Part 4 ❖ E A S Y   L E S S O N

By Carol Doak

Piecing on Paper

Designing Your Own Blocks

You want to design your own paper-pieced patterns, but you don't have a clue how to get started. Well, come along with me, and I will help you. I use a drawing program on my computer to create designs, but you can simply use graph paper. Draw a finished size block, and then use a pencil and ruler to draw your lines and number the pieces.

A paper-pieced design is one where the subsequent patches of straight-seam fabrics cover the preceding intersecting seam(s). The traditional Log Cabin blocks, shown in Fig. 1, illustrate this concept. The square in the center is the starting point. Once it is laid in place, strips of fabric are added in the numeric order indicated to cover the preceding intersecting seams.

As you design your block, it is important to keep in mind that you are drawing it as it will appear as a foundation, that is, on the back of the block. Therefore, the design you draw is the reverse image of the finished block. The Log Cabin design, as a foundation pattern and as a finished block, would appear as shown in the two blocks below.

You can use this concept of adding strips or other shapes around a square to create your own foundation-pieced design. In Fig. 2, I added strips around a center square, but placed the square on point and only added one round of strips, finishing with triangles.

Again, using the premise of adding strips around a shape, I began with an irregular shape in patch 1 in the corner of the block, and I drew angled lines that covered the preceding seams to create the design in Fig 3. I then played with this block in multiples of 4 and 16 to create these more intricate designs.
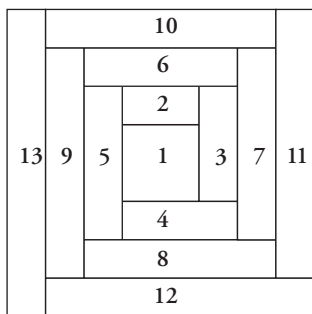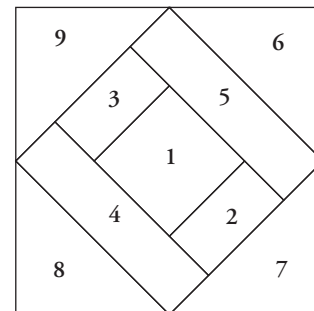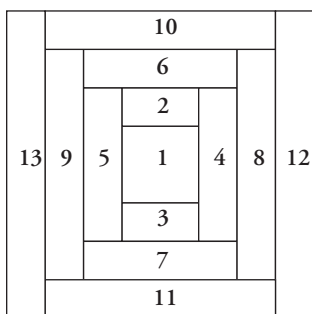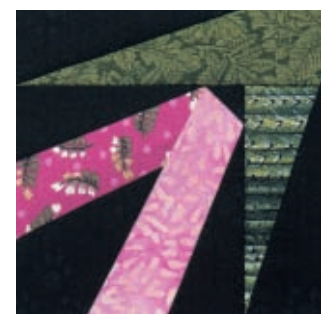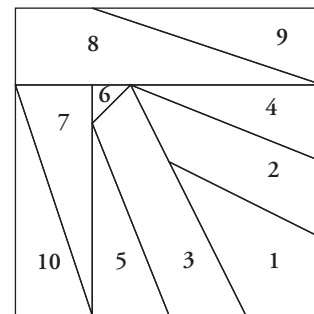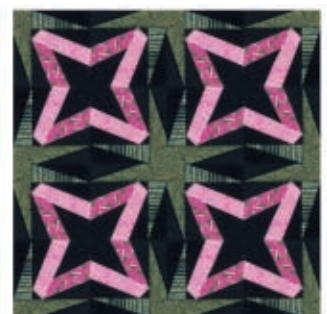

Fig. 2

Fig. 1

Fig. 3

For me, playing with line placement to create interesting designs has always been fun. I guess that would be the best advice I can give you regarding designing paper-pieced designs; just play with the possibilities and see what develops.

Sometimes you may have a specific picture that you want to create as a paper-foundation-pieced design, and problem solving becomes important. Suppose you want to draw a paper-pieced house. Begin by drawing the basic shape (Fig. 4).
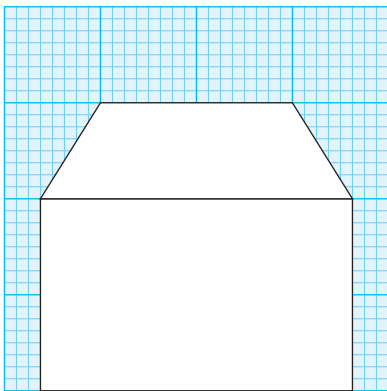
Fig. 4

Draw a window, patch 1, and place a house section below it, and continue to add strips to each side for the remainder of the house (Fig. 5). Add a larger area for the door. When possible, I attempt to create similar size patches to reduce the number of different cut sizes for the same fabric. In numbering, I use the window as 1 because it offers the opportunity to center a fabric element, such as flowers sitting in the window.

To add a chimney to my house, I will first add pieces to each side of
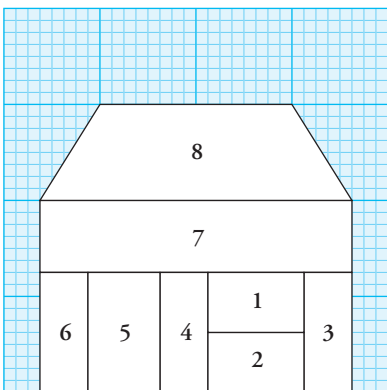
Fig. 5

the roof to make a straight edge. The patch across the top of the house has to cover the roof, and the chimney is added by dividing this area into patches. I indicate pieced unit seams on the patterns by putting // marks on the seams that need to be joined first, before adding the pieced unit to the foundation. The pieced unit is given the number 11 on the foundation pattern.

To make pieced units, measure the finished size of the patches, add seam allowances, and join with the traditional piecing method. Place the unit on the foundation, aligning the seams with the chimney lines drawn on the foundation. Pin in place and stitch.

Add strips 12 and 13 to each side of the house and 14 across the top to complete the design (Fig. 6). Alternately, you could extend the roof lines into the background and piece as illustrated (Fig. 7).

Try some of these ideas, and allow yourself to add and subtract lines, playing with new ideas. My goal is to give you insight into creating your own paper-pieced patterns.
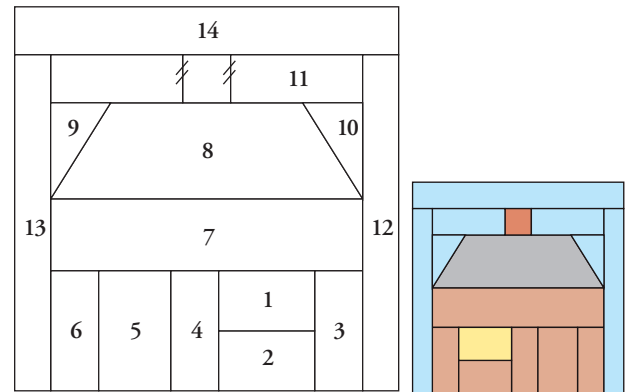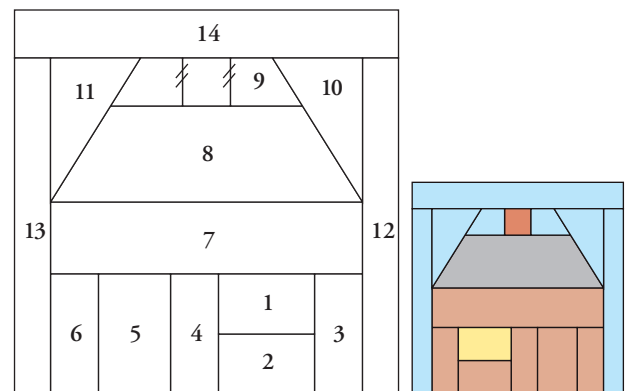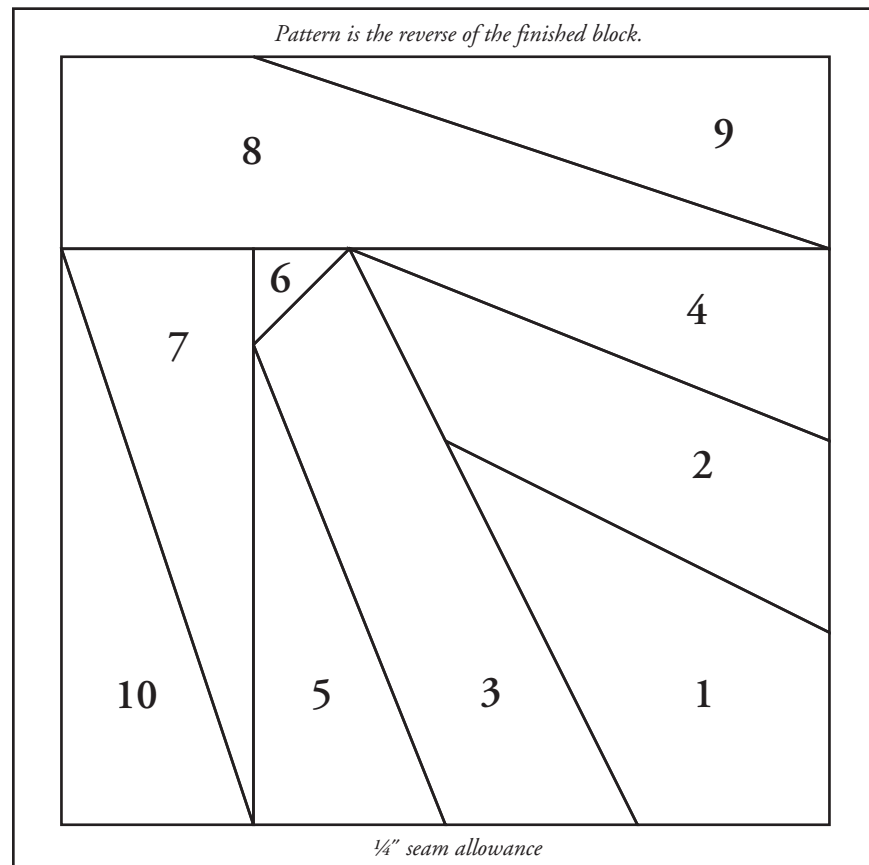
Fig. 6

Fig. 7

Pattern is the reverse of the finished block.

¼″ seam allowance

Next month: Turning traditional designs into paper-foundation-piecing patterns.