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## Big Stitch Hand Quilting with Tara Faughnan

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### Chapter 1 - Big Stitch Hand Quilting

#### Overview

(bright music) - Hi everyone, my name is Tara Faughnan and I'm a quilter, I'm a teacher and I'm a textile designer. In this class we're gonna cover big-stitch hand-quilting. We're gonna make a 20 by 20 mini quilt that you can also use as a pillow top. This is a really easy quilt to make but it's still really fun, no matter if you're a beginning quilter or an experienced quilter. We get to play with color in the quilt. There's so many threads to experiment with and we're gonna cover some of my favorites in this class.

#### Materials

- Here are the materials you'll need for this class. I have chosen about 25 different colors of cotton fabrics. You can go as little as 10 or as many as you want. The mini quilt is going to finish at 20 by 20, so here I have a piece of backing material that's 24 inches by 24 inches and a piece of batting material that's also 24 inches square. A rotary cutter. I have two different types of marking pencils for marking the quilt top for light and dark fabrics. Pins. We have assortment of threads of your choosing. Small sharp scissors, a needle threader and a thimble. Thimble, really become friends with your thimble. You don't want holes in your finger from the needle. I have pins for basting and an assortment of needles and a handy dandy little needle holder so I don't have to keep opening up the packages of needles. I have a couple of rulers. I like to use a big ruler when I'm cutting yardage, and then I like to use a small ruler when I'm cutting out the pieces for the quilt top. You'll also need a cutting mat, an iron and an ironing surface, and a sewing machine. You'll also need artist tape for basting your quilt. You can use masking tape. You could even use duct tape. I prefer artist tape because it peels off of any surface quite easily. I'm a big believer in making do. I have such a wide variety of threads, and I have a lot of different needles. But use whatever you have on hand. My rule of thumb for big stitch quilting is that if the eye of the needle is big enough to get the thread through, use it. As you experiment with different kinds of threads and become comfortable with the basics of hand quilting, you can decide what type of needle works best for you, what type of thread you prefer. But until then, experiment, have fun, use what you have on hand.

#### Piecing the bar quilt top

- For this quilt I used about 25 colors. You can use as few or as many colors as you want. You could even make this a two-color quilt. I like to cut all of my strips first and then subcut them for the quilt, and the width that we wanna cut our strips is  $4 \frac{3}{4}$  inches. That's a little larger than you might think to have a 20 by 20 inch finished quilt, and that's because when you hand quilt everything shrinks a little bit. So you wanna give yourself a little extra room, especially if you wanna make a 20 by 20 pillow top. So I'm going to cut a strip from each of my fabrics that I've chosen to play with, and you'll really only need maybe about a 10 inch by  $4 \frac{3}{4}$  strip. You might have to cut more, and you'll probably have leftovers if you choose a lot of colors like I have, but you can make two pillows. I really love to cut. I think it's one of the reasons why I started using so many fabrics and so many colors is because I could just cut all day long. And I think it's really fun when you're going to play with a quilt, and you don't have to stop and cut fabrics. You can just grab colors and go. It helps me to keep the momentum of my creative process, and I always end up using the leftovers in another

project, or they go into the scrap bin. They never go to waste. I've cut all my strips and we're ready to start playing. For this quilt you create what I call bars, and they're sets of two colors. One color is going to be cut narrow, one color is going to be cut wider. So what I like to do is pick two colors that I think go well together. And I have all of these colors to play with. I like those two together. You can decide which color goes into the wide position and which color goes into the narrow position. Be aware that my natural tendency is to always put the dark color in the wide position and the light color in the narrow position. So be aware of your natural tendency and try to switch it up a little bit, so sometimes the dark strip will be narrower. Cut it anywhere between two to 3 1/2 inches. It's really up to you, this is an easy, fun, playful quilt. And I'll usually cut about three or four pieces from each color. So the blue is the wide. The yellow I'm gonna cut between 1 1/2 and 2 1/2 inches. Really, feel free. If you wanna go down to one inch on this narrow strip, go for it. And I don't worry about cutting them all the same. This quilt is very improvisational in that way in that you can just play with the widths, you can play with the proportions. And I'll lay them out like so. I'm ready to choose two more colors. I like to fold my fabrics in half. It's more efficient when I'm cutting. For this quilt, I really only like to cut one color at a time though, because I need to choose which color is going to be wide and which color is going to be narrow. Normally I'll stack all of these together and just start cutting, but for this quilt, one color at a time. You can unfold it at any point. I'm cutting the wide pieces out of this dark maroon color, and this pale lavender is going to be the narrow piece. Experiment with these proportions, it's fun. It's a really big difference to cut something that's an inch versus 2 1/2 inches. It'll look very different. You could use the same color combination of maroon and light lavender, but you can vary the proportions. You can have the lavender be in the wide position. You can have the maroon be in the narrow position. You can make those bars really, really narrow. Do whatever is fun for you. So now I have another, what I call, bar for lack of a better word. Here I have a bunch of pieces already cut. I have more pieces than I'm going to use in this mini quilt and I'll probably end up making two. Now is the fun part of laying it out and just playing with color placement. You can make substitutions until you're happy. And because we're not measuring this quilt it might end up being a little wider than we need, but we'll just lop off the ends. Once we start sewing the bars together we'll start looking at that measurement. We want this quilt to end up being a little over 21 inches. And that's because once we baste it and start quilting it will all shrink up a little bit. The fun thing also about this pattern is that it's really flexible, so if you need to cut off the edges, if you need to trim the top to get down to the perfect size it will accommodate all of that. When I'm transitioning from one set of colors to the next I do like to go from light to dark. You can do it however you want. It's the joy of this quilt. It's open to interpretation. We're gonna need five rows total for this quilt. Here you'll see that I threw in a pink instead of a coral. I like to do little substitutions like that. I think it keeps the eye moving. It's fun, it adds a lot of interest to the quilt. I'm gonna have to make this longer, so I'll just move these down and add to this side. Because I have a lot of turquoise over there I'm gonna put this turquoise over here. And I'm gonna start with a narrow piece here and the wide piece there. Up here we have a bit of a line up, but that's fine too. Having some inconsistency in the quilt and consistency just adds interest. If I ran out of this color I would just go grab a lighter aqua and stick that in there. I think it's fun. And here I'm gonna use this narrow piece to add some interest. I might change that out later if I don't like it in there. I might need to add some there, but these all might be too long. Play with the layout until you're happy. I've got a layout here that I'm happy with and I'm ready to start sewing the bars. Bring the first two pieces of fabric to your machine. I like to layer the light fabric and the dark fabric so that the light fabric sticks out a little bit beyond the dark fabric. That way no matter which way I press the seams there won't be any

shadowing on the front of the quilt. I'm using a little bit wider than a 1/4 inch seam here. That's what the machine is set to, but a 1/4 inch seam is sufficient. First I sew everything into pairs and then I sew the pairs together into the bar. It's just the method that I've developed. Again, when I line my fabrics up I want to make sure that the light piece is even just a thread or two beyond the dark piece to avoid that shadowing. You can iron once you have a few of the bars sewn together. And I'm gonna move onto the next. You can do a little strip piecing on this quilt as well. Not cutting the threads you can just go to town with the sewing. I'm gonna sew the first two rows together and then check my measurements and see how wide my piece is going to be. I've sewn the first few sets of bars together and I'm going to press them. I like to set my seams as I press. I just find it distorts the fabric less. A little steam's always nice. On the first row I'm pressing all of the seams to the right, on the second row I'm pressing all the seams to the left. That way if anything does actually line up there won't be a bunch of bulk that I'm gonna have to quilt through. Now is the moment of truth. Is it too wide? Is it not wide enough? I haven't sewn this last seam together, but I know that it'll take up about 1/2 an inch when I sew it together. So this one will finish at about 21 1/2 inches wide. It might be a little wide. This one is gonna be much too wide. What I'm going to do with I sew these together is probably just cut that piece off right there or I might cut right here. I'm going to sew the first two rows together. I like to do these first two rows and get the measurement set, because it helps when you're sewing the next bars. We know that row is a little too long. Just going to finger press this open, so I can get a nice, good measurement. Same with the top row, I'm just gonna finger press it open. If your ironing board is handy you can just iron this at this point. Okay, let's give it a final measure. This is 21 1/4 inches wide, that's perfect. I've cut off the extra bit on my first row and now both of these measure about 21 1/4 inches wide. Continue sewing each row. Because the first row was so long maybe you just want to take off that piece and not add it in until you've sewn the whole row together, ironed it, and measured it. Then you could always add that in very easily, instead of having to cut it off.

### Making the quilt sandwich

- I have my top all sewn up, and we're ready to baste. For hand quilting, you want to baste your layers together a little bit closer together than you would for machine quilting, to account for any shifting that's happening. Hopefully as you're sitting on the couch enjoying yourself. I'm going to lay out my backing fabric. And then I like to use painter's tape or artist tape to tape it down. You want to stretch it nice and tight, but you don't want to pull it out of grain. I like to really use tape about every six inches when I'm basting. The more care you take at this stage of the process, the less wrinkles you'll have when you start quilting. I'm going to take my batting, make sure that all my bits are off, so that they won't show through the back. And smooth that out, from the center. Smooth it out. I like to have my batting a little bit smaller than the backing. Because batting gets everywhere. So I just like to have the backing a little bit wider. Really you just want, for this size quilt, maybe an extra inch around the sides. I trimmed off a little bit of batting so that the backing would extend past the batting. Smooth out your quilt starting in the center, and working your way to the corners. It's nice and smooth. You really want to get this puppy smoothed out. I'm sure if you've ever done any type of quilting, you understand those ripples that can happen. If you take your time at this stage, it can really help prevent some of that. For hand quilting, we'll be basting about every three inches. I find... Again, this is approximate. For machine quilting, I generally baste about four or five inches apart. For hand quilting, more is more. The less shifting that happens, the better. And I like to be really efficient. So I will go ahead and put in quite a few pins. This is a little trick. And then I'll

close them all at once. Make sure you baste all the way out to the edge. This is pretty close, it's about two inches. Generally, when you're basting, you want to start in the center of the quilt, and work your way out. And then start in the center of the quilt and work your way in the other direction. I'm not doing this directly on this table, because it will leave little tiny gouges in the wood. So I'm doing this on a cutting mat. At home, I do this on my floor, and my floor has definitely got some war wounds from basting. Once my quilt is basted, I just go and close all the safety pins. And you can see, it's quite heavily basted. This is really different than machine quilting. So make sure that you're hitting all three layers. I've put my pin down, and you can kind of feel the mat behind it. Or if you're basting on the floor, you'll feel the floor behind it. And then just come up again. Take your time if you're new to pin basting, and make sure that you get all three layers in that safety pin. We're done. We're gonna pull off the tape. You're gonna need to grab your ruler and your marking pencil, and we're gonna mark some quilting lines. I just lay the ruler right down on top of the quilt. I want a nice vertical line. And I mark with my light pencil. If you can't see the mark on the light fabrics... I don't want to use a lead pencil for this, because those don't always wash out. So you can come in with your blue pencil. I just skipped over the safety pins. And I'm gonna mark a few lines. These will help guide the quilting stitches. And sometimes I don't need to mark for this type of quilt, where there's a lot of vertical lines to follow. But it really helps to mark, because then it frees your mind to not worry about the line that you're following. You have a line to follow, and you can just focus on your stitching. Another little trick to use is painter's tape. It's great, it's repositionable, so if you don't want to mark your quilt top, you can just lay that down on your quilt and follow along the painter's tape. I generally don't mark the whole quilt top in the beginning, because I find that where I place my stitches, once I get them physically stitched, can help dictate where I want to put the other lines on the quilt. So I'll start with a few... Just a few guiding lines to begin. Then once I've quilted along these lines, I'll lay the quilt back out, and mark a few more lines. We're ready to quilt.

### Basic big stitch quilting

- We're ready to start quilting. I have a variety of quilting threads here. I have pearled cotton in eight weight which is a pretty standard weight for big stitch hand quilting. A lot of colors. I like to have choices. Over here I have a silky 12 weight cotton quilting thread in a wonderful variety of colors, and I have a pearl 12 weight cotton thread. They're the similar weight. They're about equal to two pieces of embroidery floss. I have some WonderFil. I have this really great thread right here. It's a pearl metal from DMC. It's really a decorative thread. I couldn't attest to how well it will stand up to wear and tear and longevity, but this is great for something that's going to go on a wall. I've got this beautiful metallic DMC thread. And then I have this whole box of goodies over here. We've got more WonderFil, the Razzle and the Dazzle. It's a really thick weight thread, adds a lot of oomph. I've got some silk thread. I've got some tatting thread. It has a higher twist than quilting cotton, but I didn't have any problems with it creating any knots. I'm going to show you all the stitches that they create and the different types of needles that I used with each thread. I'm going to start with the silky twelve weight. It's a pretty standard twelve and eight weight thread for hand quilting. I like the smaller thread a lot. And I cut a piece about maybe 18 inches long. The longer you cut your thread, the more it will tend to knot. I have my handy-dandy little pincushion here. It keeps my most used needle sizes in there rather than continuing to open up the different needle cases. I generally use a size six. You can start with a larger needle. I use a needle threader. It makes life very easy. I also have a magnetic thimble, and it kind of holds the needle in place. It's great. I would recommend trying a couple of different types of thimbles. You want it to be nice and snug and not fall off your

finger. When you're starting at the edge of the quilt, you can either back stitch in place or you can make a knot. You come in to the fabric maybe an inch away from where you want to start. Come up into your starting position. I do not like to place my thread right close to the edge because when you're squaring up the quilt when you're done quilting, you don't want to cut that thread off. So you could even start a quarter inch away. That's where the binding's going to be. That's where the seams gonna be. That way you don't have to worry about cutting your thread when you're squaring up your quilt. Give it a little tug. You want the thread to go under the batting, and you want that knot to get caught right there under the batting. It's firmly in place. This is a really basic stitch. I'm just gonna place my needle straight down, and my other hand is behind the quilt. And I have my middle finger waiting, and I go down. The needle touches my middle finger, and then I rock it back up. When you're beginning to quilt, or at least what I did, was I just did one stitch at a time. I felt the whole trying to get a bunch of stitches on my needle was really unwieldy, and I came up with really crooked stitches. So when you're beginning, just go down. Let that needle graze your finger on the back, then just rock it back up. Don't pull your stitches too tight. You don't want that. Creates all kinds of tension issues. Your quilt will shrink a little bit from this quilting, same as with machine quilting. It shrinks the quilt. Come back up. When you're feeling comfortable with that stitch and the length is really up to you. You'll find a natural length that you just tend to start sewing in. That's your length. You can vary it. You can go bigger; you can go smaller. Once you've warmed up, just rock that needle up and down, get a few stitches on and pull it through. It usually takes me about five or ten minutes to really get warmed up, just like with machine quilting where you might want to have a practice sandwich to start quilting with until you're warmed up. You can make a practice sandwich or you can just dive right in. I generally dive right in and know that my stitches are going to even out as I warm up. When you come to a safety pin, sometimes your needle will hit the pin and you'll get a funky stitch so I just take it out. For this little mini-quilt, what I will generally do is cut the thread longer than the top so that I don't have to start and stop in the middle. But I want to show you guys how to start and stop in the middle of a quilt because if you do a bigger project, it's definitely gonna come up. There's many different ways to make knots. This is how I like to do it. I make a knot. I put my needle here, and I just help place that knot right snug against the fabric. Now, this is a light colored fabric right here. If I place that thread right underneath there, you might see the little thread bits. What you want to do is go right back into that hole you came out of and go underneath the batting but not through the back, especially if you're working on a white area. This thread will show if you don't go underneath the batting. Then just give it a little tug until it's buried. Don't clip too close to your quilt top. And that's how you end in the middle of a quilt. To start a row of quilting in the middle of a quilt I'll make a knot. This is a twelve weight thread so I do like to make a double knot just to make sure my thread doesn't pop back out. I place my other hand behind the quilt. If you're right-handed, you're gonna be doing this opposite. You're going to be quilting with your right hand and your left hand is going to be behind the quilt. I just place the needle into the quilt sandwich, and it's in between the back of the quilt and the batting right there because we don't want that thread to show through our light fabric. And I just come up right back into that line of stitching. I give it a little tug. When you're learning how to hand quilt, be sure to check the back of your quilt when you start and stop in the middle. When I first started, I thought that I was sticking my needle and thread right between the batting and the backing, but really when I looked on the back of the quilt, the thread was sticking out of the backing. So just double check when you start and stop. Now just rock that needle up and down. I've found that in order to get nice, even stitches on the back, if I really bring that needle up vertical and then I use my thumb to indent the fabric in



the front so that the needle can be pretty vertical as it's coming back up, I get pretty nice, even stitches on the back. Do not worry about perfect stitches when you're learning how to quilt. Just quilt. A few hours in, your stitches are really going to even out. Let's take a look at the back of the quilt. Pretty nice. You can see here where I was warming up. And you can see here where I've been quilting for a few minutes and my stitches are starting to get a little bit more even. Also I find quilting on the edge of the quilt is harder. Start in the middle, and it's a little bit easier. You have more fabric to hold onto. So here's the basic stitch again. Thimble on the needle, rock it up, let it graze that finger behind. Use your thumb to press down in front and bring the needle back up. That is your basic quilting stitch, and you get to determine how big or how small your stitches are. Also the type of thread that you use will help determine that. If you're using a really thick thread like I'm gonna show you with this WonderFil, the small stitches, I don't think they look as good as the big stitches. The bigger the stitch, it really showcases that big, fat thread. If you pull your thread too tight like this and you start getting wrinkles, just use your fingers to smooth that out. Sometimes you might need to come in with the back of your needle to kind of loosen up the thread. We're coming to the end of our stitching, and we're going to tie off about a quarter inch away from the edge. I make a loop and just guide it with my needle right down there next to the fabric. I insert the needle right back into the hole that I came out of, through the batting. Check to make sure that we're not showing on the back. Give it a gentle tug. Just give it a clip. And our first line of stitching is done. Here I have WonderFil Dazzle thread. It's a really beautiful rayon metallic thread that gives a lot of bang for your buck in your quilt. It's quite thick. And for this thread, you wanna use a chenille needle. I use a size 22. Again, I will just make sure that I have enough thread, a little extra to go the length of the quilt. This thread is so thick that you do not need to tie more than one knot. I wouldn't recommend it. You won't get it through your fabric. So we're going to tie a knot. Place one hand behind your quilt. You want to go down behind your batting, come back up. This thread definitely is not quite as easy to work with in terms of gliding through the fabric so you have to give it a little bit more of a tug. Same stitch, but I'm going to make it a little bit wider to really showcase that beautiful metallic thread. You go down. Give it a little tug, come back up. This thread, you don't really want to load a bunch of stitches on your needle for. If you're quilting through a really thin fabric, it's easier. If you've got a nice thick cotton on there, there can be a little bit more resistance. But again, it doesn't hurt my fingers to quilt with it, and I quilted... Well, I quilted a mini-quilt with it so it was about 30 by 30, 40 by 40, something like that. And it was great. It's got a beautiful glitter to it. We're coming to the end of our stitching row, and you can see that the thread is getting quite a bit frayed at the end which is why I often cut my thread quite a bit longer than necessary when I'm using these specialty threads. You're going to tie this off just as you would with regular thread. I'm getting close to the end so I'm gonna come down and come up pretty close 'cause I don't want to risk cutting my threads off. When you get to the end of the line of stitching, tie a knot, insert it into the quilt, pull it through with a little tug. There's one more thread I want to show you guys that's not your typical quilting cotton. I want to show you metallic thread because there's a few tricks to using metallic thread to prevent fraying. I'm going to try our number six embroidery. It might be too small. You don't want to stress the metallic thread out by putting it into a needle that is too small because it will get kinked. It will fray. Let's see. That went through just fine. Okay, the thing that I really want you to know about metallic thread is it will get a kink wherever you're pulling it through. If you do not move the thread through the eye in different places, it will kink and eventually break while you're quilting. Make sure the needle does not stay in the same place along the thread the entire line of quilting. Give it a little tug. If you have a tail sticking out, just pull it back out and snip it. Same

stitch. I'm going to do it a little bit bigger because I want to see more of the metallic thread. Go down and up. Let's see how this needle... Oh, it pulled through really well so I'm not gonna worry about using a larger needle. If you have a lot of resistance, go up a size. You can buy great variety packs of embroidery needles, and it's good for starting because it let's you experiment with different size needles and find the one that's comfortable for you and works best with the thread you're using. Beautiful. What you guys might notice as you're quilting is that your thread starts to really twist. And you'll see it on the top of your stitches. So I will just unwind it, even it out, and make sure that I put the needle in a new place on the thread. And I'll keep sewing. We're coming to the end of our row of stitching. I really love this bronzy, metallic thread. I'm getting close to the edge so I'm going to go down and come back up right close so that I don't cut my threads off when I square up the quilt. Tie a loop and use your needle to snug it right up against the fabric. I find with metallic threads, one knot is generally just fine. Go in beneath the batting, come back up and give it a little tug. If your tug has created some tension, you can just use the back of your needle to loosen that up. Cut it off. I made myself a little sampler of all the different threads that I have, and I wish I had done this years ago. It's so helpful. I have the thread name, and I have what size needle I used with it. That's always a problem for me when I leave a project for a couple of months and come back. It's, "What needle was I using?" Super helpful. This row is that WonderFil Dazzle. I used a chenille 22 needle. I also showed you the silky twelve weight, and I used a number six embroidery needle. You might want to use a number four. Please experiment. Find the needle that works for you. This is that beautiful metallic DMC Diamant. I used an embroidery number six. I also have the DMC number eight and the DMC number twelve. For the number eight, I used an embroidery number four needle. I had to go quite big for that size thread. For the DMC number twelve, I used an embroidery number six needle. Here I have this Guterman beautiful silk thread, and it quilts so smooth. I used a larger needle, an embroidery number four with that. This is WonderFil regular Razzle. Not the Dazzle, it's Razzle. It's the same weight as the Dazzle, and I used a chenille number 22 with that as well. I found this really cute little tatting thread, and I couldn't resist these tiny balls. It's wound a little bit tighter than these threads, but I didn't have any problems with knotting which was my concern. And I used an embroidery number eight. The last thread that I wanted to show you, a DMC metallic pearl. I used an embroidery number four, larger needle. You want to use a short length with this thread just as we did with the other metallic thread. And what I do is just like with embroidery thread, I unwind it, and I just use... And it's very twisty. I just use one strand at a time. It's got a lot of sheen. Again, with the other metallic thread, this was for decorative stitching. Here I have my finished quilt top. I'm gonna measure it and make sure it's nice and square, and then I'm gonna cut off the excess batting and backing. I have 21 rows of quilting in this quilt. You can follow the manufacturer's instructions on your batting. Maybe you don't want to do 21 rows. You could probably get away with doing it four or five inches apart if that's your preference. Once I start quilting, I really can't stop. You'll see in some places I've quilted maybe a little bit quarter of an inch apart. Other places it's an inch and a half. I like the look of randomly placed quilting lines which is why I start with a few lines, quilt them up, lay the quilt down, and mark a few more lines and quilt those up. For these lines that are echoing, I didn't draw out a mark for them. I just followed the existing line of stitching. We've made a beautiful bars quilt and you've learned the basic hand quilting using a big stitch. Now it's up to you to experiment and explore.