

## Modern Quilts Take on Small Piecing

By: Katie Chicarello

Small piecing has become a big trend—and modern quilts are a great testament to that. Amy Friend explores this topic—and the quilters behind it in 2019 issue of *QuiltCon Magazine*. Read on for Amy's thoughts on this modern quilt trend.

### Small piecing is gaining momentum in the modern quilting world.

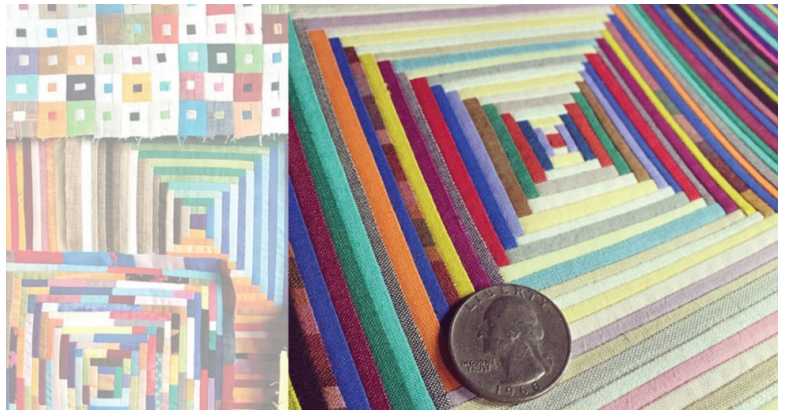
Not a day goes by that you don't see an example of this trend pop up in your Instagram feed. When some go big, others go small. And these small piecers are making a big impact.

Of course, small piecing isn't new; quilters have always used small bits in their quilts. When the MQG was founded in 2009, it wasn't a significant trend. Those quilters identifying themselves as modern tended to use larger scale piecing. This could have been for a number of reasons, from the influence of the mid-century modern aesthetic with large areas of color, to the ease of piecing larger chunks of fabric by new quilters.

### The movement begins

As I attempted to narrow down just when the small piecing trend began, I realized that Chawne Kimber first introduced it to me. This is not to say that Chawne 'invented' modern small piecing, but she brought it visibility by exhibiting her work and teaching the technique at QuiltCon 2017. As the trend continued the following year, there was a marked increase in 2018's winning quilts that incorporated small piecing.

Among them was Stephanie Skardal's Best of Show winner, "Going Up." This year, the QuiltCon Charity Committee chose small piecing as the theme for the 2019 challenge. Clearly, small piecing is having a moment in modern quilting. Chawne Kimber admits she likes the technical challenges and the thrill of creating hand-pieced patchwork pieces that are just two to three threads wide. Hand piecing improvisationally can be a far more difficult undertaking because each design decision is weighed a little more heavily as they can result in extensive changes in construction and, therefore, labor. Her work often includes traditional blocks, usually in solids with an occasional print, frequently joined with some type of alternate gridwork, traditional blocks, usually in solids with an occasional print, frequently joined with some type of alternate gridwork.



## Spreading the love of working small

Chawne's small piecing has been credited with inspiring a number of top modern quilters.

Kitty Wilkin was introduced to small piecing at the Maine Slow Stitching retreat in 2015, where she met Chawne. Seeing her tiny piecing in person inspired Kitty to dive in, and she hasn't looked back. She is enjoying the challenge of "making smaller" and will be sharing her project with students at QuiltCon 2019.

These 1" pinwheels are part of a tiny piecing sampler that Lynn Carson Harris uses for teaching Kitty also credits Lynn Carson Harris for inspiration. Lynn has always been attracted to quilts with small pieces, especially antique quilts. Her love of small things reaches back to when she enjoyed making miniatures for a dollhouse as a preteen/teen. Inspiration found in antique quilts is apparent in her work where she tends to sew recognizable, traditional blocks. She uses both precision piecing and liberated or intuitive piecing, or a combination, to arrive at the desired look. Lynn chooses to work with small pieces because small-scale blocks are simply cuter! She is also thrifty and hates to throw small fabric bits away. She says she is on a mission to scale down as many traditional blocks as she can.



The Raspberry Kiss block by Kitty Wilkin will finish at 1¼" square. She enjoys photographing blocks with color-

A quick scroll through Instagram will reveal many quilters, who are inspired by some of the small piecers mentioned here, playing with small blocks as technical challenges. This is the first step in acquiring a new skill. I imagine that eventually, we will see many of these quilters learning to join these blocks together into compositions. I'm looking forward to seeing this trend play out!

## Technical Tips for Small Piecing

**Pressing matters:** "I am a press-aholic. ... Press every seam individually and press the seam you just stitched, and then repress all of the previous seams. This will make a huge difference when working with tiny piecing."—*Maria Shell*

**Be precise:** "Paper piece or measure carefully. This isn't complicated work. By pretending otherwise one can scare folks off of trying."—*Chawne Kimber*

**Start fresh:** "Use a new sewing machine needle, a thin thread, and a single stitch throat place. Quality materials also give better results."—*Lynn Carson Harris*

**Slow down:** "I'm meticulous! Foundation paper piecing helps, since I'm sewing over lines, but being slow and careful while cutting and piecing also help with precision." —*Kitty Wilkin*



Chawne Kimber's 12" square block uses 1/8" 'logs'

**Amy Friend** is a designer from New England specializing in modern-paper piecing designs. She is the author of *Intentional Piecing* and *Improv Paper Piecing*, and recently designed *By Hand*, her current fabric collection. Amy travels to lecture and teach workshops. [Visit Amy's website](#) to learn more.