

Ultimate Backgrounds Stencils Handout

by~

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Revised 2020

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2020 Updates: Only minor changes were made. No need to reprint!

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Introduction

Background quilting is a very important and beautiful part of any quilt. Backgrounds provide the “shadow” so that your primary designs, such as feathers, can pop and stand out.

There are an infinite number of background fillers that require no marking but there are those that do require some marked guidelines. That’s what the Ultimate Backgrounds stencils are for!

I created a set of 6 designs, in three sizes each, that give you the needed guidelines to create some amazing background designs. I also included a 1/2” and 3/4” grid. This handout will provide you with very basic guidelines on how to use the stencils.

I post all of my class samples on my Pinterest page. You can access these off of the home page of my website. Scroll down to the bottom of the page and click on the Pinterest button.

Thank you and let me know if you have any questions!

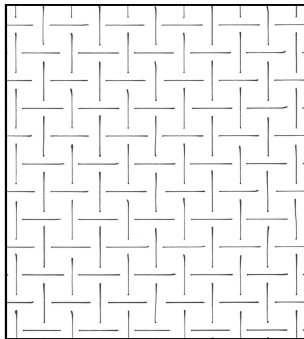
Hugs, Cindy :)

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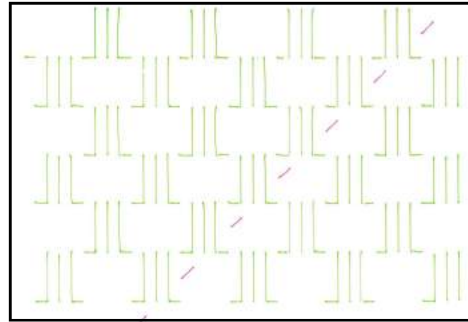


The Ultimate Background Stencils

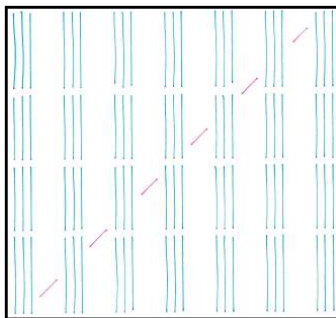
Papa, Mama & Baby Sizes



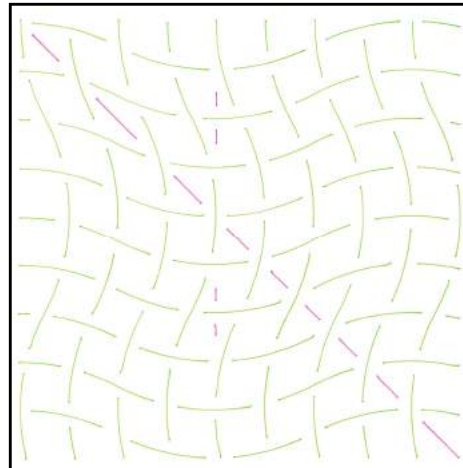
1/2" & 3/4" grid



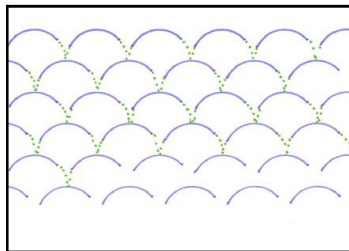
Basket Weave



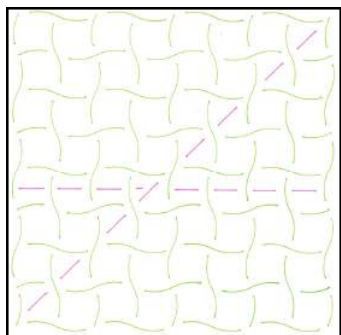
Triple Lines



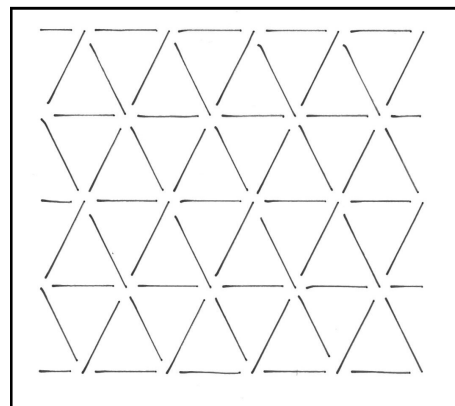
Twisted Grid



Clamshells



Twisted Clams



Diamonds/Triangles

Threads for Backgrounds

Your thread choices for both primary designs and background details are VERY important. These choices will dictate whether your designs will show or blend...both are critical to a beautiful quilt. I am going to discuss the threads I use for the backgrounds only.

I was a National Educator for Superior Threads (www.superiorthreads.com) for many years and absolutely LOVE their products. Their threads and needles are top quality and they are the only ones I use. Whatever threads you choose make sure they are good quality threads from a reputable manufacturer.

My theory is that most backgrounds should blend. They are the texture and the shadow that support and show off the primary designs. A thin thread will blend...a thick thread will show. When choosing threads always look at the thread weight on the spool. Generally the higher the number on the spool the thinner the thread and the less it will show.

With regard to the needles I use, I love and use the Topstitch needle for everything. The Topstitch has a long rectangular eye and a groove that runs the full length of the needle which protects the thread as you are quilting. When using a thin thread I tend to use the 70/10 or 80/12 sizes. They leave a smaller hole in the quilt. If I'm going very tiny with my designs I use the Microtex Sharp 60 or 70. It has a very fine point and is fabulous to use!

If you are interested in a lot of good information on threads and needles, please email me and request my free Needles & Threads E-Book. It is packed full of useful information and also includes many education articles from Superior Threads' website.

The next two pages will include a brief description of the Superior Threads that I use for my background quilting.



Thread photos courtesy of Superior Threads' website. www.superiorthreads.com

My Favorite Background Threads



Bottom Line 60 wt. polyester Microquilter 100 wt. polyester

I have used Bottom Line for many years and love it for the fact that it blends into my fabric and I don't see it. I use it in my bobbin 100% of the time.

Microquilter is a 100 wt. polyester and blends in even more than Bottom Line. Fabulous thread and VERY popular!

For my own personal use, I use either one of these in the bobbin 100% of the time. I use the Microquilter in the top for stitching in the ditch and free motion quilting.

Kimono Silk

#100 filament silk. I LOVE this thread and use a lot of it for my fine detail Quilting and nearly all of my background work. It makes a beautiful stitch.

I use a Topstitch 70/10 or Microtex Sharp 60/8. I recommend Bottom Line, or MicroQuilter in the bobbin.





MasterPiece

50/3 extra-long staple Egyptian grown cotton. This is a thin thread and is excellent for machine quilting. This will show a bit for background quilting.

Very smooth with virtually no lint.

Use a Topstitch 80/12 needle. I recommend either MasterPiece, Bottom Line or MicroQuilter in the bobbin.

So Fine #50

50/3 polyester that looks exactly like a 50/3 cotton. This will show the same as the MasterPiece.

Use a Topstitch 80/12 needle. I recommend either Bottom Line, MicroQuilter or So Fine 50/3 in the bobbin.

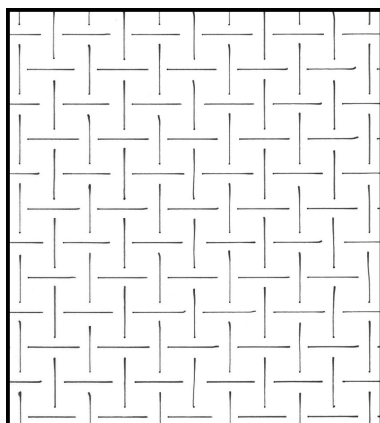


1/2" & 3/4" Grids

A very common background filler is gridwork...it's a classic design and you see it on quilts going back hundreds of years. Plain gridwork is a "sunshine" background and doesn't make your primary designs pop very much. There are lots of wonderful things you can add to simple gridwork to make it come alive!

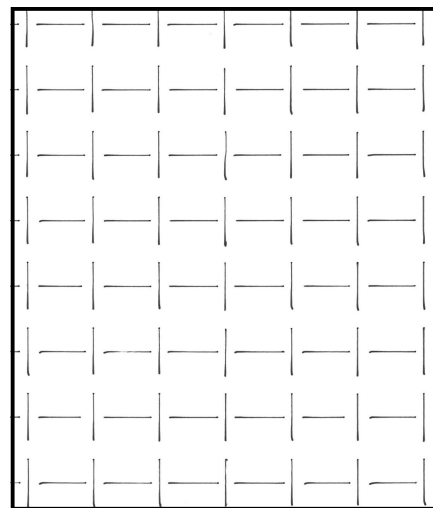
There is one important guideline when marking gridwork and that is to mark it on the diagonal grain of the fabric. If you quilt gridwork on the horizontal/vertical grain (straight up and down), your fabric has a difficult time easing in and you run the risk of puckering and snowplows. By quilting your gridwork on the fabric bias, or diagonal grain of the fabric, the fabric can easily move.

The Ultimate Backgrounds contains two sizes of grids, i.e., 1/2" and 3/4". By skipping lines on both you can create ANY size grid!

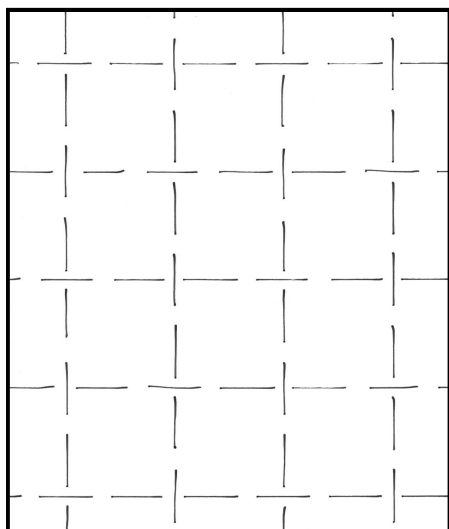


For example, if you mark every single line on the 1/2" grid you will obviously create a 1/2" gridded background.

If you skip every other line you will create a 1" gridded background.



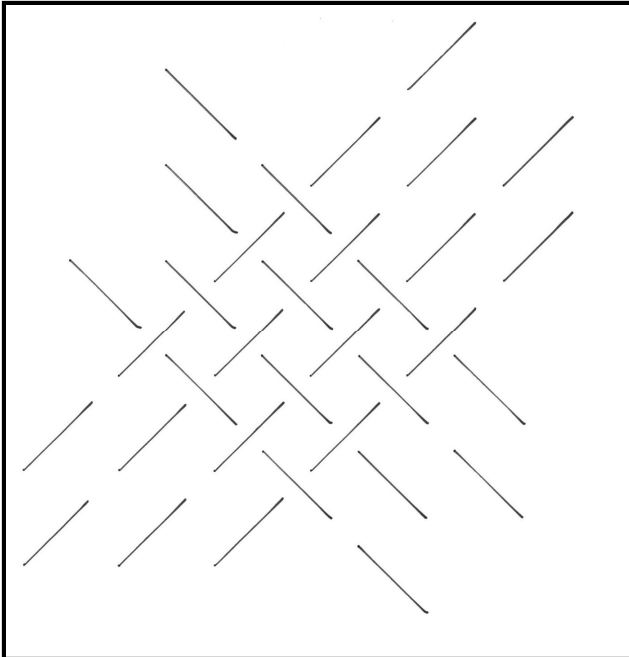
If you skip two lines you will create a 1 1/2" gridded background.



The same holds true for the 3/4" grid. The more lines you skip, the larger your grid is.

The grids that are included in the Ultimate Backgrounds set are small and I've had many students ask why they weren't bigger. My answer is they don't need to be!

When I want grids on a large project I always start with a grid stencil. These have perfectly marked lines that provide a good foundation for marking the rest of my gridded background.



Place the stencil in the middle-ish of your quilt and make sure your lines are on the bias (45 degree angle).

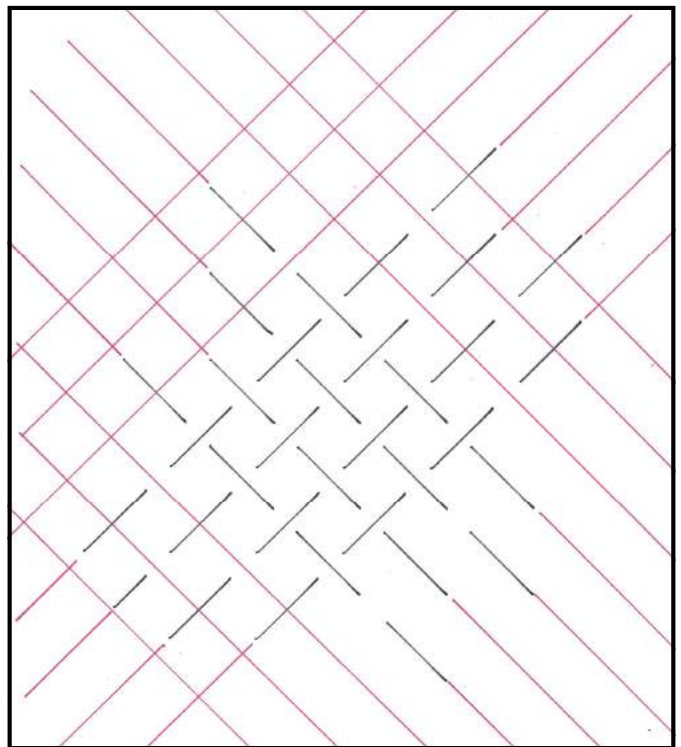
Mark at least 4-5 lines going in both directions.

This is all you will have to mark with the stencil!

Now grab your long ruler and line it up to each of your marked lines and extend the lines as far as you want.

By marking your "perfect stencil lines" FIRST, the rest of your lines can be easily marked with your ruler extending out as far as you need to.

This helps to ensure that your gridwork stays accurate in all four directions.

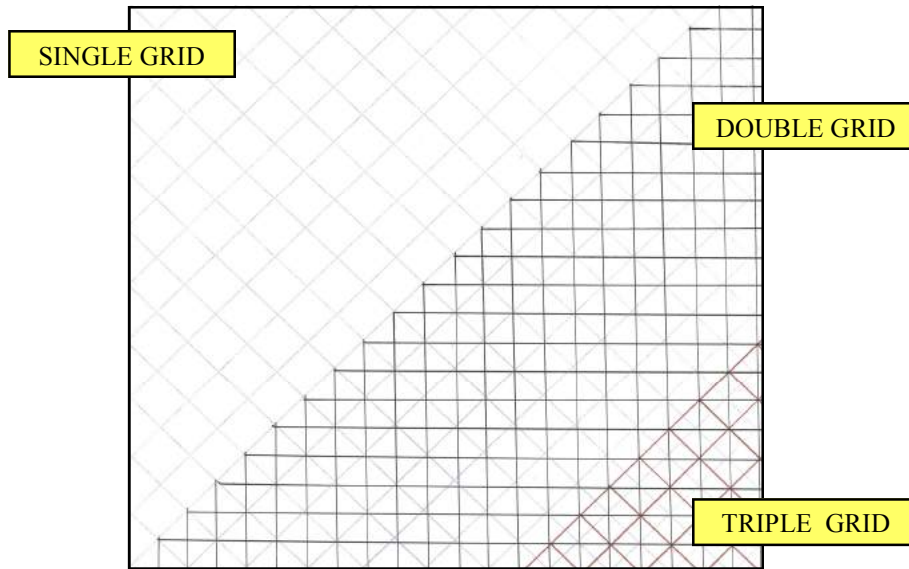




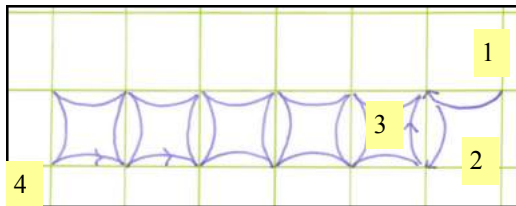
Single 1" grid marked on the bias grain of the fabric

Double-Triple Grid

Let's create a pretty overall design by simply adding some extra horizontal and vertical lines...I call this double and triple gridwork. Basically you are redividing the main grid squares both horizontally and vertically.

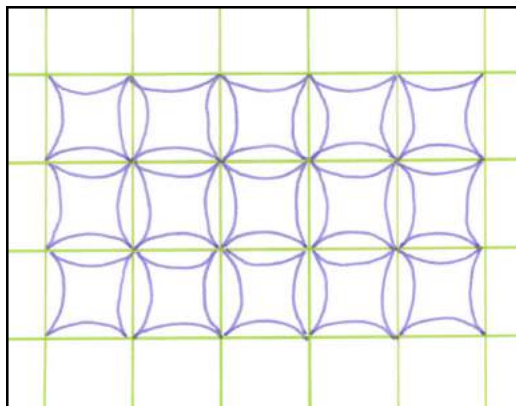


Cathedral Window

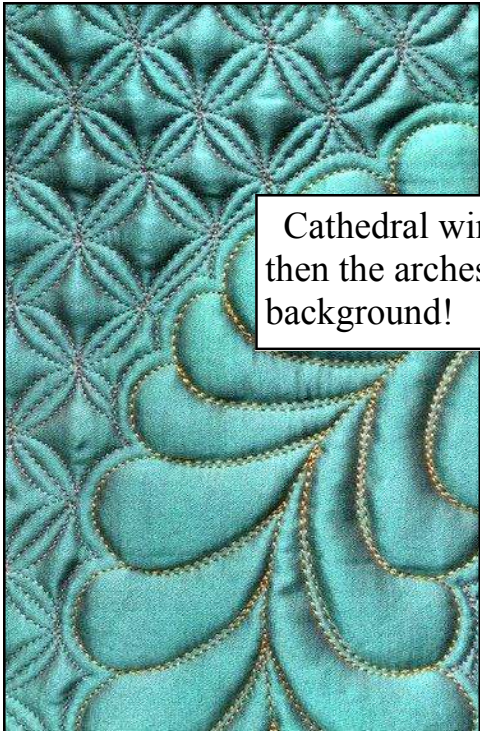


For fun I like to treat the rhythm of this design as a dance step...your first dance is the "3-Step Waltz".

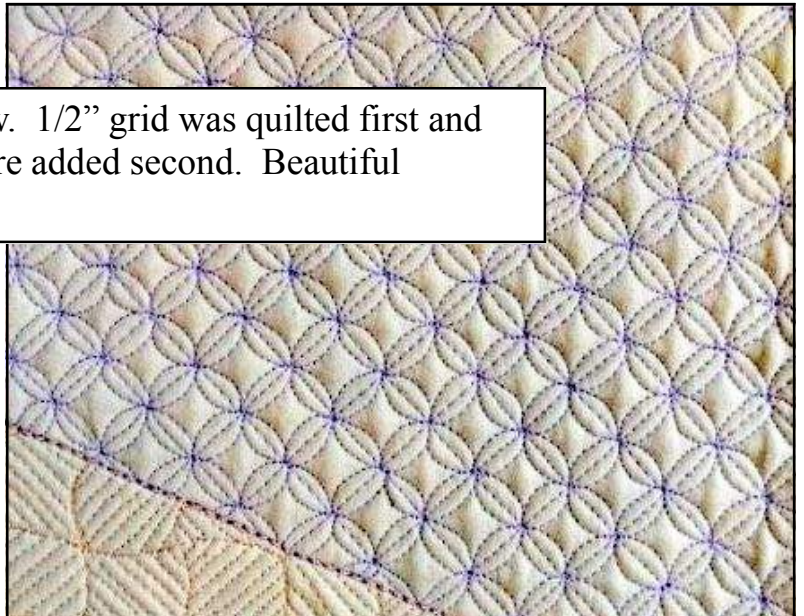
1. Start in a corner and quilt an arch from one corner to the other..
2. Now quilt an arch going down to the bottom corner..
3. Now quilt an arch going back up.
4. Now finish up the bottom of the squares by doing the "Hokey Pokey".



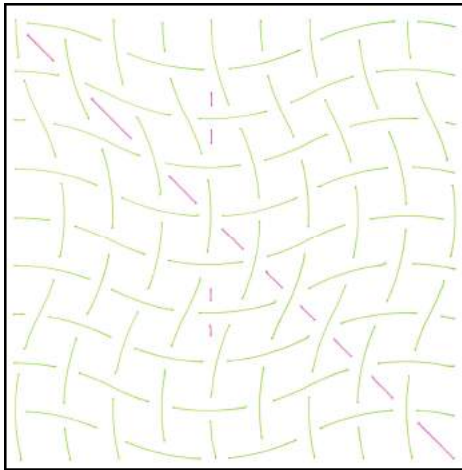
Double grid. The 1" grids were redivided horizontally and vertically.



Cathedral window. 1/2" grid was quilted first and then the arches were added second. Beautiful background!



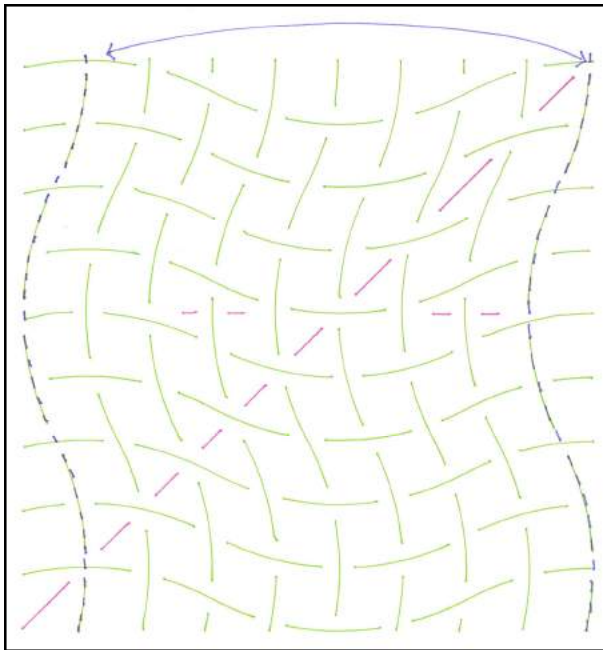
Twisted Grid



This is the Twisted Grid stencil.
Everything that you can do on a straight grid you can do on a twisted grid.

This will provide some great movement to your backgrounds.

Notice that a diagonal line and vertical line have been cut to help you line things up. I HIGHLY recommend that you repeat this horizontally and vertically only...diagonally gets very confusing and is hard to repeat.

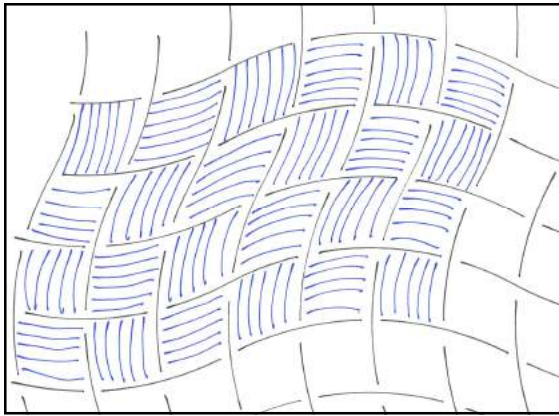


Just like the Twisted Clams, many people have had trouble repeating this stencil to fill a larger space.

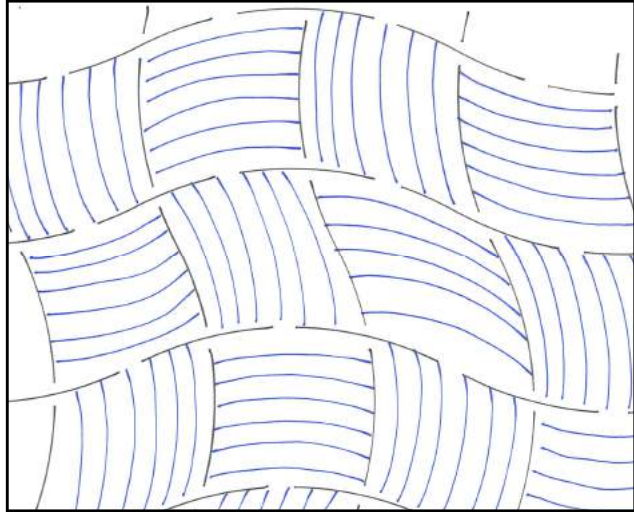
I recommend that you do not repeat this diagonally. Keep the stencil horizontal and vertical...just like it's shown here.

I've made dotted lines where your repeat is. Once you've marked the full grid pick up the stencil and match these two lines and you'll be set to go again.

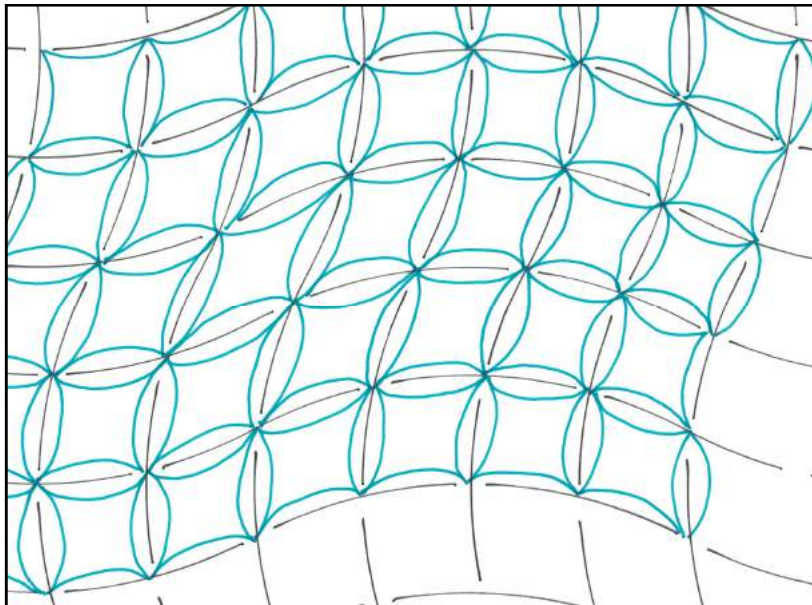
Twisted Basket Weave



Quilt your grid lines first and then add repetitive lines. If you skip grid lines you can make your blocks larger!

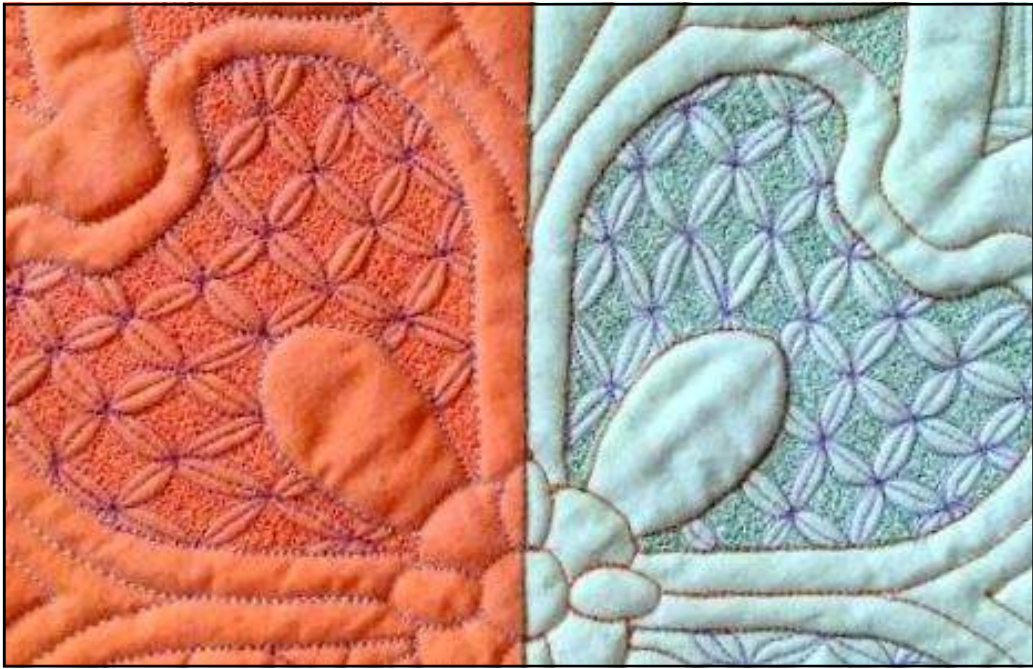


Twisted Cathedral Window

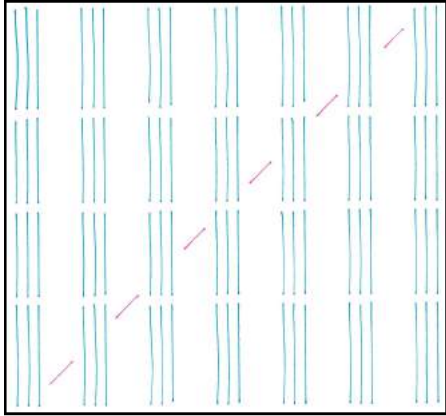


Mark and quilt all horizontal and vertical lines of the Twisted Grid.

Now go back in and fill with Cathedral Window/ Orange Peel arches. Remember...you can fill in your windows with other details if you wish!



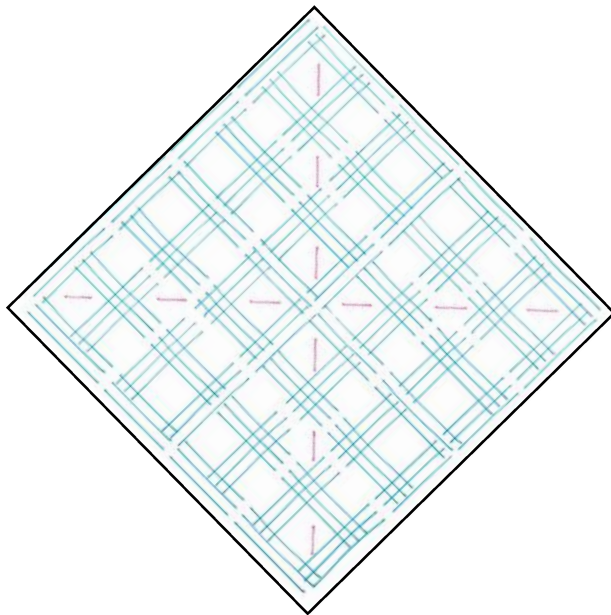
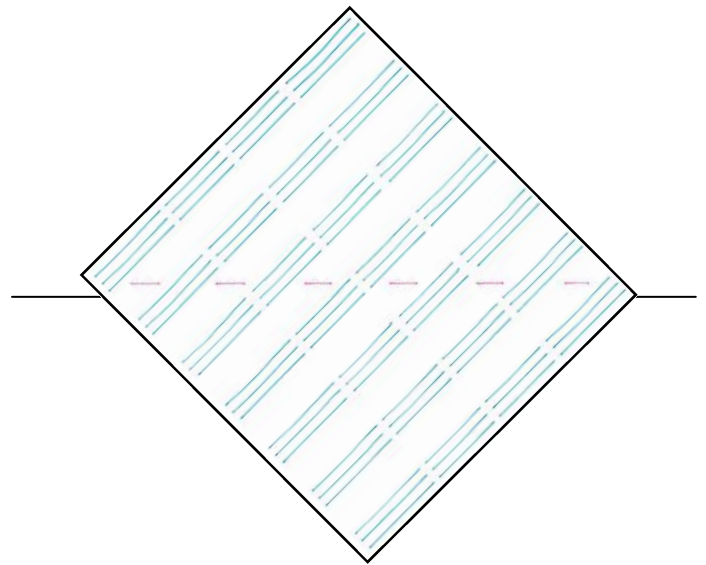
Triple Lines



This is the Triple Line stencil in the Ultimate Backgrounds set. You can repeat these lines vertically and horizontally.

Notice the pink line running diagonally.

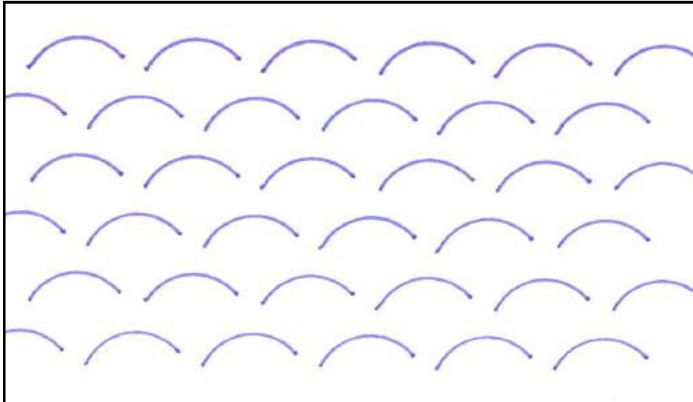
If you line up the diagonal line with a horizontal line you can run your lines at a perfect 45 degree angle.



If you flip it again you cross your lines and you end up with a triple line grid. Very cool and easily done with that pre-marked diagonal line.

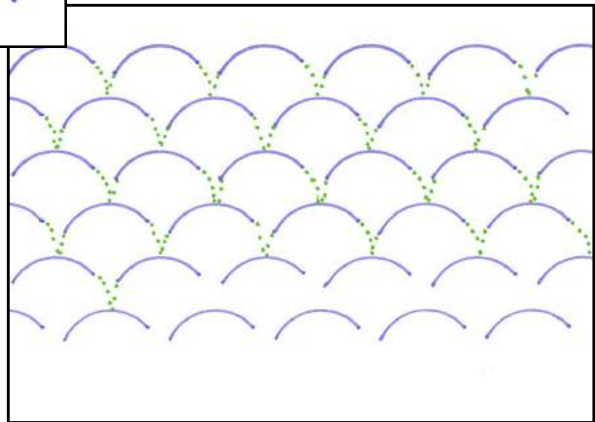


Clamshells



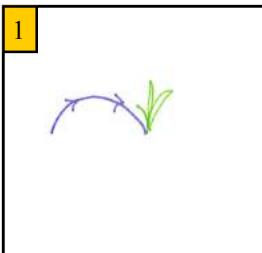
It is important when you quilt your clams that you bring those scallops all the way down to the clam below it so you get sharp points.

Another good tip is to quilt your clams from the bottom row and work your way up.



Whispy Clams

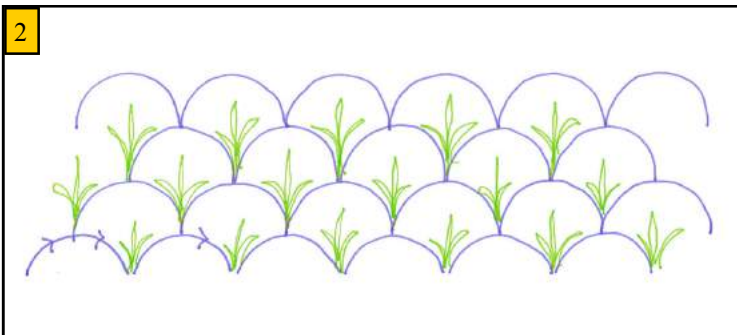
1



1. As you make your first clam and you come to the point or bottom end, immediately add a little whispy in the point which goes up into the “unquilted” clam above it.

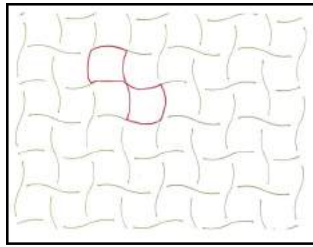
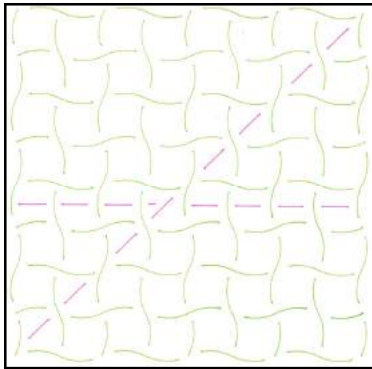
2. As you quilt the next row of clams those will already be dressed up.

2



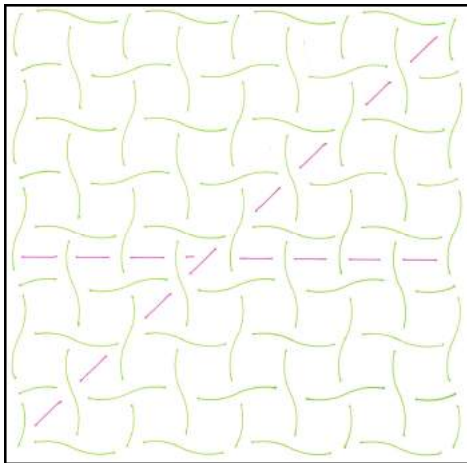


Twisted Clams

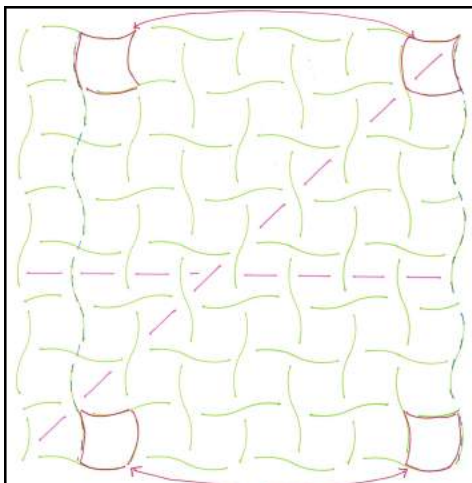


This is the Twisted Clam background stencil. It is made up of clamshells that rotate from side to side.

You can embellish a twisted clam the same as you do a “regular” clam.



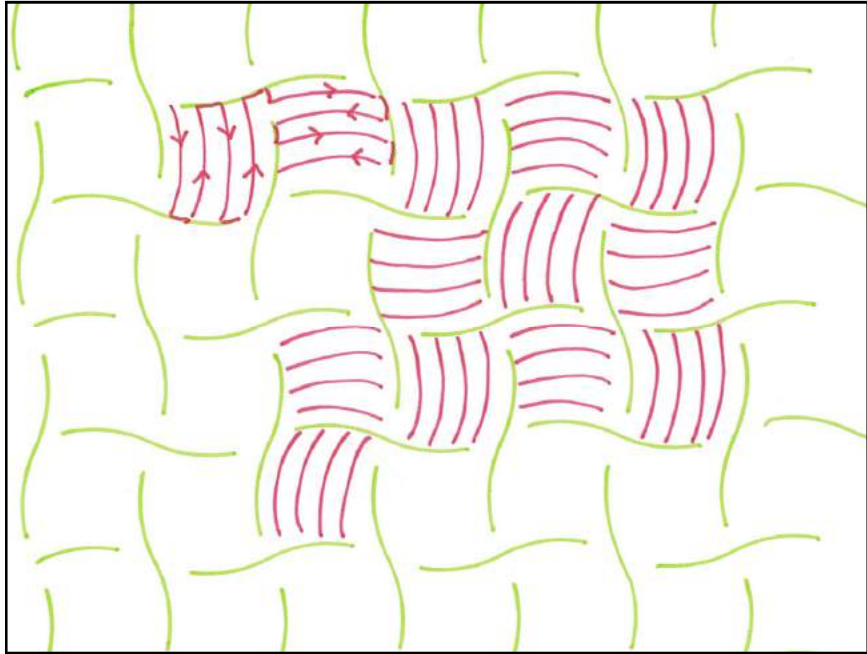
This stencil also has the pre-cut horizontal and diagonal lines to aid you in lining this up on your quilt top.



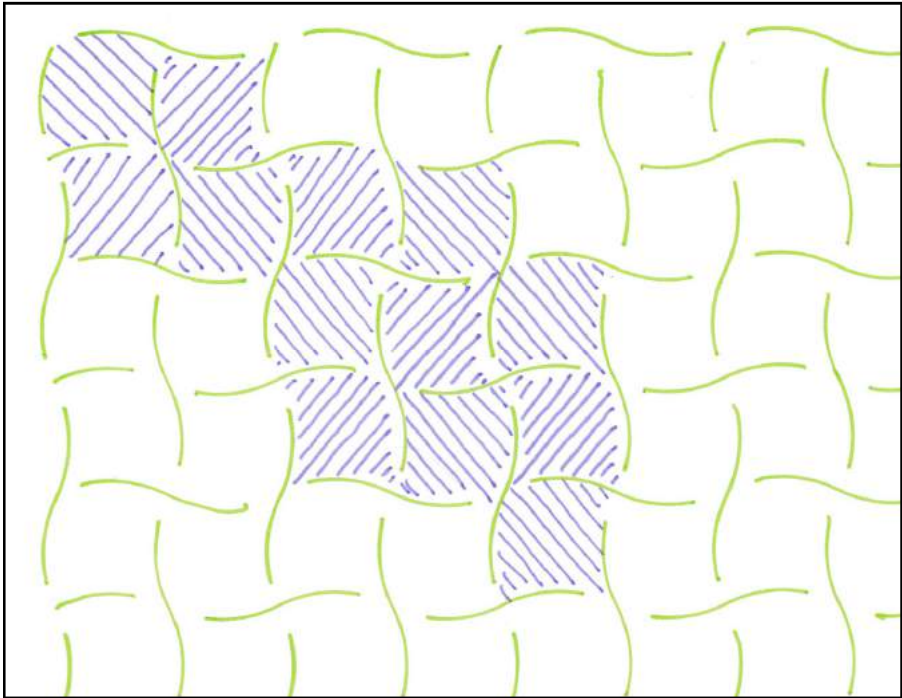
There has been confusion on how to repeat this stencil to cover a large area.

Every stencil must overlap a previously marked line in order to accurately repeat. I’ve made dotted lines and also highlighted the clams in four corners. Once a full block section has been marked, pick up your stencil and line it up with the previously marked matching clam.

Twisted Clam Basket Weave

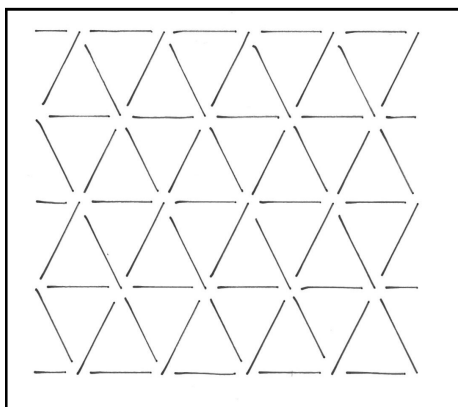


Twisted Clam Diagonal Lines





Triangles/Diamonds

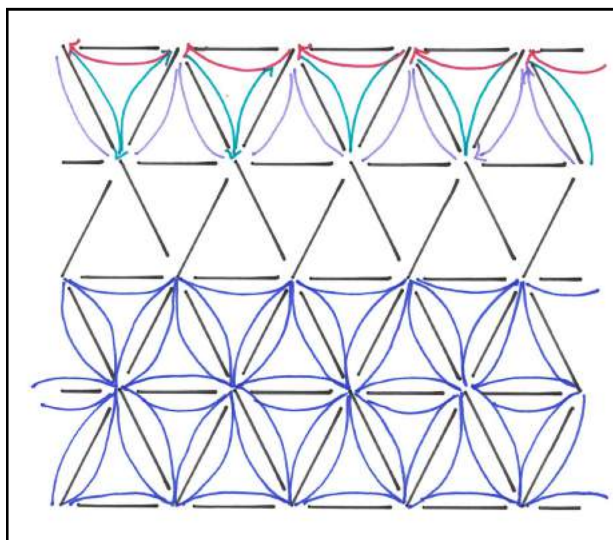
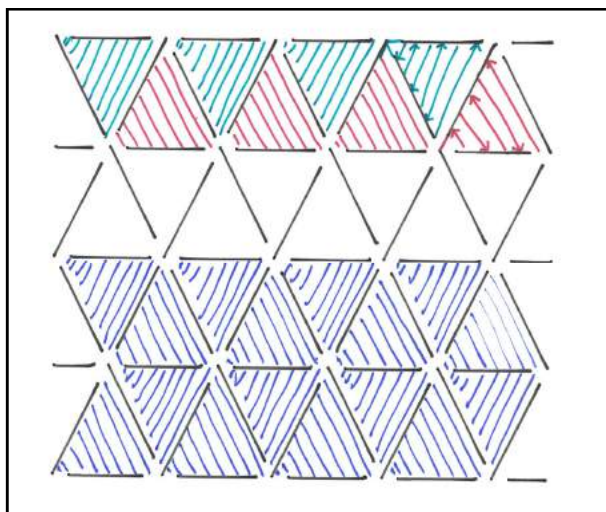


This is the basic Triangles/Diamonds background stencil.

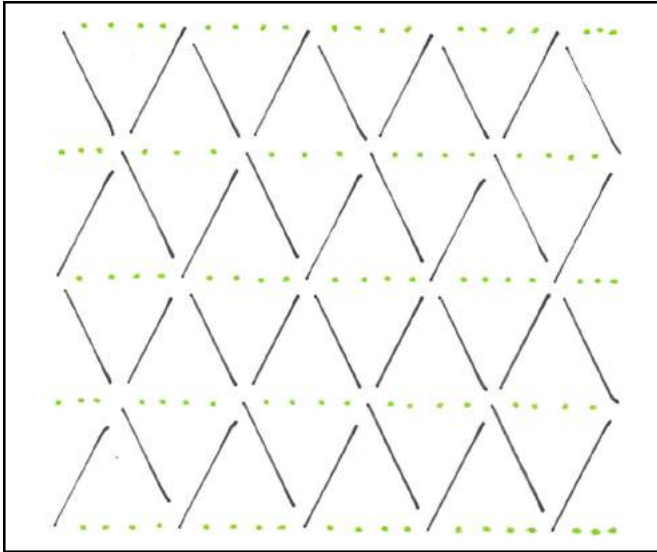
There are a multitude of beautiful designs you create with this template!

You could quilt this design exactly the way it is here without adding any embellishments and it would be beautiful.

Adding repetitive lines in the already-quilted triangle shapes adds beautiful details.



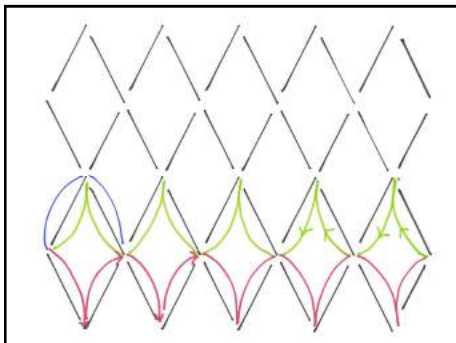
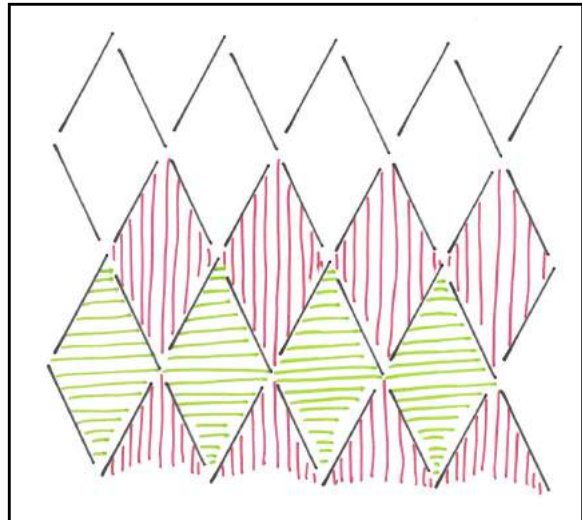
Look what happens when you add a cathedral window curve to each side....LOVE this one!



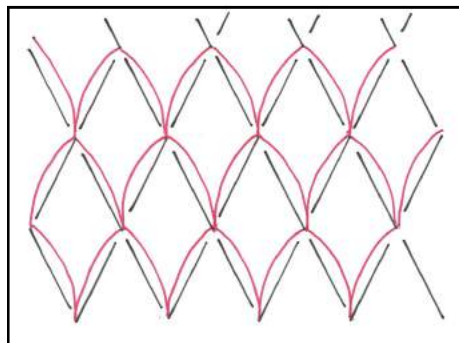
This is the triangles stencil that we just worked with on the previous page.

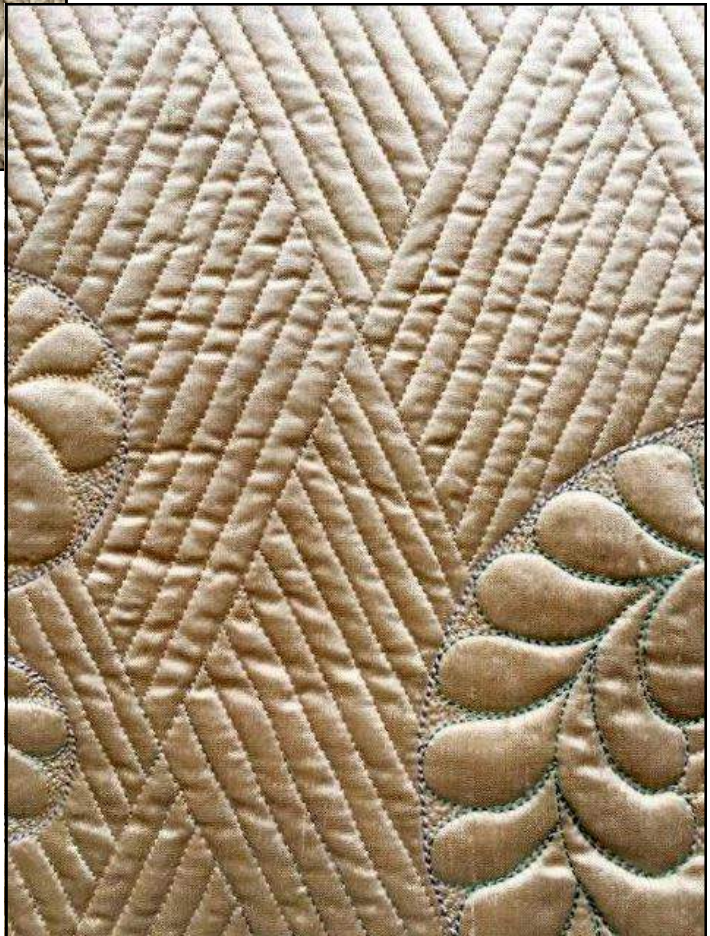
The green dots show how you can eliminate the horizontal lines from the stencil and create diamonds.

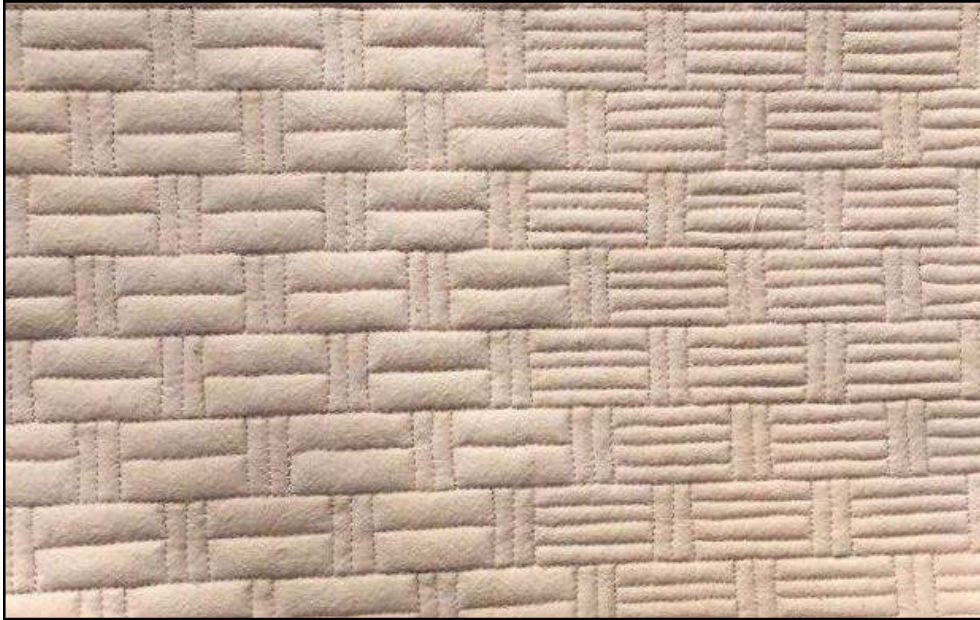
Just like the triangles, you can add repetitive lines to create some beautiful designs!



And of course there's always my favorite cathedral windows!







I hope this small handout has provided some good, very basic instruction on how to use The Ultimate Backgrounds stencils.

You may contact me at any time via email if you have any questions. Please reference quilting in the subject line so I'm sure to open your email.

Remember...you may visit my Pinterest page for tons of inspiration on using the stencils. You can access the boards by scrolling down to the bottom of my home page and clicking on the link there.

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Thank you!

Cindy :)