

How Quilts are Judged at Georgia Celebrates Quilts®

Frequently Asked Questions

Q – Are the judges objective?

A – Yes. Judges do not know the name of the quilter, only the title of the quilt and its category. Guild volunteers do not influence judges' decisions in any way. Volunteers in the Judging Room must not let anyone know when their own quilts are being judged, even if it means leaving the room temporarily.

Q – But don't judges have their favorite kinds of quilts?

A – Yes, but their certified judge training teaches them how to separate their preferences from an objective review of each quilt, regardless of style or color. This training is applied when judging the quilts for category awards and "Best of" awards. Only with the Judges' Recognition Awards does each judge have the chance to recognize 3 quilts that appeal to them – and these quilts must also meet workmanship standards.

Q - How are judges selected?

A – The Judging Committee Chair reviews the list of judges certified by the National Association of Certified Quilt Judges and narrows the pool down to those outside Georgia (currently there are none in Georgia), but close enough that travel is convenient. As much as possible, an attempt is made to balance the judges' quilting backgrounds in quilting styles and techniques. Interviews are conducted by phone or online if the judge has not worked for ECQG before. The Judging Committee Chair's recommendation is reviewed and approved by the Quilt Show Chair.

Q – What is involved in the certification process?

A – Certified judges have completed a course of study involving classroom training, judging room apprenticeships, and an oral exam. The average time from application to certification is about 5 years.

Q – Are the judges paid?

A – Yes. Judges are paid per day worked. Their travel, lodging and meals are covered by the Quilt Show.

Q – How many judges are there?

A – Two. When a category is relatively small, they judge quilts together at the same time. For large volume categories, the quilts are divided approximately in half with each judge preparing their comments on half the quilts. Each judge selects quilts to “Hold” for further evaluation or releases those that she feels will not compete for awards. Then, the two judges confer on each of the “Hold” quilts from that category and select the category winners.

Q – How are quilts judged?

A - There are several steps.

For each category:

1. Quilts are stacked by category, flat atop each other on tables
2. Quilts are quickly unfolded (called “fanning”) so the judge can see the totality of the quilts in the category.
3. Each quilt is held up for the judges to see.
4. After examining each quilt, the judges dictate to the volunteer guild scribe the information for the Judges Comment Sheet.
5. The judges either release a quilt (meaning it will not be in the running for an award) or hold the quilt for further consideration.
6. When all quilts have been reviewed, the judges look at the quilts held for further consideration, and decide which ones will receive first, second, third and honorable mention awards. They also set aside quilts for the “Best of” awards (Best Hand Quilting, Best Long Arm Machine Quilting, Best Stationery Machine Quilting, Best Use of Color and Judges’ Recognition).
7. Each quilt that wins first place in its category is set aside for consideration for Best of Show.

After all the quilts have been judged:

1. The judges review the quilts held for “Best of” Awards and make their decisions. Usually, some quilts are released, and the finalists are held up by the volunteers.

2. The judges review all the first-place quilts from each category and decide which one will be Best of Show.

Q – How long does a judge look at each quilt?

A – It depends on the judge, but usually 3 to 5 minutes in the first review. During that time, the judge first considers visual impact, then design and workmanship. If the quilt is held for further consideration, more time will be spent by the judges evaluating the quilt.

Q – How does the name of a quilt and/or the artists statement impact the judging process?

A – Judges are read the name of the quilt, but not the artist's name or statement. From observation and conversation with judges, the quilt name does not influence their evaluation. The artists' statements are of most value to visitors to the show, who are always eager to know more about the quilts they like.

Q – Does the quilt backing affect the judges' decision?

A – No, so long as the backing is smooth and flat. Judges examine the back of the quilt to evaluate the quality of the quilting (stitch tension, neat stops and starts). The design of the backing fabric (printed or solid, scrappy or all one fabric) is not a factor in the judges' decision.

Q – Do judges prefer hand work (applique, quilting, binding) over machine stitching?

A – No, judges have no preference for either hand or machine work. They look at each quilt to evaluate how well it is done, not the method used.

Q – How can judges evaluate how difficult some techniques are?

A – Judges are quilters themselves, so they have personal experience in many of the techniques. Additionally, their course of study to become certified includes in-depth study of techniques and elements of design. Because quilting continues to evolve, judges also continue to study (and perhaps try out) the latest quilting trends.

Q – Do judges prefer original design over quilts made from patterns?

A – No. Unless the category rules require original design, the judges are not aware of whether the quilt is an original design or made from a pattern, unless they happen to be familiar with the pattern. Even if that is the case, they are more focused on the actual judging criteria: visual impact, degree of difficulty/complexity, and workmanship.

Q – Do judges expect quilts to be perfect?

A – No! Judges know that quilters are people just like them, so there is no expectation of perfection. Quilts are judged against the other quilts in their category, not against a hypothetical perfect quilt.

Q – How will I know what the judges thought of my quilt?

A – The judges comment sheet will be returned to you with your quilt after the show. It will be in a sealed envelope “for your eyes only.”

Q – What are judges’ comments like? I don’t want to be scolded!

A – Judges comments are provided in two parts: 1) ratings on a list of criteria, ranging from “Excellent” to “Needs Improvement” and 2) a few phrases or sentences specific to each quilt, letting the maker know of the quilt’s strong points and making suggestions for improvement. All comments are made to provide guidance for improvement and to encourage the maker to enter quilt contests again in the future.