

Blocking a Wholecloth Quilt

By Cindy Needham

When I create my wholecloth quilts, whether they are from vintage linens or “regular” fabric it is important that they hang flat and straight. These are show pieces, for exhibits, for teaching and often times are hanging on my walls at home. It is normal for quilts to become distorted or tweaked during the quilting process, especially wholecloth quilts, so I take the time to stretch and block them afterwards.

The instruction I’m providing is very basic and you can add to it or tweak it any way you wish. There are a number of different methods for blocking so use what works for you!



Let’s pretend this is quilted!

When I quilt a wholecloth quilt I will mark a line around the perimeter where I would like the finished edge to be.

I quilt up to that and at least 1/4” PAST that marked line.

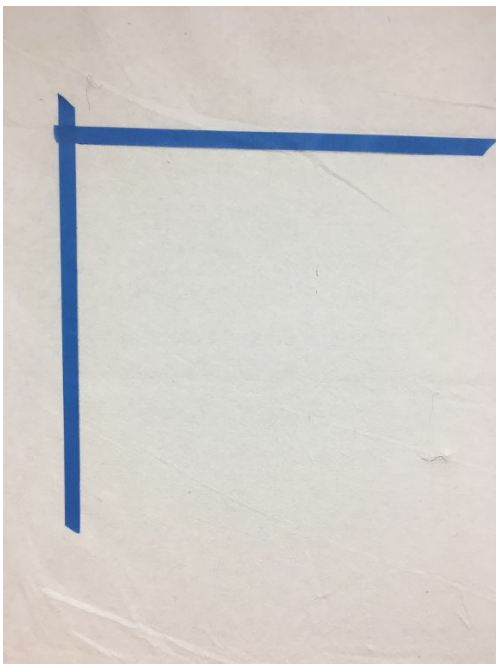


I trim the rough edges off of the quilt so that my edges are straight and square.

Notice that I did NOT cut on my finished edge line but PAST it.

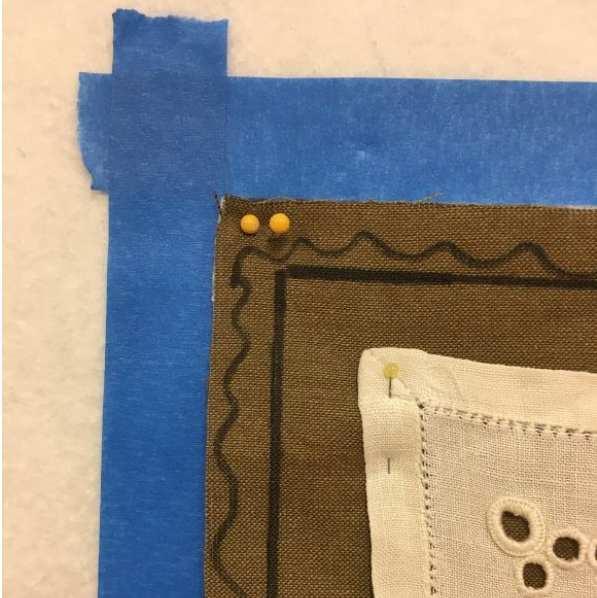


I like to use the home insulation foam sheets you can get from Lowes/Home Depot. They're about an inch-ish thick and I wrap them in Warm & Natural batting.



I take my large square ruler and with my Frixion pen draw a long line at the top and then down the left side. For photography and video purposes I added blue tape so you could see what I was doing. You can extend these lines as far as you need to.

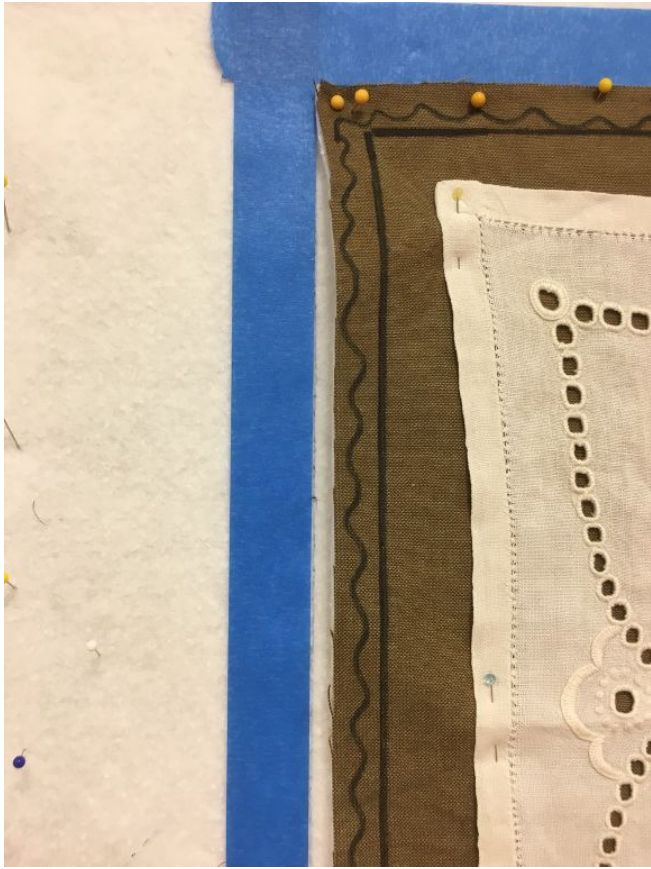
I either soak or hand wash my quilt prior to blocking. If the quilt is large I soak it in my washing machine and then spin it to get the excess water out. If it is a small piece I soak/wash it in my sink and then roll it in a towel jellyroll style and squeeze the excess water out.



Starting in the top left hand corner and using the heavier straight pins, place two pins in the corner to hold it. I put two pins in the corners because there is a lot of stress in this area and it helps to hold it in place.



I start with the top edge first. I gently pull the edge over and line it up with my line and bury a pin in place. I place my pins about an inch-ish apart and keep pulling and lining up the edge as I go. Be sure to really bury the pins in so they don't move.



Once the top edge is done I start on the left side.

See how the left side has pulled away from the line? This is normal and will happen with each edge.

Repeat the same steps as you did for the top edge for this left side. You will need to encourage and pull the edge of the quilt so it eases up against this straight line. Be sure to put the double pins in the corner!

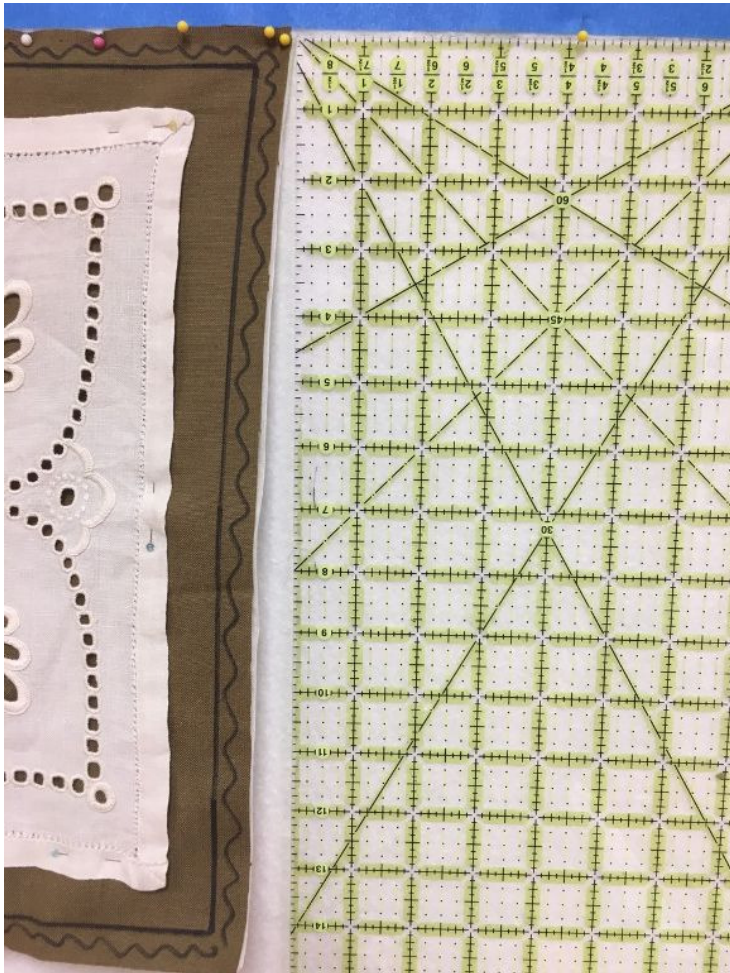


This is what the finished left side will look like.

This photo is a very good example of why I cut PAST the anticipated finished edge line for blocking. The pins will pull and distort the edge of the quilt during the blocking process. When the quilt is blocked and dry you will simply cut this damaged edge off.



Now it's time to address the right side. Can you see the slight bow to the edge? This is normal!



I take a long ruler and line it up the marked straight line on the board right up to the pinned corner. I draw a straight line all the way down. Repeat the same pinning steps as you did for the other two sides.





Now repeat the same step for the bottom edge. Line the ruler up, draw your straight line and ease and encourage the edge to be straight.

I recommend you leave your quilt on the board for at least 24 hours so give it ample time to dry. If I have a fan available I will use that to get it to dry faster.

Once your quilt is off the board RE-MARK your finished edge cutting line. Trust me, this line will be distorted after the blocking process! This is also another reason to quilt past this cutting line so you have wiggle room.

These instructions make this process look easy...to me it isn't. I hate the blocking process because there is a considerable amount of time involved. When you are pulling and stretching the quilt it is basically "borrowing from Peter and paying Paul". Something is going to have to give somewhere. You may have to unpin some spots and restretch. Some areas take a little more encouragement than others. Put on some good music and be prepared to devote some time to this!

Is the process worth it??? Yes!!!!