



"What Do Judges Want?"

Tips for Better Quilting

Wonderful quilts spring from the PARTNERSHIP of excellent design and exemplary workmanship. The following judging criteria speak to issues of workmanship in quilts.

PIECING:

- Intersecting seams meet exactly—"just so" rather than "so-so".
- Points of triangles are preserved (rather than being sewn into the seam).
- Piecing thread is an appropriate color.
- Stitching is close, smooth, precise, and secure.
- Pressing is logical and consistent.
- Bias and directional prints are handled appropriately.
- Machine tension is properly adjusted.
- Long straight lines are straight.
- Curved seams are smooth and free of puckers.

HAND APPLIQUE:

- Stitches are small, close, and secure.
- If stitches are meant to be invisible, they should be invisible.
- If stitching is meant to show, it should be even and consistent.
- Thread is matched to the piece appliquéd (unless doing decorative contrast stitching.)
- Curves are smooth.
- Inside angles are well-secured, without fraying.
- Points are sharp and without excess bulk.
- Accuracy of repeated shapes is maintained.
- Appliqué pieces are free from shadowing.

MACHINE APPLIQUE:

- Starts and stops are well-handled and secure.
- Decorative stitches are sewn at the same angle to edge of piece being appliquéd (pivot, pivot, pivot.)
- Piece is free of distortion.
- Thread is well-chosen.

BORDERS AND SASHING:

- Borders and sashings are a true, consistent width.
- Borders and sashings are in a pleasing scale to other design elements.
- They are properly sized, without ripples or bowing.
- Grain lines and directional designs are properly handled.
- STRAIGHT LINES ARE STRAIGHT!!!
- When quilted, the sashings and borders have an appropriate density of quilting in them.



QUILTING

- Stitch is uniform and even.
- Knots are buried (hand quilting.)
- There is an appropriate AMOUNT of quilting in the quilt.
- There is an appropriate DENSITY of quilting throughout the quilt.
- Repetitive elements (grids, echo lines) are consistently spaced.
- Markings are removed.

SPECIFIC TO MACHINE QUILTING:

- Thread tension is good throughout.
- Thread build-up in motifs is avoided (choose motifs with avoiding build-up in mind.)
- Backtracking or retracing is controlled and accurate.
- Designs are fluidly executed.
- Quilting causes no pleats, tucks, or distortions.
- Stitch in the ditch should stay in the ditch.

EDGE FINISH: There are many ways to finish an edge. Whichever you choose, your edge finish should be appropriate to the piece and its intended use and be well-executed. Most people want to know how to do the classic bound edge. These criteria speak to the CLASSIC BOUND EDGE:

- For durability, a double-fold binding is preferred.
- A bias binding must be used in curvy edges; for issues of durability it is often chosen for straight-edge binding also. Width of grain can also be used, but often length of grain (because of its lack of give) produces a “bumpy,” uneven look.
- Lengths of binding are joined with a 45-degree seam to reduce bulk.
- Machine stitch binding to front of quilt. Turn to back of quilt and secure with small, secure, invisible stitches. Thread should match the binding fabric.
- The batting should fill the binding (again, a matter of durability.)
- Binding should be straight and maintain an even width.
- Square corners are indeed square—a true 90 degrees.
- Miters are true and the folds are stitched closed front and back.
- Mitered fold of binding lines up perfectly with the miter of the border—this is called “golden” by judges.

These criteria are not meant to be comprehensive, but rather an overview of good quilting techniques. These criteria are excerpted from a program, “What Do Judges Want,” presented by Marilyn Hardy, NQA Certified Judge, to the Gulf States Quilting Association and used by permission.

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