

Let's Play Sampler Spree 1

This book should be titled Playing Spree. Or Having Fun While Making a Sampler Quilt.



No. That's still not right.

Having Fun.

That's what Susan does when she makes quilts – she revels in it, she enjoys it. “We’re not solving world problems, we’re playing.”

It comes through in what she shares on her wildly popular Instagram - @yardgrl60, in her books, in feature articles in quilt magazines, and in chatting with her.

Just so you know, while I met Susan many years ago at Quilt Market, I didn't get to know her until Instagram became a “thing”. Susan's IG is everything social media should be – generous, engaging, funny, honest, and inspirational. Her popularity didn't change her, she's still the same person. So add “authentic” to the list. I still love how she mixes fabrics, and her color sense is spectacular. That she continues to make what she likes, and put her own spin on it... that's what I like best.



This is Airboats from Susan's book *Start with Strips - 13 Colorful Quilts from 2½" Strips*.

So yes, I was going to get this book, no matter what. That it's a block book is the cherry on the sundae. But unlike most block books, *Sampler Spree* is also filled with the kind of tips and insights come with experience, trial-and-error, and an adventurous spirit.

Since books always come with silly limitations on space, there were things Susan shared that I wanted to ask her about, to fill out. For me. And to share with you.

Orphan blocks. Are these leftover blocks? Or is this a block that got lost while making the quilt?



Susan's Basket of Orphan Blocks.

No! I have an "orphan block bin" because I'm a firm believer in making practice blocks. When I see a pattern that I'm on the fence about making because of block construction, or because it's a block I've never made and there are a lot of them in the quilt, I always make a practice block to see if I can make it easier for me. From a shortcut that lets me make more than one at a time in the same color, to how to condense some of the steps in a way that makes more sense to me. And sometimes I don't know the block well enough to know if I want to make an entire quilt with that one block. So I always race to my scrap bins, find colors that are close to what I'm planning for the quilt so I can wrap my mind around what the block will look like on repeat even if that block never gets used in the actual quilt. I have made my own reference block.

Let's talk about scraps. What winds up in your scrap bin? Do you have more than one?

Is this the part where everyone is going to gasp and cringe at the same time? (Will they think I've gone mad?).

I crack open all bundles and pre-cuts.

Yep. That means Jelly Rolls, Honey Buns, charm packs and layer cakes are sorted by color and thrown into my scrap bins. Yes, I have more than one. All fat quarter bundles and fat eighth bundles are sorted by color and folded into my color wall. I do pet them in their original form first – I'm not a barbarian! But they don't stay together as a bundle for very long. The sooner I can see the colors and prints in my working stash, the more creative I can be with putting together scrap quilts.



Susan's Scrap Bins - image from Instagram.

Breaking apart pre-cuts? Nobody does that! You're nuts.

So if I've never saved scraps and want to start building the kind of color variety you have, where would I start?

When I really want to see what a fabric collection looks like before I start purchasing yardage, I start with a charm pack. I can see all of the prints and colors, and get a sense of the scale. From there, I can buy my favorites. Then that charm pack is off to reside in my scrap bins.



A glorious collection of strips and pieces waiting to be sorted.

Genius. For building a stash of bigger scraps, do you prefer Jelly Rolls or Layer Cakes?

This isn't a one or the other answer because they both serve a useful purpose. I have a love for Jelly Rolls because I can make strip sets quickly, and then cut those down to different widths if I need to. A Layer Cake is a large working piece of fabric, and I feel like I can get so many things made with a 10" x 10" square. I use them for different things so I really need both.

Do you actually use the charm pack squares in a project?

Most definitely! Boy, oh boy, those 5" squares are easy for making half-square triangles with those Cupcake papers. And I can make some super scrappy flying geese just by having a bunch of squares in the same colors right at my fingertips.



I also buy charm packs of collections that don't really fit my style, but are in colors I use, or have the size print I like. Reproduction collections are perfect for little filler prints, and there are collections designed for kids that have the best blender prints in the colors I love. That's how I find some of my favorite prints, and the other squares will always get used.

You've convinced me. What else would you tell quilters about building a scrap stash?

Charm packs. Charm packs. Charm packs. Whether you're ordering online or doing curbside pickup, getting the fabrics you want is easier when you use a charm pack as your guide. The size of the squares truly gives you what the fabric is saying about color and print. Then it's super easy to pick and choose your favorites.

I also pay attention to the designers when they share which Bella Solids or other Basics match their collections best, and I always order those. I also make sure I have a current color card of solids to choose from because that's the easiest way to add more fabric in shades that I might only need a small quantity of. And I don't think there has been a time when I would pass up bundles from shops that mixed backgrounds, especially when there was a mix of designers.

That's it for today.

Don't worry, there's more to share. I had a lot of questions for Susan.

Do you have questions for her? If so, what would you ask her?



Blocks from Susan's Sampler Spree - 101 Fresh & Fun Quilt Blocks.

Do you have Sampler Spree yet? If not, why not?!?