



TEXTILE ARTREPRENEUR

JAMIE  
FINGAL

TEXTILE ART BUSINESS INTERVIEWS

WITH CLARA NARTEY

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# FABRIC DESIGN (FROM SKETCHBOOK DRAWINGS) - AN INTERVIEW WITH JAMIE FINGAL

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# Clara Nartey Interviews Jamie Fingal

Jamie is a full-time artist, an avid illustrator, and a sewer. She's a curator for the [Dinner at Eight Artists](#), a quilt artist, a teacher, and a fabric designer. It's my pleasure to welcome Jamie Fingal to the blog today.

CN: Hi Jamie, it's my pleasure to have you on the blog.

JF: I am happy to be here. Thanks for asking me.

## The Beginnings of A Creative Journey for Jamie Fingal



"Hopscotch" Fabric Line by Jamie Fingal

CN: What drew you to working with fabrics? There are so many artistic media, what about fabrics attracted you to working with them?

JF: My grandmother taught me how to sew at an early age and I really loved it. The fact that you could take a piece of fabric and cut it up to create a piece of doll clothing and have that sense of accomplishment and wonder is what grabbed my imagination.



I made my own clothes for years, before embarking into quilting.

CN: I noticed that [your new fabric line “Hopscotch”](#) was just released. How did you become a fabric designer? Is it something you’d aspired to become, worked at becoming, or did it sort of happen?

JF: It was always a dream of mine. I was asked if I was interested, and I gladly said yes!

The wheels in my head began to turn at the possibilities. The thing is that someone believed in me, and all I had to do was believe in myself. I could do this!

## Behind the Scenes Look at How to Create a Fabric

CN: And you did, Jamie. You did!!! Give us a behind-the-scenes look at how to create a fabric design. What’s the process? Where does the inspiration for your designs come from? How do you start and what do you do to end up with a beautiful fabric design?

JF: It started with my sketchbooks where my designs are about 1” square.

Most of these designs come from my imagination or are inspired by my environment. Nature, home, textures, objects and things that I love.

CN: Did you say your sketches are 1 inch in size? Why that small? I also love to sketch quite regularly. But surely, 1-inch sketches must be challenging. How do you pack detail into a 1-inch square?

JF: My [Moleskine Storyboard sketchbook](#) has small sections.





A Sketchbook Page by Jamie Fingal

CN: Got it. Please continue. So, after you're done sketching, then what next?

JF: The two artists that I worked with at [RJR Fabrics](#) went through all of my sketchbooks and selected what they thought would make good fabrics.

I drew the designs on paper, [RJR Fabrics](#) scans them, adds color, and then I got to see paper printouts of my line.



That was an exciting moment.

Then the designs are sent to the manufacturing facility to make strike-offs, which are 5" squares of what the fabric could look like.

Then all of us check for clarity and color.

The changes are made and another set is made. If there are no changes, the fabric is printed.

## The Fabric Design Tools Jamie Fingal Uses



"Hopscotch" - A Fabric Line by Jamie Fingal for RJR Fabrics

CN: That's quite a multi-step process. Jamie, so what about tools? What are you using to create your designs? Types of pens and paper? Paints? Do you ever use a digital drawing tablet?

JF: I am old school and I want to draw directly on paper to create my designs. Someone gave me some advice years ago to keep drawing with a pen



Someone gave me some advice years ago to keep drawing with a pen to paper, and not use a computer.

It's pure art from head, to heart to pen, to paper. I use a [Sharpie Extra Fine Point Pen](#), erasers, mechanical pencils, and [mixed media paper](#).

For other lines, I turn in pen on paper designs, as well as, designs that are painted with watercolors, so that [RJR Fabrics](#) can have a sense of what my color palette is.

CN: So, what are the skills someone needs in order to be able to create fabric designs?

What Skills Do You Need to Design Fabrics?

JF: The great thing about being a fabric designer is that there isn't just one way to design fabrics.

Artists who do surface design, fabric collage, block printing, stencils, and paint, just to name a few, me, and others who prefer pen to paper - everyone is welcome to the table.

For me, I draw every day to hone in on my skills.

I challenge myself to not use a pencil. That has been a huge growth experience for me.

CN: Jamie, you're absolutely right about the different paths to fabric design.

In my [interview with Jeni Baker](#), she states that drawing is not her strong suit. But one look at her fabric designs and you'll know that the lack of strong drawing skills does not in any way hinder you from becoming a great fabric designer.



Let's talk about creative freedom and designing for a fabric company.

How much creative freedom do you have when designing for a company? Do you feel like your creativity is stifled or not?

JF: I have a lot of freedom. Potential designs are discussed way ahead of time.

We all need to be happy with the designs. I don't feel stifled. [RJR Fabrics](#) has been an excellent fit for me. I feel like I can spread my wings.

[My fabric line - Hopscotch](#) has 11 hand-drawn designs and comes in 84 colors. I smile every time I think about it.

I was given a great opportunity to create a 'basics' line with my signature drawings.

One of my designs - Triangle Symphony - was drawn with a pen, and not a pencil and it has two squares in it. I wanted them left in because I love the imperfection of it.

## The Intricacies of Promoting Your Fabric Line

CN: What exactly is involved in promoting your fabric line? Are all the marketing activities in conjunction with the fabric company or do you do some marketing independently?

JF: Working with RJR Fabrics' marketing plan, I could create a marketing plan for myself.

Social media plays an important role here. I started talking about my line as soon as the fabric was delivered (3 months before market) on Facebook, Instagram, and my blog.





A Quilt Designed with Fabrics from "Hopscotch" - A Fabric Line by Jamie Fingal

I wanted to have a consumer-driven plan so that people who follow me would ask their local quilting stores to carry my line.

I figure every bit helps in some way.

RJR Fabrics markets a line a few weeks before market. And continues to talk about my fabric line on social media and in their catalogs as they are published.



## Step-by-Step Plan to Creating Your Own Fabric Designs

CN: You're an artist, a fabric designer, an author, a teacher, and more. For someone who wants to expand their service offerings to include one or more of these options, what can you say to them about fabric designing in particular?

JF: Look at your strengths in an artistic way.

- △ What can you bring to the table? Make a plan.
- △ Be able to verbalize who you are and what you create. Are you passionate about your artwork?
- △ Research fabric companies online to see which ones would be a good fit for you.
- △ Go to [Quilts, inc](#) to find out the criteria for getting into Quilt Market. It's in the Spring (location changes) and in the Fall (Houston).
- △ Create a portfolio of your work and how it would translate to fabric. (You could even have your designs printed on [Spoonflower](#), then make quilts with that fabric for a full-circle presentation). Take the time and do it right.
- △ Go to [Quilt Market](#) and talk to the powers that be; to show them your work.

You just never know what the outcome will be unless you take the leap.

## The Benefits of Creating a Fabric Plan



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Learn the winning mindsets and  
business systems, thriving textile  
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CN: Thanks for that step-by-step explanation. Jamie, I've got to ask you this. How would you weigh the benefits of being a fabric designer? Is it a helpful way to build



authority and name recognition in the industry or is it a lucrative money-making venture?

JF: I do think it's important to build my brand and an audience.

It is good to get my name out there, and not just as a fabric designer, but as a quilter too.

I am a full circle artist. I want to see it through from design to fabric, to making wall quilts.

This is not a get-rich scenario. I don't get paid until the fabric ships to quilt stores, and that is usually a year from the date I turn in my designs.

Patience grasshopper.

That's why two or more lines would be better. Because you have the overlap. But, there's a catch, because there is more work to be done if I choose to do it.

## Some of The Work Involved in Marketing a Fabric Line

- △ Making wall quilts (that's all I make) to show the fabrics for the **print catalog** and for [Quilt Market](#).
- △ Designing a pattern that uses a charm square pack that is handed out at the School House at Quilt Market where my presentation takes place introducing my fabric line and everything made with the fabrics to an audience.
- △ Designing a pattern that might get picked up by one of [RJR Fabrics](#)' large clients. I can do these things, or I can ask [RJR Fabrics](#) to find makers who do this on a regular basis.





Jamie Fingal's RJR-Fabrics Booth at Quilt Market to Promote Her Fabric Line

It's all about choices and listening to what people want.



For this line, I wanted to reach outside of my comfort zone and design the pattern for the charm packs and one that could be marketed to clients.

The 'Art Haus' below is sold as a kit at Missouri Star Quilt Company. It made me giddy to see it in their store.



"The Art Haus" by Jamie Fingal - Designed with Hopscotch Fabric Line



## Jamie Fingal's Five Faves



1. [Havel's Scissors](#), because they have serrated blades that hug the fabric when you cut. I love their rotary cutters, rulers, cutting mats and snips.
2. [Mistyfuse](#), a fusible web that doesn't change the hand of the cloth and is easy to use, sew through by machine or by hand. It works every time in cold and hot weather. This product gets me to where I need to be in my designs, which are all raw edge applique.
3. [Sizzix die cutting machines](#) – to save my hands, I use dies to cut 7 layers of pre-fused fabrics for my quilts and other projects
4. Bernina 750 QE – my personal favorite brand
5. [National Non Wovens wool blended felt](#) (WCF001) that I use instead of batting and I never had to do a binding. It's a finished edge. I back it with another layer of wool blended felt too in black or a fun color!



## Jamie Fingal's Tips for Becoming Successful at Fabric Designing



1. Just do the work – practice, experiment, create a body of work. Find out what your strengths are and make a portfolio of designs that you are passionate about.
2. Start a private Facebook group with friends who share some of your same interests. This is a great way to learn from others and they can learn from you. It is important to surround yourself with positive and encouraging people. Having honest feedback will enable you to grow as an artist.
3. Have a social media presence on Facebook and Instagram. Start posting what you create. Build your audience.
4. Start a blog with your full name on it, and start sharing the things that you love to make. This also helps get your name out there. It also helps with your writing skills, and you never know where this will lead.
5. Do some research on magazines that take submissions, and try your hand at writing an article.
6. Be a good listener with everything that you do. You don't live in a vacuum. Be humble. Be thankful. Know what is out there in the world of fabric design. Take notes. Be authentic.



CN: Congrats Jaime. You have a beautiful fabric line. And thanks for taking the time to shed some light on the fabric design business for us.

To learn more about Jamie Fingal's work, visit her at [JamieFingalDesigns.com](http://JamieFingalDesigns.com) and here's where you can get her Hopscotch Fabric Line.

## Interview Highlights and Quotes

- △ It's all about choices and listening to what people want.
- △ This is not a get-rich scenario. I don't get paid until the fabric ships to quilt stores, and that is usually a year from the date I turn in my designs.
- △ Be able to verbalize who you are and what you create.
- △ I challenge myself to not use a pencil. That has been a huge growth experience for me.



Clara Nartey is an artist and a writer. She finds and interviews thriving entrepreneurs from all over the world about their mindsets and the systems they use to grow their businesses, in order to help artists learn how to start or grow their own creative businesses. To get more of her writings and access to her free resources for textile & quilt artists, makers, and creators, [sign up here](#).

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