

Many people judge quilt competitions,

whether certified by the National Quilting Association or not. It is common for show sponsors to hire a teacher or vendor who is scheduled to come to the show as a quilt judge, as this reduces expenses. Whether certified by NQA or not, there are excellent judges, mediocre judges and poor judges. The skill of the judge frequently has to do with his/her continuing education. A good judge will know quilt history in order to recognize derivative work as well as current techniques and materials. He/she will need to make meaningful, concise comments to the entrants. An understanding of design principles and color theory is part of a certified judge's education and testing process. They also know what constitutes good workmanship. It is an ongoing educational process.

It is important for quilt judges to approach each quilt in an identical manner, systematically assessing general appearance, design, workmanship (in and of itself as well as for intended use), and finishing so each can be evaluated using the same set of considerations. In elimination style judging, quilts are judged with respect to their quality relative to the other quilts in the category in which they are placed, and not relative to some ideal formulated in the judge's mind. A judge's comments allow entrants to focus on the areas where they can improve their work and tells them in which areas they are successful. The comments are necessarily short and succinct, due to time constraints. They are not intended to be teaching-style comments, as there are usually multiple ways to create similar effects in quilting. A trained quilt judge will objectively state the strengths and shortcomings of a quilt, without inclusion of his/her own preferences.

One of the missions of the NQA is to provide educational opportunities for their judges, the general quilting public and the certified teachers. This mission is the primary difference between its annual national show and other national shows. This is why the annual show awards ribbons, but no monetary awards for quilts. It is also the reason that the show is not juried, but is open to the first 400 entrants.

The basics of quilt evaluation are available on the NQA website at www.nqaquilts.org. The quarterly publication of the NQA, *The Quilting Quarterly*, features a series of articles by Lynne Erbach on quilt judging, covering a wide variety of issues. Scott Murkin has written some excellent articles on quilt judging for Professional Quilter. Much can also be learned from working as an aide in a show judging room.

The goal of the NQA certified judges program is to assure that all certified judges understand professionalism and the important criteria of judging. The individual judge must work to keep current with the quilting world, and the art world as well.

A new publication, *The Guide to Judged Quilt Shows*, covers the nuts and bolts of staging a judged quilt show. It is a useful tool for show sponsors about how to categorize quilts, hire a judge, set up a judging room and find a venue. This book is available online at The National

Quilting Association website. I urge anyone who would like to learn more about quilt show judging to join the NQA and read back issues of the *Quilting Quarterly* or find a member and read their copies.

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Andi Perejda, Education Chair

