

March 2009 Newsletter

Textiles 101 - Backing

How much thought do you put into backing and how much expense?

First, a story...

As I have mentioned before, I do some long arm quilting. Recently, I was asked to complete a quilt that was a family heirloom. It was red and light yellow, in the drunkard's path pattern. It was definitely older cotton fabrics, that had been in storage for a while, but quite attractive all the same. (First of all, let me say that personally I would have hand quilted it – but the customer insisted on machine quilting.) I pull it out of its packaging and what do I find as the back? A poly-cotton blend that was not suitable in the least for the quality of the pieced top. It made me think.

If you are putting a lot of work into a pieced quilt top – why are we backing it with low-quality backing?

Do you want the front to last 100 years? Will the backing last that long too?

Personally, as you can probably tell – I am particular. There have been times (many, many times) when I have purchased the quilt top fabrics only. Then I have used my scraps (if large enough) for the backing, but I have had to go in search of matching fabrics. Often, with a Moda designer, the fabric designs change, but the colors repeat themselves over time. Typically even though the line of fabric may have disappeared, you should be able to find a matching solid or tone on tone by the same designer in a newer fabric line. I have done this quite often – even sometimes buying different fabrics in three yard increments until I have the 9 yards for a queen sized quilt back (I made my bedspread like this and I flip it over from time to time).

There are also other options. High quality muslins can be found (which we recently added to our website). It is muslin with only 1-2% shrinkage rate - definitely better than a poly-cotton for longevity. Also many solids, such as Kona Cottons or Bella Solids, are less expensive than a printed fabric. Many solids are currently made in so many colors it is easy to find a color that “goes” if not “matches” perfectly.

Many companies are also making backing in 108 inch widths. These backing fabrics are a great cost savings at \$12 - \$14 a yard. If you consider a quilt size of 90 x 108 inches, a regular 45 inch width of yardage at premium quilt store price (\$8.50 per yard) is \$51.00. That is a conservative 6 yards – which will barely cover the 90 x 108 inches. If you are to purchase 108 inch backing fabric, you could purchase 3.25 yards. The purchase prices for this back would be \$45.50 – and

you would have ample backing.

Hopefully this will give you some food for thought on the backing issue.
Enjoy your quilting. Life is short!