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Appliqué Dilemma

Should you quilt on appliqué patches, or shouldn't you? It may depend on who you are trying to please—quilt judges, your mother-in-law, or yourself!

Some quilters argue that early examples of appliqué quilts do not have quilting stitches across the appliqué sections. They believe that contemporary quilters should respect that tradition. Your decision on whether or not to stitch over appliqué depends on what you want to emphasize on your quilt.

Quilt judges look for consistent density of quilting over an entire quilt. That means that if you've densely quilted the background with meandering, cross hatching, or other stitches, they will expect to see stitching on top of your appliqué for consistency. That doesn't mean you need to use tiny meandering stitches, but your competitive score would improve with balanced quilting throughout the piece.

You can add definition to appliqué with strategically stitched lines that represent natural breaks. Imagine your appliqué as a page from a coloring book that has been colored

with crayons. Your fabrics represent the colored sections, and the edge of each patch represents a solid line where one color meets the next. In a coloring book, those bold dark lines give our eyes that natural break we expect to see in real life. On quilts, the indentation and texture created by quilting stitches provides the necessary break we need.

Take a look at the teddy bear outline in *Diagram A*. That's what appliqué would look like if you only stitched around the outer edge. But the teddy bear comes to life in *Diagram B*, where the additional lines help us recognize features.

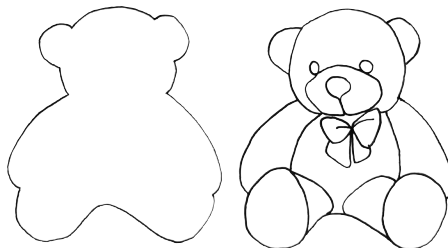


DIAGRAM A

DIAGRAM B

Some textile preservation specialists suggest that stitching on the appliqué will actually help a quilt last longer. That's because unquilted fabric areas are raised up from the rest of the quilt, and receive the most wear and abrasion. Your batting choice will also have an impact on the quilt's stability long term. If you choose batting that must be quilted 2–4 inches apart, but your appliqué section is larger than that, the batting in that area could separate and bunch up after washing.

Quilting stitches can help add longevity to appliqué sections, but that doesn't mean that you **HAVE** to use detail quilting to secure them. You can certainly stitch an overall design across the quilt, right over the appliqué. This will do a good job of stabilizing the quilt and adding durability. Some quilters feel that quilting an all-over design on an appliqué quilt is wrong, but if it means that the quilt will be loved and used instead of staying tucked out of sight inside a closet,



You can give your quilt a realistic look by stitching details on the appliqué.

then that's exactly the right way to quilt it.

If you're not confident enough to attempt detail quilting with colored thread, invisible thread is a great alternative. It blends in, allows you to pass through a section more than once without thread buildup, and camouflages wobbles. In fact, it's my favorite thread for stitching around appliqués. However, I switch to regular thread to stitch on TOP of the appliqué patches.

To help you visualize how different quilting techniques will impact your appliqué, I've stitched six different candle mats for your review.

Example 1 (on page 80) illustrates how the appliqué puffs up from the background meandering around it. That draws attention to the flower, but it also looks distorted, with puckers and wobbles in the fabric. *Example 2* shows the effect of quilting over the top of the appliqué with an overall design. This makes the appliqué blend in with the background instead of becoming a focal point.

I switched to invisible thread for *Example 3*, and only outlined the edges of each appliqué section. The appliqué has dimension due to the loft of the batting (Hobbs Wool). If I had quilted the background, it

would become even more prominent. *Example 4* has outline stitching with invisible thread around each patch, but I also added detail lines on top of each section with invisible thread. The detail lines create slight indentations that are subtle, however, the needle holes are more noticeable with invisible thread since I used fusible web to hold the appliqués in place. Fusible web does not allow the needle holes to heal, and the invisible thread does not fill up the entire needle hole.

Example 5 showcases detail quilting with pale pink thread. Because it's thin and blends in very well, I didn't bother switching to brown thread to quilt the leaves. The colored thread adds even more realism to the appliqué, but does show up more where I traveled through a section more than once. It's also more noticeable when I was not right on target.

Example 6 shows contrasting thread for detail quilting. The slightly darker color adds richness and texture to the petals. Using the darker color around the perimeter of the flower centers also outlines those sections much like the thick outline in a coloring book, giving each shape more definition and bringing individual elements to life. None of the examples represents the "right way" to handle appliqué on a quilt. Choose the method you prefer, and keep in mind that the only person you truly need to please is you!



EXAMPLE 1



EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



EXAMPLE 4



EXAMPLE 5



EXAMPLE 6