 8). The final seam joins the section into a ring. Finger press the seam allowances in the opposite direction from

the points in section 2.

To complete the block, sew section 3 to section 2. Pin at corresponding points, aligning the center of the G patches with the unit-2 points and the unit-3 points with pivot points (dots) on the D patches. Pin one unit at a time using the long side of the G patch as reference. Sew the seam, backstitching on both sides of each intersection and leaving seam allowances free. Press section 2 seam allowances toward the outside of the block.

IMPORTANT NOTE: Seam allowances are pressed to one side or the other in a clockwise or counterclockwise direction.

The finished block may be appliquéd or pieced to a background of any desired size.

