



By Judy Woodworth

Managing Editor's Note:
This article is the first in a series in which Judy offers up solutions on how to tackle all those problems typically encountered at one time or another when quilting for ourselves or others.

Tackling Problem Quilts

WAVY borders

Do you ever have quilts that are not flat, have loose threads that are everywhere, or have borders that ripple like waves? Then you are not alone. These aren't show quilts, and the piecer just wants it quilted. She doesn't want to redo the border. She doesn't want to pay to have you redo it either. She is so sick of this top, if you won't quilt it, she'll probably just throw it away. She just wants to finish the project.

You almost don't need to tell her it's not great, she knows it. The quilt is just going to be used as a utility quilt, or sent off with a college student, or used for picnics. Many of these tops have been purchased for only a few dollars and were found at the bottom of a box at some antique auction. You know the quilts I'm talking about.

Talk to Your Customer

To find out if you are going to be dealing with a problem quilt, you need to lay it on a flat table, or drape it over your quilting frame so that it drops over each side. You and the customer will be able to see if it is flat or if it ripples. There might be a large amount of puffiness in the middle of the quilt. The customer needs to see these problems before you accept the quilt.

Diplomatically talk to the customer about the problems. Ask your customer what the quilt will be used for? Will it ever be shown in a show or to a guild? Or, will this top just become a utility quilt? Was this quilt top a "saved antique" that the customer just wants the owner in heaven to know that her efforts weren't a waste. Someone is really going to use and enjoy the efforts put forth to make the top.

Be gentle in your questions. This might be the first time your customer has brought a quilt in to be quilted, maybe this is their first quilt, and you don't want to run them off. If they are new to quilting and want to learn, you can tell them how to keep their borders straight, either for this quilt or a future quilt. Be careful not to discourage your customer, especially someone new to quilting, because your comments and how you make them could possibly make them decide to just quit piecing altogether.

Educate Your Customer

To educate my customer, I tell my customer what **I do** to keep straight borders. I personally always iron the border with starch, so that it will lay flat and not be stretchy before I cut it. If I can, I will cut the border fabric on the length of the grain, as there is less stretching when I do this and most of the time I don't have to piece the border. I will measure the quilt several places across the quilt top and use the average quilt length and width size, if it's just a slight difference. If it's more than an inch or two difference, I'll go with the lesser measurement, and ease the quilt top in by placing the quilt top on the bottom next to the feed dogs and the border on top as I'm sewing, so that the feed dogs will help to ease in the extra fabric.

Before I begin sewing the quilt top and border together I *always* begin by pinning. I start pinning by quartering each section, then pinning together in smaller sections. I don't want the border to run. I would rather have a little puffiness in the middle of the quilt than to have a wavy border. If the measurement is a large amount, I might recheck some of the blocks in the quilt to see where I went wrong and re-sew if necessary. Hopefully on a

show quilt the middle is very close to being perfectly pieced. (I've only known a few piecers who can achieve perfection, remember we are all human.)

For my show quilts, I use my "walking foot" to sew on the border so that it is evenly moving along as I piece it together. This makes such a big difference and is worth taking a few extra seconds to put the special walking foot on your machine. Several of my machines have the built-in feed dogs. If your machine is like this, just make sure the feed dogs are engaged.

For those customers who don't want to redo the borders and who aren't going to show their quilt, give them a verbal disclaimer such as the following.

"I will do my best to ease in this border but there are no promises that I won't quilt in a few pleats, and it most probably will not have a straight line at the bottom of the quilt. But you should be able to lovingly use it just knowing that it's not perfect."

I had a quilter tell me one time that she was too busy to take on problem quilts. She felt that if the customer couldn't take the time to do the border right, she wouldn't take the time to quilt the quilt. I think even great quilters such as she was, should show a little understanding and compassion. We can try to teach our customers so that rippled borders don't happen too often in the future, but we must always remember that not all quilters are "show quilters" or "perfect quilters". I know someday when I am ninety years old and I can't see very well, my borders might be all rippled. I hope some quilter will have the compassion to quilt my top with all its flaws and give it the best love they can give it.

Quilting Wavy Borders

To quilt a top with a wavy border I begin by stitching down the side and bottom edge of the quilt top with a normal stitch length about 1/16 of an inch from the edge. As I sew I gently pull on the batting so that the top is being pulled tight. This is like easing in a shirt sleeve, if you have ever done that, on your sewing machine. ▶



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As you sew you can press down off the side of your Extend-A-Base. This will ease in small amounts all along the bottom of the border.



As you can see in the photo, the border fabric will be eased and it will be slightly puffy.



Now that the edges are secured, the time has come for you to quilt out the puffiness by capturing small areas along the border and quilting inside of the area you have captured. This process starts pulling in all the excess fabric. Depending on the design, you may do a little capturing here and there across the border and go back and fill in the middles with stippling.

The following, before and after, photos should give any quilter encouragement to proceed with quilting a wavy border quilt top.

Yes even, a quilt top this wavy can be eased in at the bottom and evenly spread out across the top as the next photo illustrates.



The bottom of the quilt did not turn out as a straight edge, but it's not that bad either considering how wavy the border was to begin with. In this border I quilted a contemporary Baptist Fan design. I quilted a little here and there and in-between until all the puffiness was eased in. Using a pantograph for a quilt this wavy would not be a good solution because you need to be able to quilt at the front of the machine. By quilting at the front of the machine, your fingers are able to push a little fabric here and there and gently ease in all the problems.

The next photo shows how the antique quilt top shown at the beginning of the article turned out after the quilting was complete. I ended up with one small little pleat in the border which I pointed out to the customer. The customer was so happy her antique quilt was quilted that she almost cried.



Be a Compassionate Quilter

Remember, be a compassionate quilter and try the best you can even if the quilt top isn't perfect. In this article, the antique quilt featured, belonged to the customer's mother. The customer planned to use this quilt and feel her mother's love as she was wrapped up in it. So, always do your best for your customers even when they bring you a problem quilt.

*Judy Woodworth is an award winning quilter and teacher. Email her at jwquilts@yahoo.com if you have questions about teaching or quilting. Judy has a new book out from the American Quilters Society called, *Freemotion Quilting*.*



Look for Judy Woodworth's new book...



Freemotion Quilting Handbook, published by the American Quilter's Society to be released this Fall.

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SHOP TALK: Product Tests & Reviews

By Brenda Weien

Sweet Set™ Curves Quilting Machine Templates

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These templates are designed to stitch out curves and keep the corner curves consistently all the same. There are several different sizes of templates ranging from a 2-inch curve to a 5-inch curve and curve heights ranging from 1 to 1-1/2 inches. The template comes in two pieces. One piece is a placement guide, the other a stitching guide. The templates also have a non-slip gripper to help hold them in place on your quilt top.

The templates were very sturdy and the guidelines on them were clearly marked. The instruction sheet that came with the templates was easy to understand and follow.

To test these templates out, I first marked a miter on each corner of the border then I found the middle of the miter. I then measured from miter mark to miter mark on the top border and side border. There is also a handy chart that came with the instructions. So using the chart with the measurements of the borders, I could find the right size of repeat curve to do for my

test setup. I also marked a line down the middle of the borders using the template and with the markings on the template I could line up the corner and curves. The markings on the templates clearly show where to place the template. Next I stitched out the curves. At this point you can go back and then fill the curve in with whatever design you like.

The templates come in several different sizes for different sized borders. You might want to invest in an entire set to cover different border sizes you might encounter. I had the 5-inch repeat, which was great for long borders. I did find that I had to have a border length that could be divided by 5 to make it work. This template worked very well, keeping my curves looking the same and the turn in the corners all looking the same. These templates could also be used as a design tool as an added bonus. Using these templates to lay out the placement of a vine in a border would work really great.

Brenda Weien has owned her own machine quilting business since 1998 and describes herself as "The people's quilter." She enjoys doing pantograph quilting and embroidery quilts, but her true passion is custom quilting.

Brenda Weien ▶



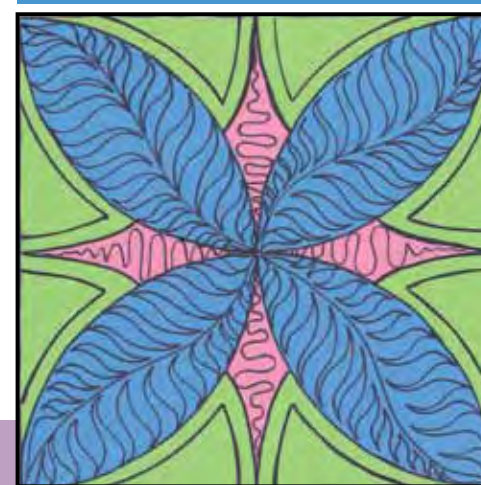
Lattice Square



Merry Kite



Alabama Beauty



This Fall Issue of *On Track! Magazine* completes my Sampler Quilt. Where did the year go? For this issue I have chosen Lattice Square, Merry Kite, and Alabama Beauty.

For the Lattice Square I chose to do Leaves. I decided on the pattern without noticing the name of the block. Starting from the center, work the leaves up one side and down the other. You can go back and SID in the center for the stem if you like. I do as it gives definition. There are many ways to do the design so find the path that is comfortable for you. Do try to keep out of the very center spot every time to keep from having thread build up. You can get close and it looks like you went into the center. Stitching the leaves on the outside can be done in a continuous line and finish off by SID around the block. For the center of the block keep it simple by stitching a cross form corner to corner.

With the Merry Kite block I again went with the Leaf theme. Adding the Swirls inside the leaves, gave a lacy or iron work look which I like so much. Remember this is a good bit of quilting and a busy fabric will not show your efforts off. Continuous curves were done for the center and the edge triangles.

For the last block I chose the Alabama Beauty. I have done a Fern Leaf or Fern Feather. In the pink I quilted a simple Curvy or Wiggly line stitching in the ditch back to the center and working on around to the next. I used my 4.5-inch pinched square ruler to echo the pedals and points.

This has been a fun adventure this year and I hope you all have enjoyed it.

Myrna Ficken has a passion for quilting and creating. She is a quilting educator, artist, and award winning quilter. As a teacher, she enjoys building confidence in her student's own abilities.

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