

# **WORKING WITH YOUR LONGARM QUILTER TO OBTAIN THE BEST RESULTS FOR YOUR QUILT**

**Prepared by:**

**Sandra G. Darlington**

**November 2011**

## **Preparing Your Quilt Top**

Keep your top square, by squaring your blocks as you go.

Use a consistent ¼ inch seam allowance.

Press your top. Most longarm quilters will charge you extra for this service.

Remove loose threads.

Seams & stitches should be secure.

It is best to stay stitch around the 4 edges of your quilt to prevent seams from opening or borders from stretching as the quilt is being loaded onto the frame and when winding it back & forth on the rollers.

Let your quilter know that you will be adding embellishments. Most longarmers will ask you wait until after the quilting is finished.

Measure your borders carefully when adding them to the quilt top to avoid fullness, a.k.a. – “friendly borders” or borders that “wave.”

Take 3 measurements from the body of your quilt top, first from each end and again in the middle. Use the average measurement to determine the length to cut your borders. Turn your quilt top and measure the other side the same way.

Safety pin a note to the top edge of your quilt top to indicate it is the top. It’s not always obvious to the quilter.

## **Backing**

The backing must be square to avoid droopy backs and puckers.

Seams should be horizontal, when possible, to avoid the “hammock effect” which greatly increases the likelihood of getting pleats/tucks.

Centering pieced backings is very difficult. If you have a special need for the backing to be perfectly centered, you need to make your longarmer aware of that. Most longarmers will not guarantee this and may turn down your job altogether.

Remove the selvages and press seams open. A ½ inch seam is preferred.

The backing fabric needs to be larger than the quilt top due to the mechanics of attaching the backing to the longarm machine. Since there are variables between the different longarm quilters and their different machines,

it is important to ask your longarm quilter how much larger she/he needs your backing to be. Generally speaking, it should be from 3 to 6 inches longer and wider on all 4 sides.

Press your backing. Most longarm quilters will charge you a fee to press the backing for you.

Bed sheets are not recommended for backings due to the higher thread count. This often causes skipped stitches. If your longarmer agrees to use a sheet, it would be to your advantage to wash and dry the sheet a few times first to help “relax” the fibers.

Wide backs are great...but they are rarely square cut from the bolt. Remember to buy a bit extra so you can square it up. Most people are recommending you buy an extra ¼ yard to allow for the squaring and shrinking. You can always add any extra to your stash!

A busy back is preferred. It will hide the many thread changes usually associated with custom quilting. There are certainly exceptions to this rule, but consider the thread color(s) when choosing your fabric. Most longarmers suggest the colors on the backing fabric should blend with the colors on the quilt top.

Is your backing directional? If so, you need to mark it, usually by safety pinning a small note to the top.

### **Thread**

Do you want the thread to really show? If so you might want to consider a thick thread, perhaps with variegated colors. Or, maybe a metallic thread, or a thread such as lime green on purple fabric; something with a great contrast.

Do you want the thread to melt into the background? If so you might want a thinner (but still strong) thread that matches your top.

Do you only like cotton thread, or do you prefer a poly thread?

Most longarmers prefer to match the top thread with the bobbin thread. Consider how it will look not only on your top, but how it will look on the back.

What thread does your longarmer prefer to use on her/his machine? Some threads run great on one machine, but cause “fits” on another one. Most longarmers prefer to use their own thread.

### **Batting**

What will the quilt be used for?

Do you like only natural fibers, such as cotton, wool, silk?

Do you want the batting to be fire retardant?

Do you want a recycled batting?

Do you like poly batting? Do you prefer a blend?

Do you like a thick, puffy batting or a flat batting? A thicker batting will show the stitch definition better than a flat batting. Is that the look you are going for?

If your batting shrinks in the wash, will that complement the look of your quilt, or will it make it ugly?

What color batting would be best for your quilt? Batting typically comes in white, natural and black.

Your batting needs to be larger than your quilt top. Usually it should be close to the same size as the backing.

Does your longarmer prefer certain brands over other brands in her/his machine? Some batting will not hold up to the tugging on the longarm. Some batting throws particles into the air that the longarmer is breathing and also these particles get into the machine and cause problems. Buy only quality batting.

Does your longarmer carry batting for your convenience?

### Quilting Designs

Longarmers typically have different “levels” of quilting to offer to their customers. Some names are:

E2E (Edge to edge): This is defined as a design that begins at one side of the top and runs to the other side of the top. There is no regard or special consideration for the blocks or the borders, Examples of E2E designs are an “all over” meander, a pantograph or a design board (also referred to by some manufacturers as “groovy boards.”)

Light Custom or Semi-Custom: Frequently this quilting will have one design in the body of the quilt and a different design in the borders. An example would be to do a puzzle meander in the body of the quilt and feathers in the border. Typically this quilting does not have SID (stitch in the ditch) quilting.

Custom: This quilting would add SID and individual designs for the blocks and borders. Perhaps some ruler work.

Heirloom or Advanced Custom: In addition to the Custom quilting, this might include a very dense background fill, possibly trapunto, usually the need for numerous different rulers, the use of stencils, marking designs (be sure to discuss what type of marking tools will be used and how to remove the marks).

Remember to mention to your quilter if you “hate” a particular design, such as McTavishing, or if you “hate” hearts or feathers, etc.

### Prices

Longarm quilters use different price structures to determine the cost of your quilting. Often a pantograph or design board will be easy to price, whether the longarmer charges by the square inch, square foot or square yard. An example of a charge would be to measure your quilt length and your quilt width to get the number of square inches, then multiply that number by the cost per square inch of the design you choose. Usually you will have the choice of a range of prices to meet your individual budget for that quilt.

50” wide X 70” long = 3500 sq in X \$.03 per sq in = \$105.00 for the quilting

50” wide X 70” long = 3500 sq in X \$.02 per sq in = \$70.00 for the quilting

50” wide X 70” long = 3500 sq in X \$.015 per sq in = \$52.50 for the quilting

Custom/Heirloom quilting may be charged by the square inch (foot or yard) or by the hour. Often you will be given an estimate that will give a “range” of the cost. An example might be a range of between \$300 and \$375, depending on the circumstances that arise when doing custom quilting.

Some longarmers have a separate charge for thread. Some will charge extra for each additional thread change/color change. Some charge extra for “speciality” threads.

Ask your quilter about the prices and any suggestions she/he has to keep your bill in a certain range if you are trying to stick to a certain budget. There may be options you haven’t considered. Some quilters are willing to “barter” their services, too.

RUSH charges...some quilters will work on their usual day off, if you have something that needs to be finished in a hurry. Be sure to discuss any “rush” charges that might be added to the regular quilting cost.

Some longarmers have a minimum charge – it seems \$50 is about the norm for E2E and \$75 for custom, but this will vary. If you have a small quilt, you should ask if there is a minimum charge. Per square inch it may be only \$40, but you will be charged \$50, if that is the minimum.

### **Payment**

Some longarmers want a percentage up front, others don’t. I think all longarmers expect payment upon delivery of the quilted top. Ask what form of payment – cash, check, credit card?

### **Contact Information**

**215-498-0497**

**[DarlingtonQuilts@gmail.com](mailto:DarlingtonQuilts@gmail.com)**

### **Information contributed by the following longarm quilters:**

Heidi Merril, New York

Diane Selman, Texas

Laura Jansen, California

Linda Rech, WA

Lynn O’Neill, MO

Kim Loar, PA

Anette DeNardo, PA

Carolyn Berch

Barb Mayfield, WA

### **Edited by:**

Nancy Villarreal, CA