



JANE BROCKET

QUILT ME!

Using inspirational fabrics to create
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COLLINS & BROWN

FOR ALICE

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

INSPIRATIONAL FABRICS

APPLES WITH APPLES

COLLECTION

NEEDLEPOINT SQUARES

WATERCOLOUR

BIG PRINT

TICKING AND TOILE

VINTAGE FABRIC QUILTS

CRINOLINE LADY

GRANNY TAKES A TRIP

WASHING LINE

WISTERIA

FALL LEAVES

KITCHEN SINK

SCOTTISH LOG CABIN

INDIGO BENTO BOX

HARRIS TWEED

WARP AND WEFT

WARDROBE

DECKCHAIR STRIPES

HARLEQUIN

MAKING QUILTS

SPACE TO QUILT

FURTHER READING AND INSPIRATION

RESOURCES

QUILT DIRECTORY

INTRODUCTION

One of the most exciting ways to start a quilt is with fabric inspiration. For me, this happens when I come across a fabric that is so lovely/ cleverly designed/unusual/colourful/meaningful that I want to create a quilt around it, to show it off, to see it and use it. It is this approach that the focus of this book; every quilt here has sprung directly from a type or design of fabric that has shouted, ‘Quilt Me!’ very loudly and very clearly.

We have at our disposal a wealth of wonderful fabrics for making quilts. In recent years, much patchwork and quilting has focused on shop-bought, purpose-made, lightweight quilting cottons: I’m not saying that these aren’t fabulous, but I am saying that there is a whole new world of alternative textiles to be discovered by the adventurous quilter who wants to create unique, individual, unusual and beautiful quilts. To use these fabrics is not so much a radical departure as a welcome return to the approach that thrifty, resourceful, inventive patchworkers have always applied when seeking out and making the most of the vast range of available fabrics. It’s also a return to traditional patchwork and quilting values; to the idea of using whatever is to hand, whether it’s a furnishing fabric, an old garment or a practical household textile.

In this book, my personal quilting philosophy and approach remain exactly the same as in my first quilt book, *The Gentle Art of Quilt-Making*: start with lovely fabrics, choose simple shapes and designs, don’t worry about perfection, throw out unnecessary rules and complications, and enjoy making and using quilts. I continue with the liberated, joyous, colourful approach that I enjoy so much, and offer designs and ideas for quilts to be made in a non-competitive, have-a-go, gentle, simple way – but this time with all sorts of different fabrics.



I have always loved fabrics – ever since I was little, when my favourites were the felt squares I bought at the market, and the tiny amounts of velvet in the empty jewellery boxes I was allowed to keep. With time, my wishlist of fabrics has grown, and I still enjoy shopping and looking for fabrics

as much as ever. There is enormous pleasure to be had in the process, in the searching, rummaging, rescuing, discovering and uncovering. It is tremendously exciting to come across something that makes your hands itch to cut out and quilt, to be inspired by a wonderful colour scheme, design or pattern. It is also gratifying to make the most of what can be found in our homes and in our traditional fabric shops, to explore our very rich textile heritage, and to consider alternatives to quilting cottons, such as clothes, curtains, upholstery, tablecloths and interior decoration. The quilts shown here are made from fabrics I have found in many different places, although I still harbour dreams of the perfect one-stop shop that I could walk into and find all the textiles I treasure: ticking, linen, vintage, gingham, hand-embroidered, indigo, tweed, tartan, suiting, shirting, velvet, silk and calico, and more.

Having done my fair share of fabric-hunting, I would always say that if you find a fabric that shouts 'quilt me!' at you, do answer the call. Whether it's fabric on a roll or a used, vintage, second-hand garment or tablecloth or curtain, I advise you to swoop when you see something good or unusual, as it may not be there another time. When buying by the length, it's always worth investing in as long a piece as you can afford, but a metre or half-metre of anything you really love will be enough to act as a catalyst for a quilt. Plus, it's always possible to supplement a rare/vintage/fine fabric with other fabrics; this is where quilting cottons are so useful, as they are brilliant for mixing in. Indeed, unusual fabric combinations are fascinating and can produce lovely effects; your entire quilt does not have to be made from silk or tweed, and a mix can make a highlight fabric look even more striking.



Please do not feel confined to, or restricted by, the fabrics I have used here; the great thing about the 'quilt me!' approach is that so many fabrics can be used. The quilts shown are made with what I have been able to find so far, but I know that there are many more amazing fabrics waiting to be quilted. It's worth keeping an open mind as to the possibilities of what can be included; just think how previous generations used what they could get hold of and were actually far less rule-bound and quilting-cotton-bound than we are today. Take lessons and inspiration from them; from the quilters of Gee's Bend who knew and still know how to improvise, and how to bend and break the rules (but who ever said those rules were the right rules?), and from any quilters whose quilts you like and who follow their instincts and personal taste in fabric.

These 'quilt me!' quilts are a way of weaving our rich textile heritage into our quilted creations, and of preserving something of that heritage. As fewer people make their own clothes and soft furnishings, many fabric manufacturers and shops struggle to survive. It would be terrible if we lost more historic and beautiful fabrics (some have already all but disappeared), and those that do survive need to be memorialised, even if it's only by means of little scraps and pieces in quilts, which then add up to wonderful textile texts. Using many different fabrics is a way of adding excitement, texture, interest, history and significant design to our quilts. It's also a way of recognising, preserving and continuing our valuable textile history.

Jane Brocket

INSPIRATIONAL FABRICS

The following is a directory of the different fabrics used in this book, but it is by no means an exhaustive list of all the fabric and textile possibilities available to the curious and adventurous quilter. I give a short overview of each fabric and indicate the merits and/or difficulties of working with it.

When choosing a fabric for quilt-making, avoid anything that is very loose-weave or very open-weave, as it will fray and distort very quickly. Avoid stretchy fabric (anything knitted or containing Lycra), as it will lose its shape. Any fabric with pleats or a surface texture (for example, some seersuckers) that could be lost after cutting or during ironing is best not used. And anything that is very silky/slippery, thin, delicate or lacy is either not robust enough and/or is unsuitable.

COMBINING FABRICS

The general consensus in quilting circles is that you should use fabrics of the same or similar weight in a quilt. This makes practical sense as it ensures the seams are balanced, that quilting either by machine or by hand is straightforward, and that the overall look and feel is harmonious.

However, there is no reason why you shouldn't mix up fabrics as much as you like, providing it's easy to stitch them together. There is no hard-and-fast rule that says you can't put tweed and silk together, or denim and lawn, or corduroy and cotton. In fact, unexpected and original mixes of fabric can create wonderful effects and textures.

The only drawback is the issue of cleaning; as soon as you bring in a fabric such as silk, wool or tweed, you are committing to dry-cleaning your quilt. If this is a problem, keep to washable fabrics only – you will still be able to introduce a wide range of fabrics. Be experimental, take risks, and do something different.

NOTES ON CUTTING AND HANDLING

Many fabrics other than purpose-made quilting cottons can be – to varying degrees – slippery, stretchy, or likely to fray, attributes that can sometimes cause problems with cutting and sewing.

❖ Fabrics with a loose or open weave (for example, tweed or gauze) will relax (and even stretch a little) as soon as they are cut, or as you feed them under the needle, so these need to be handled as little as possible and with extra care. I tend to use these fabrics in squares, strips and rectangles, as anything with points such as triangles or diamonds can fray or distort.

❖ Corduroy also stretches because the flat 'furrows' open up a little horizontally (across the wales, or ridges) once the fabric is cut into small pieces. Take care when cutting and allow for the fact that pieces may become a little larger across the width (but not vertically along the length of the furrows and wales) after cutting.

❖ When cutting, you may find that wool, cord, linen and velvet fabrics move under the ruler. You need to be ready to gently ease the fabric into a straight line along the edge of the ruler, and avoid cutting

more than a couple of thicknesses at a time, or you may find that the pressure of your hand on the ruler causes the fabric to slip as you cut and you end up with a wonky or rippled edge.



- ❖ It helps enormously if you pin the pieces of these trickier fabrics right side together before or as you sew to keep them in place. If it's a really thick, open fabric such as Harris tweed (see page 15), go back and forth at the beginning and end of a seam, just to be sure the pieces are held together securely.
- ❖ If there are problems with fraying due to an open weave, it may help to use a $\frac{1}{2}$ in (1cm) seam allowance when cutting. But do remember to do this with ALL the other fabrics in the quilt top.
- ❖ Alternatively, cut out fray-prone fabrics with pinking shears or use a pinking blade on your rotary cutter.
- ❖ Smooth, shiny and delicate fabrics need careful handling to ensure they are cut and sewn accurately. A very smooth fabric (such as silk, lawn, poplin or shirting) does not have enough loose surface fibres to enable it to 'stick' to other layers of the same fabric (quilting cottons 'stick' together well), so cutting more than one thickness at a time can be a little difficult as the layers of fabric move easily under the ruler. In addition, sewing one or more smooth fabrics together requires concentration to ensure that the edges are lined up, and the fabric doesn't slip during sewing. Pinning before sewing helps, as does taking things slowly, not rushing, or working on automatic pilot.
- ❖ While some fabrics cause problems with too much movement and give, others (such as twill, canvas or silk) are so fine and/or tightly woven that they have no 'give' or stretch at all. These need to be cut as accurately as possible to ensure all seam allowances are correct, as you won't be able to ease (or gently stretch) the fabric later when sewing.

CHOOSING AND BUYING FABRIC

Deciding which fabrics to buy is best done when you have time to browse, consider, reconsider, build up piles of bolts of cloth and play with different combinations. This is the beauty of browsing on the

web: it's very easy to fill a shopping basket, take a break and come back to review your selection. It's not always as easy in a busy shop. Don't rush and don't feel you need to rush; these places are used to customers making thoughtful, time-consuming purchases (and if you do feel uncomfortable, then shame on the shop). It's worth asking for a second opinion, too; fabric shop staff can be very helpful and enthusiastic and able to make excellent suggestions.



I rarely decide to buy all the fabric I need for a quilt in one shopping expedition. I discovered early on that it was too easy to get carried away with a theme and the convenience of a single-stop shopping trip, and too often I came home with fabrics that seemed like a good idea in the shop but that I really wished I hadn't bought. If you are going fabric shopping, it's always worth checking what you have at home before you set off so you have a more informed idea of what you actually need. But if you happen to come across a wonderful fabric unexpectedly, buy it; it pays to purchase fewer in terms of numbers of fabrics and more in terms of a fabric you adore. Once you have an amazing starting-point fabric you can take your time, shop around, and buy the rest of the fabrics over time. Your quilt will be all the better for a little extra consideration.

The best way to make good, true decisions is to go browsing when you are looking for nothing in particular and are not under pressure. This is when the fabrics you truly love catch your eye, and you know immediately that you want to make a quilt with them. It's also the time to trust your instincts; I regret very few impulse purchases of stunning fabrics I have found when not looking for anything specific, because I have bought them for all the right reasons and subsequently loved using them.

You may prefer to build up a collection in the traditional thrifty manner, by saving old clothes and household linens, or by cutting up summer dresses and cotton shirts, or by swapping with friends and fellow quilters. But if you are new to quilting, or don't have the resources of used or shared fabrics, or simply prefer to buy new fabric for your quilts, you need some shopping strategies.

❖ The best places to shop are those that offer a good range of fabrics and plenty of inspiration. This may sound obvious, but it's not always that simple. Unless you are able to get to one of the enormous US-style shops that stock a huge number of fabrics, you are limited to the selection made by the own

of a small shop. There are thousands of designs available at any one time, so editing is necessary; if you can find a place where the edited selection matches your tastes, you are in luck. If not, keep trying new places, no matter how apparently unpromising. Or go to one of the major quilt shows and festivals, where there are a number of vendors and plenty of choice.

❖ If you don't have any inspirational fabric shops near you (and there is a woeful lack in the UK), the next best option is to buy online. Looking at photographs of fabric is never the same as seeing and handling the real thing, and there is always an element of risk with colour reproduction and scale of pattern, but the best online sellers offer fantastic choice and excellent service.

❖ When shopping on the web, it's best to play with wishlists and design boards and browse extensively before committing to buy. Put lots of fabrics in the basket but leave them there for a day or two before coming back and being ruthlessly selective.

❖ Before buying, it is worth having a look at your collection to remind yourself of what you have already and what you need. If there's a particular quilt in a book or a fabric design that has inspired you, take the book or the fabric to the shop, or keep your source of inspiration next to the computer for easy reference.

❖ If there's a colour combination you like, take pages from magazines or paint charts to remind you of the exact colours. Unless you have an amazing memory, it's very easy to recall incorrectly and plump for the wrong shade.

FABRIC DIRECTORY

Here is an overview of the various different fabrics I have used in this book, together with some notes on using them.

Quilting cotton

There are many good reasons why lightweight cotton quilting fabrics, designed and sold as such, are ideal for making quilts. They are durable, hardwearing, colourfast, washable and easy to iron. They have an equal number of threads to the warp and weft, which means they do not distort easily, and they keep their shape after cutting. They have a medium-density weave; if they had a more open, loose weave, they would stretch or fray very easily, and if they had a much tighter weave, they would not have the necessary give that allows quilters to 'ease' the fabrics where necessary when sewing and ironing. Quilting cotton is not super-smooth like poplin, lawn or many shirt fabrics, but instead has some short fibres on the surface. This means that layers of the fabric 'stick' together rather than slipping, and this removes the need for pinning. This fabric is also soft to the touch, and wears beautifully.

In addition to the physical properties of light quilting cottons, there are of course aesthetic considerations, and this is where these fabrics really come into their own. Quilting cottons are big business, especially in the US, and there are fabrics to suit every taste. Many fabrics are brilliantly inspirational and can spark off all kinds of ideas for quilts. Increasingly, manufacturers are enlisting the services of talented designers whose name helps to sell the fabrics (see the Lotta Jansdotter fabric here).



These cotton fabrics make quilting easy because, even if you prefer to sew with only simple shapes, there is no reason why you can't produce a fantastic quilt using clever fabrics designed by someone who knows exactly what they are doing.

Quilting cottons are easy to find if you are willing to use the web for shopping, but do be careful with colour matching. It's still worth seeing a fabric before buying whenever possible, but I know that it's often not.

Shirting and dress fabrics

Any lightweight printed, yarn-dyed or colour-woven cotton fabric is ideal for making quilts. Dresses and skirts cut up beautifully, as do cotton pyjamas, dressing gowns and shirts. High-quality cotton shirts can sometimes be a little too smooth and fine, which makes them tricky to handle, but this isn't a problem when you are using smaller pieces. However, if you use full-width (60in/150cm) shirting off a roll for backing quilts, its smooth surface means it doesn't cling or stick at all to the wadding (even wadding with scrim – see here); it simply falls away from it, unlike quilting cottons and many simple dress cottons. The only solution is to use large numbers of pins when making the quilt 'sandwich', or to baste before quilting.

Cotton lawn

Many quilters love Liberty Tana Lawn fabrics. These are very smooth, light, printed cottons, many of which feature the distinctive 'Liberty print' and Arts & Crafts designs. I have tried using a few small pieces in my quilts because the designs are wonderful, but find the fabric is too light and fine for my liking, and it tends to slip when sewing. I'm also not keen on the fact that these fabrics crease easily, and worry that as they are so fine they will be less durable in the long term.

Double gauze cotton

Double gauze isn't particularly well-known, but it is being used by a few – mainly Japanese – designers and companies to create very soft, bouncy, floaty fabrics.

Cotton gauze is a type of muslin (the kind of thing used for bandages and for straining cheese and jam), and has a very open weave. In a single layer it would be totally unsuitable for quilts, but double gauze is created by weaving two layers together. This entails picking up threads to hold the two layers together, which is why there are tiny dots over the surface of the fabric.

Since there are two very airy layers, it is difficult to get double gauze to lie absolutely flat; this means it can be hard to cut out and to piece accurately. The edges also tend to fray and it's possible to lose the seam allowance alarmingly quickly once you start handling the fabric. But it has a lovely drape and handle, and in quilts it feels as though it's already been washed many times. Either use a ½in (1cm) seam allowance, or cut and handle the fabric as little as possible. I imagine it's difficult to machine-quilt double gauze as the fabric would bunch up very quickly, so I recommend hand-quilting with quite long, not-too-tight stitches that don't pucker the surface.

This fabric is not cheap (the result of the production method) and some examples can be narrower than standard quilting cottons. Plus, many of the designs are large-scale, so it's best to use a piece whole in a modern design with a few supplementary fabrics (see the Watercolour quilt here).



Indigo cotton

Authentic indigo fabrics are often piece- or thread-dyed by hand (using a plant-derived dye). Usually it's a simple light- or medium-weight cotton, like a basic tablecloth or hardwearing dress fabric; it is ideal for quilts, although generally speaking it is not very wide.

Be careful if you have real indigo fabric as the dye might run when washed. Pre-wash it, especially if you are planning to mix it with other fabrics. Alternatively, buy the more commercial (and less costly) quilting fabrics that mimic 'real' indigo fabrics.

These cottons are lovely, easy to use, and show up the stitching beautifully (see the Indigo Bento Box quilt here). They fall into the category of being useful and beautiful, not too fine, and absolutely



Barkcloth

Real, traditional barkcloth is a non-woven fabric made from the bark of certain trees in Asia, Africa, Indonesia and the Pacific. However, these days, barkcloth is more commonly associated with a soft, thick, woven cotton fabric with a textured surface that resembles tree bark. It was particularly popular in the post-war years and up to the 1970s, when it was widely used as a furnishing and upholstery fabric. In the UK, it is associated with the ‘atomic’ 1950s patterns that were popular at the time of the Festival of Britain. In the US, it enjoyed great popularity with lush, large-scale tropical designs in rich, deep colours – the kind of thing you’d see in Elvis Presley films or in bars with rattan furniture. Even today, the best barkcloth designs can be found in the US in vintage fabric stores, and especially in Hawaii.

Barkcloth is usually made from cotton, although some examples might contain a proportion of viscose or linen. It’s very washable and durable and, although it is a little thicker than most quilting cottons, it works brilliantly in quilts, bringing wonderful texture and some rare and unusual patterns.

Barkcloth all but disappeared after the 1970s, but the recent explosion of interest in mid-century design has rekindled its popularity, especially among fabric collectors who realise that many of these fabrics feature outstanding, time-specific designs by well-known designers. It’s not always easy to go looking for barkcloth; it’s more a matter of buying it if you find a piece you like. It is sold by specialist vintage fabric sellers, but lengths (often as curtains) can be found in car boot sales, vintage fairs and flea markets. Any piece of barkcloth in decent condition would make a marvellous starting point for a quilt (see the Wisteria quilt here). It is also (usually) washable, and is very easy to handle

Vintage hand-embroidered textiles

After years of being hidden away in attics and cupboards, vintage hand-embroidered textiles are enjoying a period of enthusiastic rediscovery by a generation of stitchers and proponents of vintage

style, who appreciate the designs, skill and colour choices that went into their making.

As most examples are worked on hardwearing cotton or cotton/linen mix, and the weave of the fabric is even, they are easy to handle, iron, cut up and sew. They are a gift to any quilter who can get over their reluctance to cut into a hand-stitched piece (not always easy, I know). If you really can't take the scissors to a pretty tablecloth, look for examples that may have good areas of stitching but are torn or stained in other parts. Then cut out the good bits, including areas without embroidery that could be useful for borders or plain sections.



Note that some vintage embroideries are on woven viscose fabric, which is very difficult to work with. Although I have bought some on eBay by mistake (some sellers don't mention or don't realise that the fabric is viscose), I have always decided against using them as it's extremely difficult to keep the edges straight and neatly lined up; viscose is slippery and has so much movement in it that the cut out pieces distort quickly. If you do want to use viscose, it would be a good idea to apply some sort of fabric stiffener; maybe starch or an iron-on backing gauze (the sort you use for machine embroidery).

Métis

Métis is not particularly well known outside a small coterie of vintage French linen enthusiasts and collectors who prize its fine, hardwearing qualities. Métis is a linen union fabric (a linen and cotton mix) that was produced in France for sheeting and tablecloths. The mix of linen and cotton varies, and depends on the date of production since the process was changed in the 1930s; generally speaking it can be 50/50, 70/30 or 30/70. It is usually unbleached or ecru, and is available as ready-hemmed sheets or by the metre (it is often much wider than standard fabrics). Métis comes in various weights, some of which are too heavy and tough for quilting; it helps to have a feel before buying, or to buy from a reputable seller who can advise you.

Métis is a beautiful, tightly woven fabric with a classic, traditional surface texture. You may need to soften métis before using it by giving it a hot wash. The generous widths also mean it is great for

backing a quilt (see the Kitchen Sink quilt here). It looks wonderful with other plain, traditional linen and cotton household and practical fabrics, and is very easy to sew with, although it can distort a little along the edges as you cut. It is down-to-earth stuff, and will give years of service in a quilt.



Vintage *métis* can be bought as sheets or by the metre and is available from specialist French textile dealers, brocantes and on eBay.

Woven woollen fabrics

For quilts, the best woven wool fabric is medium-weight and not too fine and luxurious – partly because of the cost, but also because really good-quality wool fabric can be smooth and difficult to handle. Choose something that is not too thick or loosely woven so that you don't get bulky seams or problems with fraying.

It is a fact of life that quilts containing any proportion of wool fabric should be dry-cleaned only. If you can't face that, it is best to avoid using wool.

Wool checks

There are some excellent medium-weight woven wool or wool and cashmere check fabrics that look lovely in quilts and are easy to handle. Soft wool checks in muted and natural palettes are a great starting point for a quilt, rather than the more definite, two-colour cotton-tablecloth-style checks that could dominate a quilt and prove problematic when you want to bring other fabrics into the mix. Quilting cottons featuring reproductions of historical and archive designs (see the Fall Leaves quilt here) look particularly good with subdued and traditional wool checks, as they tend to have the same slightly faded 'natural dye' look and subtle detail.

Tweed

Beloved of gamekeepers, farmers and brogue-wearing outdoor types, the traditional rough, hairy tweed is famous for being warm and incredibly hardwearing. It is also immensely subtle and beautiful due to the way in which the colours are blended and mixed. Unlike many checked wool fabrics that use solid colours, tweeds often have a mixture of yarns within yarns and very clever shading and colour patterns within the design. If you look carefully, you will often find all kinds of surprises: purples, oranges and emerald greens, and all sorts of natural sea, sky and earth shades.

The best tweeds are heavy and use thick yarns, which means they can fray very quickly and easily. However, they do look amazing in quilts; the trick is to cut them quickly and handle them as little as possible. You may want to use pinking shears or a pinking blade on a rotary cutter when cutting out, even allow a ½in (1cm) seam allowance. (If you do this, cut out all the fabrics with the same allowance.) A quilt made from just nine or twelve large squares of a number of different heavy tweeds would look wonderful, and the little streaks of brilliant colour in the weave would be an invitation to use some bright quilting threads.



Harris tweed

Although there are many regional tweeds (such as Irish, Donegal and Cambrian), Harris tweed is probably the most famous. It is also the only tweed still being made by hand on the Hebridean island of Harris and Lewis off the coast of Scotland. It is made entirely from Scottish wool and has its own 'Harris tweed' label to denote authenticity. The yarns are dyed with natural dyes made from local dyestuffs, and create wonderfully subtle hues.

Harris tweed is expensive to buy by the metre, but there are sellers on eBay who offer mixed bags of off-cuts that are good starting points for a quilt (see the Wardrobe quilt here). Alternatively, buy a single piece to inspire a quilt, and supplement it with other fabrics, such as velvet, cord and cotton (see the Warp and Weft quilt here). You could also cut up Harris tweed garments found in charity shops and jumble sales.

Harris tweed needs to be handled with care (see general notes on tweed, previously). It is worth

pinning the edges to be sewn together to avoid any extra movement and pulling that might lead to fraying.

Suiting

Suiting is a marvellous fabric for quilts. It's light, beautifully made, cuts well, is easy to handle and sew, and doesn't create bulky seams. 'Suiting' refers to any woven wool fabric that is intended for clothing. It is usually long-lasting and crease-resistant, with an excellent handle and drape. It is most often 100 per cent wool (merino wool is the highest quality) and there are some lovely ultra-soft, wool/cashmere blends. It also often has the added bonus of distinctive selvages that proclaim the fabric's quality and provenance. These can be incorporated into the quilt; just fussy-cut to get the wording into a piece.

Although these fabrics are often expensive, they are much wider than most quilting cottons, and you don't need a lot if you are mixing a suiting fabric with other types of fabric; even a 4in (10cm) strip would provide plenty of small squares. It's worth looking for end-of-roll pieces, as these are often sold off cheaply.

Alternatively, use old wool suits and skirts, cutting out the best bits (it is usually worth washing or dry-cleaning any clothes you plan to recycle before you cut them up). Charity shops are a great source of second-hand clothing and can yield some amazing vintage and not-so-vintage wool fabrics in garments. And, as ever when it comes to fabrics, eBay has plenty of excellent suiting fabric, often sold in small cuts.



Tartan

Tartan fabric is a woven woollen fabric with distinctive and often historical colours and patterns that can be hardwearing and heavyweight (for example, for bagpipes, blankets, kilts and coats) or medium weight and softer (for trousers, suits or dressing gowns).

Although a kilt tartan could be used in a quilt, it is probably a little too heavy, weatherproof and

windproof for the average indoor quilt. On the other hand, a few large squares of richly coloured tartans in what could be a tartan sampler quilt or a tartan family tree quilt could make a really unusual and very long-lasting quilt for outdoors (hunting, shooting and fishing, and all that). Alternatively, use medium-weight tartans that are easier to handle and more suitable for a quilt that will be used indoors (see Scottish Log Cabin here).

When quilting with tartans, it's important to be as accurate as possible with cutting and sewing, as any wonkiness will be immediately apparent due to the linear nature of the design. This can be a little difficult with good-quality smooth wool fabric that has a tendency to distort as you handle it, so do bear this in mind. If, however, you are cutting out lots of small pieces to make a big Scottish tartan statement, the straightness of your lines won't be as crucial.

Velvet

Velvet is both a treat and a bit of a headache to quilt with. Silk velvet is beautiful but very expensive and difficult to handle, so look for medium-weight cotton velvet instead. (Heavy velvet can also be used, but it does create bulky seams.)

Velvet's pile gives it its distinctive and luxurious plushness, its ridiculously soft texture and its wonderful depth of colour. The pile also causes it to move slightly whenever two right sides are facing, which makes it a little hard to keep two edges together when sewing. Velvet also frays easily.

However, if you can take care when using it, and pin before machine-sewing, velvet is an incredibly rewarding fabric (see the Harlequin quilt here). I would recommend using large and/or very simple shapes, and mixing them with other fabrics if the idea of a whole quilt in velvet is too much.



Velveteen

Velveteen has often been seen as a poor man's velvet, but this overlooks the fabric's specific attributes. Good velveteen is made with cotton, and the lighter examples (rather than the tough, often

synthetic velveteen furnishing fabrics) look lovely in quilts. Velveteen is easy to use as its structure means it frays less and is more stable than velvet. It is also easy to wash, iron and care for.

These days, it's possible to find some beautiful printed velveteens in a good weight for quilting. In fact, such is its appeal, more designers are coming to appreciate the qualities of velveteen as a base fabric (the shorter pile means it is more suited to printing than velvet) and are creating designs for craft and general sewing.

Corduroy

Any kind of woven cotton corduroy, from thick, jumbo, elephant cord to fine needlecord, is useful for quilting. It's soft, washable, light enough despite its thickness, and adds great texture and visual depth.

It's easy enough to find rolls of cord in fabric shops and department stores, but you may find enough to put into a quilt from cutting up old trousers, skirts and jackets (see the Wardrobe quilt here). A quilt made entirely from corduroy would be interesting, but if you can get hold of only a few pieces, use them here and there in a quilt to add contrast to other fabrics. Corduroy also makes an excellent backing fabric if you want to add extra weight and warmth to a quilt, plus it has great 'sticking' properties so it doesn't slip off beds or settees too easily. The only thing you have to be careful about when quilting with cord is that the fabric can widen and stretch across the wales (the furry ridges) when cut (this doesn't affect the length of the fabric). Either pin before sewing or take extra care when feeding the fabric under the needle.

When it comes to quilting, it's best to make stitches across the wales rather than along their length (it's easy for the quilting stitches to disappear into the furrows, and they don't look quite right on top of the wales). Alternatively, tie the quilt (see here); this works especially well with plain cord quilts.

Canvas

Most canvas produced for practical purposes is too tough and heavy to use in quilts. But there is a huge range of weights, so it is possible to find canvases suitable for quilting. However, I recommend always feeling a canvas before committing to using it, or even making a sample block to test how easy it is to handle and sew. If it is light enough to go through your machine without needing special thread or needles, then it's okay to use. Do bear in mind, though, that canvas has a very tight weave that makes it hardwearing, strong and firm, and means you need to cut and line up pieces accurately.

Deckchair canvas is an example of a canvas that can be used in quilts. It is 100 per cent cotton, with woven (as opposed to printed) stripes in all sorts of colours. It makes a hardwearing and extremely stripy quilt (see the Deckchair Stripes quilt here), but is a little too thick to hand-quilt with ease and comfort, so tying (see here) is the best way to hold the three layers together.



Tickings

Tickings is another firm, tightly woven, hardwearing and practical fabric, originally intended for mattresses and pillows. It has a distinctive stripe woven into the cotton, and is usually a single sober colour (such as black, navy, dark red or bottle green) in a regular pattern of thick and/or thin stripes on ecru. Some tickings are simply too thick for quilts, but lighter ones are excellent.

Tickings has become a tasteful choice of furnishing fabric in the last twenty years; there is now a wide range of tickings to choose from and most of them are still very traditional in their stripe patterns and colours. Some have more than two colours, which makes them look less traditional. I still don't think you can beat the very simple, very striking versions with thin black or navy stripes on ecru. Tickings can be a little tough on the hand when quilting, so you may want to consider tying (see [here](#)) or machine-quilting.

There are also now a few 'ticking'-style fabrics being sold by quilt fabric shops and websites. These are still two-colour, but are much lighter and softer and suitable for general cotton quilts. They might be called – tautologically – 'Striped Ticking' or 'French Ticking Stripes'. Some have woven stripes; others have less authentic printed stripes.

Needlepoint

This is not your average quilting fabric, perhaps, but abandoned or incomplete needlepoint can be used to make a quilt (see the [Needlepoint Squares](#) here). It's best to look for finer needlepoint (up to ten holes or stitches per inch), as anything thicker can be unwieldy and create very bulky seams.

Use decent-quality needlepoint that you are happy to show off, and avoid anything that smells unpleasant or is worn out or damaged. Cut out the areas you like or that are useful and feature them either in a needlepoint-only quilt or as focal points in a mixed-fabric quilt.

Remember that cutting and sewing through the dense wool stitching and the tough base canvas will wear out your cutting blade and sewing machine needle, both of which will probably need replacing afterwards.

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