

## Quilt as you go

by Phyllis Maddox

Make and Quilt the blocks separately. It's very hard to machine quilt out at the edge of the fabric. To make it easier, cut the fabric, batting and backing fabric (or the backing fabric at the very least) 2 inches bigger in both directions. This leaves you a 1 inch edge to grab while you're quilting. You can make the blocks any size, but I find that 40 inches is the largest block I can quilt properly on my home machine. 12 inches is about perfect.

### **Join the squares**

#### ***using a half inch sashing and top stitching on the front***

Trim the quilted squares the size of the finished block plus  $\frac{1}{4}$  inch seam allowance all around. This  $\frac{1}{4}$ " inch will be covered by the sashing.

#### Step 1:

Cut 2 sashing strips 1 inch wide and a half to an inch longer than the block. Cut one strip for the front of the block and another for the back the same size. A little starch makes the sashing fabric easier to cut and to sew. Since the sewing machine sometimes pushes the top fabric a little, the extra length offers protection against the sashing coming up too short.



You can use any width you like. Cut the strips  $\frac{1}{2}$ " wider than the finished width.

Fold over a scant quarter inch of the front strip and iron it down like a hem.

#### Step 2:

Pin the unhemmed edge of front strip, right sides together to the edge of the front of the block. Let the extra length of the sashing stick out on both sides.



Pin the back strip, right sides together to the same edge on the back of the block.



Stitch an exact quarter inch seam along that edge through both strips and the block. Finger press the sashing over the seam.



If you plan to hand stitch the sashing to the back instead of topstitching it, switch these around. Sew the strip that has the hem to the back of the block. Then join the sashing to the front of the next block

Step 3:

Pin the same back strip, right sides together to the left edge of the back of the next block, lining up the top and bottom edges of the blocks.



Front

Back

Stitch an exact quarter inch seam along the pinned edge of the block. The bobbin thread should match the color of the front of the block so it won't be so noticeable if the sashing doesn't cover it completely. This might be a place for invisible thread.



Step 4:

Open the 2 blocks and lay them front side down. Finger press the seams.



Block Fronts



Block Backs

Then turn the blocks over. In a perfect world the edges of the blocks would meet exactly with no overlap and no empty gaps.

Finger press the sashing to cover the seam. Pin and top stitch the hemmed edge of the front strip just over the seam line where the back strip was attached.

When you top stitch in that perfect world the stitches on the back would all fall into the sashing or disappear into the ditch. But in the world I live in they sometimes wander, some falling in the sashing and some in the block. Choose your bobbin thread accordingly. If there's much contrast, this might be another place for invisible thread.



Do the same for the all blocks in that row, then join the pairs in the same manner to make all the rows.

### ***Join the Rows***

Step 5:

Cut the vertical sashing strips 1 inch wide and 1 inch longer than the total length of the row of blocks. Cut one strip for the front of the quilt and another for the back the same size.

Fold over a quarter inch of the front strip and iron it down like a hem.

Step 6:

Join the rows in pairs, making sure the horizontal strips line up exactly – or as close to it as possible. Then join the pairs to make the whole quilt.

### ***Variations***

You can do the vertical joins first, whichever makes a shorter row. The long rows are harder to handle. You could also do sets of 4 if it's easier.

#### **Sashing Width:**

You can use any width strips you like. Cut the sashing strips  $\frac{1}{2}$ " wider than your finished sashing width. You will need batting strips to fill in the space in the sashing. These strips should be cut  $\frac{3}{8}$ <sup>th</sup> inch narrower than the finished sashing. This allows a little bit extra to avoid any gaps. I like to use soft batting so that the width compresses to fill the space. I also like to use a very slightly thicker batting to compensate for the 4 extra layers of fabric used in the sashing seams. It looks better if the sashings aren't hollows.



If you will wash the quilt you can use Elmer's School Glue sticks to stick the batting in place until you get a chance to quilt it. If you don't plan to wash it, pin it immediately and top stitch carefully around the pins. (Yes, you will have to quilt it or it will roll up into a lumpy tube.) Elmer's School Glue sticks are all starch and wash out completely. This requires an act of faith. They go on purple but the color disappears when the glue dries.



Curved quilting lines shown in the sashing in the lower photo on a plain fabric disappear in a busy pattern like the sashing in the top photo. The only quilting pattern I've found that shows on a busy fabric is straight lines.

### **Hand stitching the sashing on the back instead of top stitching**

Sew the hemmed strip to the back of the block instead of the front and sew the other strip, right sides together to the same edge on the front of the block. Sew the next block to the unhemmed strip front sides together. The front of the block will have no seams showing. When you turn it over, hand

stitch the hemmed edge to the seam line on the back of the block. This is more elegant because your stitching line is perfect and disappears. It takes longer but hand stitching is relaxing.



Front of the blocks

### **Appliquéd Sashing**

If you're going to top stitch or appliqué the sashing on the front, your strip doesn't have to be plain and straight. You could use any kind of elegant curves on one or both sides.



### **Sashing Colors**

I found that when there was too much contrast between the sashing and the blocks, the sashing hijacked the whole quilt. Your eye follows the sashing and ignores the blocks.

### **Double framing**

Adding an inner frame around the block before the sashing adds a lot to the looks of the quilt, but it's more complicated. Cutting the batting an inch larger all around and then adding the framing strips is hard because you have to match the seams without an edge to follow. Cutting separate batting strips for the frames means you have to quilt them too to hold the batting in place. There's probably a way to do this.....