

“QUILT AS DESIRED”

The quilt will tell you how it should be quilted and you need to listen.

People think I have to be an artist to design. But we know a lot more about design than we think. Think of how you react to signs. We know a poor design when we see it. You know when the flow is funny. Some of what we know is intuitive. In conjunction with this, it is my belief that all of us know more than we realize about good design, because it is all around us. Architecture, fine art, folk art, clothing, media images, packaging and other things have competent designers behind the work. Conversely, as an example, a poorly designed house may be unpleasant to us. If we were to analyze what bothered us about it, it might have awkward or unbalanced proportions, or too many details fighting for our attention. A walk through the houses may have an uncomfortable flow from room to room or impractical uses of the interior space. We would think it was poorly designed.

Good design is not accidental, it is planned.

Will the quilting show? Will you see the design? Will it show? Is the quilting or the fabric the star? Either emphasize it or hide it. Look at a project where quilting won't show up too much as an opportunity to hone free motion skills.

Preliminary Decisions:

Comfort level

How long have you been quilting? What kinds of quilting have you done in the past and what do you feel comfortable with. What would you be prepared to try to stretch and advance your skills? You may want to start out with designs that use a walking foot for more control starting out. You may want to include more free motion quilting, or mix the techniques together! Only you can decide what you feel comfortable doing, but don't be afraid to try out new techniques.

WALKING FOOT: The walking foot is a foot with its own feed mechanism that moves the top layer of fabric, while the machine's feed dogs move the bottom layer. The machine's feed dogs grip the bottom layer of fabric and pull it through the machine, and the walking foot ensures that the top layer flows under the needle at

the same rate, preventing shifting or puckering. The walking foot is a quilter's go-to tool for binding, for stabilizing and for in the ditch quilting, but it can also be your best friend in the quilting process. Examples of how to add design elements with a walking foot:

- Instead of invisible thread in the ditch, use pretty thread that will show up on the surface.
- Instead of a straight stitch, use a serpentine or other decorative stitch. - [Lengthen feather stitch 1314, 1352 on Bernina]
- Expand your stitch repertoire by mixing decorative and straight stitches. Make thread beads.
- Use straight or curvy lines as background fill

FREE MOTION: In contrast to the walking foot, a free motion quilting foot allows you to move the quilt without any help (or interference) from the feed dogs. You determine the stitch length and direction of the stitching line by moving the quilt underneath the needle. For those of us with home machines, free motion quilting is like drawing a design on paper by moving the paper under the pen. You can mark your design with a stencil, or echo quilt, or create a free form pattern.

Free motion mastery takes practice, but the results are well worth the effort.

Use

The intended use for the quilt will help with your design decisions.

Choice of Quilting Pattern: If the quilt will need to be washed often (like a quilt for the baby's crib, or tummy-time, or a quilt destined to be used as a tablecloth during college pizza consumption) consider a design that will help reinforce the seams. For example, a serpentine stitch will stabilize and help prevent unravelling of fabric in seams, especially in a flannel quilt.

For a quilt that is going to be used to provide warmth, design your quilting to be far enough apart to preserve warmth afforded by the loft of the batting (so the quilt is more fluffy or cuddly). Also consider whether the quilting in a design will

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be far enough apart for the quilt to drape nicely, for example, if the intended use is to show off the quilt by draping it over a couch.

An elegant wall hanging or art quilt can support a more complex, closely quilted design, and you don't need to worry about losing the loft or stiffness in the finished quilt.

Investment in Materials and Time: The intended use for the quilt will also let you plan the investment that you want to make in your materials cost (thread, batting, etc.), and the amount of time that you want to spend on the quilting process.

Time

Quilting takes a lot of time.

The actual time it takes will depend on your equipment, the size of the quilt and the density and complexity of the quilting, and it is not easy to accurately plan for. Everyone will take a different amount of time.

The first question to ask is: "When does this project need to be completed?" - Is it for the baby shower or anniversary party next weekend? If you don't have a deadline (although we probably should not use that word) do you have a timeframe in mind for the project?

DON'T PANIC: How do you approach the concept that you will be investing 10's of hours, or more, without panicking? Reduce the project to smaller pieces – like – "I can get this bit done at my Friday night sew in at the quilt shop", or, "I can get the borders marked this weekend".

IDENTIFY YOUR PERSONAL BLOCKS OF TIME:

When will you be quilting? We all have different blocks of time for quilting. Based on your past experience, identify your personal blocks of time. Do you spend an hour or two every day? Do you regularly spend Sunday afternoon quilting? Do you devote an evening or day once a month to sewing with friends at a sewing evening? Are you planning to attend a 4-day quilting retreat? [picture of quilters in Anita's cabin]

ASSESS YOUR TIME NEEDS:

Assess the time that you think you will need for each step in the quilting process and then figure out how many of your personal blocks of time you will need for your project. Another advantage to doing this is that you set yourself small goals along the way, so that the quilting process does not become overwhelming.

- Time for getting the quilt layered and pinned: this will depend on the size of the quilt, and whether you need any special assistance, like scheduling a time to use the larger tables at your local quilt store. Time yourself next time you layer and pin a quilt and keep notes for future reference. (For example, you may find that it takes 3-4 hours to layer and baste a queen size quilt, so that would translate to an evening sewing with friends, or a Sunday afternoon.)

- Time to get the stabilizing quilting done: stabilizing quilting follows the natural lines of the quilt. For example, on a quilt top of pieced blocks, quilt in the ditch around the blocks (with your piecing thread or a fine matching thread). See further information on stabilizing in the Technical Expertise section. Again, time yourself on a couple of tops and use that information for future planning. For example, you may find that it takes 3-4 hours to layer and baste a queen size quilt)

- Time for marking: are you going to mark at the start, or as you move from section to section, or a combination? Plan your personal blocks of time accordingly.

- Time for quilting each section: how long will it take to quilt each section of the quilt? Will it take an afternoon (or one personal block of time) to quilt four 12-inch blocks? Again, timing yourself on a project or two will help you plan this time for future projects.

ALLOW TIME FOR INTERRUPTIONS:

Life will provide interruptions, so plan for them! Set your quilting goals taking into account that stuff happens, and that the cat will want to be involved in all steps of the process. Seriously, though, no project will go 100% smoothly so the key is to be realistic and flexible.

Batting

Batting is available in many natural and synthetic fibers. Traditionally we were taught to think of batting choice as it affects the weight, warmth and drape of the quilt, and whether it will stand up to heavy use and frequent washing.

But when you are thinking about quilting design, your choice of batting will also be made by how you want your quilting to look.

- Do you want a flatter, more vintage look? A low loft batting is thin and the quilt will be flatter.
- Do you want a pretty puff? (The “puff” is the space between the quilting.) A high loft batting has more volume, and so the quilting will produce a more defined “puff”.
- Do you want the batting to shrink when washed, which helps sink the stitching line into the quilt, concealing any irregular stitches? Would you rather use a batting that shows off your stitches (and does not shrink)? Check the batting package for shrinkage information.

Cotton: Cotton is a low loft batting that will give a flatter finish when quilted and shrinks when washed, so the quilt has a vintage look and the stitching line will sink into the quilt.

Cotton/Poly Blend: This is usually 80% cotton/20% polyester, shrinks less than Cotton and is less expensive.

Polyester: Polyester doesn't shrink or crease and comes in many different lofts. Traditionally, the higher loft was recommended for tied quilts, but machine quilted, it will produce a beautiful puff.

Wool: Wool has a higher loft than cotton and creates a beautiful puff.

Silk: Silk is flatter than wool and shrinks less than cotton.

Bamboo (50% bamboo fibers, 50% cotton) or Soy (50% soy protein fibers, 50% cotton) are both low loft battings that behave like cotton but have a softer, more drapey feel.

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Other blends: made from plastic, other stuff!

Make batting samples for future reference – try out different types of batting.
Make 18” squares.

Layer a high loft batting on top of a low loft batting in a single project to create an enhanced puff. Try layering wool batting on top of a 100% cotton or experiment with other combinations.

Thread: Audition and select thread (types of thread, metallic, monofilament, polyester v cotton etc.)

- Matching fine thread as opposed to contrasting heavy thread.
- Puddling thread
- Types of thread; (gold is the new neutral)
- Special section on metallic (in technical expertise section)
- Free motion quilting vs thread painting?

DESIGN

Identify Spaces to fill

Divide the quilt into sections, by identifying spaces for your quilting designs. This will also help you plan your stabilizing quilting lines as well as break the project into smaller sections so that you can set and achieve mini goals along the way as you quilt the top.

We are used to quilting traditional quilts with defined blocks by quilting each block separately, with flowing designs in the borders and sashing. But if you step back and *think outside the seam* you will see the overall flow of the fabric and the piecing or applique design, and you will find other spaces for design opportunities. You can identify quilting design spaces that enclose different areas, perhaps by following a design element or a pattern or color of fabric.

Improvisational or modern quilts have large, irregular amounts of negative space.

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Select your designs:

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Is the quilting or the fabric the star?

Either emphasize it or hide it.

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Sources for design:

Design around the print on your fabric, take out the line element

Things in the everyday world –

- swirls on the screen door,
- shapes on a leaf,
- city lights from an airplane, freeways from the sky, fields in the day, land contours
- old buildings, ceilings, mosaics, architectural details.

Categories of designs.

- All-over design
- Ghosts
- Floating
- Thematic
- Contrasting
- Conforming
- Handwriting

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Design Elements

Develop a repertoire – a basic library of designs, swirls, pebbles, flowers, leaves, squiggles, doodles. You only need a few!

Some authors who show how to create a design: Diane Gaudinski, Angela Walters, Christina Camelli, Leah Day

These are YOUR shapes. Remember three things:

1. Repeating the same shape – repetition makes the quilting appear deliberate and cohesive.
2. Echo your shapes - echo lines enhance
3. Combine large open shapes with smaller, denser shapes – use the puff to emphasize.