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# How to Quilt Borders



*In the last issue we looked at the correct way to sew borders to your quilt top. It's a boring procedure but very necessary if you want your quilt to turn out nicely. As a machine quilter, there are many things I can do to try and tame problem areas in quilts, but sometimes it's just not possible to 'quilt it out'.*

*So having discussed how to attach borders, the next logical step is to look at ways to quilt them. Borders have traditionally been thought of as the 'frame' around your quilt 'picture'. Modern quilts tend to move away from having borders but the majority of our quilts still make use of this design element. We've seen before that the quilting designs used can really make or break a quilt, and the designs used for your borders are no exception.*

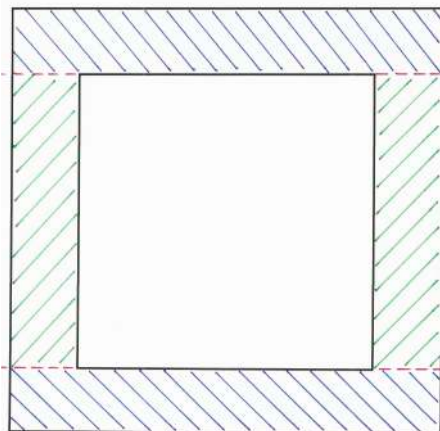
**B**orders can be quite intimidating to quilt; they are on the edges and therefore the least stable area of your quilt, they are long areas that need to be filled, they are the number one place for having extra fabric to accommodate. You have to work out how to get round corners and spacing designs can involve more

maths than we really want to consider embarking on!...Ok, I can already hear you thinking up excuses why that quilt top is going to stay a UFO for a while longer! Let's look at the whole picture a bit more closely and try to find solutions to help you. For me, the 2 biggest issues with borders are **1)** you have work out how to handle

the corners and **2)** you have to space designs evenly so it gives a balanced appearance. Sometimes the best solution is to avoid the problem altogether! So let's look at ways of not having to work your design around a corner!...Sounds good right?!

## **Butted borders**

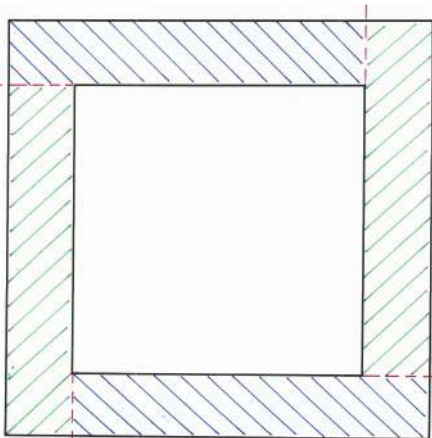
In this example, you can quilt a design in each border 'panel'. This is one of the easiest methods you can choose. You would quilt your chosen pattern in the side panels of the border first and then do the top and bottom panels running the complete width of the quilt.



## **Same side butted borders**

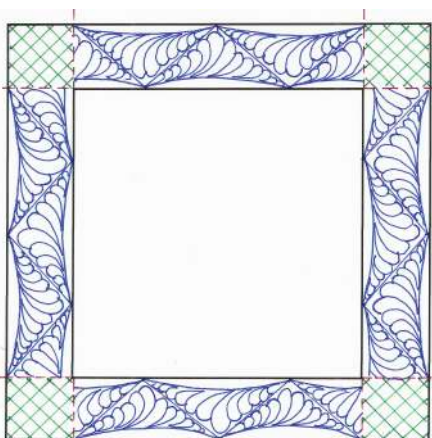
Same side butted borders are a variation on the simple butted border. You start with one border panel and quilt from the edge of the quilt to the edge of the far side of the central panel. Then 'turn' the quilt and work down the border again working from the edge of the quilt to the bottom edge of the central panel. Do this on all 4 sides and you have border patterns that fit together a bit like a puzzle and you've

avoided having to work out designs to go around corners!



### Cornerstone borders

In the same way that you can put cornerstone pieces between sashings surrounding a block, you can quilt cornerstone designs on your quilt. They are separate from the longer sections of the border design and may or may not follow the fabric of the border. I often use this technique even if the border is made from a continuous piece of fabric without pieced cornerstones.

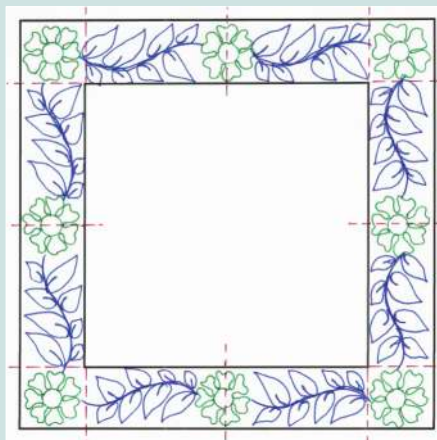


It's an easy way to help you focus on spacing designs along the straight edges rather than worrying about corners too! I find it especially useful in more modern and contemporary quilts where I use a lot of ruler work and straight lines. It's not always easy to find a way to take a very

geometric design and find a pleasing way to get it to go around a corner. By using a cornerstone design you avoid that awkwardness.

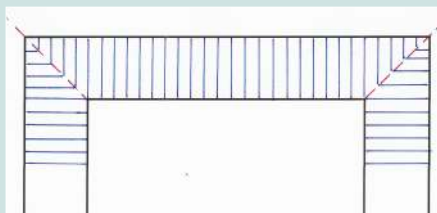
### Floating borders

This is a variation on the cornerstone border idea. Use designs in the corners and at points along the border and fill in the spaces between them with a different design.



### Mitred borders

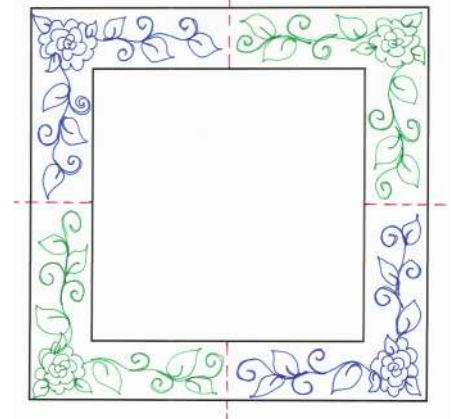
Sometimes people piece mitred borders, in which case it is good to quilt following this idea. Piano key borders are the easiest to do in this way but feathers work well too.



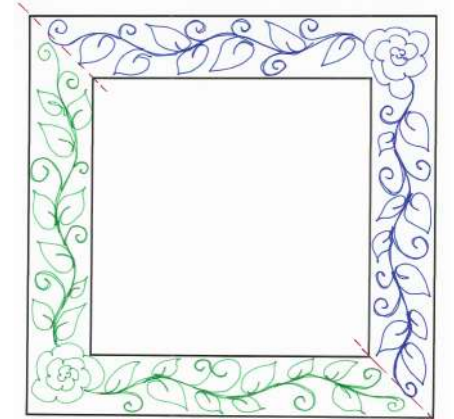
### Sectioned borders

I use this kind of border quite often, but can't find a documented name anywhere, so for want of anything better let's call them sectioned borders. You take a design that goes from half way down the border, around the corner and half way along the next side. That becomes your design and you repeat it in mirrored forms for the other 3 borders.

I like these because it helps you get around corners but reduces the problem of trying to get your designs perfectly spaced between the corners.



Another obvious variation would be to divide the quilt in half diagonally and quilt from top left to bottom right in one piece. This can be mirrored to finish the remaining half. You've effectively halved the number of corners but significantly reduced the calculations needed to space designs!



### Continuous borders

In continuous borders the aim is to have one line of quilting design that goes all the way around the 4 borders in one continuous design. Continuous borders can be tricky if you want them to be very formal and evenly spaced. But you can go with a more informal style and just start

quilting. I learnt a brilliant technique from American longarm quilter DeLoa Jones, where you quilt up to the corner and then stitch a hook shape. This allows you to 'bend' your design around the corner and carry on down the next side. Google DeLoa Jones; she is an amazing Longarm quilter and teacher. Even if you are a domestic, or sit down, quilter you will be able to learn a huge amount from her techniques.



If you want a very formal, evenly spaced design, you will have to do a few calculations! I like to have an odd number of pattern repeats in a border, it just looks better. So I'd measure the length of the side I need to fill and divide it by an odd number. Let's look at the example of a 60 inch border length. If I want 5 pattern repeats each pattern must measure  $60/5 = 12$  inches. This might be a bit big. 7 repeats would need to measure  $60/7 = 8.5$  inches each and 9 repeats would be  $60/9 = 6.7$  inches. You can decide which size would be best given the size of the quilt and scale of the pattern you want to quilt.

Another simple technique to divide your border length into even sections is to use till paper. Take a length of paper the same length as the border and fold it in half. Fold in half again and continue until you have a section of the kind of size

you feel is manageable. It will create an even number of sections but you can very easily use this paper to now mark your border into appropriate sections.



I try wherever possible not to mark my quilts. It takes a lot of effort but there are times when it's unavoidable. I have some stencils I made with vertical lines various distances apart. I use them with a chalk pounce pad to quickly mark lines in borders (and blocks). These help you space narrow designs and can be 'fudged' if you need to work in an area that is not exactly the correct size.



Conventional stencils are also great for borders. Beginners are often overwhelmed by the idea of having to choose, fit and quilt patterns. Stencils take some of the thinking away from you by giving you the basic design.



It's then up to you to embellish the basic design and make it your own...but that's a whole other interesting topic!

When it comes to actually quilting the borders there are several methods to use. If you are a domestic machine quilter then you normally quilt from the centre out and the borders are a natural last step. You are moving your fabric under the machine and other than having to cope with the size of the quilt, there are no restrictions to you quilting the whole border in one go. Frame based machine quilters face slightly different challenges.

The quilt is mounted on poles to be able to move the machine over the quilt and you have a certain amount of quilt top that you can see at any one time. If you position your quilt on the frame at the top then you can quilt a portion of the left hand border, all of the top border and a portion of the right hand border. The amount of side border you can work will vary from 4 inches to about 20 inches depending on the type of machine you have. But either way you can't see all of the side borders without

advancing your quilt.

Some people choose to quilt "chunks" of the border as they quilt through the rest of the top. They would start with the top and portions of side border and complete all the central quilting that they can before advancing the quilt and completing the next visible portion of the borders and centre. This technique has the advantage of controlling waviness as you go along; quilting evenly across the whole quilt as you go. The downside of this method is that you have more stops and starts and quilting chunks of border doesn't allow you to build a rhythm...which I need to get consistency in my quilting. My preferred method is to do all the

Stitch in the Ditch and quilt all the inside of the quilt and then go back and quilt the borders at the end. I **ALWAYS** stitch in the ditch and I use flower head pins to stabilize the border section that I'm leaving for the end. This helps to control the waviness I mentioned earlier. If you densely quilt the centre but leave the borders untouched then they will be considerably puffier. Fortunately, this will disappear as you quilt the borders so long as you use an even density of quilting. You may have heard people talk about turning their quilts to quilt the border. This applies to people using frame based machines and while I try not to, because again it takes more time, there are instances when it's quicker and much easier to turn a quilt. You quilt your top

and bottom borders first because you can quilt their full length along your quilt frame. Then unpin the quilt, turn it 90 degrees and reattach it to the frame. Now you can see the full length of the remaining borders. This is better if you are marking your borders and want to check your spacing...you can't do this if you are constantly rolling your quilt back and forth for the side borders.

I hope this has given you some helpful insight into quilting borders. For those who are still intimidated with quilting we will be running the hugely popular **Machine Quilters Bootcamp** where you will learn all about machine quilting. See details in advert below. I hope to see you there!

Claire



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# Machine Quilters BOOT CAMP

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The advertisement features a collage of quilting-related images: a colorful quilt top, a quilted runner, and several spools of thread in various colors (yellow, red, blue, green). The text is overlaid on these images, providing details about the bootcamp event.



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