



HITTING THE WALL

by Ashleigh McBain

We have all been there. We have all taken on an exciting, but onerous, quilt project, only to hit a wall once (or twice or seven times) throughout the process. Maybe you reached the moment where you have to pin blocks together, or cut the same piece 100 times, or it just doesn't feel like you are seeing any progress and that vision in your head of a beautifully polished quilt slowly slips away. The remnants of the vision slide easily, and frustratingly, into the category of an unfinished object, or UFO, as we know all too well.

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As a beginner quilter, I didn't think I would ever meet this wall. I loved every step of my first few quilts. The cutting, the sewing, the piecing, even the binding—it was all a new and exciting process to a beautiful end result. I even found satisfaction in the monotony of pinning my *Around the World* quilt for nearly four hours (not that I plan to do that again any time soon, though). Then, I decided to tackle my first sampler quilt as an attempt to expand my quilting horizons and learn how to make a wide variety of blocks. Ashleigh, meet wall.

In spring 2015, I set out to create a sampler quilt to enter into my local guild's quilt show to be held in 2018. I knew I wanted to challenge myself to create something intricate and time-consuming, and I was fully prepared to work on this project for however long it took to complete. I'm not sure what happened, but somewhere along the way, for the first time in my quilting career, I packed up my project and put it away in a drawer. I was done. It needed to happen; yet somehow, I felt off balance. I felt I had failed myself in some way.

In talking to other quilters, I began to realize how common an occurrence hitting the wall is. In fact, the term UFO took on a humorous connotation in the quilting world. Eye-rolling, chuckling or at least an empathetic half-grin at the very mention of a stack of UFOs seems to be the quilting norm.

How do we get over this wall? How do we rediscover passion for a project that has lost its spark? How do we avoid our pile of unfinished projects from becoming never-finished projects?

I think the UFO is actually the answer. The reason why quilters have many unfinished projects is that it allows us to finish other unfinished projects. Clear as mud, right? Think about it the same way you might consider your dinner. If you eat chicken every night for a week, you aren't going to want to eat chicken for some time. If you mix up your meals, your craving for chicken will eventually come back.

Quilting projects are the same. If we work on the same project over and over again, monotony sets in and it's easy to get bored. Having a pile of UFOs available allows us to switch it up, to change gears and rediscover excitement in our work.

The UFO theory worked for me. After two years of slowly working my way through my sampler, taking many breaks along the way to redirect my energy to new projects, I found my way back with the verve and excitement I had originally. I wish I could say I was done. I'm not. But I did manage to finish the top last summer, and so I'm happy to say I'm now in the home stretch. What once felt like failure now feels like huge success on many levels. I learned how to create 19 new quilt blocks (only 15 were actually used in the quilt), I honed my paper-piecing skills, I developed my

understanding of colour coordination and I learned to persevere through the ups and downs of a long-term quilting project. Overall, I realized the UFO is not actually a three-letter swear word unique to the quilting world, but the answer to a quilter's "wall." After all, nobody wants to eat chicken every night of their life. 🍗



Random blocks that sat on my design wall for nearly a year before I packed them up and put them into a drawer.

FACING PAGE The finished quilt top of my sampler.