

One of my favorite things about free motion machine quilting is watching the whole quilt come to life with the threads and the motifs that I'm laying down while I'm doing the quilting process. But one of the things I really want to try to share with all of you today is the difference between the loft of the quilt and the crush of the quilt and the way we get the crush around the rest of our motif is by filler stitches. And one of my favorite, very very favorite filler stitches and most versatile is the circles. And the way that they play into pebbles or cobblestones. So let me show you how to do that right now.

So the art department over at Man Sewing has done a great job with this basics of free motion quilting little drill set that we have. So you see some straight lines. Look past that right now. And the link is in the description below like all of our supplies are as well. I want to focus for a little while just on what I called, learned this from Mr. Miyagi my quilting teacher, big circle, little circle. So we're going to train our brain to be able to complete a perfect circle in both directions. And then that opens up the world of anything with a curve especially pebbles and cobblestones. So before I move my big quilt out of the way. We've been working on this sampler, putting together a bunch of different motifs. You can notice the use here of just standard big circles. And they're not perfect. But they are almost round. And you can see in this section right here how just three circles does all of the quilting I need. And this is that loft that I wanted and here's the crush around it created with other filler stitches. Now as I'm putting my gloves on though let's step back a little bit and break this down for you, down to the basics. So like I said we're going to start with the drill that I call a big circle, little circle. And all you need for that is just some sort of sampler project here.

Now with my sampler sandwich here that I'm doing. It's a small sandwich. And I'm doing that on purpose just to get a rhythm. Remember I want to try to learn circles in both directions. But I do have three layers. I've got my batting and everything in there. And I'm going to be working from the top down towards me. Just because it's easiest to see what I am doing there. So right now I'm not too worried about my start and stops of my threads so I'm just going to take a few stitches to lock in my bobbin thread there. And then I'm going to come down a little ways just so I can get that thread tail cut. And then the lesson is going to start. Let's get that out of the way. Now for the first circle I am going to go ahead and the key is to complete the circle. So I'm coming all the way around because I want to be in a straight line I'm actually going to practice following that circle. And then I'm coming out of the circle and I'm doing a small circle complete. And now I'm moving directions and as I'm coming back around right here I'm following that circle again. Now let's stop for a second. I want you to notice what started to happen to my hands. I never move my hands when the machine is moving or the needle's moving but I'm getting to a

point where I'm out of grip. So I need to stop and grab my hands here. And again this is all about learning the circle. This isn't a design you'll use very often, maybe sometimes in borders. But I'm just going to do my small circle again, keeping my fingers close to that needle. Now once you've gotten the feel of going your circles in both directions we can start to close them up or tighten them up a little bit and begin thinking about how we're going to do our pebbles or our cobblestones. So let's come over here for a second and stop.

Now for cobblestones are basically the best way to do poor circles or poor circles make great cobblestones because they're all different shapes, triangles, rectangles, squares, circles all together. Pebbles are all circles. And always the key is to complete your circle. And watch what happens to the thread. I will be sewing over some of the threads and it starts to add the intensity of the color of the thread. So the first circle I'm just going to start. And now I'm not going to race away from it. I can stop right here and I can even start another circle but the key is I can't stop right there, I have to complete my circle. So completing the circle is the key and then trying to keep a variety. So we can sneak a small one in there. Now we can sneak a little bit bigger one in there. You can follow back on yourself if you need. Try not to leave too much open space in between your circles. Or if this was true cobblestone work it would be the grout, right? In between. This is a great spot for another big one. Coming back around and I really want to connect. And when you're learning to machine quilt, doing your designs a little bit larger helps you get the design down. But if you do it too big it's hard to control the quilt and if you do it too small it makes a lot of work as well as it becomes a little harder to control as well. So there's a balance I believe like in everything. Of changing of sizes and that adds interest. And of course I could do this for hours. The more of this you do or the different color thread you use, the more intense the space becomes in between the circles.

So let's talk about a few of the things we don't want to do with our circles. One of the things I generally don't do with circles is I don't do variegated thread with circles. Because variegated thread changes colors as you go and that actually takes away a little bit of the flow of the entire circle itself. One of the other things I try not to do and I'm going to do it right now to show you, is if I'm working my way back around in the circles I try not to stay in the same path too many times because it will really start to darken up the thread. Watch this. Now I'm coming back over here again and maybe I need to travel to another location. And if I work in this area for quite a while you'll start to see that that thread intensity will really build up. Now watch this. Let me pop it out of the machine so you can get a better look at it. Now as you look down on this you can actually see the intensity of the areas where I was just stitching more heavily. And I've got a really cool sample here I was working on before. And if you look at the whole sample, this is a

lot of different motifs I was playing with. You just see the basic stitching in most of them until you get right here where the circles themselves are and you really see the thread. But then you also really see the loft from a distance. It almost make it looks like it was orange fabric with the blue popping out. And that is a really fun and interesting texture that you can learn to use. So I want you to take some time and practice your circles. Don't worry if they're not perfect right? But I want you to learn to be able to do them both directions. Mr. Miyagi style, right? So that you can really get the shapes down.

And this is one of those great warm up drills that you can do before you start your real quilting each day. And the last thing I want to close with today on, is when you're doing your circles you're really testing some of your body mechanics. And you may find that in certain areas on your machine you might skip threads or break needles or something like that. We've got a cool quick tip that shows you some of that and we've built a quilter's compass basically that shows you directions and movement. But more so I want to talk about needle choices because in circles if you're using too large of an eye of a needle or too small of an eye of a needle you may find that you skip stitches in the same spot over and over because I have found that often. So I like a size 90 needle when I'm quilting when I'm new at it. And a size 80 needle as I get more and more experienced. So I hope that was some great information for you. A lot of fill on one little filler stitch but just think about it. With a little bit of practice and a lot of enjoyment, you're going to be improving with each and every stitch. And we'll catch you next time here at Man Sewing.