

HOW TO MAKE A PRIZE-WINNING QUILT

To win a prize for your quilt, it must be entered in an appropriate category in a Quilt Show. Check carefully that your quilt is in the right category. Whatever the category, check the required measurements. Your quilt MUST fit the size requirements.

What Judges look for?

The first thing is the WOW factor. Something that catches the Judges' attention. It makes them stop and have another look. It could be colour, design, line, originality, or interesting quilting.

The judging process for a Quilt Show is very quick and there is little time to examine details until the final elimination process. All the quilts in a category are piled, on top of each other on tables, and they are slowly turned back, to show most of each quilt to give an impression of the standard of the category. This process is repeated a second time, and the quality of the quilts is assessed. Quilts are "released" or "retained for further viewing", and slowly, the number of chosen quilts is reduced to, usually 5. It is then that each quilt is carefully examined.

Judges are looking for originality, balance of design, good use of colour and fabrics. Then there is a careful examination of techniques.

- Is the piecing accurate?
- Are the points sharp?
- Do seams meet?
- Are appliqué stitches invisible?
- Are curves smooth?
- Is the quilting design appropriate for the quilt?
- Does it enhance or detract from the quilt?
- Is the quilting distributed evenly and appropriately over the quilt?
- The border should have the same amount of quilting as the rest of the quilt.

Once 5 quilts have been chosen, each one is examined and compared for the highest standards of design and construction. Then they might be hung to see how straight they fall.

A good way to check that the quilt is likely to hang straight is to fold the quilt while it is lying flat on the table, so that the top and bottom edges meet in the middle of the quilt. If there is no overlapping at the sides, that is a good sign.

That is a handy hint for all quilt makers. As you are assembling your quilts, always check the measurements. Matching the top and bottom edges to each other is not always an accurate measurement.

Let's return to actually making the quilt.

Having chosen your design, consider colours carefully. There are many books these days on the creative use of colour and these are well worth reading, especially if you are nervous about colour. Look at magazines, the Internet, and try to expand your colour horizons. Visiting Quilt Shows is a great way to learn more about colour, especially if you test yourself on your likes and dislikes of certain quilts. Ask yourself, "Why DON'T I like this quilt?" "Why DO I like this quilt?"

Is it the colour, the design? Would I like it better if the colours were different?

When constructing your quilt, measure, measure, measure. Keep measuring as you construct the quilt. When adding sashing, check that the fabric is straight and cut straight. Before you add borders, measure the opposite sides and the middle. They must match. Fold the quilt into the middle as suggested before.

Quilting

Whether you choose to quilt your quilt or you give it to someone else to quilt, carefully consider the quilting design. Will it enhance the quilt? Will it overwhelm the quilt design so that the fabric disappears under all the stitching?

Stitching must be even and well finished on the back. Judges do look at the back of the quilts during the culling process as well as at the final assessment stage.

And now we come to the FINISHING process. This is very important, as the finish of the quilt may be the deciding factor for a prize.

There are many ways to finish a quilt, and it is important to choose the most appropriate way to complete the quilt. It might be a binding, a facing, or the quilt might be bagged and quilted. Whichever method is chosen, it must be well executed if a prize is to be awarded.

Binding

I am known as the Quilt Police as I feel very strongly that beautiful quilts can be let down by poor bindings.

Imagine you have a painting you would like to have framed. If the frame was crooked or badly constructed, you would immediately see that it does not do justice to your beautiful painting.

Similarly, with a quilt, if the binding is crooked, not filled with wadding and the corners not sharp, the quilt may not hang straight and square.

When you prepare the quilt for binding, check that the edges are straight. I like to leave ¼" of the backing and wadding all around the quilt to fill the binding, but if using the seam as a guide, make sure that it is even and the binding will be filled when it is turned over. The corners should be sharp with good mitres, or for those who prefer straight corners, they should be even.

The hanging sleeve must have a bulge in it to prevent the front of the quilt being distorted when hanging.

Label your quilt with information about your quilt, as this is a record for the future. The quilting world needs to know where quilts came from.

It seems obvious, but always make sure that your quilt is clean, with no dirty marks. Check that all pencil markings have been removed. Above all, check that there are no cat or dog hairs on the quilt.

We make them for our own pleasure and satisfaction, and what a wonderful way to spend our time! The joy of creating something fills us with such a sense of achievement, and above all, it should be fun.

Lynn Hewitt

Extract from the QuiltNSW newsletter
"The Template" (November 2017)