



## Choosing the Best Quilting Design for your Quilt

As much as we'd like to think each quilt we make is a masterpiece destined for greatness, sometimes we must let go of our delusions of grandeur and move on. Some quilts clearly shout, "PLEASE custom quilt me!," and some yell, "No way! Overall design, please!"

### Types of Quilting Styles

All over, or **edge-to-edge quilting** (also known as a pantograph design), means that the quilting pattern starts at one side of the top and goes to the other side regardless of blocks or borders. Edge-to-edge quilting is at the cheaper end of the cost spectrum when it comes to quilting.

**Custom quilting** is where each block and border is treated separately and a combination of quilted designs will be sewn onto the quilt to enhance the different elements or areas of the quilt. Styles such as stitch-in-the-ditch, cross hatching, stipple effect or other custom patterns can be used. Because of the additional design work and attention detail required along with a more denser stitching, custom quilting is more expensive.

**Heirloom quilting** is the highest quality quilting. It can be highly decorative with a great deal of movement. It will be dense, adding its own statement to the quilt but not overriding the piecing composition. Heirloom quilting, being on the highest end of the cost spectrum, is for the pieced top that will be entered into competitions and/or used as a focal piece in the decoration of your home. Depending on the desire, the pieced top can be quilted with remarkable results using such patterns as feathering, McTavishing, echoing and skilfully executed cross-hatching and stitching in the ditch along with other themed patterns.

### The "feel" of your Quilt

The type of quilting chosen can also have an impact on the "feel" of a quilt. An edge-to-edge quilting pattern is generally of a lower density of stitching. This helps to keep the quilt more "fluffy or cuddly" as the loft of the batting will not be as compressed. High density custom or heirloom quilting will have much more stitching compressing the batting loft and making the quilt much stiffer (great for wall hangings or display – not so nice for a comfortable quilt!

### Simple questions to ask yourself before deciding on a quilting pattern

Many of the quilts we make would look good in either quilting style. The trick is deciding which way to go. When debating between custom and edge-to-edge quilting for your quilt, you'll save yourself lots of time and stress if you answer these questions to help you decide before you bring you quilt in:

#### 1. What is your budget?

As we have seen above the type of quilting chosen varies in cost. If you are on a tight budget or the quilt does not warrant the expenditure then choose edge-to-edge. If budget is not an issue then custom may be an option open to you.

## **2. When is the quilt needed?**

Edge-to-edge quilting is the quicker of the styles of quilting, with custom and heirloom quilting taking much longer to complete. Remember that your quilt will not be the only quilt being undertaken by your chosen long-arm quilter. A long-arm quilter can complete many more edge-to-edge quilts in the time it takes to do a custom job. So the wait time of edge-to-edge quilts is usually shorter. Be prepared to have a estimated completion time for custom or heirloom quilts of several months away. Whereas an edge-to-edge quilt can often be completed in a matter of weeks. So make sure that you allow plenty of time to complete this work before trying to meet your own deadlines!

## **3. Who will be the recipient of your quilt?**

Is it for your parents' 25th anniversary? It deserves custom work.

Is it for your six-year-old niece? She'll jump on the bed with it - edge-to-edge would be best.

Is it for your son, a university student? Definitely edge-to-edge - he'll never wash it!

Is it for your best friend who's recovering from breast cancer? Could go either way.

## **4. How will your quilt be used?**

Let's go back to your best friend recovering from breast cancer. If you want her to snuggle under the quilt during chemotherapy treatments to remind her she's wrapped in love and support, edge-to-edge quilting would be appropriate. If you want her to hang it on her wall as a symbol of conquering the disease, custom quilting would give it more power.

## **5. How will the quilt be cared for?**

If this is a baby quilt and it's destined for a weekly spin through the washing machine, edge-to-edge quilting is perfect. Use polyester thread and batting so it will hold up to all of that stretching and agitation. Maybe it is for an adult's bed quilt that would only ever require occasional careful hand-washing then maybe custom would be appropriate.

## **4. Does this quilt have special meaning to me?**

If you can't attach a lot of personal significance to the quilt, quilt it with an edge-to-edge design or very simple custom stitching and move on to the next project.

## **5. Will this quilt be entered in a show?**

When your quilt is entered in a show, your quilting selection takes on more significance as it relates to overall design. Before you commit to a particular design or style, put yourself in the judge's shoes. The judge will study the quilting to see if the design you chose was appropriate to the quilt's style, and whether it "enhanced" the quilt or did nothing for it.

## **6. Are there areas on my quilt I want to highlight or downplay?**

Sometimes a quilt will look better with an overall design that pulls all the pieces together or camouflages things. An overall design can behave like a diffuser. It's like looking through a window screen that softens the view just a little bit—our eyes focus on the screen itself for a brief moment before we realize we can actually see through the screen to the garden behind it.

## **Design Factors for Edge-to-Edge Quilting**

When choosing the right edge-to-edge for your quilt top, take design hints from your fabric. Do the fabrics in your quilt top have flowers, paisleys or baseballs? Pick an edge-to-edge design that compliments your quilt and is appropriate to the scale of your fabrics and size of your quilt blocks.

Quilt tops that are visually busy because of piecing or fabric choices are more suited to an edge-to-edge pattern. This is because the quilting will not be as visible because of the busyness of the top and custom quilting would be an unnecessary expenditure and a waste of time.

Edge-to-edge designs can also be chosen to add texture to your quilt. Using an edge-to-edge that offers both curves and movement in an organic way can enhance quilts with geometric designs. In

this case, you are adding another “design element” on top of your pieced quilt pattern. Similarly quilts that contain curved piecing and/or appliqué, consider a linear quilting design such as cross-hatching for background filler. The juxtaposition of linear and organic will render a very moving visual encounter.

Even the movements of the colours in fabrics will hold clues. This is especially true of batiks. Quilts made with these fabrics are great when paired with an edge-to-edge pattern that gives the illusion of water moving over a quilt top. A flowing design is perfect.



Examples of edge-to-edge quilting style

If you find that there are two or three edge-to-edge patterns that you feel would all look equally nice on the quilt top and you are not feeling drawn towards one over the other, do not agonize or over think your pattern selection. Just pick one. You will see very few quilts that will look great with only one particular pantograph. Most would be pretty with any one of a number of different approaches.

## Design Factors for Custom Quilting

Generally, custom quilting is for those quilt tops that are targeted for adults or young adults sensitive to the quality and value of a well made quilt. Custom is chosen when a pieced top is made with high quality fabrics and threads, and piecing is of the highest calibre. Also, custom quilting is considered when a pieced top provides areas of embellishment with simple piecing, soft colours and solid or tone-on-tone fabrics where the quilting will be front and centre, so the investment can be appreciated and enjoyed.

Any quilt that contains areas of calm fabrics such as solids, tone-on-tones and gentle, soothing colours/images will allow the quilting design to stand out. Take advantage of the negative space these fabrics provide and embellish your quilt in those areas with feather wreaths, ornate feather patterns, or designs with a great deal of movement. Allow the remaining areas a simple, deliberate pattern of movement. The combination is striking and very complementary to the quilt as a whole.

Custom quilting can be a costly option and should be discussed with your chosen quilter at the time you submit your quilt. The density and complexity of the custom quilting will determine the cost.

**PLEASE NOTE** – *that due to a change in personal circumstances I am no longer able to accept Custom Quilting or Heirloom Quilting work.*



Example of custom quilting style

## Design Factors for Heirloom Quilting

Heirloom quilting can be highly decorative with a great deal of movement. It is of the highest quality quilting. It will be dense, adding its own statement to the quilt but not overriding the piecing composition. Heirloom quilting will be aesthetically pleasing and intellectually stimulating. It will leave the viewer wanting. This type of quilting, when executed with great skill, can turn the pieced top into a collector's greatest find.

A quilt in which the pattern and fabrics are deliberately and carefully chosen, that perhaps has a specific purpose and there is much more emotional investment, calls for the same deliberation and investment in a quilt design. A careful assessment of the quilt can render optimum results. This is where you can put your money, so as to marry both piecing and quilting for lovely, heirloom results

Depending on the desire, the pieced top can be quilted with remarkable results using such patterns as feathering, McTavishing, echoing and skilfully executed lovely cross-hatching and stitching in the ditch. Also the option of using different coloured threads will add another design element to the quilt.

Each design element will need to be discussed in detail between the quilt maker and long-arm quilter to ensure that both parties agree on the style elements chosen and the likely impact on the overall quilt design. This consultation/design phase can be lengthy before the first stitch is even made. So Heirloom quilting takes much longer to complete as a job, meaning less of them can be done in a given time frame. Combined with the amount and quality of stitching undertaken this is why heirloom quilting is the most costly of quilting styles.



Example of heirloom quilting style

**In summary, the correct choice of a quilting style can make or break any quilt top project. So it is important that you consult with your long-arm quilter about what will be best for your quilt.**

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