

The Art & Craft of Quilting Your Quilt

1) Quilting Makes the Quilt:

- a) **A Quilt is a blank canvas:** A beautiful quilt top deserves beautiful quilting.
- b) **Utilitarian vs. Art quilting: What kind of quilting to choose and how much quilting is appropriate?**
 - i) All over meandering is fine for a utilitarian quilt but does not celebrate a beautiful quilt.
 - ii) Use beautiful 'custom quilting' (where the stitching design varies from place to place based on the quilt top design) for art and heirloom quilts.
 - iii) With any quilting, the closer the stitching, the less cuddly the quilt becomes.

2) Thread: Type & Color:

- a) **High contrast:** Quilting stands out becomes a graphic line drawing, requires confidence and skill. Hard to hide mistakes but easy to see previous quilting to render intricate designs.
- b) **Medium-Low contrast:** Quilting still graphic but more subtle than high contrast, mistakes are less visible. Moderately easy to see previous stitching.
- c) **No contrast:** Quilting creates texture with light and shadow but no graphic design. Beginner friendly as mistakes are fairly well hidden but previous stitching can be hard to see making it difficult to coordinate designs.
- d) **Color Combinations:** Can be very effective especially if a high contrast is used for motifs combined with a low or no contrast for textured backgrounds.
- e) **Decorative threads:** Rayon, metallic, sliver and polyester embroidery thread (isocord) – beautiful but may require additional skill and the correct needles to use.

3) Machine vs. Hand Quilting:

- a) **Machine Quilting**
 - i) **Pros:** Fast, durable if thread tails are secured properly, easier to render denser stitching patterns than by hand.
 - ii) **Cons:** Difficult to stitch large quilts with a domestic machine, tethered to electricity, starting/stopping points vulnerable to unraveling unless secured properly.
- b) **Hand Quilting**
 - i) **Pros:** Portable if quilted in a hoop – no electrical cords needed, easy to travel between layers to new design areas, better stitch regulation/control – less shifting of layers that can result in unsightly ripples and tucks, beautiful 'traditional' look,
 - ii) **Cons:** Labor/time intensive, superior skill needed to create well defined designs.

4) Design Tips:

- a) **Quilting designs should be appropriate to the top design and style of the quilt.**
- b) **The three categories of quilting designs:** Motif, linear and background filler.
 - i) **Motif:** Best used in a setting that allows for good visibility of the design. Examples: flowers or floral sprays, medallions, novelties; preferably used in areas where you can see and appreciate the designs.
 - ii) **Linear:** narrow, continuous designs to quilt borders and sashing. Examples: continuous feathers, trailing vine/leaf combinations, twisted cables, strings of 'pearls'
 - iii) **Background filler:** primarily used to create texture to enhance motifs or make appliqués or areas of piecing 'pop'. Examples: random meandering 'stippling', pebbles or pea gravel, cross-hatching.
- c) **When NOT to stipple:** use stippling because you want the textural effect, not as a default because you can't think of anything more creative to do.
- d) **When/where NOT to quilt:** learn to use un-quilted negative space as a design element.
- e) **Contrast provides visual interest.**

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- f) For machine quilting minimize starting and stopping points as these are vulnerable to unraveling, adapt designs to a continuous line much as you can and secure the starting and stopping points as well as possible.
- g) Practice your designs on paper with a pencil before attempting to stitch it: Work out logistics as to how to make it fit into a given area and how to make the design as continuous a line as possible.
- h) Test your design on plastic sheeting laid over your quilt before committing it to thread: Use a pen like a 'Sharpie' brand marker that won't smear. A dry erase pen can also be used and will allow the plastic to be erased and reused.
- i) There are also a variety of Apps for I-pads and Android Tablets that allow you to import a photo of your quilt and then 'doodle' designs over it with a stylus.

5) Design Resources:

- a) Look to designs/patterns existing in the fabric print for inspiration.
- b) Theme: look to the theme or subject matter for your quilting inspiration – leafy meandering vines as background texture on a botanical themed quilt, playful puffy clouds on a child's bed quilt, swirling waves or fish on a nautical themed quilt...
- c) Traditional design sources: you can find these in quilting design books, Golden Threads patterns, etc.
- d) Non-traditional design sources: Dover Pictorial Archives books, Zentangle® books
- e) Other art mediums: Mosaics, illuminated manuscripts, Sashiko designs...
- f) Natural objects. Non-symmetrical (organic) designs taken from nature such as leaves, bare trees and seashells... these are particularly good choices for novice quilters as they are forgiving and require less skill to render well.
- g) Allover Textures: look to man made and natural textures such as topographical maps, satellite photos, brick and mosaic work, wood grain, tree rings, etc. for interesting allover textures beyond traditional stippling.
- h) There is a world of design sources out there; remember, if it's a line it can be quilted.
- i) Keep a design notebook – use graph paper for easy to scale reference.
- j) Design exercise: Analyze quilting design choices in quilts you see. Would you have done anything differently? Do this with friends and compare design ideas (this makes a great group project if you 'assign' a quilt from a book and have everyone create a pencil rendering of quilting ideas on that quilt.

6) Quilting Strategy For Large Quilts:

- a) Start with small projects while learning, build up to large quilts once you feel comfortable with your skills.
- b) Provide adequate support and work space; sit at a comfortable height to avoid back, shoulder and neck strain.
- c) Use thin batting and pin or spray baste well.
- d) Stabilize quilting areas by quilting in the ditch before proceeding to the detailed quilting.
- e) Choose quilting designs that minimize pivoting and turning (learning to stitch backwards can be an asset)

7) Quilting Resources:

- a) Zentangle® Tutorials: Available free online on the Zentangle website, this free subscription to a newsletter will provide you with free tutorials on creating many of the Zentangles® designs. Not all are suitable for quilting but many are adaptable to that purpose and it's a great source for ideas. <https://zentangle.com/pages/online-zentangle-resources>
- b) Dover Publications: finding good design resources that take you out of the box can be a challenge particularly as regards to copyright issues. Dover Publications publishes a whole line of design resource books for artists and craftsmen called the Pictorial Archive series. The designs in these books are royalty-free and can be used with liberal permission on projects without fear of copyright infringement repercussions. The styles and design subject matter are vast and cover many cultures and periods/styles of art and design. Dover also has a free resource where you can sign up for their online newsletter and check the box for free samples. Once a week you will receive a newsletter with free sample pages from a variety of books – excerpts from literature, clip art, coloring pages and children's crafts/activity pages <https://store.doverpublications.com>