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We've been talking about possible Leader & Ender projects for months. I have an idea board that is added to, and subtracted from, and notebooks galore of ideas and photos and sketches and possibilities.

I've been in love with simple rail fence quilts for as long as I have been quilting. How many of you made your first quilt using the rail fence pattern?

I learned right off when making a simple 3 rail fence quilt that if that seam allowance isn't where it is supposed to be, my blocks would be wider than they are tall, or visa-versa, and things wouldn't fit nicely when turning the blocks to make the stair-step design we all love.

Because these rectangles are easy to cut ahead and store in baggies or baskets, this is going to be a VERY EASY year for our Leader & Ender project.

And better yet, you can choose how many rails you want your blocks to have, what colors you are going to use, how you are going to place your values and what size your project is going to be.



Vintage 3 rail fence!

Suggested Sizes:

Block Size: 3 1/2" unfinished, 3" finished:

Cut Rectangles: 1 1/2" X 3 1/2"

Fabric Arrangement: Print/Print/Blue

Block Size: 5" unfinished, 4 1/2" finished:

Cut Rectangles: 2" X 5"

Block Size 6 1/2" unfinished, 6" finished:

Cut Rectangles 2 1/2" X 6 1/2"



Vintage 4 rail fence!



I love the black in this one!

All of the blocks have 3 scrappy rails, and one solid black one. I love how the black zig-zags through the quilt.

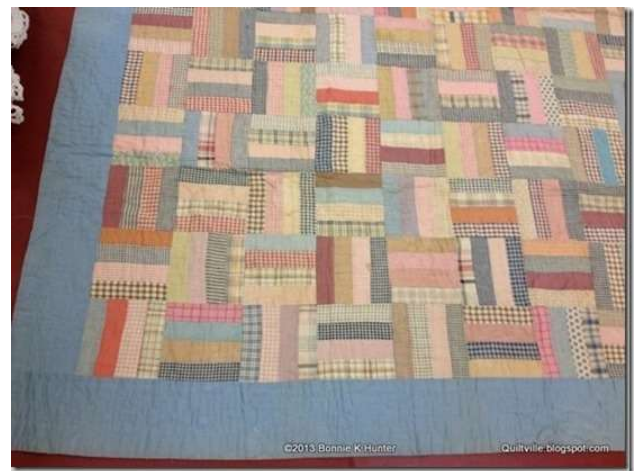
If you cut all of your rails $1\frac{1}{2}'' \times 4\frac{1}{2}''$ this would be a great 4'' finished block.

If you cut them $2'' \times 6\frac{1}{2}''$ you'd have a 6'' finished block.

Remember you are going to decide what size of block you want, how many strips per block, and the finished size of your quilt.



How about 4 rails from recycled shirts and plaids?



Aren't these fabrics great?

These photos were from a 2013 blog post.

There are so many different variations of the rail fence theme that I started saving them all in a [Rail Fence Quilt](#) Pinterest board!



Vintage 5 rail Fence



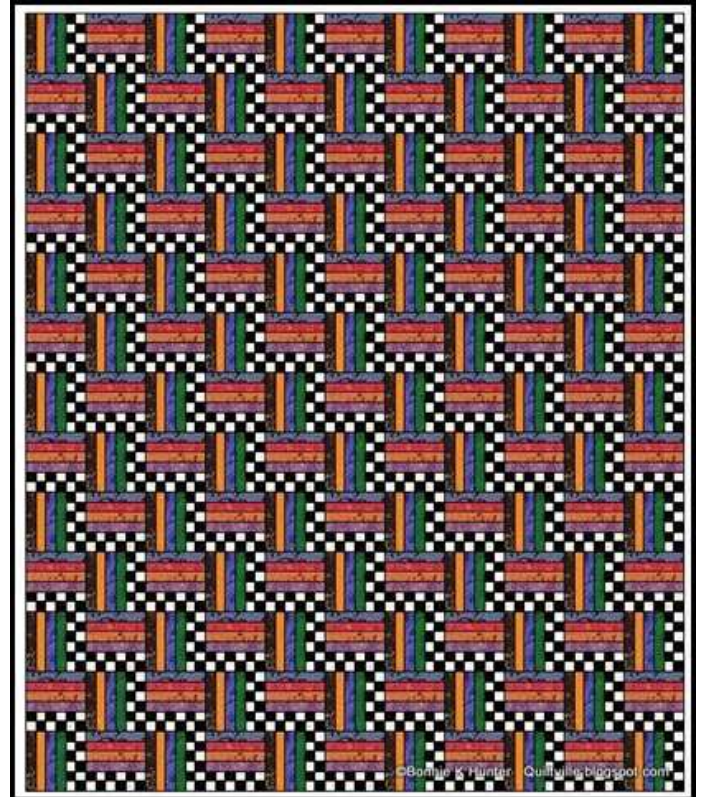
Close up – VELVET!

Most of these blocks seem to have one center color with a second color on either side, and the last two rails black. This pattern would work great in 1 1/2" strips for a 5" finished block. If you worked with 2" strips your blocks would finish at 7 1/2".

The last few years have been a bit on the intense side with our Leader & Ender challenges, and this year I am bound and determined to give you a break. NO TRIANGLES!

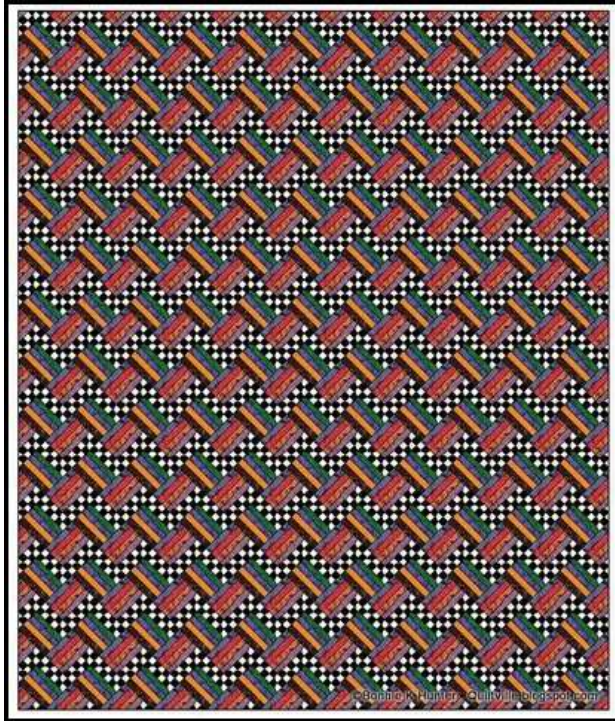
But I am going to spice my OWN Rail Fence project up a bit --

With CHECKERBOARD RAILS!

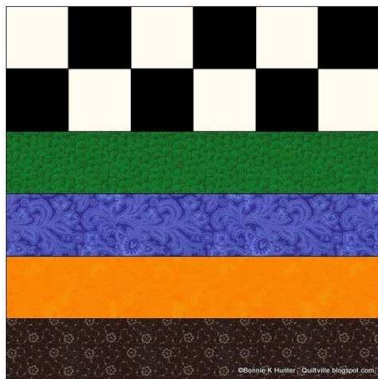


Straight Set Stair Steps

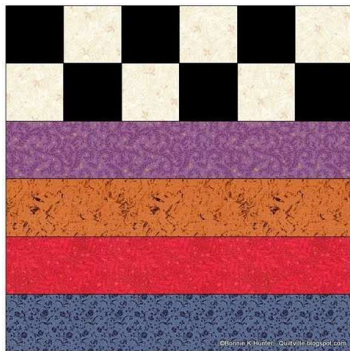
or:



On Point Zig Zags!



Block A



Block B

Blocks measure 6 1/2" unfinished and finish at 6" in the quilt.

And the blocks are SO simple. The checkerboard portions are 4 patches, 3 per block, so easily sewn in between the lines of chain piecing other projects.

After all, that is what a Leader & Ender challenge is for, right?

As this is a challenge, and not a fully written pattern, no yardage requirements are given. Work from what you have on hand, add to it if necessary.

Everything comes from 1 1/2" squares and 1 1/2" x 6 1/2" rectangles. You'll be digging into your 1 1/2" strip drawers or easily cutting small scraps to be able to use them in this quilt.

As you clean off your cutting table from other projects, consider slicing down scraps into just these sizes. It's like doing the dishes, better done often, rather than waiting 3 months to get the job done.

My 4 patches will be solid black (1 have 3 yards to work with. That should be enough for blocks and for binding if I stick with the full/queen I am intending) and random scrappy neutrals.

My rails will be all colors of the rainbow, and I'm not using any neutrals in my rails. Just 4 colors. Rails are cut 1 1/2" x 6 1/2".

Making the 4 patches:

Cut a bunch of black and neutral 1 1/2" squares.

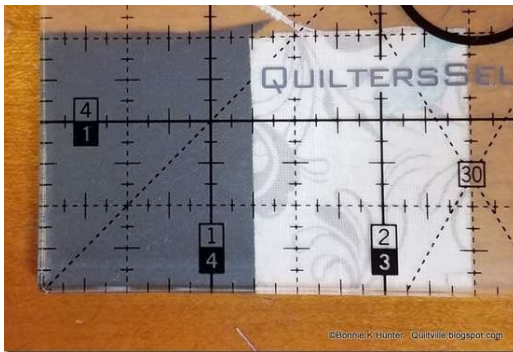
Keep a basket of these by your machine, and stitch pairs of squares at the end of chain piecing instead of sewing on to a folded over thread covered scrap, or cutting threads.

That is, after all – the whole reason for this Leader & Ender challenge adventure!



Pair at the end of a piecing chain.

Snip between the leader/ender pair and the piecing.



Press to the black and measure.

Units should be $1\frac{1}{2}'' \times 2\frac{1}{2}''$.

Adjust seam allowance if they don't.

Do not skip this test!

As you continue to build pairs, stitch pairs into 4 patches.

Make sure you are feeding your 4 patches through the machine all the SAME WAY

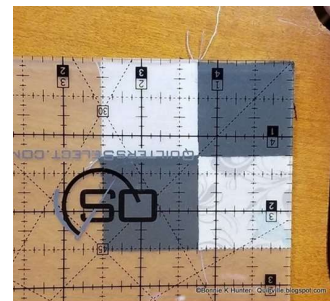


! Here the top seam allowance is pressed toward the black, and it is pointing UP toward the needle. Stitch ALL 4 patches this way.



Spin the seams on the back like this!

For more information on spinning the seams, click the [Tips & Techniques](#) tab at the top of the blog and locate the Spinning the 4 Patch seams link. There are more photos and info there on why and how.



4 patches measure $2\frac{1}{2}''$ square and will finish at $2''$ in the quilt.



Block A units with 4 patches in this position.



Block B units with 4 patches in THIS position.

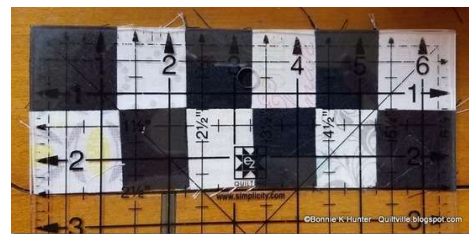


Do you see how seams will oppose each other and nest?



Join the 3 units side by side and spin ALL the seams.

****hint**** The seams that join the 4 patches together will spin the opposite direction.



Unit should measure 2 1/2" x 6 1/2"



Stitching blocks:

While sewing over the course of the past weekend I joined the 1 1/2" X 6 1/2" rectangles into random pairs of colors and joined pairs into fours.

Add a checkerboard unit to the top of each rail section.

PRESSING MATTERS!

If we want these blocks to nest each other when we arrange them in the quilt, seams need to be dealt with in a specific manner.



Press like this!

Press the checkerboard section down toward the top strip of the rail section. Press seams as shown so they will nest with the next checkerboard section:



I love it when things work this way!



And this is only the beginning of an exciting new journey!

Whether you decide on a simple 3 rail fence, 4 or 5 rail fence with coloring of your own choosing, or decide to join me in stitching up Checkerboard Rails, it's going to be a fun year with an easy, breezy, scrappy project growing on the side, don't you agree?



Now go start some fence building!