

SA Quilters Judging Team Leader, Jill Christian, answers questions relating to the judging process.

Judging a competition could take forever if you assessed every quilt in detail so do you assess every quilt? How do you start the judging process? What are you looking for? How do you remember what you see?

Thankfully SA Quilters has a great Festival of Quilts (FoQ) Team supporting Judging day to organise the quilts so that our job can flow through swiftly and efficiently. Categories are set up so that we do not have to look through 170 or so quilts to find the Best of Show. In other words, the best quilt. The quilt which is closest to perfect is from within the group of quilts which are in front of us on the day. By breaking the quilts down into categories, this means that we usually won't have to judge more than about 15 or so quilts at once. We can remember about this many at one time.

The FoQ Team provides us with excellent paperwork for each category, listing the quilt name and number, and whether it is an original design, quilting technique as in hand quilted or domestic machine, sit down long arm, or frame mounted computerised. At a glance, we can see all this information, and at any time while we are judging, we can also request further information about the quilt to be read out by the scribes. At all times, the quilt maker remains anonymous to us.

So, in answer to the first part of your question, yes we do look at each quilt closely. When we approach the category for judging, each quilt in the category has already been laid on top of each other ready to be judged. With the aid of two quilt handlers, we will do a quick flip of the quilts first, to gauge a bit of an idea of what is in the category, and an idea of the standard. Then we begin to look at each quilt more closely one at a time and will look at the back also. At any time during this process, we can request quilts to be held up or request further information from the scribe.

There are five main features that we keep in mind as we look at the quilts, and this helps us to not overlook any aspect of the quilt. These are: Visual Appeal, Design, Craftsmanship, Quilting, and Finish.

Using this method, every aspect of the quilt is considered. As we look at each quilt, we may make notes about it on our paperwork to help us remember a detail. At this time, we may also mark it for consideration later for the Special awards such as Hand quilting or Retaining the Tradition etc.

After each quilt is examined, we will indicate whether it will be retained for further consideration or released.

This process continues until only about four or five quilts remain. Then from those remaining, placement in the category is decided, considering all aspects of each quilt. The judges make their decisions by way of consensus. When one judge does not agree, they will make their case, and through discussion come to agreement.

After all categories have been judged in this way, all first-place winners are judged together to determine the Best of Show and Runner up.

How is the judging process similar or different for an SA Quilters Affiliated Group quilt show and FoQ, especially when one has one or two winners and FoQ has many categories?

The group show exhibition organisers or committee may nominate categories, or they may just require a Best of show, or they may leave it up to us. Usually, the quilts have already been hung before we come to judge them, so in this way the judging is a little different. In some ways it's better as we can see how they hang and visual appeal is easier to see. In other ways it may be more difficult, with the eye level area the easiest part to judge properly. Backs are also more difficult to see thoroughly.

To get an idea of what is in the exhibition, and the standard, we gauge this by doing a walk through, which is similar to doing a quick flip of the category in FoQ. If categories have been nominated, we will look at what's in the category first. If categories have not been nominated by the exhibition organisers, the judges may choose to break the exhibition down into categories, so that they find the best of these groups first, by comparing quilts of similar style, e.g. Appliqué, Pieced or Art quilts etc. Then from the best of these, the Best of show will be decided. We then will inform the show organisers the category winners if requested, and best of show. If we had broken it down to categories for our own ease of management, we may suggest a special commendation to these winners, but it is up to the group committee if they choose to pass this information on to their members.

How can you prepare to enter a quilt in a competition?**When you enter FoQ, is it a requirement to have your quilt judged?****Why would you enter a quilt into FoQ if you didn't want it judged?**

Personally, I would suggest you make the quilt that you want to make, whether it is for someone in particular or for a particular spot in your home. You will get more pleasure from this, and your enjoyment will show in the end result. Rather than make a quilt for a particular competition or category, just to have it folded away in a cupboard, never to be seen again after the exhibition.

But while you are making your quilt, consider making it for entry into the Exhibition also, so that you share your work with others. While you are at it, you might as well enter it for judging, and in doing so, do your very best effort while you are making it. Unpick that little mistake if it's not quite right. Re-make that block that didn't quite work or take a bit more care when doing the hand sewing on the binding.

By putting in your best work, at the end of the day you will have made a better quilt, and this will help to raise the standard of your own work. By taking the extra care, you just may have done enough to have made a winning quilt.

Even if you don't win a prize, you have made that competition a little harder for others, by being in it. If there is only a handful of quilts in the category, there is not much of a competition. You never know what the standard will be, so you may just have a chance. If you want your quilt to do well, pay attention to every single detail and do it to the best of your ability. Remember, the judges look at every aspect of the quilt.

Visual Appeal, Design, Craftsmanship, Quilting, and Finish.

Pay attention to each of these aspects and do your best. Things like binding technique commonly let a quilt down. Sometimes it may be the tiniest of things that may mean the difference between winning quilts.

Before it is handed in to the exhibition team, always make sure your quilt is clean and at least pressed, and, if you are really serious, block it if it needs it.

Your work is just a reflection of where you are in your quilting journey, so there is no such thing as a bad quilt, and it is more than likely to inspire someone.

When entering a quilt, check the Exhibition Handbook preferably before you start making it, and make sure it fits the criteria. There's a good chance that a 5 metre square quilt just finished, might not get accepted!

If my quilt is in the Appliqué section of a competition, are the other aspects of quilt making also judged, such as the piecing or sashing/borders or quilting?

Because it is an Appliqué category, this means we are comparing apples with apples, or similar quilts.

Visual Appeal, Design, Craftsmanship, Quilting, and Finish are all looked at, in every category.

The appliqué will be considered under craftsmanship. Here the techniques chosen to be used are considered for suitability and how well they are done. Are curves smooth where they should be? Are points done well? Are stitches invisible where they should be invisible? Are stitches even and tension correct? Is the choice of appliqué thread and colour of thread appropriate? Etc.

The degree of difficulty and amount of effort is taken into consideration. Having said this, a difficult quilt with lots and lots of work done **poorly**, may not do as well as a slightly simpler quilt done excellently. Work with techniques which are familiar and you know you can do well.

Piecing, sashing and borders and other techniques also are considered under craftsmanship. *Visual Appeal, Design, Quilting, and Finish* are also important, so attention needs to be paid to these areas.

Having said this, this also applies to all categories, including Art quilts and Challenge sections. Even though these may be textile art, or involve other techniques, if it is in a **Quilt Show** it will still be judged as a quilt, including everything that has gone into making it a quilt. This is why we will not judge a quilt with a false back, as we cannot see the quilting on the back as well as the front, so therefore we are unable to judge its quilting properly.

If the exhibition is primarily for art quilts, then the art aspect does hold more weight, but other aspects are still important to get right. Likewise, in a machine quilting exhibition, more weight is given to the machine quilting aspect, but other features are still taken into account.

Some exhibitions may call this category "The Best Appliqué" section. The criteria set by the exhibition organisers may be looking for the Best Appliqué specifically, which may override what's happening with the other construction areas of the quilt. This then becomes more like some of our Special Award categories, where we are looking for the best Hand Quilting or whatever.

If everything about my quilt is my own original design, is this taken into consideration; how? How do the judges know when a quilt is an original, or using original fabric choices, and not a kit or a copy of another quilt?

When we are considering the design aspect of a quilt, we look at a number of things. At a glance, our paperwork tells us which quilts are original designs, and we can ask the scribes to provide more information; like if it was a block of the month with fabrics provided, etc.

Design choices include choice of fabrics and choice of threads, suitability of colour and contrast, balance of colour, tone and shape. Could clumsy shapes be improved to achieve better balanced proportions? If the quilt has been made from a pattern designed by someone else, how much of the eye appeal comes from decisions made by the designer, or how much of the wow factor comes from the decisions of the quilt maker? Just because someone has called it an original design, does not mean it would be given a 10 out of 10 score for design. The design needs to be successful, pleasing, and work well.

A very simple, clumsy, original design, without many design choices, may not do as well as a carefully thought-out elaborate quilt from a pattern where the quilt maker has given a lot of consideration to those design choices just mentioned. E.g. An old Traditional quilt design may have been used in a completely new and unique way, with very different modern fabrics, resulting in a very different quilt. The question here is, has the quilt maker successfully achieved good visual appeal.

How does the judging process make sure personal preferences don't influence winning choices?

I encourage judges to be aware of what their personal preferences are, so that when they see them, they can pay more careful attention to the judging process, so as to not make judging decisions based on their preferences, but rather on the true overall merit of the quilt.

Would a quilt with lots of blocks and work, like a *Dear Jane*, always win over one that has fewer less complicated blocks?

The simple answer to this is yes! But this is only if all other aspects of the quilt are on par. Things like workmanship, quilting and binding etc. If the two quilts are completely equal in every other way, the degree of difficulty and demonstration of mastery of different skills, will bring it above the simpler quilt.

Or it may be some other area of the quilt making process that lets it down. For Example - the quilting.

A well-made quilt will do better than a poorly constructed one. I would suggest that you stick with what you know you can do well, rather than making a quilt for competition using new techniques which are unfamiliar and not done well. So, the simpler quilt may do better if the workmanship of the more complicated quilt is done poorly, and the simpler one is done really well.

In other words, there is really no simple answer to this question, as it's all relative, and everything about the quilt is considered.

Can you ask the judges of a competition for feedback on your own quilt? Would you recommend doing this?

In South Australia we, the Judging team, generally do not provide feedback sheets, as it's simply not practical within the time constraints of judging. We have a big enough challenge getting through the judging process within the time provided, without adding the time it takes to write up feedback.

If you would like feedback on your quilt, the best way to obtain this is to have your quilt appraised, and on the paperwork you can request feedback. I would recommend if you are getting your quilt appraised to request the feedback, as this can help to indicate where you are at with your quilt-making skills, and what areas could do with improvement.

The Appraisal Team and the Judging Team look at the same aspects of the quilt, but where Appraisal differs to Judging is that the time taken to make the quilt and cost of materials are considered, whereas these elements do not come into play when ranking quilts against each other in the judging process.

What is the difference between a juried competition and an open competition?

When a competition is juried, photos will be requested with the quilt entry. Then someone, either from the exhibition committee, or a quilt judge or judges, will select the quilts to appear in the exhibition based on the photos and paperwork provided by the entrant.

In this case high quality photos are advisable to give the quilt its best chance of being accepted into the competition, by showing detail clearly, as well as its overall appeal. Sometimes quilts may be judged at this stage based on the photos alone.

In open competition the quilts or images of quilts have not been seen by the judges prior to when they are all judged together. The photos requested by the FoQ Team are purely for identification purposes and at no stage are seen by the judges.

First time entrants can be a mess with emotion and nerves. How do you feel as an experienced quilter and a trained judge preparing and entering a quilt into a competition (that you aren't judging)?

I still try to enter when I can, because it is a good opportunity to share my work with others, and it may just inspire someone too.

By putting an entry in, it creates more competition for the eventual prize winners. It's not much of a competition if there are hardly any entrants. I know that judges like a bit of a challenge, by having more entries.

At the same time, yes, it is intimidating knowing your work will be looked at closely. I am aware of every single mistake or flaw in my own work, and this can be a bit overwhelming. But as a judge, I know that they are not likely to see **every** problem, and while they are looking for the most appealing and perfect quilt, this is a rare animal. Even if my quilt doesn't win a prize, I will have done my best effort to my ability at the time, and so for that reason have a better quilt.

I know some of the SA Quilters judges have judged other states' competitions and we have an interstate judge in the SA Quilters Festival of Quilts. Why do the states do this and are the judging criteria the same across Australia? Are they the same across competitions, like FoQ, Dare to Differ, country show and Royal Adelaide show?

It's always good to have different judges each year as each judge will judge a little differently and place more value over different areas of quilt making, even within the same judging criteria. We continue to learn from each other.

If we recognise a quilt, and are familiar with who made it, the judge will declare that to the other judges, and step aside from judging that quilt. An interstate judge is less likely to be familiar with local quilts and their quilt-makers.

Some states or territories do not have judges of their own, and that may be why interstate judges are required.

Judges judge based on the criteria set by the exhibition organisers. This includes things like category stipulations, such as size or originality etc. Different State or Territory Guilds may also have slightly different Judging criteria, but generally it is much the same.

How can a quilt win in one competition and not in another one it enters like Houston and Quiltcon?

Regardless of whether it is Houston, Quiltcon, or smaller regional shows, results differ simply because the competition of what it is up against will be different. Competition guidelines may also be different. The best quilt in one show may not be the best quilt in the next show, or even win a prize. Or then again, it just might.

Each category of quilt is laid out in a pile with all the bottom left hand corners level with the bottom left-hand corner of the table. Why do we do this?

By aligning the left bottom corner of the quilts, this means none of the quilts get lost in the pile, small ones amongst the big ones. It also gives some indication of the straightness of the edge of the quilt, compared to the table edge, and flatness of the border or quilt edge.

What are the benefits of becoming a quilt judge?

For someone new to the team, they may learn things which can help them improve their own quilt-making skills or help them recognise those areas which could be improved.

The best thing for me about judging is being able to have the opportunity to look closely at each of the entries in the exhibition, and enjoy what they have to offer, while sharing these experiences with a great team.

Quilt judging can take you to different regions within South Australia or sometimes it may take you interstate, where you see not only the trends in other areas through their beautiful quilts, but also get to meet some of the amazing quilt makers and other wonderful people along the way.

What is involved in becoming a Quilt Judge?

If you would like to learn more about quilt judging, why not consider joining the Judging Team. We meet four times a year over lunch at a Café and members are expected to attend the Festival of Quilts judging day, as this is an important judging training experience.

Our first meeting of the year is an Education and Training Day, where a guest speaker gives a presentation, or leads discussion on a chosen topic in which they have expertise. Sometimes this may be a member of our own team.

To gain experience judging, if the occasion arises, a small group of us join an experienced judge to visit group exhibitions to either judge, if requested, or just as a training exercise. As we only have one major show per year, Festival of Quilts, these smaller shows are essential in giving our judges experience alongside an experienced judge, before judging a major show such as FoQ.

I hope that by answering these questions, this has given you a bit more of an understanding of Quilt Judging.

Jill Christian
Team Leader
Judging Team
SA Quilters

Email: saquiltersjudgingpanel@gmail.com