



Pattern of the Month - August 2013

by Evelyn George

"UFO turns into Tote Bag!"

Stranger things have happened in my sewing room, and probably yours, too—but digging through a tub of UFO's left from workshops and other projects, I found some signs of life from another "world"—beautiful samples of improvisational piecing from a Carol Taylor workshop a few years ago. I had thought then of making a vest, but that didn't happen.

The tantalizing, colorful pieces now spoke to me and said, "We really just want to be a tote bag!" Of course I would need to piece just a few more strips from the leftover fabrics, so the bag would be big enough. The bright green that was going to be the vest lining could be the bag lining, and soon I had it all figured out—I thought. But a little problem had to be solved first. I had originally made 3 cute little pockets for the vest's front, and I decided to use those on the bag. But that meant I couldn't quilt the bag in the usual way, because then the pockets would get quilted shut! So in the end, I added fusible batting to the *lining*, and just didn't quilt anything! So, perhaps it's not too durable, but I promise not to get it dirty, so I'll never need to wash it. Haha.

The tote is so colorful and was so much fun to make, maybe I'll see if I can do this to some of my other UFO's! Here's a modified version (without pockets) of the way I constructed the bag. If you don't have a UFO whispering to you that it could turn into a tote, just use plain fabrics, strips, and/or assorted blocks, and combine into a panel big enough to make a bag. For a medium size improvisational tote (about 14" x 12" x 4"; without pockets), you'll need:

$\frac{1}{2}$ yard fabric (or blocks and coordinating scraps) for the outer panel

$\frac{1}{2}$ yard lining fabric

Two contrasting strips of fabric for handles, see below

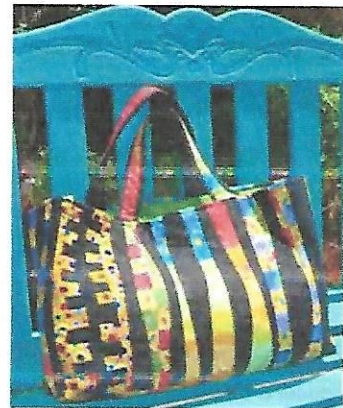
Piece of fusible batting at least 16" x 36", plus a strip $1\frac{1}{2}$ " x 36" for handles

example of panel, with improvisational piecing ↓

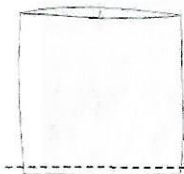
Arrange blocks, partial blocks, strips, etc. in a pleasing manner, add coordinating strips as needed to fill in between parts, and sew together to make a panel approx. 16" x 36". If it's a little smaller or bigger, that's OK, just keep building until you have a panel approximately 16" x 36" or a bit bigger. Press well; trim edges even.



Cut fusible batting about 1/8" smaller all around than pieced panel, and fuse to wrong side of panel according to package directions. (*I only fused it to the lining because my panel had those pockets, but it's easier to work with a plain lining, without any batting fused to it.*)



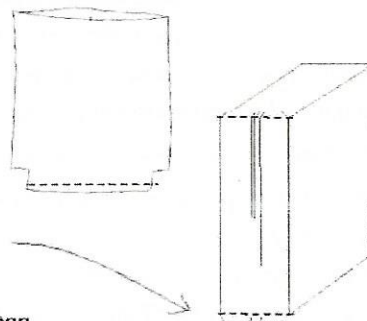
Quilt the panel with the batting fused onto it; simple straight or wiggly lines is enough, or get as fancy as you wish. After it's quilted, trim edges and square up corners, making a rectangle approximately 14-16" x 34-36". Now it's your final size; the lining will be the same size, so you might make a note of it.



For outer bag, sew short ends of panel right sides together, making a tube. Decide which edge is the top of bag, center the seam in back, then pin bottom edges together and sew with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam.

Lay bag on cutting board with bottom edges aligned nearest you. Make box bottom corners by cutting out a 2" square from each bottom corner, through both thicknesses. (Measure the 2" from folded edge, and from seam line at bottom, not from raw edges).

Open out corner and bring raw edges together, matching bottom seam with side center; pin raw edges together and sew with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam, backstitching at both ends. Do this at both corners, to form bottom of bag.

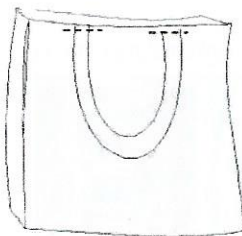


Cut lining the same measurement as bag. Sew lining into a tube as you did for bag, making sure to leave a 6" opening in seam, for turning. Sew bottom seam and make box bottom corners, same as for bag.

Next, make the handles. Cut one strip of fabric $2-5/8$ " x 36" and a contrasting strip $1\frac{1}{4}$ " x 36", plus a batting strip $1\frac{1}{4}$ " x 36". (This will make one long handle which will be cut into two shorter ones.) Sew the two fabric strips, right sides together, with a $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam allowance, along just one long edge. Press seam toward wide strip. Turn this pieced strip wrong side up and lay it out straight on the ironing board. Lay $1\frac{1}{4}$ " strip of fusible batting, fusible side down, over the narrow strip, covering it, with edges matching (they are the same width). Carefully cover with a press cloth and fuse lightly, then turn over and fuse from the fabric side. Fold narrow strip and batting onto wide strip, leaving about $\frac{1}{4}$ " of wide strip showing along the stitched edge; this will be the trim, on the front of strap. Fold remaining raw edge of wide strip over twice, to match width of trim on first edge. Pin in place and stitch along fold. Topstitch the other edge to match.



Cut long handle into two equal pieces.



Lay outer bag, right side out, on flat surface. On upper edge, measure and mark center front and center back with pins. Pin one handle on front and one on back, positioning them on bag with right sides together and raw edges aligned, so there is a 5" space ($2\frac{1}{2}$ " on either side of center mark) between the two ends of handle. With handles hanging down, baste ends in place, a scant $\frac{1}{4}$ " from top edge of bag. Turn bag *wrong side out*; slip lining, *right side out*, down inside it. Match edges and pin at center fronts and sides. They should be right sides

together---the handles hidden between them --- and be sure you left an opening somewhere in the lining seam for turning! Pin together every couple of inches around the top edge, distributing fullness evenly. Stitch together all the way around, slowing down over the handle ends. Turn right side out, through the lining opening. Now you should see the handles, and the right sides of bag and lining. Slip stitch the opening closed, tuck lining down inside the bag, and topstitch around the upper edge. . . . UFO no mo!