

Colorscaapes

by Timna Tarr

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp with Timna Tarr

Materials

- Quilt blocks

Optional

- Color wheel
- Camera

• Often when laying out scrappy quilt blocks, quilters disperse the colors throughout the quilt top. This traditional technique is pleasing to the eye, but I have found that sorting the fabrics into like colors and placing them together can create a cohesive background palette of color—what I refer to as a “colorscape.” This method provides a visual organization for the blocks. Creating a colorscape is an easy way to put a modern spin on traditional blocks.

• This technique works best if you have many different fabrics and colors to work with. It is much easier to blend 40 fabrics than 4, and 400 fabrics is easier still!

• When making a traditional quilt block such as a Nine Patch, I do not worry about how all of the blocks will fit together or if they will match. I focus on one block at a time, pairing two fabrics that I like together. I do this for as many blocks as I need. Once I have the blocks together then I think about the layout.

Since it can be overwhelming when there are too many variables to think about when deciding on block placement, I choose to look at only one variable—the background fabric. In my mind, the background fabric is at the edges of the block (and often there is a larger percentage of background than foreground fabric in one block). In a Nine Patch, the background is the X blocks (the fabric that is in the corners and center). The O blocks are the foreground. In a Diamond-In-Square block the center diamond is the foreground, while the background is the outer triangles.

By ignoring the placement of the foreground colors, they end up in somewhat random locations. The unplanned placement gives the quilt a little sparkle as your eye travels over the colorscape.

INSTRUCTIONS

1. After you have made your quilt blocks, sort them into color piles based on their background fabrics. When sorting do not focus on the details of the fabrics, just their overall color impression. My blocks are often sorted into stacks of red, pink, orange, yellow, green, blue-green, blue, purple, light brown, and dark (which includes dark brown, dark navy, and black).

Tip: If you have trouble deciding on which pile to put them in, step back 10 feet and make your decision from a distance.



Detail of quilt

2. Arrange blocks on a design wall. I start with the light yellows and work out from there. Light yellow can sit next to medium yellow, and light orange, pink, and green. The goal is to create a smooth transition from one color to another.
3. Keep rearranging and playing with the block placement until the background colors blend into each other. Light colors blend into medium values of the same color, and medium values blend into the color's darker values.
4. Occasionally put contrasting background colors or values next to each other. The contrast creates a visual surprise, and a place for your eye to hang onto.
5. Once you have a layout that you are happy with, step back and look at it from another angle, or take a photo and look through your camera screen. These tricks will often point out problems that you might have missed while working up close with the blocks. ■■■

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Tip: A color wheel is an excellent tool to consult during this process. It may remind you that the reds can blend in to both the oranges and the purples, as it lies between them on the color wheel.