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## Machine Quilting Entering a New Age!

# Preparing Your Quilt For Long Arm Quilting

by  
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Thinking about sending one of your quilts out for long arm machine quilting? There are several things you should know that will affect your choices and preparation. By preparing properly, you'll be happier with the finished product, and keep the costs down (as well as prevent frustration for the quilter).

### What You'll Need to Provide For the Quilter

For any machine quilting, accuracy while creating your quilt top is the single most important issue. The top, batting, and backing are pinned to rails that are perfectly parallel. If you've not made sure your top and backing are super square, you can end up with tucks, puckers, or added costs since the quilter will have to correct your mistakes. See further down in the article on preventing wavy borders, and take the time to check all components for square edges on a large group of tables. Frequently your local shop or the long arm quilter have the facilities for this, and are happy to provide them for your use. Use a large square ruler and extended (36" or more) straight edge.

Again, accuracy every step of the way while completing your top counts! There are loads of wonderful local classes and teachers to show you the proper technique. Press the top, and stay stitch any pieced edges for stability. Remove any extra threads, cat hairs, or other guest fuzzies. To prevent wrinkling, fold the quilt in accordion folds that are parallel to the top and bottom of your quilt. Hang this over a padded coat hanger. This is easily accomplished by wrapping some extra batting around a hanger.

If you are providing batting, prewash it if necessary. Some batting has a 6-10% shrinkage rate if not prewashed. Quilting also reduces the size of the quilt somewhat, so if you don't preshrink those battings, you can lose 10 inches on a 100-inch square quilt. Follow the manufacturer's directions, and discuss batting choices with your local shop or the quilter as they can vary greatly in quality, cost, and how they'll affect your final project.

You will need to provide a batt and backing that is at least 6" larger than the top. See below for some thoughts on these. If you have thread preferences, check with the quilter, and make sure you provide more than enough thread. Certain machines like certain threads, so the quilter may have some feedback on this. Press the backing, and hang as discussed for the top. Folding the top and backing in accordion folds parallel to the top and bottom edges will ensure that those folds will be released because of the tension of the rails of the machine. If the folds are perpendicular to the top and bottom, it is difficult to eliminate them without pressing. If the quilter has to press – you get to pay for her time!

### Costs & How They Are Determined

Many things will affect how much you pay for quilting services. If you have thoughts about the design and density of the quilting, you can at least get an estimate. Most quilters charge by the square inch. Compute this by multiplying the width times the length of your quilt.

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Very loose quilting can run 1-2 cents per square inch. Custom or dense quilting can run 2 cents and up, depending on complexity. If you have a quilt design in mind, discuss it with the quilter. There are many sources for continuous motion patterns that can be adapted for your quilt. Try to give the quilter some guidelines, or else know that she'll do what she's either most accomplished with, or requires the least amount of time. Some quilters will only use pantographs, or patterns that run the width of the quilt. Others get bored with these, and prefer to do custom work that enhances the design you've created. The prices and quality can range considerably, so you may want to check around, and ask for referrals for the type of quilting you desire!

Ask for a timeline. Many quilters are backed up several months. If there is a quilter that you are willing to wait for, ask if you can schedule the project, and provide the quilt and other materials just before she is ready to begin. Some quilters prefer not to store a large number of projects for extended lengths of time, so are willing to make arrangements to get your quilt at a date close to when they can complete the job. Think ahead, and take waiting times into account. If you need a quilt for a deadline, you may end up paying a "rush" fee.

There are several machines out there of varying quality that can affect the costs. Some machines have stitch length regulators, a computer component that adds a considerable amount to the cost of the machine that ensures a consistent stitch length. Other less expensive machines go one speed, and the skill of the quilter will determine the stitch length. Tension control and the way the quilt is loaded onto certain machines can also affect the finished quality. You get what you pay for here. If you are looking for a bargain, you may not be as happy with the finished job. Again, check references and ask to see samples of the quilter's work.

### Cotton vs. Synthetics: Batting and Threads

Batting is a critical component of your finished quilt. Polyester battings may be less expensive, but can have their own set of issues. We have many quilts that are still in excellent condition from the 1800s. Cotton batts were the only battings available, and they've withstood the test of time. Polyesters can break down, and a quilt with a high loft when made may ultimately lose the loft. They tend to dull needles faster, and since they are slippery, can lead to unintentional puckers and tucks. We prefer cotton, and are very pleased with Quilter's Dream. It has a low shrinkage rate, does not require prewashing, and is very consistent in quality. The drape is wonderful, and since it "sticks" to the top and back, ensures that there is never any shifting in the layers. It is available 120" wide, and runs \$12-13 a yard, a very good price for great quality! Your quilter may stock batting that they prefer. If you give permission for them to use their own, check the quality and fiber before it is stitched into your quilt.

If you provide your own batting, open it and let it relax before taking it to the quilter. You may want to place it in a dryer with a damp cloth to eliminate wrinkles or flattened areas. Pre-shrink the batting if recommended. Read the package insert for directions.

Threads are constantly evolving, and there are many wonderful choices on the market. Machines are calibrated to certain manufacturers, so the quilter may have specific preferences. Take time to discuss this with her during your planning. Polyester threads, usually less expensive, can cause greater tension and mean that you'll lose some of the size of the finished quilt. They can also be stronger than the fibers in your quilt, so if some little kid jumps on the bed where your quilt is displayed, the quilt will tear before the quilting threads do. It is easier to repair a bit of quilting than to mend a torn quilt! Communication about this is critical before the quilter begins!

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### Wavy Border Syndrome

Walk any quilt show, and you'll see loads of quilts hanging with wavy borders. These are caused by a number of problems. Preparation and proper technique will prevent W.B.S.

Borders should always be cut parallel to the selvage of the fabric. Cut the selvage off, and purchase enough fabric (if possible) that you can cut the border in one piece. You can piece the borders if necessary, but you may lose some of the integrity. When fabrics are woven, long fibers run the full length of the bolt. These are the most stable. If you cut parallel to the selvages, these fibers are intact and won't stretch as much as if you cut the border on the cross grain of the fabric.

Fold your quilt top, after pressing and squaring, and measure along the center fold to determine the length of your borders. Cut the borders to this measurement, and make both quilt edges fit the border! If you make the borders fit the edges, it is easy to have one side of your quilt be longer than the other. Once the quilt is pinned to the frame, part of the quilt can be taut, and the other droops. The tension cannot be adjusted if this is the case. You will end up with puckers and tucks!

Work with the quilter to make sure the quilting is even across the entire quilt surface. If you desire tight stippling in the blocks, but want the borders loosely quilted, your quilt will resemble a bowl or bra cup. The quilting needs to be evenly planned and balanced.

### Piecing the Backing

With the exception of purchasing the new wide backing fabrics, chances are that you will need to piece the backing. There are some things you must either know or be prepared to pay more!

The best way to piece the backing is to cut away all selvages, and to seam the backing with all seams parallel to the quilt top and bottom edges. After sewing the sections together, make sure the sides are perfectly square, and the whole unit is a minimum of 6" larger than the quilt top. If the seams are perpendicular to the top and bottom edges, it can create some problems for the quilter, especially on very large quilts. If you leave selvages in place, chances are she'll need to spend time cutting them away and repiecing your back, meaning extra costs. Selvages don't stretch, so they can be taut while the rest of the backing droops in other areas. The quilter will be unable to make adjustments, again meaning your backing will have unintentional surface textures!

When delivering your quilt, place a pin and piece of paper on both the quilt top and backing indicating top edges. If you have thoughts about how the backing needs to be positioned, let the quilter know immediately!

### What if I want to Quilt my Quilt?

Some quilters do not wish to let someone else work on their quilts. We provide lessons and rental time on our American Professional Quilt System Millennium machine, a top of the line, stitch length regulated machine. If you would like to learn to operate this machine, are thinking about purchasing your own longarm, or wish to know more about the process, call us for a one on one class. The three-hour class is \$70.00, and you get an additional three hours of free time for practice. Rental ranges from \$10-15 an hour, depending on the blocks of time you prepurchase. If the machine is not in use and you provide a letter of intent, we provide free time on the machine for quilts for philanthropic purposes. This gives you

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some free practice on a quilt that is not a competition masterpiece. It does take quite a bit of practice before you feel completely confident, so understand that there is a learning curve!

### Who We Are

Jukebox is a Tustin-based quilt business that publishes quilt patterns and books, provides hard to find quilt pigments and supplies, offers many awesome classes with some of the top international quilters, and provides long arm quilt services. We are happy to provide references and share samples of our quilting, and to answer any questions you may have. We are capable of adding custom, high quality quilting to your treasured quilts, and will work closely with you on the design process. We prefer not to use pantographs or to do loose, lower quality quilting. We recognize you have many options and choices for the quilting process. We take a great deal of pride in our skill level, quality of workmanship, and design talents. We may not be your least expensive option, but have many customers who will tell you that they are thrilled with the services we provide.

If you enjoy hand quilting, or wish to quilt on your home machine, we can provide basting services to help you prepare your quilt. We also can bind quilts if you desire. Don't hesitate to contact us with any questions! We frequently bring award-winning quilters in for classes, so watch our class schedule to learn things like machine quilting from some of the world's most talented quilters!!

### Checklist for taking your quilt to a long arm quilter...

- Top and backing is pressed and clean.**
  - Drape over padded hangers to prevent wrinkles.**
  - Top and backing are accurately squared.**
  - Backing and batting are at least 6" larger than the top.**
  - Top edges of quilt top and backing are marked.**
  - Call ahead to schedule the quilting services.**
  - Consider designs and patterns for the quilting for your quilt.**
- The more planning you do, the happier you'll be with the finished project!**
- Decide on threads and batting. Discuss these with the quilter.**
  - Clearly communicate any ideas or thoughts you have with the quilter.**

If you are happy with the quilting services you receive, tell your fellow quilters! If you are not happy, take into consideration that the quilter cannot perform miracles if your top was less than perfect to begin with, and probably does not read minds well. Discuss any dissatisfaction with the quilter and allow her the opportunity to either correct or explain any problems or issues.

If you are thrilled with the quilting, chocolate is highly recommended to guarantee the quilter will work with you on future projects! Many quilters quickly develop a client base, and at a certain point, do not take any new clients. If you have developed a great working relationship, future projects will be fun and satisfying, so a bit of bribery never hurts!

For wonderful products, a schedule of our classes, how to articles and other features, please visit our website at [www.jukeboxquilts.com](http://www.jukeboxquilts.com). We also offer a free e-zine newsletter that is packed with interesting items and articles. Opt-in for this *Notes From Jukebox* newsletter over our website!