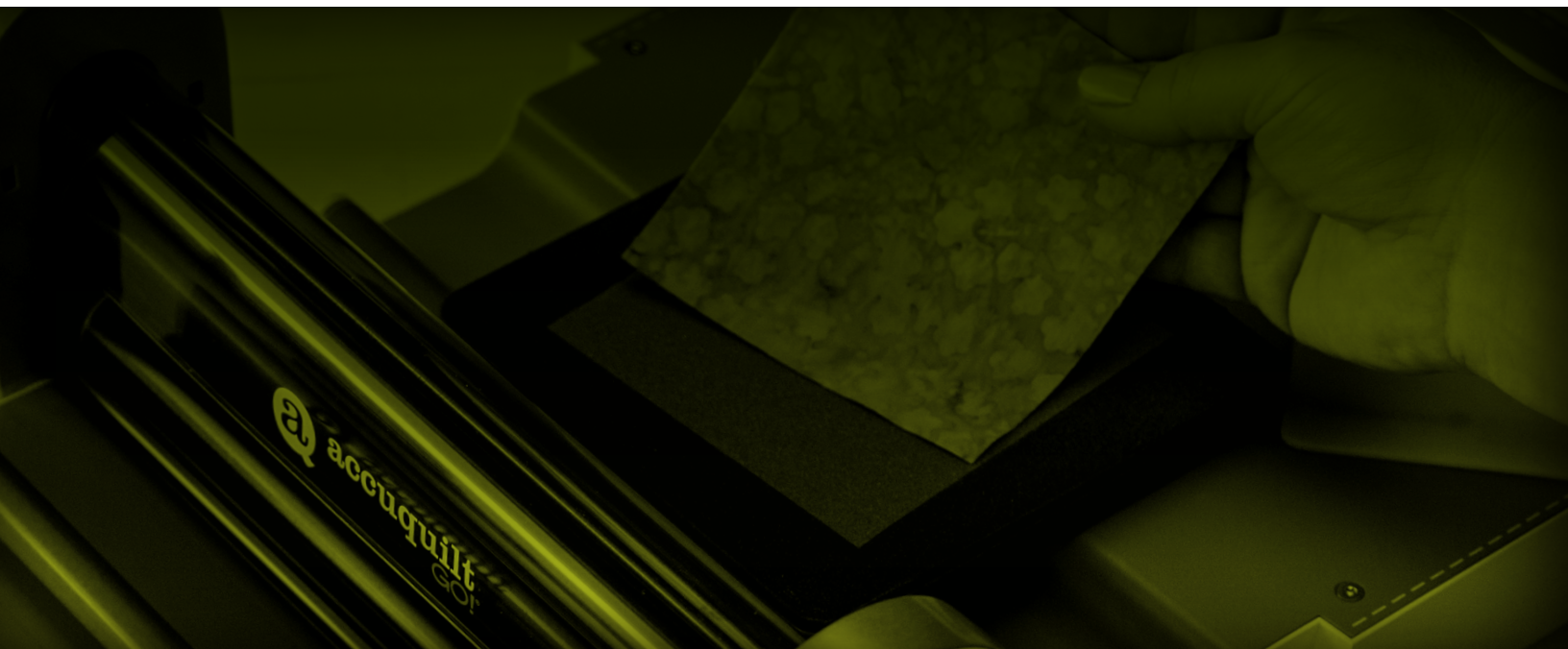




THE EVOLUTION OF FABRIC CUTTING

Scissors. Rotary. Rolling Pin.



A SPECIAL REPORT
FOR QUILTERS & CRAFTERS



 **accuquilt**[®]



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ABSTRACT

Thousands of years have passed since the first pieces of fabric were quilted. Throughout much of that great span of time, though, quilting methods have remained largely unchanged. It wasn't until the advent of the rotary cutter, in the early 1980s, that scissors finally faded into the quilting backdrop. Indeed, the rotary cutter represented the wave of the future in its time.

Then, only when Steve Nabity was theoretically struck by a rolling pin did the finest innovation in fabric cutting finally come to fruition. Today, Nabity's company, AccuQuilt, is dedicated to consistently raising the bar in cutting, allowing quilters to focus on the aspects of quilting they truly cherish.

*The heart of a quilter
is stitched together
of dreams and
adventures.*

INTRODUCTION

The heart of a quilter is stitched together of dreams and adventures, of sorrows, determination, and joy. Through each period in quilting history, quilters have had unique stories to tell. Those stories were – and are still today – reflected in their quilts. And a quilt, like its creator, is composed of more than meets the eye. Before it becomes a beautiful finished piece, though, it is first but fabric and thread. And even before the two should meet, the fabric is lovingly and meticulously – if painstakingly – cut by a quilter. In fact, quilters' stories are not reflected only in the finished product but also in their quilting methods – methods that have improved dramatically with time and innovation. Indeed, the evolution of fabric cutting is as storied as quilting history, as detailed as an intricate pattern, and as fascinating as the life, love, and laughter that together create each quilt.



■ FABRIC CUTTING: A HISTORY

The origins of quilting and fabric cutting can be traced back to ancient civilizations. Thousands of years ago, vegetable fibers were woven together to create clothing textiles. Then, as early as 5000 B.C., linen (made of flax) was quilted together to become lightweight Egyptian clothing. Interestingly, the ancient Egyptians are also often credited with the advent of the first iteration of scissors, so the scissor cutting methods are almost as traditional and historical as fabric itself. These scissors bore quite a resemblance to the scissors still used to this day. However, similar fabrics, cutting tools, and textile remnants were also discovered in China, and scholars dated these to the same time period, so the early history of quilting is as diverse as the quilts of today.

The earliest surviving bedquilt on record was crafted in Sicily in the late 14th century.

It's believed that the Crusades catapulted quilting from these earliest civilizations to Europe in the Middle Ages. The Muslims wore quilted clothing underneath their armor, and the European soldiers took note. Over time, quilted clothing – and eventually decorative panels and bedcoverings – became popular in Italy, France, and England. The earliest surviving bedquilt on record was crafted in Sicily in the late 14th century. The Tristan Quilt was created as a wedding gift, as part of a Tristan and Isolde pair, and it is now properly preserved for posterity in the Victoria and Albert Museum in London (Breneman, 2001).

Colonists, of course, brought their traditions with them to the Americas. In the late 17th century, at the height of intrigue and hysteria in Salem, Massachusetts, a far more comforting – and far less documented – piece of history was being crafted in the very same township. This is the earliest lasting reference to American quilts.

At this time, quilts were often made of fabric salvaged from a previous use, which would have negated the necessity of starting from scratch with cutting, in some cases. This method likely made the quilting process smoother and less time-consuming for quilters of the day. However, considering the extra love given to the materials over the generations, these pieces simply couldn't hold up against the test of time. According to Julie Johnson of Emporia State University, "The earliest surviving American pieced quilt is the Saltonstall quilt from 1704. Historians were able to date the Saltonstall quilt in an unusual way."



In that time period, quilters cut pieces from newspaper, joining the pieces together as a liner before adding fabric. The Saltonstall fabric eventually showed wear, revealing dates on the newspaper, published in the early 1700s. Based on the history of the materials, though, it may have been finished later (Johnson, 2017).

It wasn't long before the settlers moved west, taking their love of quilting to the Great Plains, where quilting bees and perhaps the first pieces of Americana crafting and folklore were ideologized. Thanks were owed, in part, to patient quilters, pencil marks, and scissors.

The first rotary cutter, introduced in 1979.

PROGRESS IN THE '70s & '80s

So, through these thousands of years, while the world around the quilter changed dramatically, as did the threads, the fabrics, and the products created by the two, techniques remained the same. The quilter spent weeks tracing the patterns and shapes of paper templates with pencil, then tediously cutting materials with a critical eye and a steady hand, lest a minor mistake be made that could derail the project. Fabric had to be cut one layer at a time. Precision was imperative and scissors were rarely sharp enough or strong enough to cut through thicker layers. Quarter-inch seam allowances, too, were added to the backside of the fabric with pencil, the marks of which often showed through, making the methodology increasingly problematic.

Change was finally implemented in the 1970s, when quilters began to use cardboard templates and sandpaper on boards to get the most accurate cut. Still, though, scissors were capable of cutting only one layer of fabric at a time, if the fabric was to be cut properly. While scissors were certainly less than ideal, they were still the only option, and, at that time, they served their purpose. Quilters knew – and had available to them – no better way.

Rotary cutters and Mylar plastic templates made their respective debuts in the quilting world in the early 1980s. The first rotary cutter, introduced in 1979, was used to create clothing, though just a short time later it was found to be equally effective in quilting. Still sometimes used by traditional quilters today, the rotary cutter is a hand-held tool with a circular, rotating blade.

Its advent sparked a new demographic to learn the craft of quilting. In fact, it transformed the art of quilting at the time, making cutting simpler, slightly faster, and often more accurate.

Mylar, a trademarked group of plastics made from the resin Polyethylene Terephthalate (PET), a form of polyester, created an opportunity for the meticulous quilter to be even more precise in his or her cutting. Yet, the cutting process was undeniably cumbersome. The ¼-inch seam allowances were still drawn with pencil, and scissors still completed the work the rotary cutter could not. Cutting a quilt effectively still often took weeks from the start to the completion.

Cutting a quilt effectively still often took weeks...

Shortly thereafter, thin acrylic templates appeared on the scene, giving the rotary cutter another shot at glory by allowing it to cut more precisely and efficiently around larger shapes. Small and complex cuts, of course, still demanded the use of scissors, along with pencils to note the ¼-inch seam allowances.

By the mid-1980s, strip piecing and machine piecing quilts called for both acrylic rulers and rotary cutters. With the combination of these tools, efficiency improved. Indeed, an impressive four layers could be cut at a time. However, even with these quicker methods, quilters continued to spend weeks on cutting alone. Rulers also moved easily, even if only slightly, ruining perfect measurements and leading to inaccurate cuts. Though frustrating, this was the least offensive of the possible mishaps.

Indeed, accidents with rotary cutters were fairly common. First, dropping a rotary cutter on another object could damage it significantly. More importantly, though, accidents caused injuries. Though directional cutting – cutting away from oneself – was an unofficial rule of thumb, it wasn't always followed, leading to injuries. The rotary cutter could also easily slip and cut a finger, or it could be dropped and land on a foot, resulting in minor cuts to more serious injuries, such as sliced arteries. Even when cutting on the floor, appendages sometimes managed to get in the way, so sliced arms and legs were certainly not unheard of.

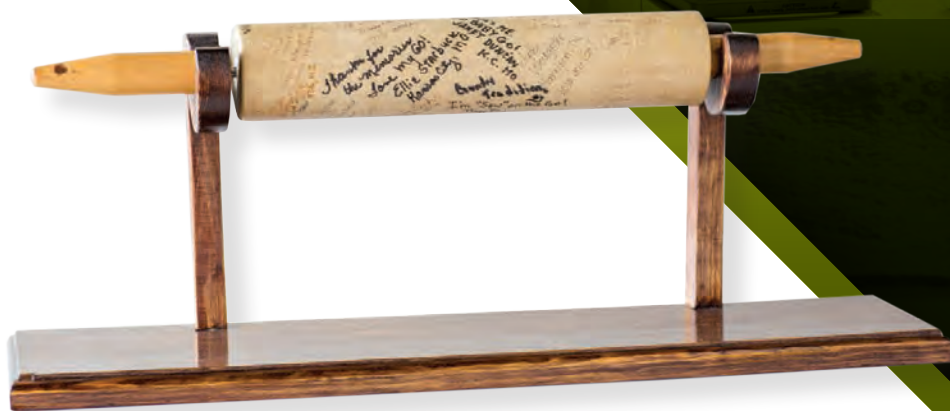
While it seems counterintuitive to think of dull blades as being a catalyst for injury, they were often, in fact, the primary cause. Dull blades caused the quilter to work harder, pressing harder into the mat beneath and making it more difficult to maintain control of the blade.

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Dull or sharp, though, it was imperative that the blade be retracted or sheathed when not in use. Whether or not this rule was properly followed, rotary cutters were not safe enough to be left in the unsupervised presence of children. And while rotary cutters were – and are still today – a staple in many quilting households, these issues continue to be problematic. Innovation in the industry halted, though, and little changed in fabric cutting over the next many years.

INNOVATION & THE BIRTH OF ACCUQUILT

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Meanwhile, Steve Nabity, an MBA-educated, Omaha-based mechanical and sales engineer by trade, was searching for the inspiration to create a machine that would efficiently cut shapes in paper. As inspiration tends to do, it came to him in the most unexpected of times. As Nabity watched his wife cut cookie dough with a rolling pin, he experienced an epiphany: perhaps a similar rolling mechanism could cut paper just as seamlessly as it cut through cookie dough.

He was absolutely right; it does. AccuCut was founded in 1990 and quickly discovered its niche in the popular paper crafting industry. The company experienced success and growth over the next several years. Soon, though, Nabity discovered that this cutting method could go one step further – it could perfectly cut fabric. He founded AccuQuilt in 2008 and soon introduced the earliest version of the GO! Cutting Machine. Along with his trusted team of quilt lovers, Nabity has endlessly endeavored to meet the needs and desires of quilters across the world since that time (think: dies with ¼ inch seam allowances – and dog-eared corners).

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*Cuts fabric
up to 90%
faster than
rotary cutters
and scissors.*

THE GO!® CUTTING MACHINES

In 2008, when the GO!® Cutting Machine launched, there were no comparable items on the market. Quilters were instantly enamored of this product, marveling at the newfound ease and efficiency of fabric cutting, particularly in comparison to the methods they had grown accustomed to over the decades before. Suddenly, they were able to reduce cutting time from weeks to merely hours, even for complex quilts with intricate shapes and patterns. AccuQuilt continued to listen to its consumer base, reinventing its product as needs were identified. Additional products were introduced over time, as well. Not only did AccuQuilt customers find value in a new variety of cutting machines, but AccuQuilt leaders found that they also appreciated new lines of dies and accessories. The company is dedicated to continuing to streamline the quilting process, offering ideas, tutorials, other resources, and even free patterns on its website. Their primary area of expertise, of course, is still the cutting machine. Four machines are now available on the market: the GO!® Fabric Cutter, the GO! Baby® Fabric Cutter, the GO! BIG® Electric Fabric Cutter, and the behemoth of the master cutters, the Studio 2™ Fabric Cutter.



GO!®

The GO!® Fabric Cutter is the modern iteration of the original product. In dramatic contrast to tools of the past, the GO! Fabric Cutter cuts up to six layers of fabric at one time – and it does so precisely, accurately, and safely. After lining up the fabric with the cutting mat and die, a quilter simply pushes the fabric, die, and mat with a firm hand through the roller. The portable, lightweight machine (weighing in at 15 lbs.), folds and offers a handle for ease of storage and mobility. The process is incredibly simple and quick, saving valuable time for both the beginner and the most advanced quilter. Indeed, it cuts fabric up to 90% faster than rotary cutters and scissors.

FEATURES & BENEFITS

- 90% faster than rotary cutters or scissors
- Accurate cuts every time
- Safe, easy-to-use design helps to reduce hand and arm strain
- Cuts up to 6 layers of 100% cotton fabric at a time
- Unlimited design options with wide selection of GO! dies
- Portable and easy to store
- Double roller design provides clean cuts
- Rubber feet grip and hold cutter in place while cutting
- Easy-lift carrying handle for easy transport to classes, guild meetings, retreats, quilting bees – or even on vacation
- Comfortable roller handle grip is easy and safe, eliminating arthritis, wrist, shoulder and elbow pain, and backaches caused by using a rotary cutter
- Innovative, easy-clean design with high-gloss exterior surface and light-colored work surface
- Cutter weighs only 15 pounds
- Boxed weight is 20 pounds



GO!

baby®

Similarly, the GO! Baby® Fabric Cutter saves time and frustration. As the name implies, it is smaller and as easy to use as the GO!®, making it the perfect cutting machine for those new to the quilting craft. It, too, cuts up to six layers at one time. And at just 8.5 pounds, it's easy to take with you wherever you go.

FEATURES & BENEFITS

- 90% faster than rotary cutters or scissors
- Accurate cuts every time
- Safe, easy-to-use design helps to reduce hand and arm strain
- Cuts up to 6 layers of 100% cotton fabric at a time
- Unlimited design options with wide selection of GO! dies
- Portable and easy to store
- Double roller design provides clean cuts
- Rubber feet grip and hold cutter in place while cutting
- Easy-lift carrying handle for easy transport to classes, guild meetings, retreats, quilting bees – or even on vacation
- Comfortable roller handle grip is easy and safe, eliminating arthritis, wrist, shoulder and elbow pain, and backaches caused by using a rotary cutter
- Innovative, easy-clean design with high-gloss exterior surface and light-colored work surface
- Cutter weighs only 8.5 pounds
- Boxed weight is 10.5 pounds



GO! BIG®

The GO! BIG® Electric Fabric Cutter provides a sizeable surface and the ability to cut two dies at the same time, side-by-side, with up to six layers each. The machine turns on and off with just the push of a button, and after the fabric is given a gentle nudge forward, the roller automatically propels the pieces through the cutter. This is AccuQuilt's biggest and fastest cutter for the residential quilter, yet it's just as safe and simple as the other options.

FEATURES & BENEFITS

- AccuQuilt's fastest cutter
- Cuts two 6-inch wide dies, side by side, at a time
- Accurately cuts up to 6 layers of fabric
- Safe and simple, alleviating strain
- Compatible with all GO! Dies
- Electric and fully automatic for ease of use
- AccuQuilt's largest home-based system
- Cuts dies up to 14 inches wide.
- Built-in safety features
- Folds for portability and easy storage
- Coordinates with GO! Fabric Cutter Tote & Die Bag
- GO! BIG weighs 23 pounds
- Boxed weight is 28 pounds

The Studio 2™ Cutter is the largest fabric cutter on the market. Industrial in terms of its productivity, the Studio 2 Cutter offers the ability to cut multiple dies at one time, in up to ten layers each. The Studio 2 Cutter is an ideal machine for quilt and craft shops, while experts and ultra-devoted home quilters will also wonder how they ever lived without it.

FEATURES & BENEFITS

- Up to 90% faster than rotary cutters or scissors
- Steel roller never needs replacing, withstands years of die cutting use
- Dies cut into reusable sheets of cutting plastic, which provide hundreds of uses
- Hand-operated fabric die cutter uses steel-rule dies to quickly and accurately cut shapes for quilting and fabric crafts
- Hundreds of shapes to choose from: classic designs, circles, hexagons, flowers, strips, rag quilt shapes, quilt block sets, and many more
- Cuts all types of fabrics: cotton, batiks, flannel, fleece, wool, denim, and even leather
- Dies never need sharpening
- No lubrication is necessary and all bearings are sealed
- All 12-inch finished block dies include seam allowance
- Accommodates AccuQuilt giant and super giant dies
- Studio 2 Cutter weighs 32 pounds
- Boxed weight is 42 pounds

WHICH IS THE BEST FIT FOR YOU?

Each fabric cutting system produces beautiful, accurately cut shapes with each cut. These cutters are not only safe and efficient for all users, they also provide benefits to quilt makers who may have difficulties performing the necessary preparatory tasks. Quilters with arthritis and other ailments of the hands and fingers, quilters with sight limitations, and quilters who are perhaps not as spry as they once were, can use these systems with relative ease. Not only does the process save time in cutting, it also allows the quilter to spend both time and energy on the quilting itself – and then on the results of the thorough process of quilting with love. The products bring great joy to quilters, which, in turn, brings the same joy to the AccuQuilt team.

*Produce beautiful
and accurate
shapes with
each cut.*

How does a quilter decide which machine is best for his or her own household? AccuQuilt wants to help each person find that answer, so they have provided a helpful video discussion to use as a guide. (Additionally, the team offers many project tutorials to access when the cutter arrives.)

Questions to ask oneself include:

- 1) What types of projects am I creating?
- 2) How often do I make these projects, and how much time do I spend on each?
- 3) Do I have space limitations? Will I prefer to store it away?
- 4) Would it be useful to take it along when I travel?

Your answers to these questions will help you determine which cutting machine is best for you and your quilts. The AccuQuilt team is also eager to help quilters with any questions they may have.

CONCLUSION

Once you've discovered which is your perfect fit, it's time to take your fabric cutter home and get to cutting. Don't be surprised if, perhaps for the first time, you find cutting fabric an absolute pleasure. In the end, though, it's not simply the cuts that make the new quilting experience special. Whether the finished quilt hangs on the wall as a tapestry, comforts a toddler as he cries, reminds a young lady longingly of her grandmother, or warms a family on a cold winter's night, there are memories to be made with each finished quilt. And the more efficiently the fabric is cut, the sooner you'll get to those experiences.

Remember, a quilter, like a writer, a painter, or a musician, has a striking story to tell. That story is built of triumph and tragedy, of struggles and strength, of bold dreams and beautiful memories. Yet, it is also crafted of mere thread and fabric – fabric that is carefully cut by the quilter. And though it must still be precise, cutting is no longer the tedious task of yesteryear. The evolution of fabric cutting is exciting, indeed, yet it doesn't hold a pair of scissors compared to the future of your cutting with AccuQuilt.

*There are
memories
to be made
with each
finished
quilt.*

RESOURCES

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