CHOOSING A QUILTING PATTERN

I think it can go without saying…but I’ll say it anyway, from the point of view as a longarm quilter…the quilting pattern chosen for your quilt can make or break the finished product.

It is the main reason I put so much emphasis on the “consultation” segment between the longarmer and the piecer. I think it is imperative that the longarmer or machine quilter has a good understanding of what the piecer envisioned when he/she said, “I’m going to make this quilt.” Then, off to the stash or the fabric store they go.

There isn’t much relevance as to how long the project took to complete, but with rare exception, whether a week or years later, when the quilt is done the piecer still had the vision of the finished product. That vision should be a part of the selection process for the quilting pattern.

That doesn’t mean the choice of the pattern is in stone. It doesn’t mean the quilting pattern from the magazine or displayed in the picture of the finished quilt on the kit package or viewed on the quilt hanging in the quilt shop is going to be “your” choice or the choice you and the longarm quilter decide on. All of these may be influences but for as many block patterns as there are, there are probably as many quilting patterns. My two main suppliers are urban elementz and Anne Bright. I have over 250 currently.

I’m not a computer driven longarmer so there are many patterns I’m not comfortable doing. When you must retrace over the same stitch line there is too much room for error for a hand guided machine and the transition from the designer’s pattern to the quilt becomes flawed. So, if the pattern has a lot of ‘return’ stitching I will recommend a computer driven longarmer. My goal is to do my best to compliment your quilt.

So, what goes into picking the pattern. Some quilters rely on the longarmer, drop off the quilt, pick up the quilt and bind it. Others will tell the longarmer the pattern they want. The rest, my preference, will consult with the longarmer, present their ideas and be receptive to the ideas of the longarmer and come to a choice that will in fact compliment the quilt. To those who choose to leave it up to me…with my whole heart I thank you for your confidence in my talent.

Quilting pattern influences are vast.

* Personal likes and dislikes.
  + Tight patterns
  + Loose patterns
  + Floral
  + Geometric
  + Feather
  + Hard lines
  + Soft lines
  + Theme specific (coincide with the quilt fabrics, i.e. Baby Quilt with zoo animal fabric. Zoo animal quilting pattern.)
  + Combination-Stippled Border with a Border to Border Pattern
  + Or as simple as an Edge to Edge Meander. A common pattern on a T-shirt Quilt, so as not to distract or conflict from the theme of the T-Shirts.
  + Does the quilt have a gender? Soft and feminine or hard and masculine. Or vice versa.
  + Is the quilt specific to an event, wedding, birthday, anniversary, holiday, graduation, retirement, or maybe memories?

Which is why the consultation and knowing your piecers thoughts are crucial. Over the last 9+ years as a longarm quilter I have learned a lot that has helped me make recommendations to the piecer. Listen to those likes and dislikes when they are shared and “listen to the quilt.” During the consultation process I open the quilt and spread it out on a worktable or my ironing table. We will usually pick thread color first. That is also part of the “compliment the quilt.” I prefer to use color that blends with the quilt. I certainly don’t want a high contrasting color that makes the quilting pattern the first thing you see. I much prefer the quilt be the main subject and the quilting pattern secondary.

The quilting pattern is twofold. First, it must properly secure the “sandwich” to provide strength and stability to stand up to use and washing. Second, meld with the quilt tops construction, fabrics pattern and block selection. While the quilt top is spread on the table I listen to the quilt. Modern in design, traditional in design, patriotic, theme specific, floral, holiday, T-Shirt, small prints, large prints, batik, or solid fabrics. It will tell you that with all the sharp points of stars that a more fluid and softer quilting pattern might well be appropriate. Like many patriotic quilts, there are enough stars and stripes already, choosing something softer and flowing may be the best choice. Very frequently fabric colors scream out, bright, joyful, and playful. Whereas others speak softer more serious, precious, and sincere or they speak about success and strength. The last two can easily be attributed to a piecer constructing a quilt for a cancer survivor. Like the piecer, the quilt top has a lot to say…listen.

The transition from bits of fabric to a pieced top, sandwich, quilted and ready for binding is a process. Each step important and deserving of the crafters attention whether it be the piecer, longarmer, machine quilter or binder. For me, the longarmer, I need to be as specific in my process as the quilter was in theirs. Hopefully when I’ve finished, I have in fact complimented their work and they see what they envisioned when it all began.

I know, it sounds like a lot. It really isn’t when both the piecer and longarmer get on the same page. The page that says nothing is chiseled in stone. Which makes quilting at all levels adventurous and habit forming.

Quilt till you wilt, we do.