

# Free-Motion Quilting

by Jill Jensen

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Host Susan Brubaker Knapp and quilt artist Jill Jensen

## Materials

- Quilt top, yardage, or preprinted panel
- Cotton batting or flannel (*Batting will show more dimension; flannel will have a flatter appearance.*)
- Backing fabric
- Coordinating thread and bobbin
- Sewing machine with free-motion capability

I began my art career as a painter and over the years I have explored a variety of media including papermaking, pastels, color pencil drawing, and printmaking. I always said that I would never make a quilt. My, how things change.

I have never made a traditional-style quilt but I discovered that surface design brought together so many of the things that I love with other media. I use paint, pastels, and pencils to add color and imagery and printmaking for bold graphic images.

The final piece of the puzzle is free-motion quilting. I use my stitching to add texture to large flat area of an image—for example, a sky or background using a thread color that matches the image. I also use stitching to enliven and enhance various parts of an image by using contrasting color thread.

I want the stitched lines to enhance an image and feel like it is continuing the concept instead of looking like a pattern that is overlaid on top. The direction of

the stitches and the thread color choices are made to add to overall feel of the design. When I am stitching a sky, for example, I try to image how wind would look if you could see direction lines in its flow. When stitching mountains, I want them to feel grounded. If I want to add texture behind plants I will make my stitches look like the outlines of leaves to fill the space.

Experiment on a plain quilt sandwich to see what types of lines would be best for a particular design.

## INSTRUCTIONS

1. Create a design or image as a wholecloth quilt or by piecing sections together.

**Tip:** A preprinted panel—with some design and some open space—makes an excellent practice piece for free-motion quilting.

2. Layer the quilt top or fabric with the batting and backing. Baste.


**Tip:** I prefer to use pins to baste my layers together.

3. Set up your machine for free-motion quilting. I use a straight stitch with a quilting foot and the feed dogs lowered.
4. If you want the stitching to blend in with the image, pick a thread color that closely matches the fabric color. This is what I do in the sky area of

### Tips for Free-Motion Quilting

- When you want to add texture only to an area of the quilt, use a thread that closely matches the fabric color.
- In some areas of a quilt I use a strong contrasting color thread to add interest or for optical blending of colors. This can be used to add highlights or shadows to various areas of the design.
- Choose a stitching design that continues the concept of the image as opposed to overlaying a grid or some other repeated shape that looks separate from the design.
- Practice, practice, practice!

an image or when filling in a large background where I want texture but not an additional color. I use contrasting color thread when I want to add color as well as texture to a particular area.

5. The direction of the stitching should enhance the imagery in the design. When quilting skies, I work with horizontal lines that are wavy and periodically curl back on themselves. When working with other imagery, I will create stitched patterns that mimic a certain aspect of the design. This might be leaf, grass or feather outlines that are seen elsewhere in the image. 

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