

## Helpful Hint for December 2012

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### Preparing your quilt for quilting.

Many of you choose to quilt your own quilts. However, more and more are utilizing the longarm businesses. Whether for utility or for show, the guidelines below will help you and your longarmer to create a beautiful quilt.

- 1) Be sure your quilt top is free of all loose threads. This is really important, especially if you're featuring applique on a light background. *(Those darn sashing threads always sneak under that light background and then show through).* It is not the longarmers responsibility to trim threads. There is a tool by Clover called a "Soft Touch Thread Pic" and looks like a tiny crochet hook. It can be inserted at a seam and can sneak under the quilting and pull out the offending thread. Look over the top of your quilt and remove loose threads as well.
- 2) Be sure your quilt top does not have any open seams. When the longarm crosses over the top, an open seam can mean disaster if the hopping foot gets caught in it!
- 3) Be aware of how you press your seams. Thick, bulky intersections can cause the needle to break. By the time the longarmer knows the needle broke, there can be a few additional stitches taken with a sharp shard piercing your quilt top and possibly causing tears. *(Not to be confused with **tears** that both you and your longarmer will be crying onto your quilt top).* Practice spinning the seams to reduce bulk. Be sure to let your longarmer know of any intersections that you think are thick.
- 4) Pressing continued. Be sure to press your quilt top and bring it folded over a hanger or folded neatly in a bag. I like to use the large diameter hangers and store the quilt tops in an enclosed wardrobe to keep them dust free. A well pressed top lays nice and flat and quilts beautifully. It is not the longarmers responsibility to press your quilt top.
- 5) Mitered corners. Be sure that you use a 45 degree ruler when you make these. An improperly mitered corner will flare out and look like "batwings". Or, there will be so much excess fabric that the longarmer will have to fix them. If your corners are not correct, be prepared to pay a fee to have them fixed or be willing to pick up your top, fix them and bring it back.
- 6) Be sure to measure your borders. I've written a whole article about this and you can find it here: [https://docs.google.com/file/d/0Byjbje\\_Gc82EWDlrWGpRT0M3Mm8/edit?pli=1](https://docs.google.com/file/d/0Byjbje_Gc82EWDlrWGpRT0M3Mm8/edit?pli=1)  
Let me show you a picture of what happens when a border is just sewn on:



Check out that top border! This is what happens when you don't measure and don't use a walking foot. Using a walking foot will feed both the quilt and border thru at the same time, thus reducing stretching. Also – pin, pin, pin! While some creative quilting can make this look better, there will be a permanent "wave" in this border. If this were hanging in a quilt show, the borders would be curling from front to back instead of laying/hanging straight. They will also do this draping over a bed and look like a big ruffle. *(Something else to notice in this pic is that this top is not square. The woman who made this just kept sewing rows of squares to each other in order to make the top bigger without taking into consideration the importance of squaring up and measuring. When she was done, she had a parrallogram instead of a rectangle).* If you've sewn your border on improperly, take the time to remove the stitching and re sew it on. It is not the longarmers responsibility to do this for you, unless you're willing to pay for her sewing time.

- 7) Bring it clean. Do you have a cat? I like cats too – but I'm allergic to them. Ask your longarmer if she's allergic to dogs or cats? Please run a lint roller over the top before you bring it over.

**Now that we've covered what you can do to improve your quilt top, let's talk about the discussion you should be having with your longarmer.**

- 1) What kind of quilt is this? Utility, Heirloom, Show quilt, etc?
- 2) Be aware of the costs of services for what you want done. An edge to edge service will cost less than having a top quilted for show. You and the longarmer need to agree on a price prior to quilting. Some longarmers charge by the square inch or some will quote a fee.
- 3) Pantograph *(also known as Edge to Edge or Allover)* or Custom? Is your top a very busy pattern with lots of print? Then most likely custom quilting won't show up on it. This would be a good top for an allover pattern. Does your top have some solids/tonals in the piecing or border? This would be a good candidate for custom quilting. Think about your fabric choices and quilting prior to piecing your quilt top for a more cohesive result.
- 4) Stitch in the Ditch is not easy to do on a longarm, thus many longarmers choose not to offer this service. Anytime a longarmer has to pickup a ruler and do SID, be prepared to pay for it. It's a difficult task and time consuming.
- 5) Talk over exactly what you want to have done on your top. I always write it down right on the work order. Discuss thread, batting and any other special services you want done. Write it down! With custom quilting, sometimes it's necessary to mark your quilt top. Do you mind if she uses chalk or water-soluable markers? You'll need to soak a quilt after using the blue markers to completely remove the ink. Be sure to put your contact phone number on the work order. If a question arises during quilting, it will need to be answered quickly or your longarmer will have her machine tied up with your quilt while she's waiting for you to get back with her.
- 6) Speaking of batting – do you know what the different types do? 100% cotton has low loft, but drapes beautifully on a bed and washes nicely. 80/20 blends have about 1/4" of loft, wash beautifully and give a nice "antique" look to your quilt after washing *(one of my favorites)*. Wool is a dream to quilt and gives the most loft – 3/8". Follow the washing directions carefully and it won't "beard" thru the top. 100% poly offers up little to no shrinkage and is great for quilts that will be washed a lot. *(T-shirt quilts, quilts that go to college, etc.)* \*A note about "Natural" batting that has brown speckles in it. The speckles are actually ground up cotton seed hulls. Over time, those seeds can cause light fabrics to stain and the staining can't be removed. This batting is fine for utility or dark fabric quilts. I would avoid it for heirloom or show quilts.
- 7) Timeframe. Your longarmer will give you a good estimate of how long it will take to get your top back. Be patient if she's a little late – longarmers get sick, have family emergencies or end up in the hospital with a herniated disk *(that was me last March – ouch!!)*. Definetly feel free to call her and see where she's at in her schedule.

- 8) Rush jobs. If you call with a quilting emergency (*meaning you need that top quilted by the weekend*), then be prepared to pay a rush fee. What's going to happen is the longarmer is going to work into the wee hours to squeeze you in while still going down the list of her to jobs. It would not be fair to her other customers to move you to the top of the list, pushing them back.
- 9) Christmas. Do not call a longarmer in December and ask if she can fit you in before Christmas. The answer is probably going to be "no". This doesn't make her mean or rude – she is probably swamped and hoping to get all her work done as it is! Most longarmers have an October or November 1<sup>st</sup> cutoff to guarantee you your quilt back. I like to have all my quilting done by December 15<sup>th</sup> so that I can enjoy the holiday season with my boys and have time to decorate and cook for my family. I also like to have the tops back in a timely manner for you to put your binding on.
- 10) Specialty quilting. Some longarmers offer heirloom and show quilt services. Things like trapunto and thread painting are time and thread consuming. (*Translation: Not cheap!*) For myself, a queen/king heirloom/show quilt with extensive quilting will take at least 4 or 5 days on my longarm. These are not inexpensive quilt jobs – however, you could win quite a bit of money when you enter some juried quilt shows! Because you've paid the longarmer for her services, you get to keep all the prize money. (*At least take a picture of the quilt with the ribbons on it so she can hang it up on her brag wall.*)
- 11) Backing fabric. Why does it need to be 4-6" larger than the quilt top? In the process of quilting your top, the backing gets pinned to a pickup leader and a backing leader. Right there, you've lost 2" of backing. Along the sides, there are 2-3 clamps that hold the backing taut, so there's another 3-4" of loss. While quilting, the longarmer does not want to run into those clamps, thus the chance of breaking a needle and peircing your quilt top. Also, try as we may, a quilt doesn't always roll up the pickup leader perfectly straight. If it tracks just a wee bit on an angle, the extra backing on the sides will compensate for that. At the very least, the extra backing you trim off can be used for 2 1/2" strips or for the binding on your quilt. If you plan to fold the backing over the top for the binding, then let your longarmer know that before she quilts your top. That way she'll be sure to leave you enough room all around the edges.
- 12) Backing fabric continued. If you purchase wide back fabric from the "National Sewing Chain", be aware they cut their backing with scissors. To square the backing, cut a notch about 1" from the end and rip it to the other end, width of the fabric. Did you find that one end is 1" wide and the other is about 7" wide? You should be angry because you paid for that 7" of useless fabric! I always urge my customers to buy at least 1/4 yard more than they need from the big store for this reason. Now to anger you more, go ahead and rip the other end. Now your backing is square. Is it still big enough? Sometimes it's just worth it to buy your backing from a local quilt shop that rips their backings! (*Flat bed sheets can be used for backings as well – ask your longarmer if she's willing to use one. You'll need to remove all the sewn hems from it, so be sure to purchase one that's going to be large enough.*)
- 13) Backing fabrics – printed or solid/tonals. Solid/tonal backings show quilting beautifully! These are a great choice for pantograph quilting. I like to call them "two for the money" because you've got a 2-side quilt now. For custom quilts with lots of thread color changes, a busy, multi-colored print works good to hide that. (*Keep in mind that the goal of the longarmer on a custom quilt is to make the top look excellent. The concern is not to have the back be two-sided. That is why they will match the bobbin thread to the top thread. A busy print will camouflage this.*) Talk to the longarmer about "shadowing". Say you have top with a majority of a light fabric on it – then a backing with lots of color may show through the batting to the top.
- 14) Piecing your backing. Many quilters do this to use up their stash. I have to say that pieced backings are not my favorite – usually because they're not square. However, you need to decide if you want the seam to run vertically or horizontally. Ideally for a longarm, you'd

want the seam to run horizontally (or parallel) to the bars of the longarm. That way when the quilt is bring rolled up on the pickup roller, it doesn't have a huge lump in the middle. Also, use a 1/2" seam and press them open. Lock your ends with backstitches. Remove the selvage edges before sewing your seams. It is not the longarmers responsibility to press your backing seams – unless you want to pay her for it.

- 15) Minky or Polar Fleece backing. For me, the only way I can quilt these is by loading the selvedge edges to my rollers. This means your quilt will have a pantograph that runs from top to bottom because I'll be quilting it sideways. Customs and freehand jobs are not a problem with this. Talk to your longarmer about which direction your quilt and minky backing will be quilted. (*Solid Minky shows quilting beautifully!*)
- 16) Drop off time. Most longarmers schedule about 1/2 hour for you to drop off your top and go over what you want done. Be respectful of time. If you want to visit and look thru the goodies in her studio, set up a time in the evening after work hours and tell her you want to visit with her as well as drop off your quilt top. (*The same goes for picking up your quilt too.*)

### **What to do when you pick up your quilt.**

- 1) Have payment ready. Write her a check or pay in cash. Do not write a check and ask her to hold it for any length of time. She did her work – now it's time to pay her. You wouldn't go to the grocery store and ask them to hold a check – don't ask your longarmer to do the same. If you don't have the money when she calls, set up an appointment to pick it up when you do have the money.
- 2) Look over the quilt and discuss it. (*Ooh and Aah and gush over it!*) **If you are not happy with something – tell her right then.** Do not keep quiet and then go behind her back to all your friends and share how unhappy you are. She cannot fix it or come to an agreement with you unless you've told her. Work it out amongst the two of you. If you're still unsatisfied, then look for another quilter. If you're really unhappy, then sit down with a seam ripper and remove the quilting and take it to someone else. (*Come see me and I'll show you a quick way to remove quilting*).
- 3) When you're happy with your quilt – then share it with the world. Word of mouth is the best advertisement for your longarmer. Be sure to add her name to the quilt label as the quilter. When showing your quilt at a Show and Tell event, be sure to give credit to the quilter.

Most of all, be willing to discuss all aspects of the quilting process with your longarmer so that you will both have a pleasant experience with your finished quilt. Ask her for quilting suggestions as well as thoughts on finishing it. A Prairie Point or scalloped binding might just be what makes that quilt sing!

If you plan on showing this quilt, then you'll want to block it. Put it in the rinse cycle of your washing machine and then pin it to a carpeted floor being sure to measure from corner to corner for squareness. Let it air dry. You'll want to do this before you put your binding on.

Did you plan on putting a hanging sleeve on it? Did you know that you can machine sew the top edge on before your binding, then when you hand sew the binding to the back, you'll be "encasing" the top edge of the sleeve leaving only the bottom side of the sleeve to hand-sew down?

About that quilt label – did you know you can apply it to your backing before you have it quilted? No one will ever be able to remove it and steal your quilt. This is especially effective for quilts that will travel to out of state shows. (*You can also sew microchips into your quilts – now you can keep track of your quilts and your dogs!*)

Just remember – your longarmer is invested in your quilt too. When you win a ribbon or Best of Show, she's just as happy as you are!

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