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# SOMETIMES IT'S NICE TO BE "INVISIBLE"!

I am astonished at how many wonderful panels and border prints are available these days. Quilters have often referred to panels as "cheater quilts" since no piecing is involved. All you need is the panel, some backing fabric, and batting and binding. Add a little quilting and "Presto!" Instant quilt!

If you need a quick gift, or you simply want to ring in a season with a new wall hanging, a fabric panel makes things fast and easy. Coordinating fabric is sometimes available so you can add borders or more piecing to your panel if you like. However, many designers have incorporated borders directly into the printing to give the illusion that you've pieced the project.

Border print fabrics offer another quick alternative to traditional piecing or appliqué. A border print allows you to add panache to a simple block layout



without investing hours and hours of time. But it can also be the inspiration "in reverse" when you don't know what to put in the center of your quilt!

I fell in love with the border print you see in my table topper (*above*). I knew I just had to have it, but I also didn't have any particular plan for using it in a quilt. The answer was literally right in front of me. I used one of the flowers as inspiration, and created a large floral motif for a center panel.

The border was already colorful and dramatic, so I used black fabric to provide contrast in the center. I fused the flower shape in place on the center fabric, and then used invisible thread in the top and bobbin of my home sewing machine and stitched a close zigzag stitch around each shape.

A separate fabric block in each corner allowed me to center each border section on the quilt to make the best use of the flowers. It also

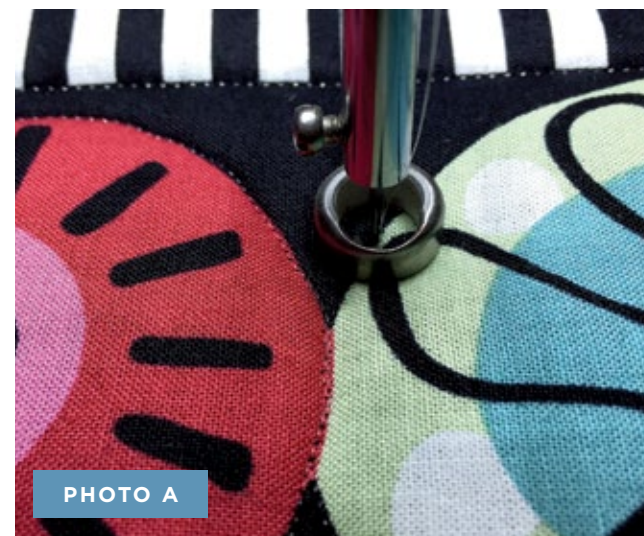


PHOTO A

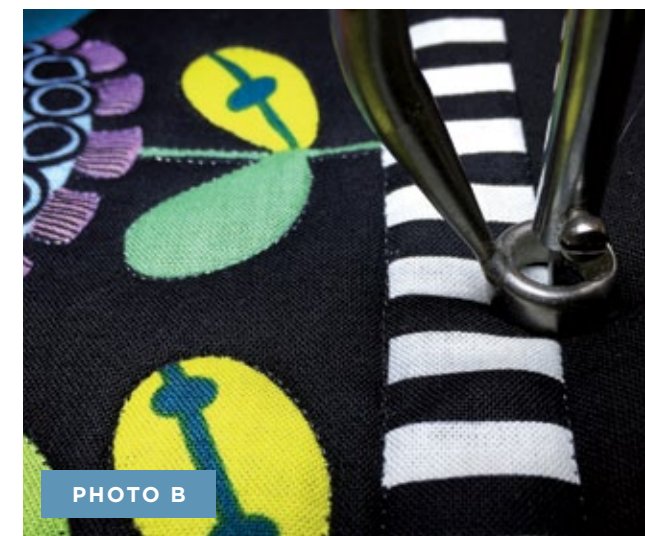


PHOTO B

introduced a place to incorporate another simple design element to tie the border and center motifs together.

As with any quilt, one of the biggest questions was how to quilt it. An overall design is fast and simple to do. However, choosing the appropriate thread color for an overall design can be daunting. If the panel depicts a busy scene, adding colored thread can be distracting. That's where invisible thread comes in. Even if you're simply meandering over the entire panel or border, invisible thread allows you to cross through dark and light fabrics while preserving the essence of the panel's image.

It's fine to quilt over your panel with an overall design, but if you really want to maintain its depth and realism, think about outlining key design elements with stitching instead. Since a panel has no seams (unless you've added a border) you won't have any "ditches" to stitch in or appliqué edges to steer around. To make those design elements pop up, you'll need to stitch around printed elements. Invisible thread is perfect for this! You'll cross over many colors as you quilt around shapes, so invisible thread allows you

work quickly without dozens of thread changes. You can even travel through areas more than once without drawing attention to them, just as I did between each flower in *Photo A*.

The black-and-white stripe on my border fabric creates a great narrow border, and I can make it look pieced by stitching on each side in the imaginary "ditch". Using invisible thread means I don't have to worry about being perfect—I can make it look amazing, even if I wander a bit, because my stitches won't show (*Photo B*).

Quilters have been afraid of invisible thread through the years. Early versions of the thread were indeed very hard on tension assemblies, thread guides, bobbin cases, and hook assemblies. Today's invisible thread is very fine, much different from what some described as "fishing line" over a decade ago. Now you can find invisible nylon and polyester thread, in clear and smoke colors. Use clear for lighter fabric, and smoke for darker fabric (*Photo C*).



PHOTO C



Each type of invisible thread has merits. Polyester invisible thread is strong, heat tolerant, and resistant to the damaging effects of UV exposure. It works well for quilts that will receive lots of wear, but it can appear a bit shiny. Nylon thread tends to be suppler with a matte finish, making it nice for areas where you want the thread to really disappear (in and around appliqué, for example.) However, it can deteriorate if exposed to UV rays over long periods, and could melt if subjected to a hot iron.

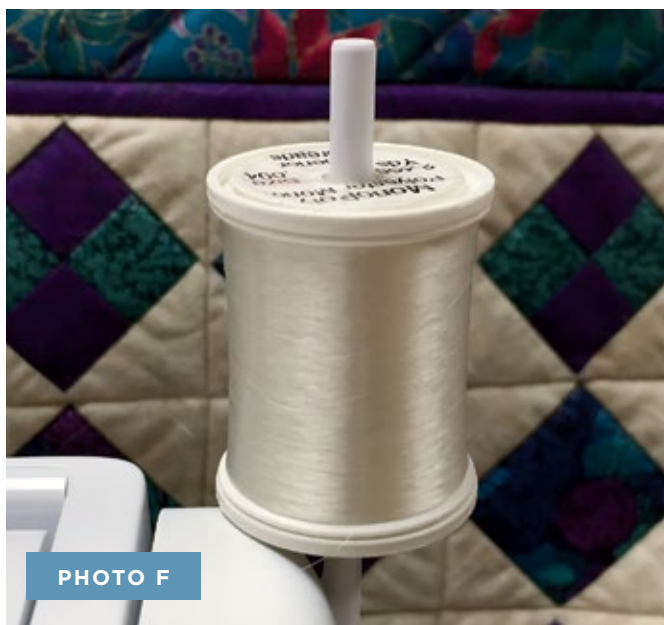
When you use invisible thread, pay attention to the way it's wrapped on the spool or cone. If the thread crisscrosses as it wraps around the cone, it should come off the top or end of the cone. (This thread is called "cross-wound" thread.) On a longarm machine, place the cone on your normal vertical spool holder. For your domestic sewing machine, orient this type of spool so that the thread comes off the top, which usually means you'll need to put the thread horizontally on your machine (*Photo D*).

If the thread wraps around the cone and does not cross itself, the thread is "stack wound." This thread works best

when the spool can freely turn. Mount this thread on a horizontal spool holder on a longarm machine as you see in *Photo E*. For a domestic machine, mount the spool vertically if you can so that the spool turns as you sew (*Photo F*).

The biggest problem with invisible thread is breakage. To overcome this, pay attention to the best spool placement

for the brand you are using, and get comfortable loosening your top (and possibly bobbin) tension a lot. Invisible thread has elasticity, but it will break if the tension is too tight. With a little practice you'll soon be adding this valuable secret weapon to your quilting toolbox—especially for your next panel quilt!



## WEB EXTRA

To download instructions for the table topper shown on page 82, go to [FonsandPorter.com/Invisible](http://FonsandPorter.com/Invisible)