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Quilting with Decorative Threads

by KERRY FINN

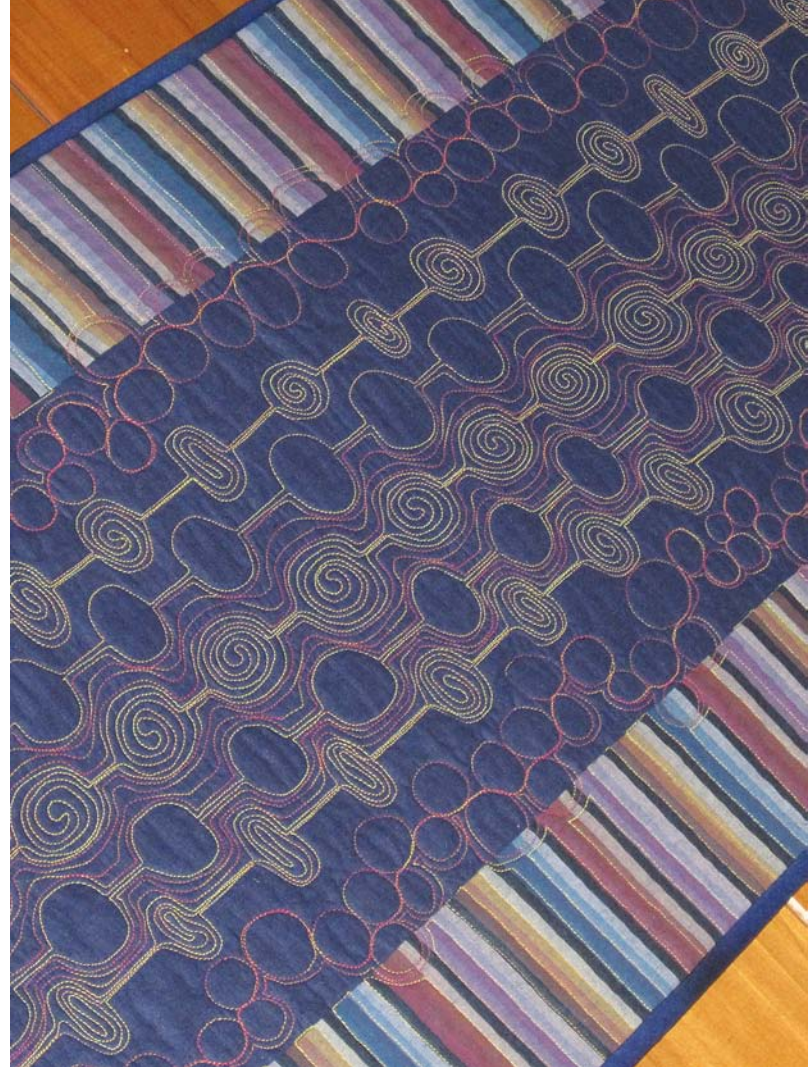
Do you have a collection of beautiful, decorative threads that are hiding in a drawer? Many of us buy them but are not successful using them because they often present stitching challenges. The solution? Most of the frustration can be eliminated by choosing the right needle for the thread you are using. A quilted table runner is the perfect project for showing off the decorative threads you've collected while practicing your free-motion stitching skills.

Supplies

- Two coordinating batiks, ½ yard each
- Fabric for backing
- Fabric for binding the runner
- Batting
- Assorted decorative threads
- Assorted Embroidery and Topstitching needles
- Color wheel
- Chalk marker

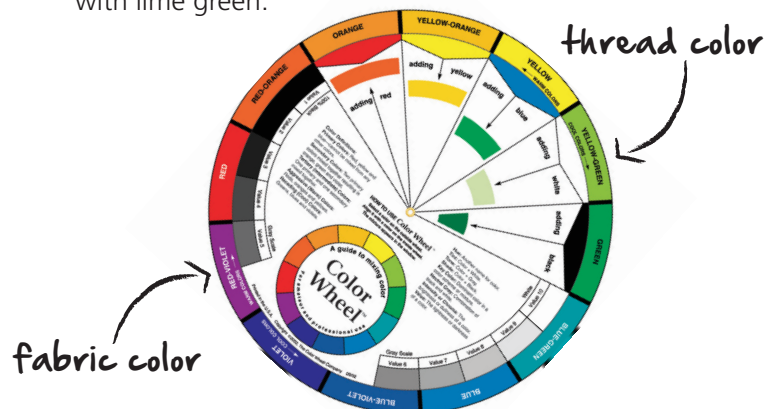
Fabric and Thread Selection

For this runner, choose two fabrics for the front of the runner—one for the center panel and one for the contrasting border. Also select a black or dark-colored fabric for the back. Dig out those beautiful batiks that you just couldn't cut into and use them as a canvas to show off your stitching skills. Or select two similar fabrics that don't have a strong, patterned design.



Using a dark fabric for the backing turns your work into a reversible runner—the back will be as beautiful as the front when you are finished stitching. For the backing you'll need a piece of fabric a bit larger than the assembled runner panel with borders.

Many quilters match thread to their fabric, and when the quilt is finished the beautiful quilting designs disappear into the background. For this project choose thread in colors that contrast with the fabrics you've chosen. We want to see the stitching and the thread, so select high-contrast threads instead of colors that match the fabric. Use a color wheel to select a complementary color scheme. For example, if your fabric is purple, quilt with lime green.



Cut the Panel and Add the Borders

Determine how wide and how long you want the center panel of the runner to be, knowing that you will be adding the contrasting border all around. Allow for a 3"- or 4"-wide border.

To the desired finished width and length for the center panel, add ½" all around to allow for ¼"-wide seam allowances.

Cut a piece the determined width across the width of the fabric that you selected for the runner body.

For the contrast borders, cut 3"- or 4"-wide border strips. Cut two strips the length of the center panel and stitch them to opposite long edges. Press the seam allowances toward the borders. Measure the width of the runner with the borders and cut two border strips this length. Sew them to the remaining edges of the runner and press the seam allowances toward the borders.

Free-motion Quilting

For your practice table runner, use chalk to mark some basic shapes such as the curve of a feather or flower on the assembled runner. Then use the shapes as guides to follow while you stitch, practicing different patterns. Echo the stitching for more interest and to fill in the spaces.

You may want to keep a journal of all your free-motion designs as a reference for your quilts. I have kept one for ten years. I doodle in a smaller notebook and transfer the pages to my journal so I always have a "go-to" source for designs.

When you have finished the quilting, trim the excess backing and batting even with the runner edges. Finish the edges with binding.

Successful Stitching

The key to success with heavier threads is to marry the right needle to the right thread. If you are using a 40-weight or heavier thread, use a 90/14 Embroidery needle or a 90/14 Topstitch needle. Both have a larger eye and sharper point than a regular needle. The Topstitch needle also has a deeper groove than most needles. Remember that the heavier the thread, the larger the needle size must be. If you experience skipping stitches while free-motion quilting, the needle size is most likely too small.

Be sure to begin with a new needle when you start a new project. Change the needle after 6-8 hours of sewing.

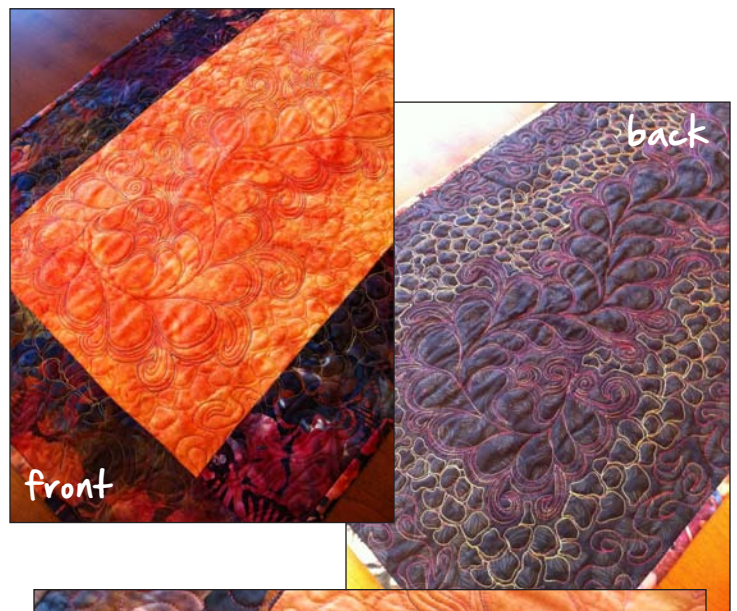
I like to use Organ Embroidery needles. They appear gold in color and last at least five times longer than regular needles.

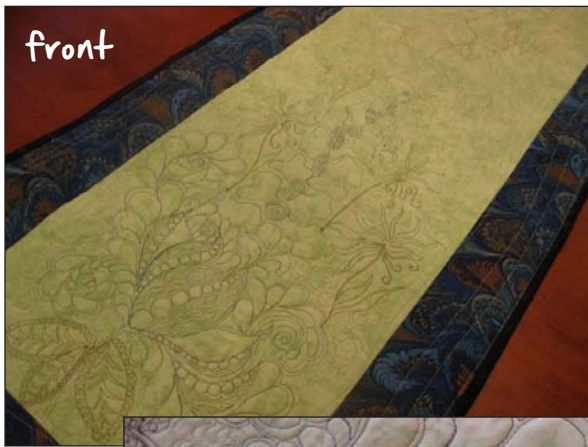
The threads used for the projects shown on these pages vary from cotton to silk to polyester, and I used two or three different threads on each runner. The majority of decorative threads will perform better with a size 90/14 needle; for example, a 90/14 Topstitch needle works beautifully with Rainbows variegated threads from Superior Threads.

For more information on choosing the proper needle for the thread you've chosen, go to the Superior Threads website: www.superiorthreads.com.

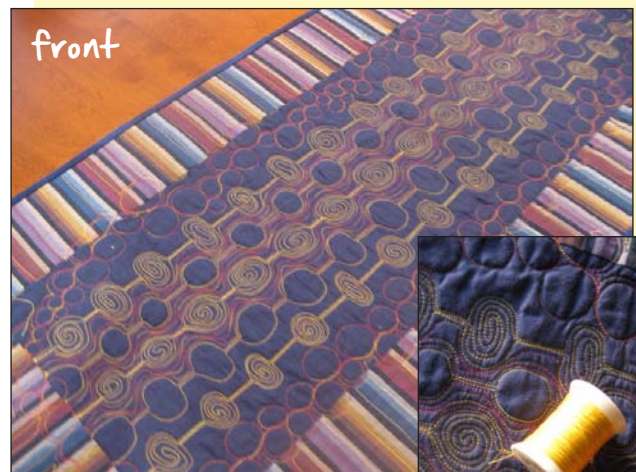
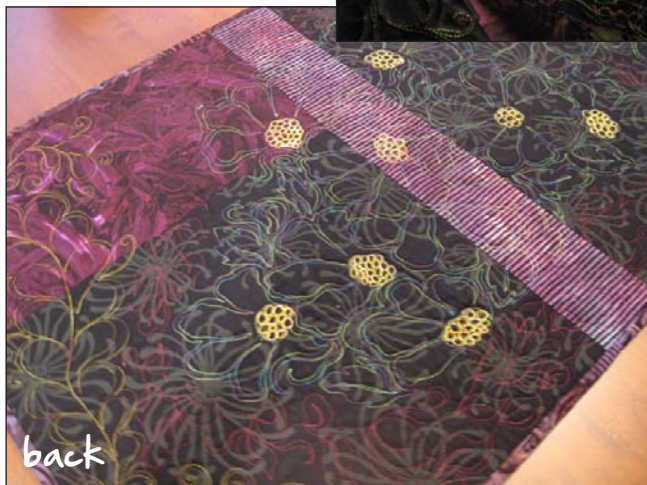
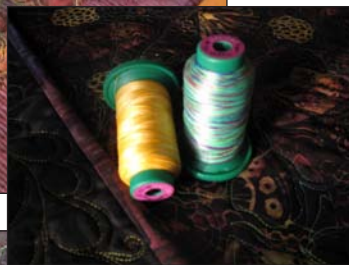
Inspiration for the table runners shown here came from Diane Gaudynski, Ricky Tims, Libby Lehman, and Laura Heine. Use your favorite designs and start quilting.

Give yourself permission to play and have fun!





This solid-colored runner with a striped border was quilted with Ricky Tims' Art Studio Colors polyester embroidery thread. Notice the "Lava Lamp" design. You can achieve this pattern by quilting one side of the bubble starting at the top of the runner. Stitch all the way to the end, then go back to the top and stitch the second side of the bubbles, mirror-imaging the previous stitching. It will help to mark chalk lines along the length of your quilt to keep the spacing even and your rows straight. After quilting your rows of bubbles change colors and echo-quilt between the rows. This is a good exercise for learning spacing. Your shapes do not have to be the same size; it will add character to your piece if they are not perfect!



Kerry works full time at Blow's Sew-n-Vac in Fargo, ND. She lives just outside of Fargo in Mapleton, ND, with her husband, Denny. When she is not working she enjoys spending time with her three grown sons and their families.