

a world first

“Human subtlety will never devise an invention more beautiful, more simple or more direct than does nature because in her inventions nothing is lacking, and nothing is superfluous.”
Leonardo da Vinci

While quilts have been made for centuries, we quilters today enjoy all the benefits of modern technological advances in equipment and manufacturing to create the heirlooms of today.

The invention that has had perhaps the most impact on quiltmaking has been the rotary cutter. Designed by the Olfa Corporation in 1979, it revolutionised the way quilters cut their fabric and the time it took to do so. It also meant increased accuracy when cutting fabrics.

Yoshio Okada established the Olfa Corporation in 1956 and the first product he launched was the world’s first snap-off blade. The inspiration for his design came from studying the sharp edges produced when glass is broken and how pieces of a chocolate bar break into small segments. He created a blade that you could snap segments off to create a new sharp edge each time.

The invention of the rotary cutter for quilters and crafters came after the quilt resurgence of 1976. The invention of the cutter not only changed the way quilters cut and piece their quilts it has also led to other inventions, such as the self-healing mat on which to cut using a rotary cutter, as well as acrylic rulers specially designed for use with rotary cutters. The inventions keep coming, with acrylic templates and rotating rotary mats now available for use with rotary cutters.

Ask any quilter and they will tell you their rotary cutter is an invaluable tool, but it can also be a very dangerous one if not used properly. Here are some tips when using your rotary cutter:

- Only use your rotary cutter to cut fabric. Just as you would keep a pair of scissors specially for cutting fabric and nothing else, treat your rotary cutter that same way.
- Always cut away from you. You have more strength when pushing than pulling and it is safer to have the blade travelling away from your body.
- Always ensure you have a sharp blade in your cutter for two reasons: one is that you will need to exert less pressure to cut through the fabric, and second you will ensure a clean cut through all the fibres of the fabric so there are no snags when you try to pull your strip away.
- From time to time, clean the lint from your blade to increase the blade’s life.
- If your blade is stiff and hard to move, wipe the blade with a little sewing machine oil to help it roll more smoothly. Be careful to wipe off any excess as you don’t want oil smeared all over your patchwork fabric.
- Always retract the blade or put the safety cover over it as soon as you have finished using your rotary cutter.
- Keep your rotary cutter stored in a safe place, out of reach of children.

If you take good care of your rotary cutter and blade you won’t have to replace what can be expensive blades.

Victoria Stars – Meredith Clark

