

Easy Bias-Strip Clamshells

From "Quick Bias-Strip Clamshells" by Barbara Barber, Quilters Newsletter, June/July 2009

Materials:

Assorted fabrics, the shells can come from charm squares, layer cakes, or any bunch of scrap fabrics that work well together, cut into equal sized squares

One larger piece of fabric for the bias strips that outline the clams, and should stand out from the others

Sewing machine with quarter-inch and zigzag feet (an appliqué foot can be used, too)

Neutral thread

Rotary cutter, ruler, and mat

Stiletto, awl, or other pointy thing for holding fabric in place as you sew

Seam ripper

Pins

Circle templates, or anything that you can cut a half circle around (I used a small bowl for my larger clams)

Iron and ironing surface (we will provide 4 ironing boards at the workshop but if you have a small portable one it will be more convenient for you)

Spray starch (optional)

Spray sizing (optional)

This technique can be applied to clams of any size, though I found the larger the diameter, the easier it was to sew the bias strip smoothly. We won't be making a quilt of any specific size at the workshop because you all will show up with different sized clams and different number of fabrics, and once you get going you'll find it easy to keep making more to get to a size you like.

The article I took this from suggests starching the clam fabrics so they are really stiff (but not the bias strip fabric) but I did not find this necessary.

Getting started:

Cut equal sized squares out of your clam fabrics: these can be as big or as small as you like. If using a 3½ inch circle template, cut 3½ inch squares, 6 inch squares if you want 6 inch clams, etc.

Next, using your template and rotary cutter, cut off two adjacent corners to turn the square into a clam.

Fold each clam in half matching the remaining corners, and in half again the short way, and press the folds.

Now you need some bias strips to outline the clams: the strip needs to go from $\frac{3}{4}$ " below the center horizontal fold you just ironed on around the half circle to $\frac{3}{4}$ " below the fold on the other side. You can try to measure this with your tape measure, or mathematically (roughly

$\times R$ where R is your clam's radius, or half the diameter plus an inch and a half) and then cut this length on the bias. To simplify things, for the $3\frac{1}{2}$ " clams, a 5" strip of fabric makes bias strips that are about 8" point to point, that will then be folded in half, wrong sides together, and pressed. Trim the pointed ends up square and it'll be about 6" long. Small clams can use bias strips that are $1\frac{1}{8}$ " wide.

Larger clams, like $6\frac{1}{2}$ " diameter, use bias strips $1\frac{1}{2}$ " wide cut from an $8\frac{1}{2}$ " wide strip of fabric. Cut and test one strip before you cut all your bias strips to be sure.

Unfold a clam and sew a folded bias strip onto the curved edge. With the clam right side up, place the end of the bias strip about $\frac{3}{4}$ " below the center horizontal fold. Align the raw edges of the bias strip with the raw edge of the clam. Sew a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam along the curve, positioning the strip with your stiletto or seam ripper, and continue until the strip is stitched about $\frac{3}{4}$ " below the fold line on the opposite side.

Press the bias strip up and over the seam allowance. Push the edge of the iron under the bias strip and "ride" the curved seam. Be sure the fold covers the raw edges underneath. Make sure the folds you ironed in are still visible: fold and press again if necessary.

Prepare enough clams to form the first two rows of your quilt, starting at the bottom and working up. Every alternate row will have a half-clam at the ends of the row. Make half-clams by cutting whole clams exactly in half.

Join the clams into rows by zigzagging the clams together. Set the machine to a zigzag stitch of medium width and length. Position the first two clams side by side with the bottom edges even and NOT overlapping. Zigzag from the bottom until you have sewn about $\frac{1}{2}$ " onto the bias edging, sewing the bias down flat. Backstitch a little at both ends to secure the zigzag. Continue joining clams, first into pairs, then pairs into rows. (The zigzag seams will be covered by the row in front of it, except for the bottom row, which will be trimmed up and covered with border.) Make the bottom row with whole clams, then the second has a half-clam at each end.

Lay the bottom row on the table, right side down. Position the second row on top of it, right side down. This is where you see the benefit of those fold lines you pressed in: the horizontal fold is the placement line for the bottom edge of the next row up. The vertical fold line is the guide for the seam between the clams of the next row up. The clams in the second row will be offset to one side by half a clam. Pin the two rows together but keep the pins low and away from the bias edging.

Turn the rows right side up. You're going to sew them together by sewing under the folded bias strip. You can drop your feed dogs and do it as free-motion sewing, or I found that regular long stitches work just as well. This stitching will be completely covered by the bias strip in the finished project. Starting at the beginning of the first row, lift the folded edge of the strip and insert the needle. Tack the end stitches and sew along the seam allowance to the next clam, sew across to the next clam as so on to the end of the row. Tack down the last stitches.

Continue to build your quilt row by row. You'll finish the top row by adding plain squares that you've zigzagged together and positioned offset just like the clam rows. The zigzagging should be hidden behind the tops of the clams in the row below. Trim the bottom row to $\frac{1}{2}$ " below the horizontal fold. Add borders as you wish.

Layer and quilt as you like. It helps to sew along the folded edge of the bias strips close to the loose edge so that they lay flat and secure.

Enjoy!

