

QUILT LABELS, Courtesy of Quilting Board

Quilt labels are considered a very important part of quilt making in the late 20th century and the early years of the 21st century. Women (and men) who make quilts are important and our work is important. Our quilts will last a long time sometimes a lot longer than we thought when we made the quilt.

Many antique quilts were never signed or labeled in any way and that has caused much frustration to quilt collectors, antique dealers, and genealogy buffs. Also, a well labeled and documented quilt is less likely to be stolen. If a labeled quilt is stolen it is more likely to be recognized and recovered.

When you finish a quilt and finally have the last stitch on the binding it would be worth your time to at least simply sign and date the quilt for the information of future generations. For more elaborate labels you might wish to add your maiden name if you are married and the city and state that you live in. This information would be especially important to those who research genealogy. The more information you put on your quilt the more likely that it will be appreciated in years to come.



A Pigma Micron pen by Sukara of America or Identi-pen could be used to sign the back of the quilt. Both of these pens are available at quilt shops, fabric and craft stores. There may be other brands available so ask at your store and be sure to purchase a pen that is permanent and acid free and is suitable to use on fabric.

For an alternative simple "signing" a quilter could discretely quilt her name or initials and date during the quilting process.

Basic information that could be included on the quilt

A label can be as simple or as complex as you wish. Susan McKelvey, a quilt label specialist, uses who, what, when, where, why, and how for a list of information to put on a quilt. This list is very similar to how you would write a newspaper article

Who -- Who made the quilt and who was it made for? Use full names rather than just first names or nicknames. Also use your maiden name if you are married. If your quilt was quilted by a professional long arm quilter make sure to give the machine quilter proper credit.

What -- What kind of quilt is it? Give the name of the quilt or what was the inspiration for the design and credit the pattern designer if applicable.

When -- When was it made? Put the date -- at least the year but a more specific date would be fine. Also the date of the occasion it was given such as a birthday or wedding.

Where -- Where was it made? Put the city and state of your residence and the city and state of the recipient.

Why -- Why did you make this quilt? Was it for a special milestone such as a birth, graduation, or wedding? Was it just a "because I love you" quilt -- include that information.

How -- How was it made and how was it appropriate for the recipient. If it was hand pieced or hand appliquéd include that information.

Additions -- you could add a personal message, a poem, or a photo with our new ink-jet fabrics,

The most secure fabric label would be to stitch one into the backing or appliquéd it to the backing and cut away the fabric behind. Then quilt the quilt as usual through the label. This label is very permanent and would be very difficult to remove. Another permanent label would be to stitch on the backing with a computerized sewing machine before quilting.

Signing with a permanent pen would be more difficult to remove than a label that is stitched on after the quilt is finished. Some suggest signing your name on the seam allowance used to attach the binding or under the attached sleeve. That way if someone does remove the label your signature would be there to identify the quilt.

Microchip identifying system

A quilt identifying system using a microchip is available to purchase if you wish your extra special quilts to be secure. The microchip is very small and can be put in the quilt after it is finished or placed in the layers before quilting. The number in the microchip is then registered to your name. Should your quilt be lost or stolen the identity of the quilt can be certain simply by scanning the chip and retrieving the number and matching it to the quilt owner.

Ready made labels

There are fabric panels available at the quilt shop or fabric store that have pre-printed quilt labels that can be written on with an indelible pen and then cut apart and machine or hand appliquéd to the backing of the quilt. These would be very simple to use the main drawback being they would not necessarily coordinate with the quilt top or backing.

Hand made labels

Hand lettering -- Use Pigma Micron pen, Identi-pen or other pen especially suited to fabric to hand letter your message onto your quilt label.

Crayon lettering -- Use crayons to create a label. Be sure to heat set the crayon with a hot iron to set the color before attaching it to the quilt.

Hand embroidery -- Choose a font in your computer word processor and type your message. Trace the lettering on your fabric using a light box and hand embroider the lettering.

Machine embroidered -- If you have a computerized sewing machine you might want to program your message into the machine and embroider it onto your label.

Cross stitch -- If you enjoy cross stitching you might wish to use an alphabet cross stitch pattern to stitch your label message.

Computer -- Use inkjet fabric sheets to print your message directly on white or cream specially treated fabric sheets. Simply stitch the printed fabric to the back of your quilt and your label is complete.

Photo labels -- Copy a photo onto specially treated inkjet sheets along with your written message.

Stamped labels -- Use rubber stamps with a special for fabric ink pad to make a personalized label. Color it in with pigma pens or crayons for more interest.

Other sources for quilt labels are online. Many quilting websites offer printable and traceable quilting labels. Some of them are quite attractive and would give you some inspiration as to how you wish to make your own labels.

There are several quilting books available that explain in detail many different types of labels. Simply type "quilt labels" into an online bookseller and you will find books that have paper pieced labels, iron on labels, and quotations for quilt labels.

Quilt labels can be functional and simple or very elaborate. It is not as important how you label your quilt but that you do label your quilt. Future generations will thank you for taking the time to document each quilt you make.

Your Personal Quarter Inch Seam

Every quilter has a personal way to stitch her quarter inch seam. There are so many factors involved that need to be considered. The width of your sewing machine presser foot, the size of thread you use, and the way you press needs to be considered.

Some quilt books or patterns say it doesn't matter how wide or narrow your seam allowance is -- simply be consistent. And in some way each quilter's seam allowance is a personal measurement similar to handwriting -- yet if you are working on a group quilt and everyone used their "special" seam allowance you can understand there would be a large inconsistency between each quilter's blocks. Remember if your quilt block has many pieces and many seams even a small discrepancy can make a big difference in a 10-12" quilt block.

Piecing accuracy test

One way to test the accuracy of your cutting and stitching is to make a sample as follows.

Cut three fabric strips 1 1/2" x 3 1/2". Stitch them together along the long edges and press. The piece should measure 3 1/2" square. If it is smaller, cut new fabric and try again making a slightly narrower seam allowance. If it is too large, stitch again with a larger seam allowance.

I always make a practice block or a test block before cutting an entire quilt top from a new pattern especially to check the accuracy of cutting and stitching but also to check my seam allowance. If the pattern specifies that your block should measure 10 1/2" unfinished and yours is exactly 10 1/2" then you are piecing an accurate seam allowance.

There are tools available to help you maintain a perfect quarter inch. Check with your machine dealer for a special quarter inch piecing foot. Or if your presser foot is slightly wide, set your needle position to the right or left to get a perfect quarter inch.

Some quilting instructions refer to a "scant" quarter inch. How large is a "scant"? A scant quarter inch seam allowance would mean a tiny bit less than the full quarter inch measurement. The reason they suggest a scant quarter inch is to allow for the thread and the fold of the fabric when it is pressed.

To press patches, first "set the seam" by pressing the closed seam allowance with a dry iron. Press on the side that you are going to press the seam allowance toward. Then open the fabric and press from the right side making sure there are no "pleats" in the seam line.

Once you do this and find your exact seam allowance then you can mark the bed of your sewing machine with stacked masking tape, stacked sticky notes, or a narrow strip of sticky mole foam from the foot care department.

So try to stitch an accurate seam allowance and check your seam allowance regularly. The more experience you have with piecing the easier it will be to maintain an accurate seam allowance.

Remember, if you buy a new sewing machine, use a different presser foot, or change brand or type of sewing thread you might want to do the above "seam allowance test" to again check the accuracy of your piecing.

