

FACE IT! A BETTER QUILT EDGE

by Kathleen Loomis



WAR ZONE 4: BOMB CRATERS, 30½" x 25", by Kathleen Loomis

Many times quilts look better without a border or binding—just turned to the back with the quilting stitches running right off the edge and around the fold. This faced edge is achieved by applying straight strips that are folded over to encase the raw edge of the quilt and sewn down by hand. Traditionally the top and bottom facings are applied first, and then the sides, tucking in the ends of the side facing strips in the corners as neatly as possible.

I always disliked the lumpy corners that resulted from this method, even when I carefully graded the seam allowances. And if the facing strip wasn't the same color as the corner of the quilt, it could be seen from the front because there was just too much fabric to bring it all invisibly to the back.

I developed a method that results in beautifully flat edges and corners with a neat back. The trick is to make

a one-piece facing for each corner instead of attaching each edge separately. Here's how to do it.

After blocking the quilt to get it perfectly flat, trim the edges ½" past the turn line. It doesn't matter if the quilt top extends the entire ½" as long as the batting—the heaviest layer—does.

Choose lightweight cotton fabric for the binding facing strips and corners. If your quilt top is multicolored, use whatever color is predominant at the sides of your quilt. These are the edges that will be most visible to viewers when the quilt is hung on a wall. Cut strips 1⅝" wide and 10" less than the length of each side of the quilt. Cut 4 corner facings using the template pattern on

page 85. Sew each corner facing to a binding strip (photo 1). Note that the facing strip is slightly wider than the curved facing piece.



Photo 1

With right sides together, place one of the facing-strip units at each corner of the quilt. Match the corner of the facing to the corner of the quilt, and carefully pin in place. The facing corner is slightly less than a 90° angle. You may need to adjust this angle slightly, depending on the firmness and thickness of the fabrics and batting used. When finished, the facing will pull toward the back of the quilt, making it less likely to show from the front. Garment sewers may be familiar with a similar technique to make the under collar of a shirt hide beneath the top collar.

Using the walking foot on your sewing machine to prevent shifting of layers, sew on the facings with a ½" seam allowance. Start sewing at one corner and stitch across the corner facing, continuing onto the facing strip. Sew until you are about 2" from the end of the strip (about 7" from the corner of the quilt) and approaching the curved facing piece.

Stop stitching, and flip the rest of the strip out of the way. Fold up a generous ¼" at the end of the corner facing, and pin it in place (photo 2). Put the binding strip back in place OVER the pinned facing and stitch all the way to the corner and off the edge of the quilt. Finish the other three corners the same way. Your seam lines cross at the exact corner of the finished quilt (photo 3).



Photo 2

It may seem counterproductive, but now you're going to rip out those seams, going back ¼" from the corner intersection. The needle holes will tell you where the edge falls and provide a guideline for resewing once you have trimmed away the excess fabric and batting (photo 4).

Carefully separate the layers into two groups—the backing and batting (on the bottom) and the quilt top and facing (on the top). Now that you have ripped the seams, you can fold the top and facing back to expose the actual corner of the quilt (photo 5). Cut away the backing



Photo 3



Photo 4



Photo 5

and batting on the diagonal, about ⅛" INSIDE the corner (photo 6, page 84). **Make sure you do not cut the top and facing.** A small, sharp pair of scissors is probably better for this task than your regular fabric shears.



Photo 6

Check your needle-hole stitching lines and make sure that you have cut inside the corner, so the actual seam intersection is gone. Smooth out the top and facing, and stitch the corner closed by resewing on the original seam lines, pivoting at the corner.

If you have quilting stitches in the very corner of the quilt, you won't be able to easily separate the layers. Don't worry—just pick out the stitches. You may want to carefully pull both top and bobbin threads to the front of the quilt so you don't accidentally cut them, and then reconstruct your quilting line by hand after the facing is in place. Or, you may be able to just dispense with that part of the quilting.

After all four corners are trimmed and sewn, edge-stitch the facing. This is another technique borrowed from garment sewing as a way to keep facings from creeping or rolling to the front. It also provides additional firmness to the faced edge. Fold the facing to the outside of the quilt and hold it taut as you stitch $\frac{1}{8}$ " from the seam line (photo 7). When you approach the place where the strip overlaps



Photo 7

the corner facing piece, just neatly overlap the two pieces and stitch through them.

You won't be able to sew all the way into the corners, but go as far as you comfortably can. Pull the thread ends to the back and knot them.

Now flip the facings to the back of the quilt and carefully poke out the corners. I use the blunt end of a small crochet hook or a wooden toothpick with the tip cut off. Between poking from the inside and prodding with your thumbnail from the outside, you can achieve almost perfectly square corners. Be gentle, however, so you don't split the stitches and shove the raw ends to the front.

If you have constructed a shirt or two in your lifetime, you may think that I left out a step—trimming away the excess fabric of the top and facing layers at the corners of the quilt. Indeed, garment sewers will trim the corners of collars and other facings to eliminate bulk in the points. But it's not necessary with a quilt. You have already removed the major bulk of the batting and backing layers, and the minor bulk of the top and facing layers is just not going to make a difference. And leaving the corner untrimmed removes the danger of trimming the corner too close—an irreparable disaster.

After all four corners are neatly turned, fold the facings to the back of the quilt, turn the edges under, press in the crease with your fingers, and pin closely. The long straight sections will be just over $\frac{1}{2}$ " wide. When you get to the corner facing pieces, turn under the curved edge as far as it will comfortably go, probably about $\frac{1}{4}$ ". Unless you have chosen particularly stiff fabric for your facings, you won't have to clip the curve to make it lie flat. Pins inserted along the edges of the quilt to hold down the turned-back batting will help you smooth the curved facings into place at the corners.



Photo 8

Leave the last 2" of the curved facing loose at the right side. Hand stitch along the edge strip to within $\frac{1}{8}$ " of the curved corner facing piece (photo 8). Then stop and arrange the curved corner piece, pulling it taut, smoothing it toward the right and tucking the end under the edge strip. Pin, and continue hand stitching around the curve to turn the corner.

You'll end up with perfectly flat corners (photo 9), quilt backing that stays neatly on the back of the quilt instead of creeping over to the front, and a beautiful frame-like facing on the back of the quilt. ♦



Photo 9

