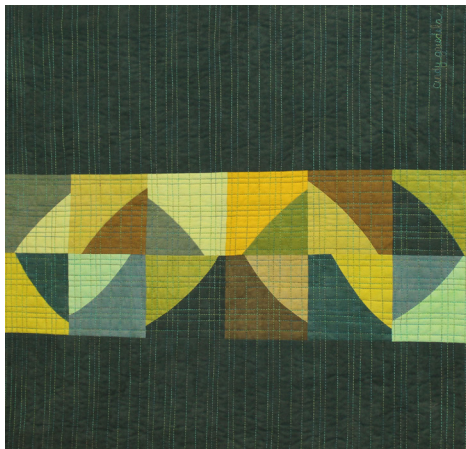


Improv Curved Piecing with Squares + Strips

by Cindy Grisdela

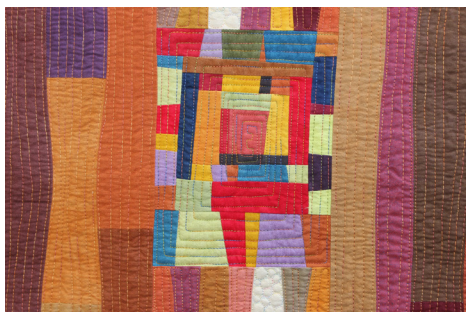
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Improv Circles



Host Susan Brubaker Knapp with Cindy Grisdela



Curved Strips along the borders

Improv Circle Materials

- 12 fabrics, each 5" square
- Square ruler, 6"
- Neutral thread
- Sewing machine

Curved Strip Materials

- Strips, 3-4, cut 2½" x 12"
- Rectangular ruler, at least 12"

- Curved piecing doesn't have to be intimidating with my no template, no pins process for Improv Circles and Curved Strips. Improv Circles are based on the traditional Drunkard's Path block, but the curves don't have to match, and it's usually more interesting if they don't. Curved Strips are useful for borders in a busy improv design to give the eye a place to rest, or they can create an abstract landscape-style quilt.

- You will cut the squares and strips a bit larger than you want the finished piece to be and square things up before putting the blocks together.

INSTRUCTIONS

- I keep scraps from other projects organized roughly by color in baskets so that I have my raw materials close at hand when I'm ready to create new blocks. My improvisational process has no rules or patterns, so my creativity is free to blossom. To start, I decide on the color recipe I want to use, whether it's warm reds, cool blues or greens, or an "anything goes" riot of color.

The only other decision is what size I want the finished block to be. For Improv Circles, useful sizes are 3", 4", or 6" square, finished. Curved strips usually start out at 2½" in width. The length is determined by the purpose of the strip—longer for a border and shorter for an accent or an abstract landscape.

Setting improv blocks

Improv Circles can be set many different ways, just like the traditional Drunkard's Path block. They can form circle shapes if they are sewn so all of the smaller arcs face the center. Or they can make a shape like a turtle if two of the smaller arcs face inward on opposite sides and the other two face outward. Or you can combine Improv Circle blocks of different sizes in the same quilt.

My book, *ARTFUL IMPROV: EXPLORE COLOR RECIPES, BUILDING BLOCKS & FREE MOTION QUILTING* has lots of ideas and inspiration for making your own original, improvisational quilt.


Make Improv Circles

1. Decide on your color recipe. Use a variety of values in each color family to add interest. For example, red includes true red, red-orange, and red-violet. Think about the accent fabric. It can be a lighter or darker value of the main color recipe, or it can be another color all together. I often use a complementary color—one that is on the opposite side of the color wheel—for my accent to add a “spark” to the design.
 2. Arrange the squares into 6 pairs, right sides up. Make sure that each pair contains fabrics that are different colors or different values of the same color.
 3. For each pair, align the edges and cut a gentle curve through both fabrics with a rotary cutter. I cut each pair individually; aiming for the curve in a slightly different place for each one, so the blocks won't all be the same.
- Tip:** *By making the cut a gentle slope, rather than a steep curve, it will be easier to sew together.*
4. Separate the halves of each pair and lay them out so you have 2 new squares with a different color or

value in each half. One of the pieces will be convex, with an outward curve like a piece of pizza, and the other will be concave, curving inward opposite the corner.

5. Put the halves right sides together and sew the curve gently with an approximately ¼" seam. The edges won't match and that's OK.
- Tip:** *It's not necessary to pin the curved edges. Just sew slowly and stop every now and then to realign the edges. If the seam allowance varies slightly, it's not a problem; pressing will fix it.*
6. Press the seam toward the pizza side of the block. Square up the blocks to 4½".
- Tip:** *To use this technique in your own project, cut the initial squares about ½" larger than the size you want them to be unfinished.*
7. Arrange the squares on a design wall or next to the sewing machine in a pleasing composition and sew them together in blocks and then in rows. Use your imagination to make your quilt your own!

Make Curved Strips

1. Place 2 of the strips on the cutting mat right sides up. Overlap the strips on the long side by about 1".
- Tip:** *When you are using this technique in a project, cut the strips about 1" wider and 2" longer than you want them to be finished.*
2. With a rotary cutter, cut a gentle curve through both layers within the overlap. Remove the excess fabric from both strips. The 2 larger curved strips fit will together perfectly.
 3. Put the strips right sides together on the long side. It looks like they won't fit, but don't panic—they will sew together just fine.
- Note:** *You don't need to match the top or bottom edges or pin them together. Just sew slowly, easing the curves together gently as you sew and stopping as necessary to realign the edges.*
4. Press the seam to 1 side.
 5. If you want to add more strips for an abstract landscape style quilt, follow steps 1–4 to add as many strips to the curved unit, as you wish. 

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