

CHECKERBOARD

A small project with *Big Stitch* hand quilting.

by Lorna Costantini



Are you intrigued by the notion of *Big Stitch* hand quilting and you are looking for a modern feel? Checkerboard is a great place to start. It's a pillow pattern created by piecing a background of low-volume prints with a graded range of bright, coloured prints. >



Finished size: 15" x 15"

There are probably some—not you, of course—who swear they will never ever quilt by hand. Here is your chance to explore the art of hand quilting, while drawing from your stash of scraps. Wouldn't you embrace a reason to grab a few minutes of quiet? This project should take you into a world of rhythmic stitches with fabric you lovingly bought.

Note: This pattern focuses on learning to Big Stitch hand quilt.

Fabric Requirements

- A variety of low-volume* background and coloured squares: 18 – 2.5" x 2.5" low-volume background and 18 – 2.5" x 2.5" coloured squares.
- Two 2.5" by width-of-fabric for the borders of the pillow top
Sub-cut: (Border **A**) two 2.5" x 12.5";
(Border **B**) two 2.5" x 16.5"
- Backing **C**: for quilt top, 18" x 18"
(*what was I thinking fabric?* works well here)
- Batting: 18" x 18"
- Backing **D**: for pillow cover, half of a metre.

Supplies

- One 14" x 14" pillow form
- Perle cotton in a variety of colours which compliment your coloured squares, size 12
- Chenille needles, size 22 or 24
- 14" quilter's hoop (nice to have, but optional)



Lorna Costantini is a retired family studies teacher with a penchant for computer technology. She is a member of the Niagara Heritage Quilt Guild and founding member of the Niagara Modern Quilt Guild. As a quilter, pattern designer and teacher, Lorna works to inspire a love of fabric and the skillful art of quilting. Her tutorials and patterns can be found on her website: lornacostantini.com. Follow Lorna on Instagram @lornacost and Facebook.com/LornaCostantini.

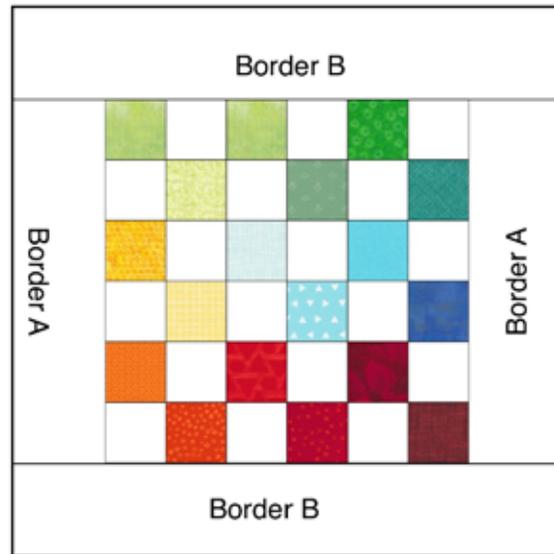


FIGURE 1

Instructions

PILLOW TOP CONSTRUCTION

Using the layout in *figure 1*, piece a block measuring 12.5" x 12.5" using a combination of the low volume and coloured squares. Add border **A** to both sides of the block. Add border **B** to top and bottom of the block. Unfinished pillow top measures 16.5" x 16.5".

QUILT LAYERING INSTRUCTIONS

Layer pieced pillow top, batting and backing **C** to make a quilt sandwich. Be sure the pillow top is centred on both the batting and backing **C** layers. *Note: Be sure to use backing **C** for the quilt top in this step, not backing **D**, which is used for finishing the pillow cover.*

Batting and backing should extend 1.5" around the pieced top edges. Baste the quilt sandwich layers together using your favourite method. If you use a hoop, consider using spray basting to eliminate the issue of quilt-basting pins interfering with the quilting hoop. You will need to do some quilting without the hoop when you come to quilt the outside edge of the borders, so baste the edges of the quilt well.

*Low-volume fabrics are defined as fabrics that "read" as light fabrics, but at the same time, have a secondary pattern or design. Just one of these fabrics can be used as the background for an entire quilt, but it's even more fun to combine many different low-volume fabrics for stunning quilts.—Craftsy.com

BIG STITCH HAND QUILTING!

Let's pretend you have never hand quilted. I'm going to take you through the basics. If the following instructions seem like a foreign language, search out a fellow guild member who quilts by hand and ask for their advice and help. You can also check out my video tutorial *Big Stitch Hand Quilting*, on my website: www.lornacostantini.com.

Throw away any mental measuring stick about stitches—their length or how many stitches to the inch. There is some latitude in *Big Stitch* hand quilting. If a stitch is a little askew or irregular in length, do not rip it out; just keep on stitching. Once you get in the groove, your stitches will start to get even and straighten out.

THREAD AND NEEDLES

I use size 12 perle cotton for *Big Stitch* hand quilting. The thread is thick, so a needle with a big eye is needed. A size 22, and smaller size 24, will work well. The thickness of the thread will determine the size of the needle. My favourite is Valdani® thread because it has a softer feel and I can easily make a small quilter's knot. It is also easier to thread into a size 24 chenille needle. The smaller needle is easier to pull through your fabric but the larger size works as well. For this small project you could use embroidery floss, but the six strands of floss can easily separate during quilting.



FIGURE 2

THIMBLES

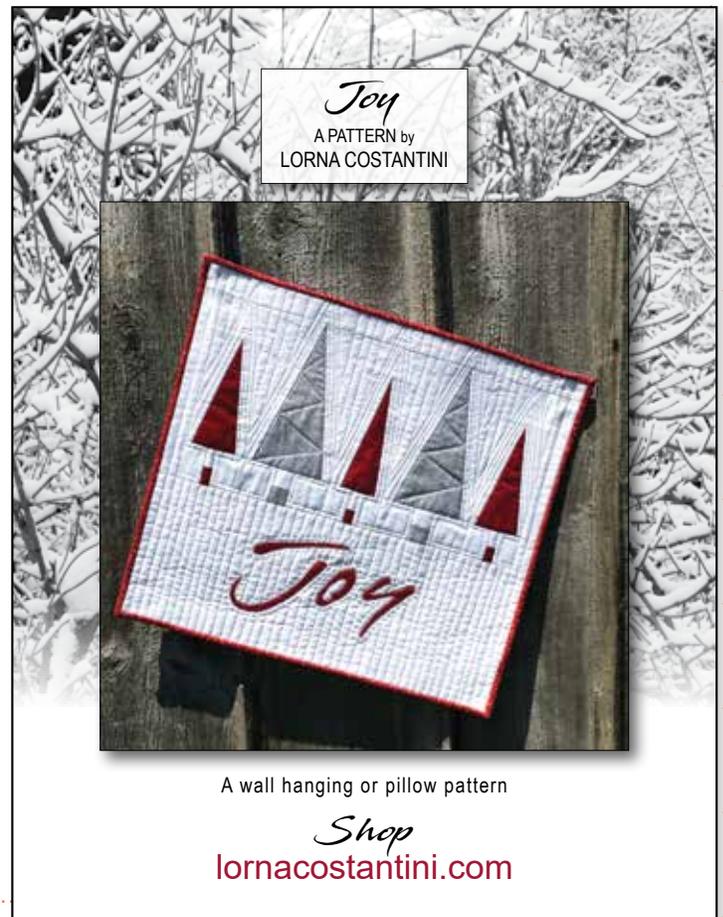
Thimbles are a personal choice. You will need one to help you push the needle through all three layers of the quilt. Try several to judge the size and fit you need. I also use a rubber finger pad, *figure 2*, to assist in grabbing the needle when I pull the needle through the fabric.



FIGURE 3

TO HOOP OR NOT?

Using a hoop is a personal choice. A hoop can make quilting easier and the stitches consistent. Choose a quilter's hoop, not an embroidery hoop. A quilter's hoop has a wood block closure, *figure 3 – lower hoop*. The embroidery hoop is thinner and could break under the pressure of a quilt and its layers, *figure 3 – upper hoop*. >



A wall hanging or pillow pattern

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HAND STITCHING BASICS

Four things to know:

1. How to make a quilter's knot.
2. How to start a row of stitching.
3. How to quilt a row of stitches.
4. How to finish a row and hide the quilter's knot.

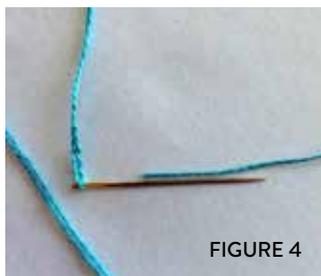


FIGURE 4

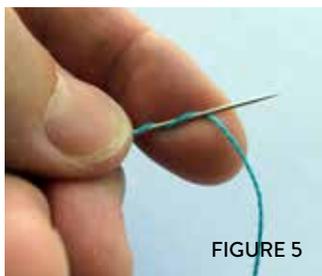


FIGURE 5

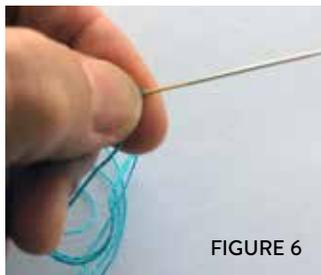


FIGURE 6

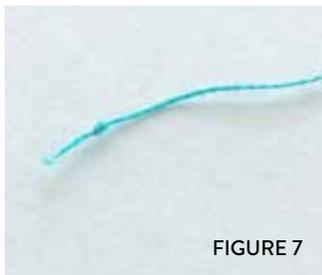


FIGURE 7

HOW DO I MAKE A QUILTER'S KNOT?

Thread your needle with about 12" to 15" of thread.

Take the cut end of the thread and place it along the side of the needle with the cut end facing the eye of the needle, *figure 4*.

Hold the thread and needle between your thumb and forefinger. Wrap the thread two to three times around the point of the needle; more twists of the thread will make a knot that is too big, *figure 5*.

Gently pull the needle through, while barely squeezing the twisted thread at the same time, *figure 6*.

Viola! You have a knot, *figure 7*.

HOW DO I BURY THE QUILTER'S KNOT WHEN I START QUILTING?

Decide where your first stitch will be. Pierce the quilt top with your threaded needle about one inch away from this spot and slide the needle between the top and the batting until the point of the needle reaches your starting point. Pull the needle through until the knot sits just on the top of the quilt. Gently pull the thread until the knot pops in-between the layers. Trim off any excess thread, *figure 8*.

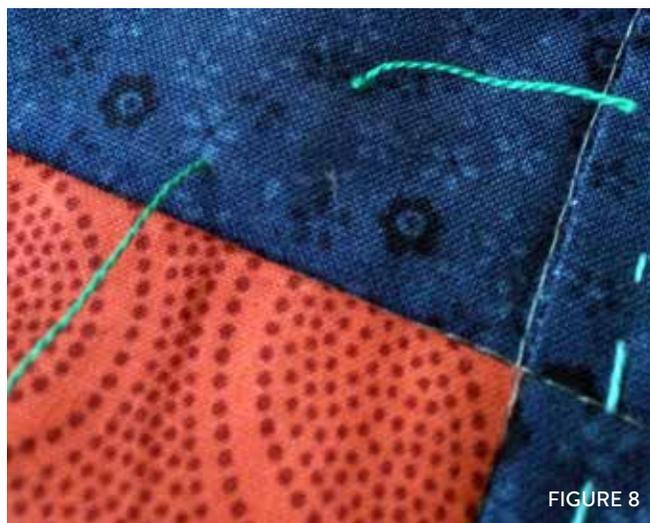


FIGURE 8



FIGURE 9



FIGURE 10

HOW DO I MAKE A ROW OF STITCHING?

Hand quilting is a process of inserting a needle through all three layers of a quilt: top, batting and backing. It's a running stitch but executed in a way that ensures the needle consistently goes through all three layers. I use a thimble and a finger pad to quilt with perle cotton. The finger pad helps grab the needle while quilting and prevents hand fatigue.

If you are right-handed, place the middle finger of your left hand under the quilt at the place you want to make your first stitch. Balance the needle at the end of the thimble, position the needle facing 90° to the top and push the needle down until you can just feel your finger underneath, *figure 9*. Slant the needle back and down towards the quilt top and slide your needle into the quilt and out through the top, *figure 10*. Repeat until you have about four inches of perle cotton remaining. Practice and, I promise, it will get easier.

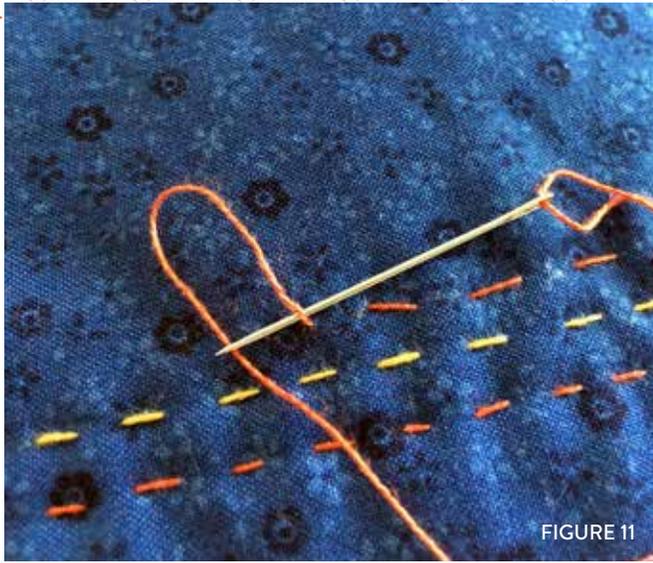


FIGURE 11

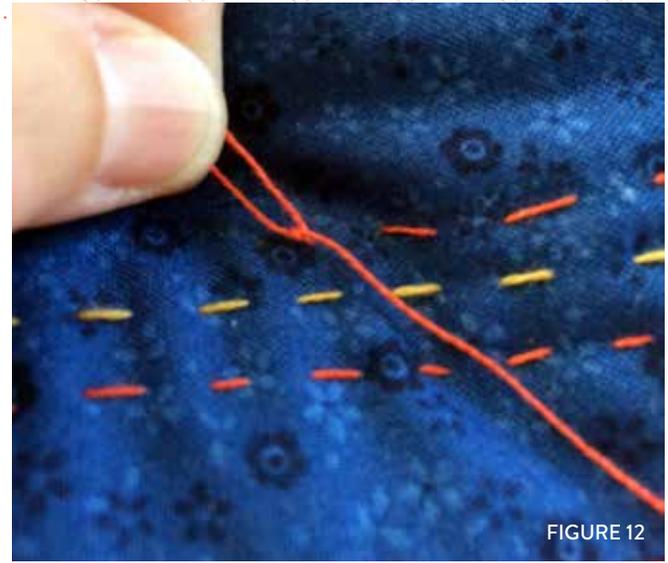


FIGURE 12

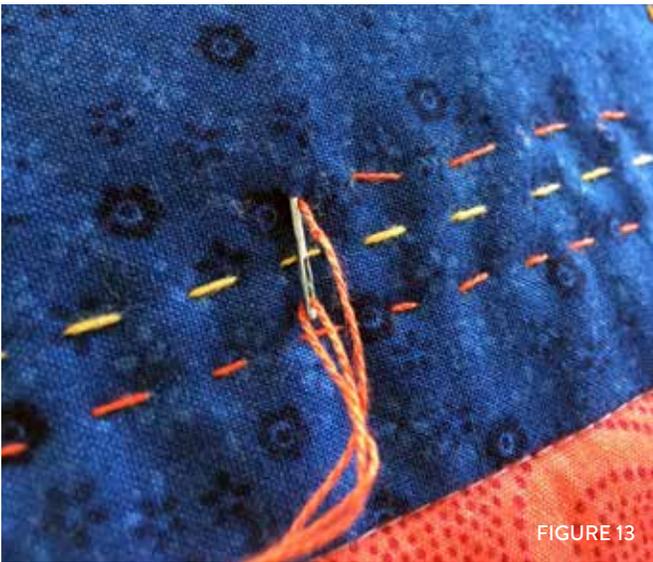


FIGURE 13

HOW DO I FINISH OFF A ROW OF QUILTING?

Lay your thread on the quilt top. Put your needle under the thread, *figure 11*.

Hold the thread with your left hand, pass the needle under and pull the thread until you get a small "v", *figure 12*.

Press your thumb on point of the "v" and pull the thread through to form a knot. Your knot should be close to the surface of the quilt.

Insert your needle back into the hole from your last stitch. Make sure it is between the top and the batting. Pull the needle through and pop the knot between the layers. Trim off any excess thread, *figure 13*.

Please remember you can watch me demonstrate these four basic steps in the video tutorial posted on my web site www.lornacostantini.com.

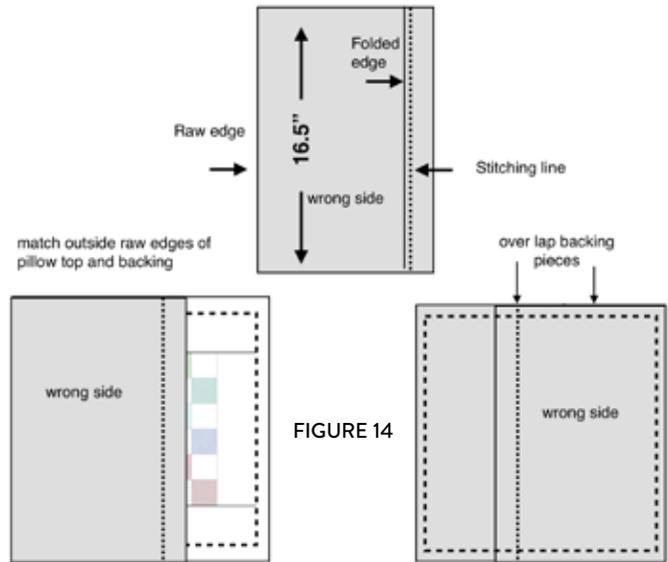


FIGURE 14

PILLOW FINISHING

Square your quilted pillow top to 16.5" x 16.5".

Cut two pieces of the pillow-cover backing **D**, 16.5" x 20.5". On one short side (16.5") of each piece, press under ½" to the wrong side, then press under another 1". Stitch through all layers close to the turned under edge. With the quilted top, right side, face up, place one of the backing pieces, face down, on the left side of the pillow top. Align the raw edges on three sides. Pin in place. The folded edge will extend past the centre of the pillow top. Repeat with the second backing piece **D** placed on the right side of the pillow top. This piece will overlap the first, *figure 14*. Be sure to keep the hemmed edges facing centre.

Sew around all four sides of the top using a ½" seam allowance. Backstitch at the beginning and end of stitching. Trim corners. Turn the pillow top right side out. Push out the corners, press and top stitch ½" from the outside edge. Top stitching will prevent the pillow backing from rolling to the front. Pop the pillow form in and you are done! Enjoy! 🍀