

DISCOVER

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# Making Big Quilts in Manageable Units



## MY TECHNIQUE

by Ann Holmes

ENCHANTED EVENING, 90" x 90"

No doubt about it, king- and queen-size quilts are a lot of work, especially machine quilting them on a home sewing machine. But I found that by assembling and quilting my large quilt in units I could easily manage the big quilt of my dreams. This article is about how I join the units, even those that have curved seams. By topstitching the units together, one layer at a time, I can achieve a very flat seam with no hand sewing involved. With some planning and adjustments, my method of joining quilts can work for traditionally sewn quilt tops as well.

*Editor's note: Read about Ann's quilt assembly technique in her book No Sewing Until You Quilt It (AQS, 2012).*

### PLANNING THE QUILT

Planning for assembling and quilting a large quilt in units needs to happen during quilt design. The easiest quilt to adapt to my technique is one that has straight sashing through the quilt as in my EXPANDED SIMPLE GIFTS. This king-sized quilt was planned in 3 units, with the center unit being a bit narrower than the side units. Because I knew exactly what the finished width of the sashing was to be, it was a simple matter to join the units with my method.

I look for clues in the design to help me decide where units can be joined, understanding that the units don't all have to have straight edges. The design for my ENCHANTED EVENING medallion quilt had diagonal lines, a curved border, and pink ribbon swag with roses. Those design clues had to line up. The red lines on photo 1 show how I divided the interior

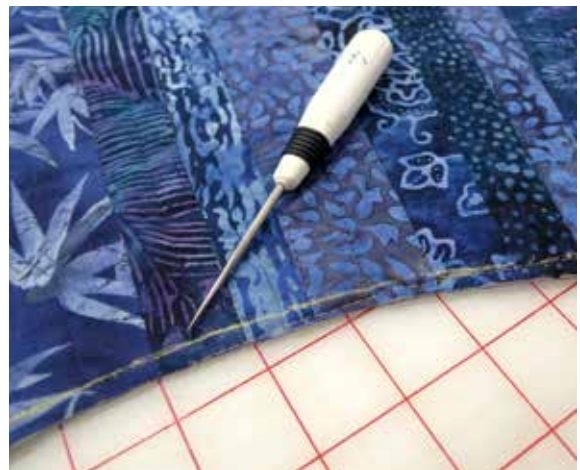


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of the quilt into units. *Note: I only drew one side border, as it was turned 180° and repeated on the other side.* With “No Sewing Until You Quilt It” assembly, I was able to pull back the rose petals before joining the quilt. It would also be possible to appliqué the roses after the units are joined.

### PREPARING THE UNITS

After assembling the units with batting, I machine quilted all the way to the edges of both *side units*. I used my freezer-paper pattern to determine the finish edge of the side units and marked the finished unit line with a chalk. Since the pieces for my “No Sewing Until You Quilt It” quilts are cut oversize, I easily added a  $\frac{3}{8}$ " allowance to the side units as I trimmed (photo 2). *Editor's note: For traditional pieced quilts, the finished unit line would usually be  $\frac{1}{4}$ " from the raw edge and no trimming would be done. If you want to try this technique for your traditional pieced quilt, Ann recommends that you plan for additional seam allowance along edges of the unit.*



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*Now follow along as I describe the steps I took to quilt and join the units for my ENCHANTED EVENING quilt.*

Before machine quilting the *center unit*, I ran a long basting stitch down the length of both sides about 2" from the raw edges, then machine quilted the large area between the basting lines. I left the basting stitches in until all layers were assembled.

I saved the freezer-paper pattern pieces for the curved sections used in constructing the quilt and ironed them to the right side of the curved sections of the quilt. They represent the finished edges of that part of the unit.

Before trimming the center unit, I pinned the backing out of the way with safety pins. I knew that I might need to make adjustments to the backing, so I saved that trimming for later. I drew a chalk line to mark the finished edge of my unit top. Since my units were oversize, I had to trim (the top and batting only)  $\frac{1}{4}$ " beyond the finished edge for a seam allowance.

With the freezer paper still on, I turned the unit over. I rubbed washable glue stick on the wrong side of the seam allowance. Matching the freezer paper edge, I folded the seam allowances to the wrong side to glue them under. Photo 3 shows the quilted center unit ready for joining with the side units.



3

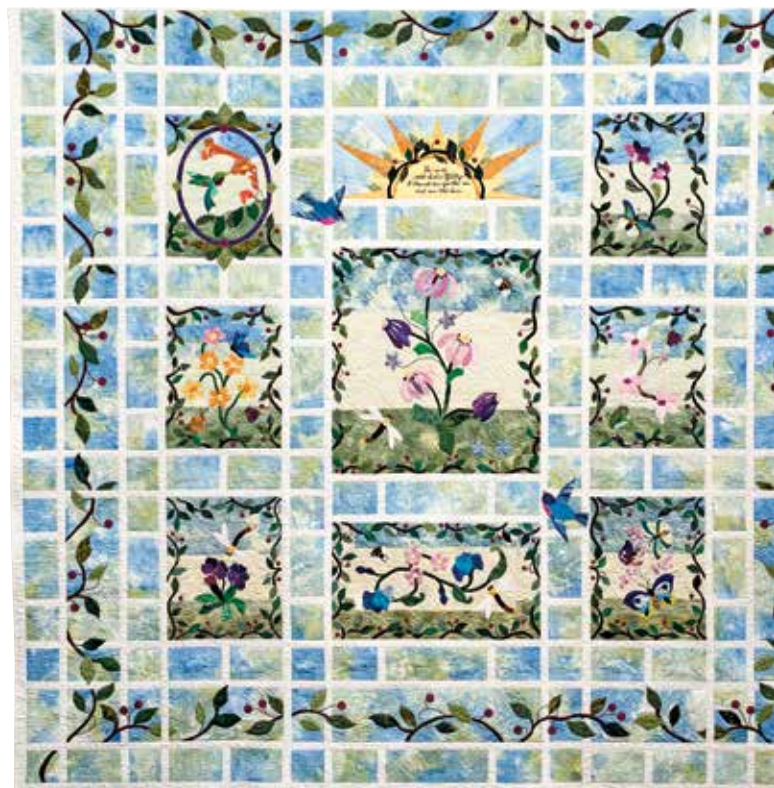
### JOINING THE UNITS

Since the first step of joining the units is to top-stitch the top layer *only* of the center panel, I pinned both the backing and batting out of the way. I looked for the clues in the design to help me position the units. I pinned the top layer of the center unit to the 3-layered side (both right-side up), matching the de-

sign clues and bringing the folded edge of the center unit to the finish line of the side unit. I added pins between the design points, easing as needed. I knew that the join would often seem too large or bulky because there is no machine quilting on the top layer yet. Photo 4 shows my EXPANDED SIMPLE GIFTS quilt almost ready for stitching.



4



EXPANDED SIMPLE GIFTS, 104" x 96". Simple Gifts pattern by Mary Sorensen (1999).

I put on my machine's walking foot and selected a short and narrow zigzag stitch: 1.5 to 1.6mm wide. I threaded my machine with invisible thread on the top and a thread to match my backing in the bobbin. With the batting and backing still out of the way, I topstitched through the top layer of the center unit and the whole thickness of the side unit, and then removed all the pins.

### FINISHING BATTING & BACK

I laid the quilt flat on a table, backing-side up, and gently pulled apart the batting from the backing. I used long, sharp fabric shears to trim the batting so it was flush with the edge of the batting in the seam just sewn—no overlaps.

With the quilt still lying flat, I folded under the backing to just cover the stitching line, snipping corners and trimming as needed. I pinned the seam using strong 1¼" pins every 1½–2" (photo 5). I didn't use glue stick this time, as I knew I might need to make adjustments. I usually do not trim the backing; it is better to have a little extra to turn under.

After pinning the entire length, I reversed the threads on my machine (invisible in the bobbin and thread to match the quilt backing on top), attached my walking foot, and selected the same narrow zigzag as for the top stitching.

*Tip: I fill bobbins with invisible thread at a slower speed, and I only fill them about half way—it is a lot of thread.*

From the back of the quilt I zigzagged along the turned-under edge. As I stitched, I pulled the pin heads out of the way of the walking foot but didn't remove them. A sewer's stiletto helped me to even out tucks or hold points in place as I stitched (photo 6).

After stitching I inspected the seam before removing the pins to make sure that both sides of the seam were caught in the stitching and restitched as necessary. I removed the basting thread and finished the machine quilting between the joined units. Photo 7 shows the center unit and one side unit joined. ♦



See Ann's web site at:

*AnnHolmesStudios.com and see her demonstrate her*

*"No Sewing Until You Quilt It" technique at:*

*<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ow3oj0ym750>*