

2020 Opportunity Quilt: The evolution

Santa Clara Valley Quilt Association (info@scvqa.org)

July 25, 2019

This year's opportunity quilt was organized by Joyce Tachner and created by Joyce, Andrea Fleiner, Amanda Fleig, Joy and John Palmer, Deb McQueen, Donna Morrissey, Isabel Rodriguez, and Jane Wegner. It started with a meeting at Joyce's where the group was presented with a set of 72 6" blocks in shades of blue and white that had been given to the guild by an unknown donor. Shown on this page are all the different patterns in these blocks. For most patterns there were two copies, but some had only one and some had three. As you can also see, most of the blocks were pieced but several, notably the leaves and the rabbit, were appliquéd. Most of the blocks were quite well made so there was a strong desire to find a way to use them.

Searching for a way to use these blocks, Andrea came up with a quilt (below right) in the May-June, 2017, issue of QUILTmania designed by Janine Alers, a Dutch quilter. This proved to be the inspiration we needed and you will see many elements of it in our quilt: the center medallion, the 7 x 5 ring of blocks around the center medallion, the on-point squares around this. Lots of other things changed because of the color, size, and number of our blocks and the inclinations of the quilters.



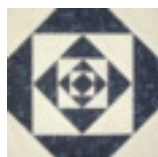
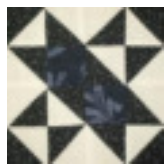
July 31, 2019

By the time of the next meeting, Andrea had done a full-scale drawing of a center medallion and had started creating the pieces to be appliqued. We spent some time auditioning fabric for the medallion, foreground and background and planning to raid stashes for additional possibilities.



John had done an EQ8 design of a possible way to use the blocks to create something close to a queen size quilt. When two concentric rings of the blocks did not look interesting, he tried rotating the blocks of the outer ring to put them on point. This spaced the blocks out enough that they could form a double-wide ring. Without good pictures of the blocks, John recreated many of them with EQ using only a few shades of blue. When drawn up with EQ8, it looked like this (At that point John's EQ8 skills did not include doing background fabric or incorporating real pictures.)

No one objected to that this approach, so John took examples of all the pieced blocks home to make better pictures of each and learn how to incorporate these into an EQ8 quilt. Somewhat misleadingly he trimmed the pictures to be exactly square and exactly the same size. They did, however, have the correct color. During assembly, the real quilters would have to deal with squaring up and sizing the blocks.



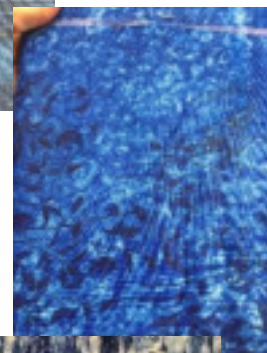
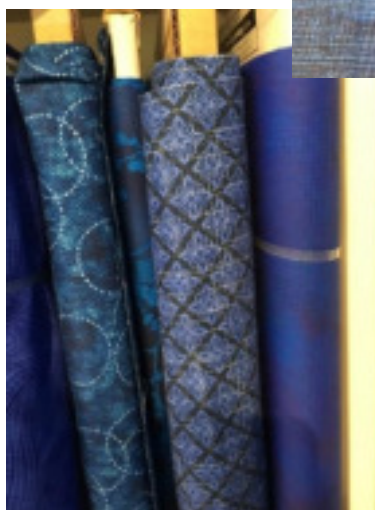
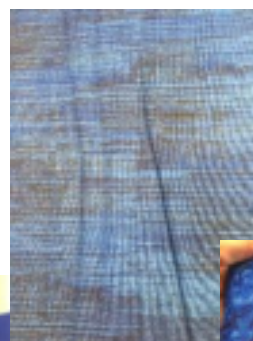
August 14, 2019

By this meeting, the real block pictures had been integrated into the EQ8 picture. We decided not to use the leaf and animal applique blocks because they did not seem to fit with the pieced blocks. John picked a few more blocks from the EQ8 library to fill in these slots and added the fillers and borders to the proposed quilt design. Andrea (master of applique) had finished the center medallion so we laid out the blocks around it to see if the electronic design would work in real fabric. Being more precise with the spacing between the rows/columns of the on-point ring, it became obvious that the outer corner blocks needed to be larger than the others. Making them generally darker also seemed appealing.



September, 2019

During September, Donna and Deb squared up the donated blocks for the center ring and sewed them into strips. The group opted to do an applique outer border so the pieced border (shown above) was dropped. Of course, this was also a time to visit fabric stores for yet more blue and/or white fabric for the additional blocks, for the separators between the rings, and for the filler around the on-point blocks.



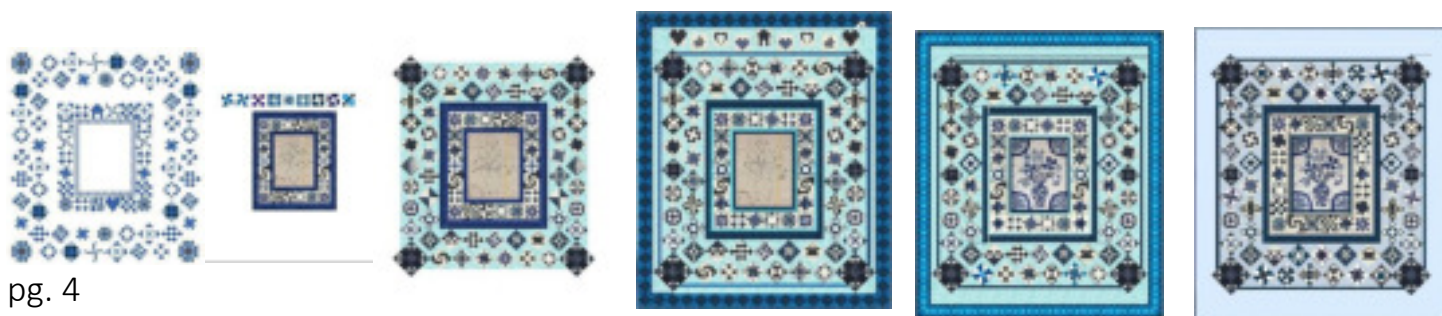
From the beginning of the project, it had been a challenge to keep track of the blocks. We were dealing with 26 pairs of blocks from the original set plus 9 pairs that we created plus the four copies of each of two corner blocks. Using the photos of the original donated blocks and printed outputs from EQ8, John created this catalog of blocks we had or would need to make. There was a fair bit of block juggling involved in balancing the various blocks across the quilt. Even with a list and checking it twice, it was hard to include each block in the design one and only one time. This list turned out not to be final as we used the “basket” block that appears here in the “not used” set. There is one of the blocks in the “EQ8 block patterns” row that we did not use. If you are stubborn, you can look for which one it is.

Here is John working on the quilt design. At the far left is EQ8 that was used for putting the pieces together. Roughly in the center is one of the two photo processing programs that was used to setup the images of the existing blocks and the center medallion for use in EQ8. On the right is a drawing tool that was used to do measurements on the various pieces, do the overlay of construction order, and play with various ways of cutting the large pieces out of the available fabric. (Don’t tell, but he actually pieced four of the blocks.)



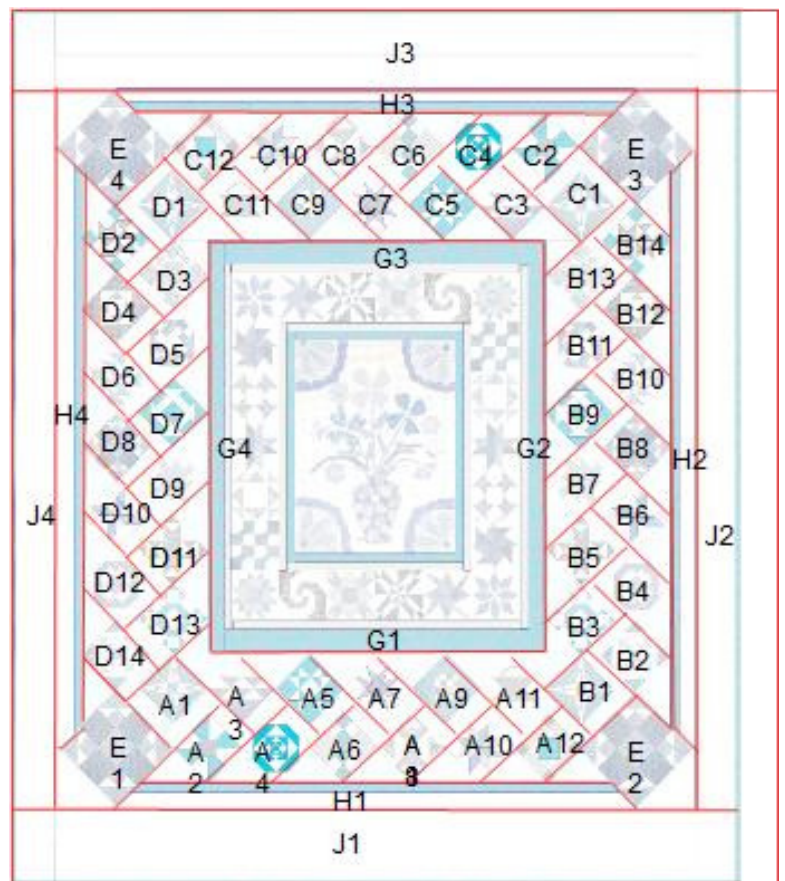
Below are six of the many images of quilt possibilities that came out of EQ8.

From left to right: (1) all of the blocks were recreated in EQ8, (2) photographs of the drawing of the medallion and of the blocks of the inner ring, (3) a fabric filler for the on-point ring, (4) dark border on an off-center version with a different feeling for the pillow area, (5) a lighter outer border, and (6) something close to what was actually created.



There was some worry about the number of inside corners we would need to sew while assembling the on-point blocks, so Joy and John created an overlay of the quilt image indicating how small sets of pieces could be created with straight seams and then joined with only straight seams. The design would have been simpler without the 2" zigzag spacer between the two rows/columns of on-point blocks but John voted with his fingers and the design included the extra pieces.

By the end of the month, the borders had been sewn to the medallion and the first ring of pieced blocks attached to that. The center of the quilt was encouraging as the pieces felt like they belonged together.



October 11, 2019

We began the process of creating the 14 blocks we would need to complete the quilt. Fortunately, EQ8 would generate templates, rotary cutting directions, or paper-piecing patterns for all the designed blocks. Each person could choose the construction method they liked.



October 25, 2019

By October 25, we had most of the additional blocks made and were proudly displaying our new blocks on a flannel board.



November 7, 2019

With all the pieced blocks done, we created the spacer pieces around the on-point blocks and Andrea sewed the first of the “super blocks” together. We then laid out the entire on-point ring on the floor and labeled each block according to the construction diagram. You can see the two super-blocks at the lower left. (The big outer corner blocks are not rotated into position.)



January 7, 2020

Each side of the on-point ring went home with a different person during the Thanksgiving – Christmas holiday season but when we reconvened in January, all were done and ready for integration.



The “no interior corners” character was true in creating the sides but there were some ugly things to manage in the corners where they came together. In addition, the exact length of the sides determines how wide the border piece inside them needs to be. Lots of things needed to be done at the same time. At the end of the day it was a very proud group that gathered around the final assembly of the pieced blocks. The sew-day hosts may have even tried it on their bed.



January 13, 2020

Andrea created the base for the applique border pieces with just an undulating vine and a few leaves. Then everyone participated in filling out the vine with additional leaves, flowers, and fruit. The party here is to cut shapes, fold edges, and glue them in place for later hand applique. Jane Wegner was a late recruit to the project but was invaluable in getting this major applique work done.



Pieces, pieces, pieces. Each one can be a different fabric. How will this work with what's already there? Time flies when you are having fun. Is it time for dessert already or is that just for inspiration? Blueberries work. Blue strawberries and mangos ????



February 28, 2020

Late February we had an applique-in day to finish putting the pieces on the border and to do some of the handwork in the corners and then attach the ring to the quilt center.



April, 2020

Joy Palmer did the quilting on her Gammill longarm. She did some of the quilting by hand guiding the machine as shown here and some of it using computerized patterns she modified to suit this quilt. All of the glorious feathers were hand guided.

After the quilting, Donna Morrissey did the binding and Joyce did the labels.

Truly it was a group project.



Why does one block a quilt? Because every quilt is distorted by small variations in piecing, slight stretching of the fabric particularly in bias areas, and inevitable local size changes caused by variations in quilting density. This is particularly noticeable where there are long high contrast lines like edges of the dark strips on this quilt. You can see this in the picture below left. Blocking is the conceptually simple process of dampening the quilt and then pinning all the lines straight, stretching the quilt where necessary. In practice, it requires a lot of measuring, a large collection of straight edge devices, and a LOT of pins.



Here is the quilt laid out on the floor with 1" thick interlocking foam pads underneath to hold the pins. To the right is the arrangement of long metal rulers and carpenter's squares that I used to find a proper rectangle for the center medallion. Below is the medallion border pinned in place.



Moving out from the center medallion, the process of making the lines actually parallel because somewhat more complex and tedious, typically using more rulers and perhaps even laser guides. There were between 650 and 700 pins used to align things on this quilt.



June 21, 2020

All done !!! It's gorgeous !!!

It was fun (and a little scary) to be one of the apprentices in a group with a few master quilters but you really do learn a lot about creating a quilt from scratch.

No one wants to let this quilt go.



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