

# THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS

We've been examining the aspects of quilt design and construction that Quilt Show judges will evaluate. The judges are human beings who respond to quilts emotionally as we all do. They may have a personal preference for applique quilts or civil war fabrics or there may be a certain color palette which speaks to them. They are professional enough to set this aside while they work but let's face it...part of quilt judging is a bit subjective. Last month we dealt with the general appearance of a quilt... how to design for strong visual impact, what a well-chosen quilting pattern can add to the composition and the importance of submitting your show entry in great condition. The judges will also consider craftsmanship...a very important component of a beautiful quilt which can be evaluated less subjectively.

The Quilt Fiesta judges deliver feedback to each quiltmaker on a form provided by the Guild. Their impartial critique is intended to explain to us where our show entry has succeeded and where there is room for improvement. The allotted time for each quilt is short but the judges examine many specific aspects of workmanship. Their written comments can inform our efforts as we work to improve our skills on future quilts. It's all about execution. Since you're working on your show quilt now, wouldn't you like to know where the judges will focus? These elements are taken right from the evaluation form:

**PIECING:** Judges will reward precise general construction. Patchwork pieces should align properly, points should not be cut off. Seams should be sewn with a matching thread color so that stitches are not visible. Pressing should be well done and intersections should lie flat.

If you want your quilt to score well with the judges, use your best piecing skills. Take your time with each step of the process: cut pieces carefully, paying attention to grain lines...especially along the outer edges of blocks. Choose a piecing thread that will not be visible on your fabrics. Use an accurate and consistent seam allowance. Since small errors will compound as your quilt gets larger, check as you sew to make sure that your patchwork is as precise as you can make it.

**APPLIQUE:** Whether evaluating hand or machine applique, judges are looking for securely attached shapes without puckers. Sharp points and smooth curves indicate prowess. Stitches should be nearly invisible unless intended to be decorative. Dark fabrics should not shadow through under lighter fabrics.

Choose any style of applique you like: needle turn, prepared edge, raw edge, or fusible. Whether your applique is stitched by hand or attached by machine with invisible or decorative stitches, to score well with the judges you must give the applique your best effort. Use quality materials and develop your hand or machine skills so that you can achieve smooth curves, sharp points and securely attached applique pieces.

**QUILTING:** In this portion of the form, the judges are not considering the design of the quilting patterns, they are studying the technical aspect of the quilting stitches. Stitches should be even and consistent front and back. In hand quilting, no visible knots should show. In machine quilting, tension should be balanced. Starts and stops should not be obvious.

Whether the quilting is done by hand or machine, the length of the quilting stitch should be consistent. You may choose a thread that is fine or thick, matching or contrasting, made from any fiber (cotton, poly, rayon, silk) ... this is a design decision to be based upon the look you desire. The judges will study the quilting on the front AND on the back of the quilt. Inform your machine quilting professional that you will be entering the quilt in a show so that they will give your quilt their best effort. If you're machine quilting your own entry, check often to assure that your tension is balanced properly and that your stops & starts are inconspicuous.

**AMOUNT OF QUILTING:** Judges will also determine if the amount of quilting is sufficient and appropriate for both the design of the top and the type of batting selected. What's most important is that the density of the quilting is consistent throughout.

Remember that quilting is both functional and decorative. If you take care to maintain an even density over the entire top, you will avoid most of the distortion problems which occur when one area is densely quilted and another is sparsely quilted. Secure large applique shapes with some quilting stitches running through them. No areas of the quilt should be unquilted or underquilted.

**BORDERS:** Construction should be well executed. Straight seams should lie or hang straight with no ripples, puckers, stretching or distortion. Corners should be precise and at right angles unless designed otherwise.

Not all quilts require borders but when you use them, they should be more than an afterthought. If you cut them on the straight of grain, your quilt is more likely to hang straight. Determine their correct length by measuring through the center of your quilt, don't just attach a long chunk of fabric to the quilt and then chop off the excess length. If your quilt is a perfect square or rectangle, it should measure the same on opposite sides. Diagonal measurements from corner to corner should be the same in both directions.

**FINISHING:** Quilt edges should be straight and corners should be square. Binding should be well executed: it should be filled with batting, it should be stitched securely and it should be a consistent width.

Where possible, block your quilt and square up your corners after the quilting is done. Choose and cut the binding fabric carefully to avoid an illusion of distortion. Bindings can be cut on the straight grain or the bias but they should always be securely attached and firmly filled with batting. Pay attention to how your binding turns the corners: firmly stitched miters will be rewarded by the judges.

**SPECIAL TECHNIQUES:** When applicable, judges will evaluate the success of unusual techniques such as embroidery, embellishments, beading, trapunto, photo transfer, painting or inking etc. All special techniques should be secure, neat and effectively executed.

A successful quilt doesn't require the addition of any special techniques but when quiltmakers do incorporate them, the judges will provide a critique. Any special techniques should be selected to enhance the quilt. Hand or machine embroidery should be carefully placed. Buttons, beads and any 3 dimensional embellishments should be firmly attached. Any special techniques should be deliberately executed and well integrated into the design.

The judges endeavor to provide you with comprehensive and helpful feedback about your quilt in the 2 -4 minutes allotted to evaluate each entry. A small army of guild members volunteer to assist at judging. Their efforts

make it possible for us to return the judges comments to you along with your quilt when the show is over. If you would like your show entry to be judged, you must indicate your preference on the entry form and include the \$5 fee. Your show entry will be welcome whether or not you choose to have your quilt judged.

Next month's column will contain useful information about the show entry form. It's not rocket science but any entries which are incomplete or incorrect can be refused by the hanging committee. Each entry form must include a 4x6 photo of the quilt so watch here next month for some helpful advice on taking great photos of your quilts.