Since first publishing *Magnificent Spiral Mandala Quilts* in 2010, I have taught dozens of workshops on creating spiral mandala quilts. In the course of teaching, I developed some techniques for designing them that are simple and very effective, and so I decided to create this supplement to MSMQ. Its main thrust is to expand the section on coloring and choosing fabrics. Eventually, these updates will be incorporated into a second edition of MSMQ, but until then, and for those who already own the book, I hope the concepts and techniques here will make MSMQ that much more useful and enjoyable.

If you would like to purchase the complete book, please visit my website at www.ranaemerrillquilts.com.

Information about my workshops can also be found on my website.
Coloring a Spiral Mandala

FINDING THE DESIGN

The first step in coloring your mandala is to rough out the shapes and the placement of colors and values. You’ll use dry erase markers to do this because they allow you to easily try ideas and make changes. Have a digital camera handy to take pictures as you work.

At this point, you’ll want to have at least an idea of what your color scheme will be, so read Choosing Color and Fabric, then come back to this step.

PREPARE THE WEDGE PUZZLE FOR COLORING

Set up your wedge puzzle for coloring by covering it with another plastic page protector.

• Tape the individual spirals of your wedge puzzle to the plastic page protector covering the skeleton.

• Take a second plastic page protector and slit it open along one long side.

• Slide the entire wedge puzzle into the cut page protector. Anchor it with tape so it stays in position over the wedge puzzle below it.

• Lay the wedge puzzle on the table, and put the mirrors back in place along the edges of the wedge.

COLORING THE MANDALA

Now use dry erase markers to map out your mandala design. Match your dry erase markers to your fabric colors as much as possible. If you can’t match the color, then match the value: use a light marker for a light fabric and a dark marker for a dark fabric. Remember: when it comes to the structure of a design, value is more important than color.

The main design elements in a spiral mandala are the curving flow forms, so let these guide the structure of your design. Before you begin coloring, read 6 Ways To Color A Flow Form to get acquainted with several ways to color flow forms: solid, gradation, split, variegated, linked and flowunders.

1 Begin by just doodling on your wedge puzzle with the dry erase markers for about 10 minutes. Color in any shape that draws your eye. Don’t try to look ahead or to plan anything. Use cotton swabs for erasers.

TIP

Admittedly, dry-erase markers don’t come in a huge variety of colors, and they don’t allow for much subtlety. However, you can indicate different values of the same color by filling areas with lines or dots in varying densities. Mix colors in an area to create a new color. Color a pattern to suggest a print.
After 10 minutes or so, stop and look at your design. Notice the individual shapes that you have colored in—we’ll call these motifs. A motif is a specific combination of color and shape, for example a red fan, a single blue triangle, a yellow ribbon, etc.

Look at your design and select 3–5 motifs. If you have more than five, eliminate some. If you need more, doodle for a bit longer. If you don’t like what you came up with so far, erase and make changes. But before you erase, take a picture—you might want to come back to those ideas later. If you feel stuck, take a break and come back later.

Here is the beginning of my design. There are seven motifs.

1. A pink fan
2. A single orange triangle paired with a single blue triangle. These form a star at the center
3. A pair of yellow triangles
4. The black-white-black combination
5. A green half-fan
6. A pair of blue triangles
7. A purple fan

Having too many motifs results in a design that feels scattered or cluttered.

In this drawing I’ve reduced the number of motifs to just three:

1. A pink fan
2. A single orange triangle paired with a single blue triangle that form a star at the center
3. A green half-fan

The design may seem somewhat empty at this point, but that’s okay.

Value

Pay close attention to where you place dark, medium and light values. In order to see the structure of the design, you must have enough contrast between the elements to separate them. Don’t put colors of the same value next to each other—they will clump. Watch how value—light and dark—makes some areas prominent and others disappear. Look at quilts throughout this book and observe how the placement of light and dark values shapes the visible design. (Photocopying them in black and white will help you better see value and structure.)

TIP

When selecting your motifs, don’t use the same color for both a straight shape and a curved shape—it confuses the overall design.
Now look through the wedge puzzle and find other places in the layout where you can repeat each motif. Repetition is very important because it creates pattern and rhythm in the design. Don’t use a motif just once. You may find at this point that you want to change the direction of a spiral in order to place a shape where you want it in the overall design; if so, just open up the page protector and replace that spiral in the wedge puzzle.

Work from the center to the outside edge. The motifs at the center of the mandala should reappear in some form near the outer edge of the mandala. This gives the mandala a feeling of unity.

In this step I repeat the three motifs to expand the design. There are now three pink fans and two green half-fans. The single orange triangle has been changed to yellow and repeated, together with its accompanying blue, to create a second, larger star. Notice that in order to get three different values of blue I’ve used black, solid blue and blue dots.

The pink fans felt too heavy, so here I’ve changed them to gradations, along with the green half-fans.

Finally, I use the darkest triangle from the blue motif to create a border. A new motif is added: a light gray fill in some of the negative space areas. I also use the light gray to create a subtle ribbon just before the border.

Take It Out

If the design seems too heavy or too busy, take something out. Even removing just one triangle can sometimes change proportion and balance in the overall design.

Negative Space

You don’t have to fill in every space of the design—it’s okay to leave some empty spaces. In art terms, this is called negative space. Negative space gives the design “breathing room”—a place for the eye to rest—and lets the elements of the design show more clearly. Curves look curvier with some negative space around them. Even if the fabric you are going to use for negative space is very dark, leave it white in your design for now. Our eyes are accustomed to interpreting white paper as “nothing” and colored space as “something”; so it is easier to see the structure of the design if you don’t color in the negative space areas. When you get to the fabric mock-up, you can slide a piece of your dark fabric under the developing design.
CHOOSING COLOR AND FABRIC
Now that you have roughly out the structure of your mandala, do a fabric mock-up to audition fabrics. Choose a mix of solid, energy and jewelry fabrics, then have fun combining them in unusual ways. This is when the design really comes to life!

COLOR SCHEME
Choose three or four colors for your basic color scheme. If you don’t feel confident choosing your own colors, find a fabric you like and pull colors from that. Also choose a light or dark solid to use in the negative space areas.

VALUE
You need a mix of light, medium and dark values. Select a color, then add some lighter and darker values, as well as some patterns. If you plan to use gradations, you’ll need several different values. Even if you don’t plan to use gradations, having just two shades of a color can help give depth to a design.

I can’t stress enough how important value is in a mandala (or any quilt design): contrasting values are the only way we can see the structure of a design. Place contrasting values in adjacent areas you want to separate and define clearly. Place similar values within a spoke or flow form, or in any other area you want to hold together visually.

PREPARE THE WEDGE PUZZLE FOR A FABRIC MOCK-UP
Set up your wedge puzzle for coloring by covering it with another plastic page protector to prevent the dry-erase colors from smearing.
• Slit open a third page protector along one long side.
• Slide the colored wedge puzzle into the cut page protector and anchor it with tape.
• If you want to audition negative space fabrics, slit open a fourth page protector along one long side.
• Slide the entire wedge puzzle into the fourth page protector. When you want to try out a negative space fabrics, slide it between the third and fourth page protectors.

• Set the mirrors back over the wedge; you’re ready to audition fabrics.

MAKE A FABRIC MOCK-UP
Cut pieces of fabric and stick them to the top page protector to audition them. Use clear, double-sided tape to hold the pieces of fabric so you can see the design through it when you change fabrics. If you wish, make a copy of the spirals to cut up and use for templates to cut pieces of fabric to size.

Read the next few pages to follow me through the process of choosing fabrics. As you experiment, use the mirrors to audition combinations of fabric—they can look surprisingly different and exciting in repetition. Be adventurous and bold with your combinations. Here are some ideas:

Place your mirrors in different directions over these combinations to see how they might look in a mandala.

Put a “pop” of energy fabric in the middle of a gradation of solids. It will create a secondary kaleidoscopic element in the design.

Use stripes and directional prints for strength and drama.

Mix strikingly different fabrics together and see what happens.
LOOKING AT PATTERN

When I select fabrics for a mandala, I combine three types of fabrics: foundation fabrics, energy fabrics and jewelry fabrics. Each type of fabric plays an important role in bringing the design to life.

Solid fabrics
Solid fabrics include solids, small tone-on-tone prints and textures: any fabric that read as a single, solid color. Solids are the backbone of your design, setting the color palette and defining the shapes. They are the best choice for narrow spokes and flow forms. Place solids next to energy fabrics to hold their edges. Solids also offer the opportunity to show off fancy quilting or add embellishment. An entire mandala in solid fabrics can be bit dull, so it's a good idea to mix in some energy fabrics.

Energy fabrics
Energy fabrics have small- to medium-sized, multi-colored patterns. They add sparkle and vitality to a design. Select patterns that are small enough to see in the narrow triangles. I often divide energy fabrics into high-energy—patterns with a lot of color and action—and low energy—patterns that have less color and more subtle patterns. Energy fabrics blend into each other, so for a soft effect, place energy fabrics side by side to hide their edges or to create gradations. For stronger lines, separate energy fabrics with solids. You may need to fussy-cut small pieces to achieve a consistent color and/or texture across an entire area.

Jewelry fabrics
Jewelry fabrics are large-scale prints that you fussy-cut to create focal points, repetition and rhythm in a design. Centers of spirals and the center of the mandala are ideal places to feature a jewelry fabric motif. Appliqué a fussy-cut detail. Backgrounds and borders are good places to show off a large-scale pattern. Pick up bits of the same fabric within the mandala (even if it's really subtle) to create unity between the mandala design and the border. If you are working in mirror symmetry, look for symmetrical prints that you can place in reflection where spirals join (see page 83 for a way to eliminate a seam at the center of the mandala).

Repetition

Just as you repeated the motif in your mandala design, you should also use each fabric in at least two places in the design—don't “orphan” a fabric. Repeating fabrics helps the viewer's eye move across the design to see symmetry. The repetition can be prominent or subtle. For example, try picking up a little bit of the border fabric within a gradation where it's hardly even seen; even this little bit is caught by our mind's eye and ties these areas together.
All that sorting gives me an idea of the fabrics I want to use in the mandala, but the final determination is made when I do the mock-up. From working with the dry-erase markers I have a pretty good idea of where the colors will go in the design, but often working with the fabrics inspires new ideas, and I might still make changes in the design at this point. Here is the final fabric mock-up for Crest of the Crane.

Once you have determined the fabrics you will use, you might find it helpful to make a fabric chart.

**TIP**

If a fabric is currently in production, the fabric company or a store online will likely have a swatch on their Web site that you can download to your computer and then import into your design program, saving you the time and effort of scanning it.
CUTTING FABRIC STRIPS

When cutting fabric for the triangles that make up your spirals, **always cut rectangular strips**. These strips will be trimmed down to triangles after they are sewn to the foundation. This does waste a bit of fabric, but the advantages are worth it:

- You'll never accidentally cut a triangle backward, because a rectangle fits both “left” and “right” triangles.
- You can place the template on the front or the back of the fabric—it works either way—so you can fold layers.
- When sewing fabric into place on the foundation, if you scoot a rectangular strip too far to the left or right you will still have adequate height for a seam allowance, so you won't have to undo and resew as you would with a triangle.
- The extra fabric makes small pieces easier to handle.

- Because the extra fabric gives you a handle to grasp when pressing, you'll press precisely on the seam line and the edges of your spokes will be smooth.
- On long, narrow triangles, the extra fabric provides stability to keep the points from wobbling.

And last but not least:
- Cutting strips is just faster and easier than cutting individual triangles.

If you cut fabric for all of the spirals in the wedge at the same time, before you start cutting be sure that the individual pieces of the spirals are all marked to indicate which spiral they go in. Otherwise, you'll end up with several pieces with the same number and no way to tell which spiral they belong to! You might find it easier at first to cut and sew multiples of only one spiral at a time.

1 Working with one fabric at a time, lay the fabric on the cutting mat with the cut edge toward you. The fabric can be folded in layers.

   Lay the cutting templates with their bases ¼” from the cut edge and the triangles at least ½” apart—a generous thumb width is just right. If you can, group the templates so that templates of the same height are on the same strip.

2 Use scissors or a rotary cutter to cut a strip of fabric ¼” higher than the tops of the triangle templates. Layer the fabric or cut enough additional strips so you have one layer of fabric for each copy of this spiral. (For example, if you have 6 copies of a spiral, cut enough strips to have 6 layers of fabric. In the photo, the fabric is 2 layers thick, so 3 strips make 6 layers.)
Cut the strips between the templates—leaving at least ¼” at each triangle tip—to separate them into individual rectangles. You now have rectangular strips of fabric that are ¼” larger than the cutting template on each side. Don’t cut the pieces overly large; the extra fabric will get in your way when sewing. Trust the template.

If fabric is tight . . .

It is possible to cut templates to shape, but do it only if you need to conserve fabric. Be extra careful to cut any reverse versions of templates correctly, otherwise you might waste precious fabric on mistakes.

Type A and Type B Triangles

The base is not always the longest side of a triangle. In Type A triangles (top right), the longest side is the base, but in Type B triangles (bottom right), the base is the mid-length side and the peak extends past the base. Labeling the triangles along the base helps to distinguish Type A triangles from Type B triangles. The ¼” seam allowance should always be on the base side of the triangle as shown above, because this is the edge that aligns with the trimmed seam allowance of the previous ring, and the edge where you sew.

Stack each set of fabric strips with its template on top and clip each stack.

Next, clip the stacks of fabric strips together by alphabet within their respective spirals. For each spiral you’ll have a group of A’s, a group of B’s, a group of C’s, etc. There will be different colors in each stack, and they do not need to be in numerical order. Every piece of fabric is now cut, labeled, and stacked in the order in which you will sew it. Place the clipped strips, together with their foundations, into a large zipper bag.