



## My Sewing Space

by David Armour

Here's a little about my sewing space. I live in a small house with children half time (one's in college so now just one half time). Small house with shared space mostly means being creative.

My main sewing area is in my bedroom which has 3 different sewing areas setup. First is a 6' by 3' table I made a long time ago. It's pretty wobbly so it's pushed up against the wall. It's has a cutting mat, color books, several lights and fabric stacked on it. Until last year it also held the sewing machine with an acrylic table (which was too high for sewing). Last years I bought a Sew Ez table (<http://www.seweziusa.com>). I love it. It's sturdy and slides on the wood floor so I can quickly adjust if I want the fabric to hang off the back of the table or bunch up on the bed.



Cutting table with designs taped above the wall

Opposite the cutting table along the other wall are three cabinets with a large ironing board on top. The sewing table sits between these two spaces. Besides ironing on the board, I layout threads for quilting. Overall the room isn't that large so it's only two or three steps from the sewing table to either the cutting table or ironing board. No long walks one way or another. While quilting a project I separate threads into 3 piles on the ironing board: A) ones I've used so if I need them again they are easy to find; B) ones that I may use; and C) ones I definitely won't use.



Large ironing board on top of cabinets with thread laid out for quilting. I will layout lots of thread choices while quilting to find the right color match

I use the kitchen table for large scale drawing and to pin quilts. It's about 30" by 48 or 50" which is not that big. I let the paper or quilt layover the edges and slide things around as necessary. The kitchen table is pretty light and slides easily on the wood floor so I will at times move it into the living room.

Kitchen table (kitchen) with full scale drawing laid out. Paper piecing stabilizer is traced from the drawing



Kitchen table (kitchen) used to lay out quilt for pinning – quilt with back covered by wool batting



Kitchen table (living room) as I pin a quilt together.

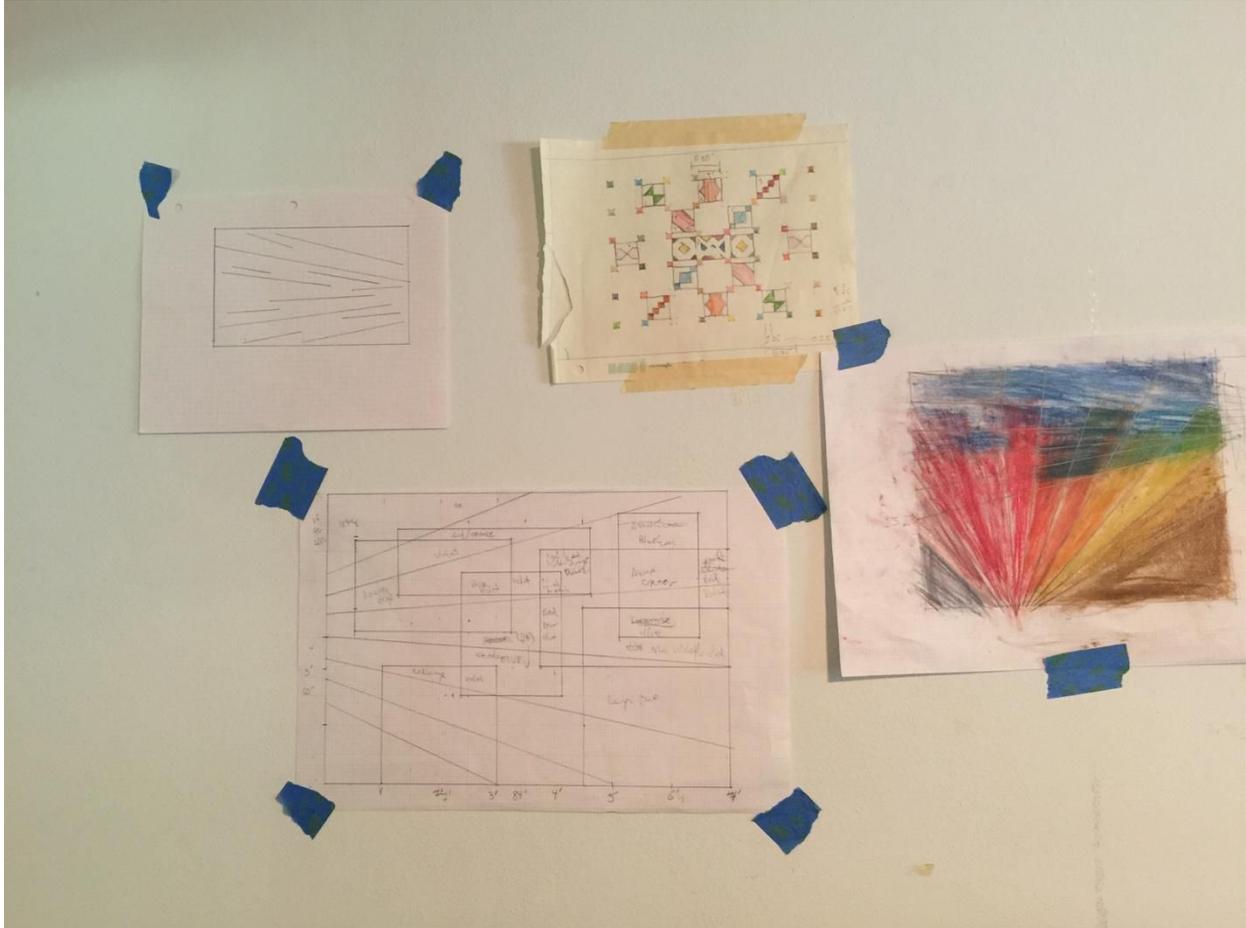
I have even gone so far as to layout the tops and backs on the living room floor when larger flat spaces are needed. Recently I cleaned off a large table (8' x 4') in the basement that I now use for full scale drawing and tracing designs onto stabilizer. I recently bought a light table from Amazon for tracing which is incredible and makes the job super easy!!! Really good investment for less than \$100 for a 17" x 12" LED light table!

As you can see from the pictures I use lots of different space in the house depending on size of project, other life events, and so on.

The wall above the cutting table is where I tape up the designs I'm working on or will work on shortly. With some designs I work out the color scheme before I start and other times I just layout lots and lots of fabric until the colors and transitions seem right.



Wall with designs taped up



Design wall Sept. 1, 2016

I bought a quilt display stand that I use to suspend quilts when doing free-motion and circular quilting with the walking foot. Getting the weight up even a little bit helps the quilt slide. I also use this as a design wall and hang the quilts as they are being pieced. I like the display stand since it's easy to move and doesn't require any permanent attachments to the ceiling or walls. Typically, it's located right in front of my closet behind my sewing chair. When my son was at camp for 4 weeks it lived in his room and I have considered putting it behind a coach with a finished quilt to liven up the living room (wouldn't that be crazy using it as an actual display stand).



Quilt display stand used as a design wall – quilt with 3 of 8 rays assembled



Quilt display stand used to suspend quilt during the quilting process. The display stand is easily located to the side, front, or back whichever is most convenient for working on a specific part of the project. Easy to move is very beneficial.

How often do I sew? I try to sew daily when I'm not traveling for work. I probably succeed about 60 to 70% of the time. Even after work if I can get in an hour or two I really like that. Sometimes it's only hand binding the back of the quilt though I don't consider that to be quite the same as actual machine work. Organizing and setting up a project I consider to be sewing time and will do that in an evening after work too. On weekends I get up at almost the same time as during the work week (weekdays about 6 AM and weekends about 6:45) so I can have long periods of sewing time on Saturday and Sunday. On the weekends when I get up the first thing I do is turn on the machine, wash up, make some tea, and within 10 minutes I'm ready to sew. Every other week my son is with me and then my quilt time is more variable. During soccer season (his not mine) I try to watch his matches but every other week I can get a lot of time in at the machine. On weekends I probably average 12 – 16 hours of sewing time and weekdays at least 4 and sometimes as much as 10. I have taken vacation days where all I do is sew but that's not nearly as often as I'd like.

Nights when I don't feel like sewing and during work trips I tend to draw a lot. That's where the ideas for the quilts come from. Recently I was on a trip to Seattle – 5 nights. I sketched

probably 40 drawings during the flights and evenings. Out of all of those I think I marked 3 or 4 as ideas to pursue. The rest I throw away or keep to continue evolving and working on them. At this point I probably have 10 – 15 designs already to go and at least the same number I could get ready in less than a day. I just need more time.

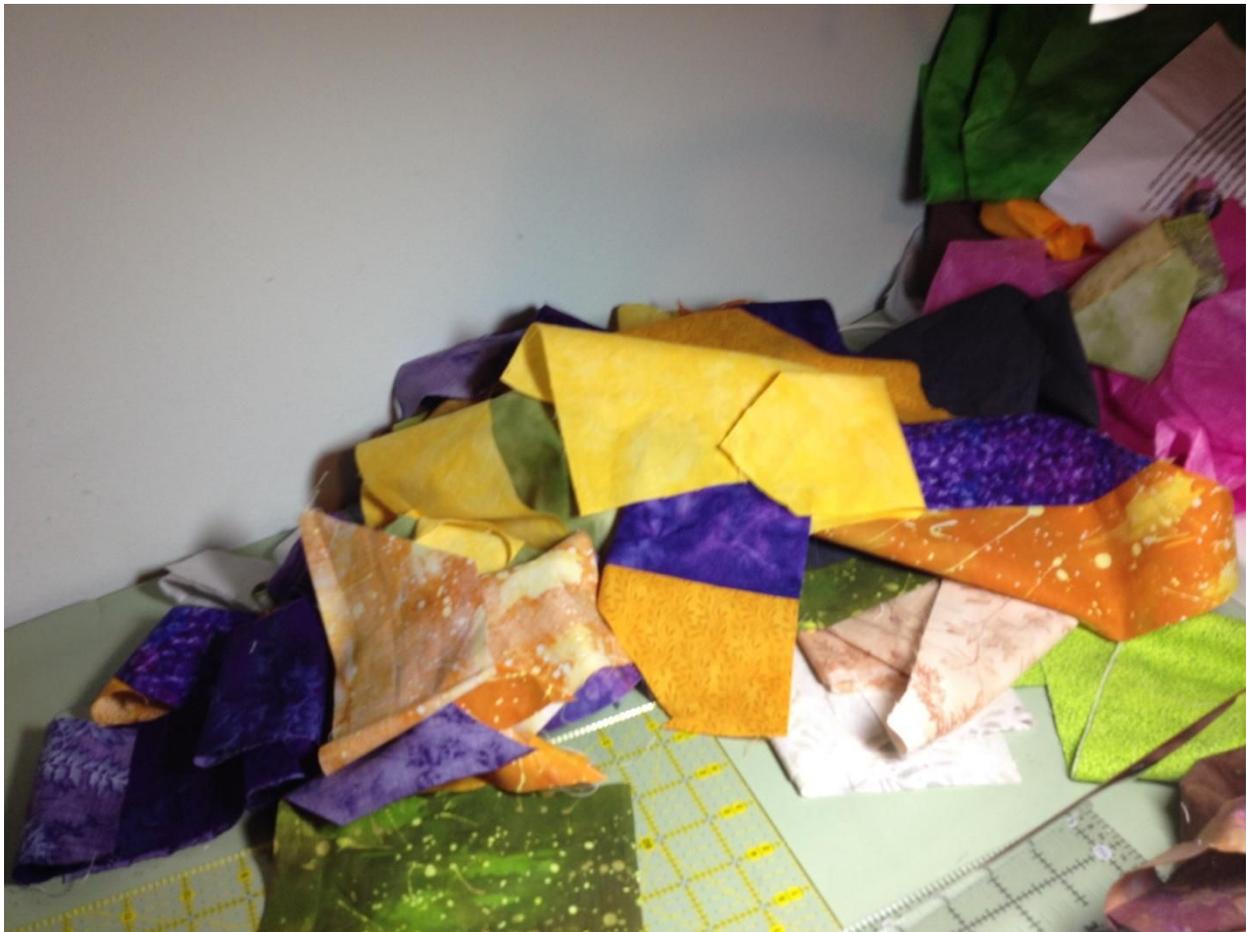
My sewing machine? When I started 14+ years ago, my sister-in-law gave me her Singer. She was trying to get me into quilting and giving me the machine removed one of the big obstacles (excuses). It wasn't one of those nice Singers but it sewed. I used it for 3 or 4 of my first quilts. Then I bought a Bernina 150 QE classroom model with about 40 hours of use from a dealer in Lincolnwood, IL. I got a super deal. I sewed on that until last year when I bought a brand new longer throat Bernina 770 QE. It's the first time I have owned a brand new machine. It has 10" of throat space to the right of the needle and the height is really tall. The space in the throat is like a mansion compared to the 150. Now the 150 sits packed neatly in the closet waiting for my daughter or some other plan. I love the 770 for many reasons. Obviously the throat. The LED lights are great (failing eyes) and this is the first time I have had a needle threader (again the failing eyes). I like the larger bobbin and when the thread tension is right the machine produces really nice stitches. In one year I have close to 3 million stitches!!

Honestly I only use two stitches – both are straight. One I use for piecing and the other for quilting. I know the machine can do 9mm width zig zags and a ton of other cool stuff but I only use the single hole stitch plate with the straight stitch. I will use three different feet most of the time and one other on rare occasion. The 97D foot is for quilting and has an attachment that screws to the base of the machine to give precise seams. It can be adjusted from ¼" to about 1". I typically have it set to ¼" except when I'm attached a binding and then it's set to 3/8 or 7/16". I like a wider binding. I'll use the 97D with the attachment for all piecing except when I'm doing paper piecing and then I use the foot without the seam attachment. For quilting I use an old walking foot that came with the 150. The new machine came with the Bernina free motion foot with stitch regulator. Lastly, I have a Janome foot mounted on a Bernina shank that I use for some free motion ruler work but honestly I'm really bad at it and don't do this often.

For all the machine can do and all the amazing feet and attachments I do very basic stuff. There you have it – simple, straight sewing. I can't sew a buttonhole or any other fancy thing at all. No joke. When I hem pants, they come out bunched up when I get to the end of the loop.

I keep thinking about buying a longarm but I go back and forth about the expense as well as whether I would prefer a sit down midarm or a standing longarm. Given that I'm torn I'll probably keep thinking about it. I really want to do more circles and I have seen a really cool attachment for some longarms that makes it easier to produce quilted circles, spirals, etc. If I were to make the investment, I would really check out what options I had for making circles. I don't want to quilt for a business so I have to decide if it's worth it to buy the machine for 8 – 12 quilts which is what I do in a year. So far I'm not convinced. I wish Bernina made my machine with about another 2 – 4 inches of throat space. That way I could have the best of both worlds in one machine. I do love the walking foot.

The next two questions seem to go together which is how do I store fabric and how do I stay organized. Honestly you're best off asking someone who's organized about how best to do it. I just move the piles around as I need different space (well not quite that bad but almost). I'm not that organized – I don't have fabrics sorted by colors, theme or anything else. I tried that once and it lasted long enough for me to pull fabrics for making a quilt and then there were no more neat piles. In my quilts I often go for very subtle differences in color and the only way I can get what I'm looking for is to layout lots and lots of fabrics to compare them as I work. It's not unusual for me to have three or four times the number of fabrics pulled out than will be used by the end. I really like to see and consider variations in color, texture, pattern, etc. before choosing. Once I have the fabrics I'm going to use I'm typically so focused on getting the quilt done that I quickly store the rest out of the way (see here is the non-organized part). I'm open to suggestions but I really don't have any great ideas to share. I have tubs, boxes, crates, and piles – in no special order or rhyme or reason.



Here is a pile of fabric I laid out for a quilt



Another example of fabrics being sorted for a quilt project. Notice the color drawing to the left and Joen Wolfram's 3 in 1 color tool. I use both pencils and Joen's book all the time.



Here is the quilt top in progress from the pile of fabric above

I do tend to get rid of smaller scraps pretty aggressively. I used to think – oh cool I'll go back and use them but it never happened and I don't need a bunch of small scraps around. I do like the ideas that were discussed at guild meeting for recycling the scraps but I haven't gotten off the ball yet. I'll try and get that organized.

At this time, I don't have a website. I have a Facebook account but only go there once every couple of weeks to post a new photo of a quilt. Nothing on Instagram either. I shop on Etsy but don't sell. Given that I work in software design you could say that I'm a low tech quilter. That's intentional. I need a break from all the digital inputs and I have no desire to bring computers into this area of my life. I am cheating by using a word processor for this article Total hypocrisy.

That's about it for my work space. Happy quilting.