
English Paper Piecing with Liza Lucy

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Overview

(light music) - I never thought I would take to English paper piecing, but about 10 years ago at the Houston Quilt Festival, I found myself in front of this quilt staring at it, absolutely memorized. It was done by Kim McLean from Australia and it never, never left my mind. I thought, This is something I'll never do, it's all hand work, it's tedious, and yet here I find myself doing it. Hexagons have become extremely popular and it's like eating peanuts, I can't stop. I'm going to show you how to choose materials, how to pick the tools you're going to need, how to make the hexagons, how to sew the hexagons together. And once we've done that, we're going to applique them to some tea towels and have a wonderful project. (light music)

Chapter 2 - Materials

Materials

- English paper piecing is taking fabric and basting it to a paper template. The things you're going to need to make English paper pieced shapes, whether they be hexagons, or diamonds, or a number of other shapes, are papers, that are sold in packets, that are in the size and shape that you wish to make your fabric. We have diamonds, triangles. This is the most common shape, a hexagon. You can make other shapes from your hexagon, such as triangles. You can draw lines on your hexagon, cut them apart and have sub-cut shapes. You don't need to worry about seam allowances. There are heavy plastic templates that are suitable for rotary cutting along the edge. They're also good for tracing with a pencil. You can isolate your motif and draw around it and cut with a scissor. The kind of fabrics you're going to want to look for are, for the most part, quilting weight fabrics. I like the fussy cut, which means isolating a motif. So if I want to use this size hexagon, for example, this is a great fabric because, as you can see, I can fussy cut any of these flowers. Which means I can isolate the motif the size and shape of my hexagon. I also like to use silk. Silk is hard to sew in most patchwork, but it's wonderful to use English paper piecing, because the paper causes it to have a stiffness, that makes it much easier to sew, than it would without the foundation. These are also fabrics that I like to use. Polka dots are wonderful, whether you fussy cut them or just cut them randomly. Here's this little baby again in a different color. Stripes can be very interesting to use, you can get a lot of motion by how you arrange the hexagons. The other items you're going to need are a good pair of scissors. I like to use two different sizes of needles. I have size nine and size 11 straw needles. This is my preference. I use the nine for basting, and the 11 for actually stitching the hexagons together. I use two different size threads. A heavy one, inexpensive that's going to be used for basting. It's just going to be thrown away so you don't need to have a good thread for that. Then a very good, fine thread for sewing the hexagons together. I use a fine thread because it has to become invisible when you sew the hexagons. One last thing that I just started to use is this glue stick. It's a temporary glue, sort of like the stuff on post-it notes. You can actually glue the fabric to the pieces of paper, instead of bastings and it does remove very, very simply. I can't believe it, but it's a miracle. Modern technology. For the most part, I rotary cut using a mat, a ruler, and a rotary cutter to cut squares for my hexagons. It's faster than cutting hexagons and I'll show you how. You may want to starch your fabric, especially at the end. I use Mary Ellen's Best Press. This is a starch-like product that leaves no residue on the iron and it's leaves the fabric flexible enough for

sewing. The last thing you will need are blank tea towels to decorate with the hexagons that we learn to make.

Chapter 3 - Creating fabric shapes

Cutting fabric

- The first decision you need to make is what size hexagon, or diamond, or other shape you want to start with. This is a three inch hexagon, that means that this edge, and every edge, measures three inches. This is a one inch hexagon, and as you can see, the edge measures one inch. Once you've decided what size basic piece to start with, you can then buy other pieces of paper that plug into it, or you can cut the hexagons apart yourself, and make other shapes that will fit into that shape. For instance, this triangle, you can purchase the triangles, which will fit in so, and all the way around, or you could actually draw the lines from point to point and cut them apart yourself. This one inch hexagon, I would like to make half hexagons. So, I drew a line from here to here and cut it apart. And, once I have the hexagons in half, I can make a little frame that plugs in just so. Here, here, and so on. And we'll achieve this effect when done, when you've sewn it together. You can also make little, tiny, tumbling blocks to fit into the one inch hexagons. And if you'll see, it fits together just like so. In the one inch hexagon. Or, you can arrange these same shapes to make a star. You can even frame the star by plugging these in around the edge. But the possibilities are endless. Its almost like putting together a mosaic with the little pieces all pulled together to make a fabulous design. There are many ways to cut. One way is to take your template, which has to be about 1/4" bigger than your paper. So, you'll see that the paper fits right here, and this template, this heavy, plastic template, is about 1/4" bigger all the way around. You can use this template to rotary cut, because it's heavy enough, or you can isolate a motif on your fabric, take a pencil, draw around the plastic, and then, with a scissor, very simply cut out your hexagon shape. Having a nice, sharp pair of scissors is a handy thing. Don't let your kids play with them. You don't have to be terribly careful cutting out, the edge will be wrapped around the back and will be in the seam allowance. So, don't be too fussy. I prefer to rotary cut squares, not hexagons. It works fine. It's a lot faster. What I do is find a motif that I wish to center. And here's one that's about the size I want, and it's gonna fit. For a one inch hexagon, I'm cutting a 2 1/2" square. As you can see, I'm centering the motif in the middle of the 2 1/2" square. And now this square will wrap around this hexagon beautifully and I won't have taken the time to do a hexagon shape. This is my preference. There are a couple of other ways to cut. One is, and this is a piece of silk, that I've taken from a mens' tie. I've simply pinned the paper template, and I'm just gonna roughly cut about 1/4" out all the way around. Silk frays a lot, so I try not to handle it too much. And that is ready to baste. One last way that I love to rotary cut, and get a lot of fussy cut squares very quickly, is this technique. And it's a little bit tedious, but it yields results quickly. I find a fabric that has a lot going on, so no matter where I would fussy cut, it's going to end up interesting. I take six layers, because I'm going to need six identical hexagons to make the project I wish to make, and I layer them very carefully by taking a needle and putting it through the middle of all six motifs in exactly the same spot, and pinning it together. So, this is six layers aligned beautifully. For my one inch hexagons, I need a 2 1/2" square, so, I cut a 2 1/2" strip, careful not to run over the pins, it'll ruin your rotary cutter. And once I have a 2 1/2" strip, I then cut 2 1/2" squares. And, as you can see, these are going to be absolutely identical. And I got six identical hexagons from this technique. No matter what shape you wish to cut, all of these techniques work the same, whether you do it with a pencil, whether you do it with a rotary cutter, whether you do it with a scissor, no matter what shape, same process.

Basting

- As with most things in patchwork there are lots of approaches you can take. Everyone has their favorite. I'm going to show you three different ways to baste fabric to your hexagon forms. No matter what shape you're using it's all the same. The first way I'm showing you is basting through the paper. Take your template, place it on the back of your fabric. Drop a pin through to hold it. This is an inexpensive heavier thread and a larger needle than you will use later on. You're going to wrap the fabric to the back. You're going to take your needle. It's a single thread with a knot in it. This is going to go into the garbage so don't be too concerned about how delicate your stitches are or how big your knot is. Pierced, pierce it right through here, all the way through and pull, turn it slightly and fold it so that you've got a nice corner. And pierce through every layer and pull it through and then one more coming toward you from the middle. Turn ever so slightly, fold it over, through every layer and continue all the way around the hexagon. I'm not being too careful about where these stitches go. As I said, it's just going to be wasted. It's to stabilize only. We're almost at the end, last corner. Tuck your fabric in. And because I'm not going to use this hexagon for awhile, or I often don't use it for awhile, I put another stitch in the end just to make sure it's secure and cut it off. Remove pin and there it is. And you're gonna say, what's going to happen with all this bulk? Well, quilts get batting in the center and a backing, it just adds to the batting. It doesn't bother me one bit. If it bothers you, you can trim it but this works for me. I like to use this technique with the silk, with the men's ties because silk really does wiggle quite a lot and basting through the paper with the silk is my favorite technique using silk. There's another way to baste. Now we will do a similar kind of thing. Same thread, same needle, same knot. This is the way I tend to do most things. This is the basting technique I prefer. I like it because it doesn't pierce the paper so I can get a lot more use out of my paper. You do reuse them. Fold it again over the edge, and this time I'm going to fold this corner. I'm going to take the needle and not put it through the paper just push the needle through that corner. And then I'm going to turn counter clockwise, fold over the next corner. I'm going to take a stitch right through the layers of fabric and pull. You can see it's holding that corner. Turn it again, fold it. Give yourself a nice corner. Go through here, turn again, fold. This may look tedious and slow but you do get faster with practice and this is a great thing to do on an airplane, on a bus, on a train. When your stitches don't have to be exact, you can get a lot of these hexagons basted. And our last corner, put in, stitch through, and just because I don't know how long these hexagons will be around before I actually turn them into a block, I'll put a second stitch in and this is a soothing technique, it's a slow technique. It's worth spending time on, and then you cut off your thread and remove your pin. So this is modern technology at work. This is a temporary glue suitable for fabric. I've taken a motif and centered it. Whether I did a hexagon shape cut fabric or a square, it's the same. For that matter if you were doing diamonds, same thing. Center it, put a little bit of glue along an edge. Fold, glue an edge, fold. It holds immediately. It holds a little better than that, a little more glue there. Magic, huh? And there it is, basted. These are the three ways to baste. Choose the one you like best for your project.

Chapter 4 - Piecing shapes together

Sewing shapes together

- There are many ways to sew your shapes together to get interesting effects. We started with hexagons, but they can be subdivided into different shapes and get fabulous effects. This one uses triangles to make this hexagon, and the fabric was fussy cut to get these concentric shapes. This one we used a smaller hexagon in the center; half-hexagons around the outside. Like so. And again,

fussy cutting to get these stripes to line up. Here's an interesting one. Exactly the same process as this one, but because of the way the fabric was cut, get this wonderful pinwheel. And then, sixty degree diamonds are sub-cut from hexagons, and you can get stars. You can also take this diamond shape to make tumbling blocks. It's a traditional block. To create a tumbling block you need a light, a medium, and a dark fabric to make one block. We're going to make hexagon florets, and you've got lots of decisions to make. Are you going to make them scrappy? Each one of these fabrics is a different fabric with a center. This one is using a single fabric, but it's not fussy cut, so the motifs are not centered in each. Are you gonna use stripes? To go around, or to twirl. Are you going to take fussy cut fabric from exactly the same large-scale fabric, and get rosebuds or twigs? Or flowers, and leaves, again from the same fabric. Or are you going to take a small motif fabric, and fussy cut it to get these wonderful eyeballs? My decision is going to be something a little different from all of that. I'm going to use fussy cut blossoms. I'm going to have a polka-dot center, and I'm going to put flowers around it, but I'm going to use two different flowers. So I'm gonna alternate like so. And now we're ready to sew. We're going to use a very fine cotton thread. I like a size 11 straw needle. You might like one a little wider. It's hard to thread. And let's start by attaching the first hexagon to the center. You place the two face to face. I like to bury my thread by sneaking it up to the corner, and coming out, and going directly across, and pick up a couple of threads from the opposite corner. And I'm pulling it through; I'm not catching the paper. One of the reasons I like this kind of basting which does not go through the paper it leaves it a little looser up here and easy to sew. I am now going come back to this side pick a couple of threads up; go directly across, and pull through. And I'm going to do that all the way down. And we're coming up to the corner. Let me take one stitch right in the corner. Some people take two for stability. I haven't felt the need, but I'm happy with it this way. Now we open it up, and we're gonna now attach this one in the same manner. So front to front, and attach this petal of our rosette to the center. Go through the corner of the middle hexagon to the corner of our new petal, and continue to whipstitch to the end. No matter what shape pieces you're sewing together the process is the same. You hold the fronts together. Papers are facing you and facing out, and you just whipstitch the two pieces together. I'm gonna continue in this manner. Attaching each one of the petals of this floret to the center using a whipstitch in exactly the same way. Coming up the end of the last petal. I'm going to go through the corner stitch. The last stitch. Putting the last petal on, and I go through twice. I'm not going to take and cut my thread off. I'm just going to tuck it away right now, leaving it attached and I'm going to pop the center paper out. So it'll be easy to sew the petals to each other. Just pop the paper out. Just cut your basting threads, pull them out. This one's going to be a little bit stubborn, of course. And just pull the paper out, like so. Now we've tucked the needle away, and, we've defined where it was which was sewing this last piece. I'm going to take the two petals where the thread was pinch them together front to front. Here's our center, and I'm going to whip-stitch to the end attaching the first two petals exactly the same way we have done all the rest of the sewing with a whipstitch. You may ask how to pop out the paper when it's been glued. This glue is very temporary, and it's easy as you can see to just detach, and the paper pops out just fine. Back to whipstitching. We're gonna go to the end And at the end go right through the points a couple of times Pull your needle through to make a knot, and I go through one more time for security, and then I like to hide my thread just by running it underneath a bit, and coming out, and cutting off. Because the paper is not here, it's easy to fold and whip-stitch the two petals together. We've sewed these two petals together We're gonna do this, this, this, this, and the last one, and we will have a beautiful floret.

Embellishing tea towel

- Our floret is completely sewed. If I were going to put this in a quilt with many other florets and attach it for example, this way, I wouldn't remove the papers until each edge was sewed to another. So until this is sewed to this, this and this, I can't remove that paper. I can't remove this paper, because this is an open edge. So a hexagon has to be completely sewed on all edges before you remove the paper. That's not what we're going to do today. We're going to use this floret as an appliqued A. We're going to put it on a tea towel, and so in order to do that, the papers need to be removed because it's too hard to sew as an applique with the papers in. We're going to starch it. With Best Press, you could use any other brand of starch, just happens to be my favorite. And then wet it quite well on one side. And the other side. Nice hot iron. Get it. And there it is, just for good measure, there we go. Now we can remove the papers. Whether you've basted through the papers, or did it this style, just remove the threads. I like to use a seam ripper, just to pull on these threads. Makes it easy. And this is not exactly delicate, you can just get the threads out. And do it all the way around until the basting threads are gone. Having a contrasting basting thread makes it easy to do. And as soon as all the basting thread is out, we will have an applique ready to put on a tea towel. Course the last one's gonna be a little stubborn because it can be. Just for good measure, I'm gonna press it again. Can't be too flat, at this stage. And scorch. Okay, time to take out the papers. Sneak your finger in there, and they come out so easily. Just make sure you don't mess with your edges too much. There it is. We can take our floret and applique it to a tea towel. Here is a tea towel, and I've decided I want to put my applique in the bottom corner. I can put it this way, or I can put it this way. I think I like it that way. So I'm going to line it up nicely, and pin it, pin the floret to the tea towel, so it's nice and flat and ready to sew. And this is something a beginning sewer can do. It's so simple. So last needle, or last pin. I've gone back to my fine needle, my fine thread. In this case, I want the thread to match my tea towel so the stitches really do disappear. To take my first stitch, I want to bury my thread where I can't see it any longer, so I'm going to just sneak it in there and bring it up through the edge of my applique. And going to pick this up and begin doing a typical applique stitch, which is to put my needle down through the background, in this case the tea towel. Go about an eighth of an inch and bring it back up through the tea towel and the edge of my floret, and pull. I'm going to go down as close as I can to the edge, through the tea towel, go about an eighth of inch, maybe less, pick up a couple of threads of the edge, and pull. And I'm going to do that all the way around, making teensy little invisible stitches. This is how all applique is done. And because we've used a matching thread, you're not gonna see the stitches on the back. I do make a point of really securing any sharp corners. So if this were a diamond or a hexagon, any really sharp point like that, I will definitely put a stitch in. I'm going down through the tea towel, right as close as I can to the edge, and to come back up through the background, the tea towel and a couple of threads. Whenever I have a point like this, whether it be a diamond or a hexagon, I do try to stitch right through that point. Because that's the place where the applique will be the weakest for people to snag it and possibly destroy it, so I'm very careful to get points well sewed. Continue sewing all the way around, using this blind stitch and this fine thread, until the end. I've done a couple of other tea towels, one with this technique, and I'm going to show that to you. In this case, I sewed a row of hexagons. I've appliqued this the same way as the floret. These are obviously sewed together differently, but you can see, because we used a matching thread, the stitches are nearly impossible to see on the back, at least I hope so. And it's sewed on there, it's nice and secure. There is another option. You can use a decorative stitch to attach the applique. This is done with a buttonhole or sometimes called a blanket stitch. Because I want my thread to show and it's decorative, I used a

heavier weight thread. This is called a 40 count, it's just a heavier thread. And a slightly larger needle than before. This is a number nine straw needle. And this is how you do a blanket stitch. You put your thread up and over. You dig your needle in about a quarter inch in from the top. Pull it back out near the edge but not through your applique. Right here, and you push it through. And pull, and don't pull too tight because the idea is to have that beautiful decorative stitch there. Dig in. Come out. And pull, I can see there's a little bit of excess seam allowance that I need to tuck down and get rid of, so that's easy to do just by poking with your needle. Again, dig in, come out, and catch this thread behind. And there we go. Continue this buttonhole stitch all the way to the end, and I'll show you how to finish this stitch. When you get to the end, you wanna make sure that it doesn't look like a beginning and an end but looks continuous, so you know that you know that I need to put another stitch right here, and I'm gonna put it in and then I'm going to try and catch where it came out the very stitch, like that. Pull it through. And then, carefully put my needle down right where we started, and pull through. Look, you can't tell where it starts and stop. And knot it off in the back. Well, let's make a tiny little knot here. So it's not too awful. And one more, just for good measure. And then I don't like to leave a tail, so I try and sneak my needle between the two layers. It's not coming above, and just hide the tail. And cut it off. There it is.

Chapter 5 - Application

Using english paper piecing

- It's not fun to make four identical tea towels. So we've got a great set started, each one different, each based on a hexagon. We got this one and this one and I've just made this surrounded little hexagon, it would be another good example for a fourth. And the ideas are infinite. You know, quilt makers are not intimidated by squares. They know how you can put a square together with maybe a half square triangle and that doesn't scare anybody, but for some reason, a hexagon shape or a 60 degree diamond shape, is a little intimidating. It really doesn't need to be, because these things all plug together so beautifully. Got lots of design possibilities, we can put these florets together, edge to edge like this and just make a wonderful flower garden or we can put some paving stones between our flower garden and do something that is traditionally called grandmother's flower garden. Most of the time that you saw those they had green between the flowers, I guess because, that's the color of a lawn. And that's a very traditional way of putting together hexagons. I've really enjoyed doing these larger scale hexagons with a much more contemporary look, using Kaffe Fassett stripes and no matter how I put these together, it turns out to be infinitely fun, and I think it's quite handsome, not so fussy as the little hexagons. In the dreamy hexagon video, that Kaffe Fassett and I did, we made hexagon frames out of these solid fabrics and framed a motif, in this case a cabbage, and here is part of that construct that we made for the video. These are all beautifully framed cabbages, ready to go as a central motif in a big medallion quilt. The thing that I think has drawn me the most to doing hexagons is the portability and how simple it is to get so much done in wasted time, doctor's offices, on airplanes. This is my sewing kit, that I can take anywhere needle, thread, papers and I'm ready to baste. As I become more involved with quilt making I'm less interested in the quick project and way more interested in a flashback to what drew me here to begin with. Handwork that is slow and steady and intense, and English paper piecing brings a great deal of satisfaction to the time I spend in front of a television or just contemplating the universe. So I hope you try English paper piecing. It's easy, it's fun, and infinitely interesting.