



quilting

THE QUILT

BY Dawn Cavanaugh.

Traditional, Contemporary, or Modern?

Are you a traditionalist, or do you lean more toward contemporary?

As the next quilting generation finds its voice, a new and different genre is emerging.

Modern quilts and modern quilt guilds are popping up all over the world. These quilts recapture some of the simplicity and beauty of early utilitarian quilts, yet they are not traditional and, also, not contemporary. You might wonder why any quilt made after the turn of the century would not be considered modern. In any other situation, we use the words “modern” and “contemporary” interchangeably but, when it comes to quilts, they are not really synonyms. To understand how they differ, it helps to first see how traditional quilts are different from contemporary and modern styles.

The term “traditional quilt” conjures up images of quilts seen on Grandma’s bed, with rows of uniform blocks, often with sashing strips and a border, in a classic layout.



Color placement is often deliberate and planned. Construction techniques are “tried and true” methods for precision.

The quilting designs on traditional quilts emulate the structured feel of the quilt. They are often symmetrical and repetitive, with the thread color blending in to create a unified look. Techniques such as stitching in the ditch, outline quilting, crosshatching, and grids are common. Feathers may appear in borders and blocks, but their placement will be precise and deliberate, with mirrored images and symmetrical shapes taking center stage.

The quilts shown here were made by Marianne Fons and Liz Porter several years ago. The quilting designs I chose for the samples reflect their different styles.

Take a look at *Photo 1* and *Photo 2*. The black fabric and vibrant solid colors create a very traditional feel, representative of Amish-style quilts. The feathers are traditional designs. If I had used a bright variegated thread instead of matching black thread, the quilt would feel more contemporary. Even a simple change such as thread color can change the style of a quilt.

Quilting styles often cross over one another, using elements from more than one genre. Contemporary quilts may have traditional blocks and layouts, but might also feature unusual color combinations, complex piecing, and embellishments. These quilts may borrow from traditional patterns, but they often stretch, skew, or flip the patterns and blocks into new and different configurations.

With the innovation of machine quilting and longarm machines, quilting density has increased. Contemporary quilts often have intense background fills, elaborate thread play, and heavy texture. Instead of confining quilting motifs inside the seam lines, the quilting designs liberally cross over those boundaries to create newly defined spaces on the quilt. These quilts may sport a variety of thread that would look out of place on a traditional quilt. Variegated thread, metallic thread, and even embellishments such as couching, embroidery, and crystals add bling and texture. *Photo 3* and *Photo 4* show contemporary continuous curve quilting wandering through the triangles. The flowing shapes in the borders and background areas contribute to the casual, yet contemporary, feel.

By contrast, modern quilts reintroduce simplicity and utility as their focus. They rely much less on quilt block repetition and traditional block placement, and asymmetry is common. When you look at a modern quilt, you’ll see much more negative space (empty area around the main blocks). Gray and white are common choices for the negative space on modern quilts, replacing the ecru, tan, or cream of more traditional quilts.



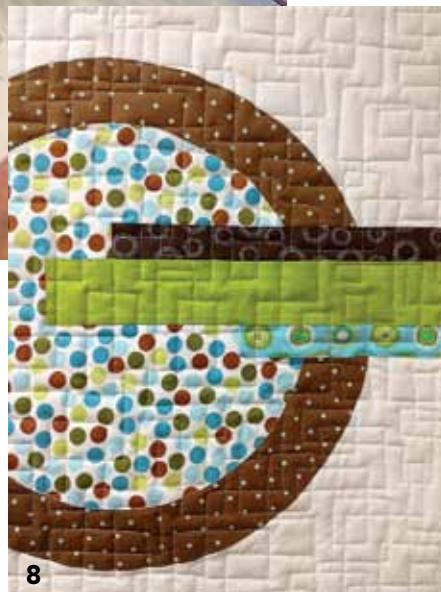
Modern quilts take inspiration from the clean lines of architecture, and even modern art, and pull in bold colors and solid fabrics. You'll also see modern quilts sporting vibrant graphic prints or following the color trends popular in home decorating. Modern quilters break away from some of the "rules" when it comes to construction techniques. Instead, they use whatever methods produce the desired results. Both the quilting lines and the pattern design have a minimalistic feel. The quilting lines may cover the entire quilt in an overall fashion. However, the stitching lines will mimic graphic, geometric shapes such as straight lines and repeating curves instead of elaborate pantograph styles. The shapes are stitched freehand,

using echoing techniques and repeating shapes.

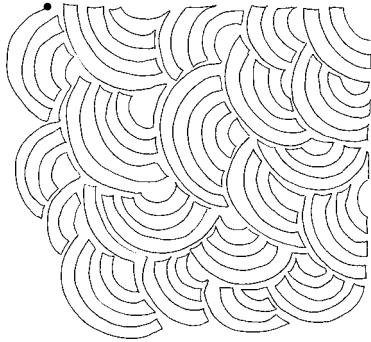
The quilt in *Photo 5* and *Photo 6* has a modern flavor with its solid colors and gray background fabric. To enhance its design, I quilted it with straight lines and triangular images that echo through the entire quilt. The quilting design flows right across the body of the quilt into the border, ignoring the imaginary road blocks that exist between seams.

To capture the essence of modern quilting designs, focus on creating geometric shapes that repeat over and over. Circles, squares, rectangles, triangles, and straight lines all create wonderful modern quilting shapes. Take a look at my practice piece in *Photo 7*. The rectangle shape is easy to create and repeat. It adds nice

contrast to the circle appliques in my modern quilt shown in *Photo 8*. I don't worry about crossing lines or following any specific, pre-planned path. Modern quilts are characterized by asymmetry, which adds more interest and texture. Don't worry about confining your designs to one specific area of the quilt; allow your design to flow over the entire surface like water rippling in the wind. Use matching thread so that the quilting creates texture and acts like a second layer over the quilt instead of drawing attention to the quilting first. I've included a few more simple modern quilting designs for you to try. It won't take much practice before you're able to add a touch of modern quilting style to your repertoire!

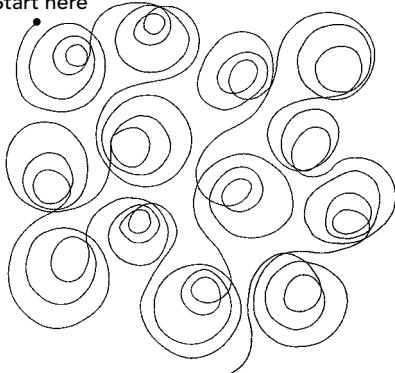


Start here



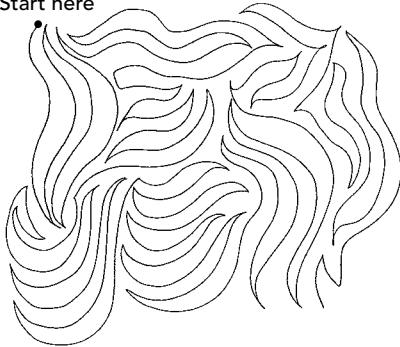
Modern Quilt Design 1

Start here



Modern Quilt Design 2

Start here



Modern Quilt Design 3



Author Profile

Dawn Cavanaugh is National Director of Education

for American Professional Quilting Systems.

Contact: dawn@apqs.com
www.apqs.com.