

Quilting/Patchwork Tips

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Below are a few issues that have shows up whenever I judge quilts. You might interpret these tips as being “rigid” or “picky.” However, when quilts are closely examined, it is obvious that many top quilters execute their particular technique with expertise, and it is often the below considerations that break the tie!

Please try to consider judging critiques as educational opportunities. If you agree with the criticisms, you might choose to make some changes in your quilt and then enter it in the next higher competition! One can almost always add more quilting if needed. I even made a completed quilt larger so that it could be exhibited in a particular show/category by cutting off most of the outer border, adding several new inner borders and re-binding it!

1. Evaluation of the overall composition of your quilt is first and includes:

- Color usage
- Design Balance
- And does the quilting enhance or detract from your overall design.

Some quilters can “see” the above intuitively. The rest of us need to take a few, good art classes. Education should be a life-long pursuit. Why not take the basic art classes of color and design at a local community college or art league? There are unlimited opportunities available – just look for them!

2. Work with a color palette that “turns you on.” Note: any color scheme will work if repeated throughout your composition. Don’t feel “tied” to the color wheel!

3. If you piece with light-colored fabrics, be prepared to grade seams and trim all threads from the back of your quilt top! *Note: quilts will rank lower if the “shadowing” of darker threads or fabrics is present and noticed.*

4. If you appliqué with light-colored fabric, be sure to trim away background fabrics, grade seams and trim all stray threads. *(See note in #3)*

5. Appliqués (whether by hand or machine) should have smooth curves, sharp points, and be firmly secured. Your hand appliqué stitch should be nearly invisible; machine stitches should be even accurately stitched.

6. Piece your quilts with a medium-colored thread. Light thread shows in seams on the quilt’s front.

7. “Stitching in the ditch accurately” is a learned skill; you do get better with practice! While you are perfecting your skill, use clear, mono-filament quilting thread. *Regular sewing thread (cotton, silk, poly, blends, etc.) should be reserved for “graduate” work.*

8. The “long lines” of a quilt are lattices, borders, and bindings that run the length or width of the top. *They should be straight – view them like you would a 2-by-4 piece of wood – get down at eye level and look!*

9. Trim the outer edges of your quilt – make them straight and make your corners 90-degrees.

10. To accurately determine the length of each border piece and the binding along each edge:

- Measure the quilt at each end (top/bottom and right/left sides) and through the middle (horizontally and vertically);
- Use the average of these three measurements for each border and binding length.

(A little extra work equals a flat, straight-hanging quilt.)

11. When preparing a quilt for binding (after quilting and after the quilt’s perimeter has been straightened and corners “trued-up”), consider trimming the batting and backing **AFTER** you sew the binding onto the quilt’s face. This prevents the quilt’s outer edge from stretching.

Other steps include:

- Heavily pinning the perimeter of the quilt through all three layers (1 pin every inch with the pin points to the outside); and then
- Stabilizing each edge to be bound by straight-stitching 1/8” in from the raw edge of the quilt top with a walking foot and the pins in place; and
- Starching the binding before pressing it in half and marking it to the correct length.

12. To additionally guarantee a flat hanging and straight quilt, pay attention to your binding technique. Your binding should be:
 - A consistent width;
 - Be filled with the three layers of the quilt, and
 - Should have 90-degree (square) corners.
13. If you hand-stitch your binding in place:
 - Use a tight, secure, but invisible stitch more like hand appliqué than the hem-stitch on a garment.
 - Do not allow this binding stitch to go too deep and show on the quilt front.
 - Mitered corners aren't essential to the binding, but they make the corners tidier than any other technique. *Master this skill – it's a great one.*
 - Tack your mitered corners closed – it only takes a few stab-stitches to do so!
 - And, be sure to avoid having the seams of your binding fabric from falling at your quilt's corners. *(If this does happen, correct the problem immediately!)*
 - If you miter your borders and binding corners, the diagonal through both should be continuous and straight.
14. If hand quilting, be careful to avoid traveling stitches that peek to the front side of your quilt.
15. Any markings used on your quilt (water soluble, chalk, pencil, etc.) should be completely removed and not visible in your finished quilt.
16. Your quilt should be free of stains. *(If soiled, wash it if time allows or pull it from entry in the show!)*
17. Your quilt should be free of human and/or pet hair. Use a sticky lint roller just prior to leaving your home with your quilt or just before placing it in a secure box to mail.