

*One of my favorite things about being a quilt artist is getting to travel around and hang out with some of the most inspiring, coolest creative people ever. And one of my all time favorites is Jean Wells of Sisters, Oregon. She is a hoot. And she is incredibly inspiring to me. I was in her studio a few years back while she was working on quilts for this book, Intuitive Color & Design. And I literally couldn't stand it. I had to rush right home and give this a try.*

*Jean's book is fantastic and there's all kinds of terrific lessons throughout it. We're going to focus today on just the basic construction so that you know how to put some of these great fabrics together for free piecing. Speaking of great fabrics. Check this out over here at the quilt. We are going to be using the Kona solids. This is the Pleasant Pastures. I love green. It's one of my all time favorite colors. And we also have up here, this is called Grunge by Basic Gray for Moda. Another fantastic palette. And I actually we'll show you in a bit how we use it on both sides for the quilting construction process. Let's get ourselves started ok?*

*Now the first couple things we're going to do, we're just unpacking those 2 ½ inch strips. Those were the greens. And I have already taken and cut basically the fold out of these. I only need about 22 inches because I want the others for constant building. None of this has any direction for me right now for where I'm going. The first and easiest seam to start building something that is going to look like this is a couple of big basic straight seams. The way I do that, not perfectly straight like this, but maybe lay it across. And I'm cheating just enough that I have good scraps of both sides. And I'm just going to take this right under my sewing machine. And I'm going to take a quarter inch seam allowance on the top and trim it off later. Check this out. Ok, so we made a very basic straight stitch here. I'm going to choose this as now the backside now. So I'm technically going to lay my ruler here. Make a nice straight cut. And as I'm working on these kinds of free piecing, I literally press with every seam. So I'm going to come back over to my mat here and press this open. Now one of the things that I love about Jean's work is when she's doing her piecing she's using skinny strips because the skinny strips are going to flex a little bit better as we're working them in. So this big 2 ½ inch strip is going to go away. One of the options would be to go ahead and take another piece, and I'm just grabbing colors that I like the way they feel together. And maybe I want to lay that right in here and do the same thing. If you feel like you don't see things coming together, at this point, I've also taken this, laid it right down and made my cut first. Sometimes that helps us design as we go. One of the things I struggle with working in abstract is I like to plan. So I want to know where I'm going. So at first this was a little uncomfortable for me, not knowing what my real plan was. But after you get about three or four seams made, you really start to get a feel for each individual cluster. And when I say individual clusters what I'm really referring to is I'm going to build a bunch of chunks and then*

*start to cut them down as I go. So straight piecing is important for this kind of stuff. Curved piecing and gradual curved piecing is also important for our free piecing or intuitive piecing. It's almost a mouthful there.*

*Now let me show you on this piece, I've already been working on for awhile because I want to use this in a minute to add in some color. A piece like this, it's got a gradual curve going to it already. If you've watching some of my other tutorials on curved piecing, there's two ways to approach this. If I was using a narrow, narrow strip, even straight of grain, I could massage that in very nicely. But what I like to do is I like to take my fabrics. These are going to be both with our print sides up or our right sides up and now what I can do is I can actually take my cutter and real carefully, I'm going to match the curve of the lighter green fabric as I go through. And just build this gradual curve as you see it. And what you'll notice here is I'm going to take this piece and join it right here. This has a neat new curve to it which will inspire me later on if I start to run short on what to do next. Now piece this in. Taking the curved pieces a little slower. And literally as I do this I am just going to build and build and build as I go.*

*But after about six or seven green strips I need to get some color going in there. And that's where that Moda Basic Gray Grunge fabric is so awesome. And the reason I like the grunge is I can use it in a variety of different ways. Check this out. Now in the quilt behind me, and of course all of our quilts will be different, I used a variety of different assembly processes for making my color blocks. A color block like this, follow me to the quilt, you can see basically fit in right there. This one was made very simply. I basically took the grunge fabric, stacked it up fairly square like yay. Coffee's kicking in. Use my ruler and I make a slightly angled cut here. And then I just go ahead unpack this. And I begin rotating the pieces so they kind of fit back together to make somewhat of a square. And just choosing alternative colors, not letting the same one touch twice. And so I could piece this together. And it will make a fairly straight strip. Even though it's a straight strip it can still be curved pieced in, right?*

*But let me show you a couple of other ways to build color blocks because the more color variety the more interest we get out of our quilts, ok? Here's another really fun one. Coming up here, I've got a couple for us here to show. I'll get those ready now. The next style I did is I actually took and unpacked these this way and I kind of card fanned them out. Or like we do with our fancy napkins at the holiday season. And for this particular one I'm going to make two cuts at a slightly different angles. And as I was saying earlier the reason I like using this grunge fabric so much is you can see that the backside has got a solid and the front has got a bit of that texture. So while I'm building my color bands, I can actually have the option to flip things over. Now as I*

*get ready to piece these, I'm going to piece them back together in either a gradual curve formula or a very rowdy curved formula. So here we'll do gradual first, ok? So something like this is going to make a gradual curve or a gradual arc when those are pieced. And they are literally just going to be laid like this, quarter inch seam allowance. And that forms something that will look a bit like that, right? So you've got some neat angles coming together some more interest. Again we're using these to fill up in small sections. Then if you wanted it to be really radical, you're going to take these and you're going to curve by finding these ridiculous angles and stitching them together, right? To make these curves look like this. And then you can come back out of that curve going the opposite direction. They're not all going to fit exactly as you suspected as you come through there.*

*And then the last thing you really can do is have a few of your grunge fabric pieces as individual parts. And again these can be put in with the grunge part showing or they can be put in as the solid part showing. And over here on the quilt, every now and again you'll see a little splash of color like this while I'm working through so that I just have the ability to plop these in. And we don't even need to decide where they go. We're going to keep building them in. Check this out.*

*Now look at this radical curve chunk that I've made. Of course I love the way it's shaping itself out. I'm going to show you how to drop this in to some of that base sub-straight we were making, ok? So we've got this already prepared. The first thing I'm going to do is I want this color band to literally cross over a bunch of the seam allowances. And I'm going to follow the natural curve but I need to clean up both edges. So I'm going to come down here to start. I do have a really fun tutorial on curved piecing out there if you need to see more of this. What we're going to do right sides both together, er excuse me, right sides both up, right? Right sides both up. And I'm going to cut this gradual curve through all the layers first following the natural curve that I created here. Now I'm going to separate these two, oop need to push a little harder. There's going to be lots of seams in some spots. And the first piece I'm going to join are these two right here over at the machine, ok? And this is going to be a bit of a radical start for me. We'll see how it goes. So as I approach my machine I'm just going to line up my tips and I'm going to begin getting ready to gradually massage these two ends together here. I kind of hold my hands like I'm braiding, watching the outer edge. A little narrower seam allowance helps in your curves. Come around here. I use my thread cutter there. Now as I come towards the ironing surface, this time I'm going to use the tip of my iron up inside first to go ahead and set the seam as I kick it open with the back end of the iron. So how I kick it open like that. And then we're going to put the green chunk we had used right back on ok? So yes, this could fit that radius slightly but what I want to do is make something that has a little more character so the*

lines are going in different directions again. So now what I'm going to do is I'm going to lay this on top of here and I'm going to gradually cut just the curve of the color chunk, if at all possible. So I'm following the natural curve of the green but I'm cutting through into the color strips. Nice clean line there. Come back in to join those points. Back to the machine we go. And you'll notice what I left behind here, over here on the table, that is not a scrap. That is just something that we haven't used yet. But we certainly will over time. So nothing is for the waste can until it's all finished, the quilt. Take your time, you've got a lot of seams in some of these places coming together nicely. Ok, get that presser foot up, set that aside. Again, let's press this open so you can see how it's going to turn out.

The next thing that's going through my mind while I'm pressing this open is most of my seam are heading in the same direction. So we have two options at this point. One of the options would be to bring in something that I've been constructing from another cluster, I mentioned the word cluster a while ago. And I could lay that across here and make a new series of seam directions. So I would just cut this line and piece it together. That's a real easy way to keep building on. A lot of us as we get more proficient at this style of free piecing, we'll build and build and build off of one of our beginning clusters. I will admit when I was working on this project right back here I had about five really cool working clusters. But I could not figure out how to fit them together nicely. So don't know if it was desperation or frustration or I just couldn't stop stitching. What I did, and a lot of you may want to do this on your first try is if you can't figure out how to get your clusters back together simply make your clusters into small squares or rectangles. So I'm just going to take and take a straight cut here. Again, this may be useful so I'm just going to set it aside, not in my scrap bin. And then I'm just going to bounce to the other side of the ruler real quick here. Not left handed obviously, press a little harder. There we go. So now I've got more of a square or rectangle. A lot of us quilters know how to work with that square or rectangle. So then I'm going to come through and cut a couple of other shapes down. Let's say. And it wouldn't be terrible maybe if I wanted to do a triangle and a triangle. Again I don't know what I'm doing. I'm just playing and that is some of the freedom within some of this quilt work. So now that I've got all of these pieces breaking apart, I can come back in here and start to build what would be a whole new series of projects. I mean even just alone. Check this out, I've got to do it for you. Watch. If I just take this piece and I seam it right back together. I'm even going to do something different. I'm rotating to mix up my colors. If I take this and I seam it back together, watch what happens. This is so rad. Just a quick little straight seam across here for us. Now even worrying about which way the seam allowances are going right now. Back over to the board, ok? So as this presses open you can see how interesting and awesome each of the individual units become.

*So as you're working through your clusters enjoy the piecing process. If you're not exactly sure on how to set up some of your lines, that's why I want to encourage you to check out Jean's book. She actually takes you through some fantastic photographs. The way she's taken them. She uses that for color, for inspiration and for composition. And she'll teach you all these fantastic ways to do it. And better than that, at the end of the book she's got all kinds of terrific alternative piecing and finishing methods. This is my first intuitive piecing quilt that I did or my free piecing quilt. This one is actually a quilt on a quilt. Check it out, I'll lay it down. This quilt here, and it's just fairy frost and batiks in the background, is stitched to a whole other quilt that is just a solid purple obviously. And stitched with a straight seam allowance. So at any rate, free piecing is a tool we should all have in our tool box so that we are able to be creative and intuitive and enjoy the quilting process even a bit further. So while you're experimenting this week I'll be making something fantastic and catch you next time at Man Sewing.*