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Heirloom Sewing Techniques

~ FABRICS, LACES, AND NOTIONS ~

The heirloom sewing techniques used in these quilts were adapted from techniques used primarily for children’s clothing. Cotton batiste and cotton laces are the standards for heirloom sewing, and these translate well into quilting. Let’s look at suitable fabrics and supplies:

**Batiste** This is a lightweight, plain weave, soft, semi-sheer fabric. Most of the quilts and other projects have sections of embellished batiste that have been layered over quilting cotton. The fabric underneath shows through the batiste, creating several color values.

One hundred percent cotton batiste is preferable to poly-cotton blends, because the blends tend to pucker and fray. Swiss cotton batiste is the gold standard for heirloom sewing for pieces such as christening gowns, but it is quite expensive. For quilts, less expensive domestic 100 percent cotton batiste works just as well. It is usually available in white, ivory, and pastels.

**Organdy and organza** These are sheer, lightweight, crisp fabrics. The finest organdy is Swiss cotton. It is crisper than organza, which is usually made of silk or synthetics. The natural-fiber fabrics are recommended. They are available in white, ivory, and occasionally pastels and dark colors.

**Handkerchief linen** A lightweight, even-weave linen fabric, it is available in many qualities and in linen-cotton blends. This fabric is used for appliqués and appliquéd bias strips, but in all the projects, quilting cotton may be substituted for the linen.

**Netting** These open-weave, transparent fabrics have tiny diamond or octagonal holes throughout. One hundred percent cotton English netting was used for the samples in the photos. It has larger holes than silk or nylon netting or tulle. It is very soft, and when combined with decorative machine stitching, it makes beautiful machine-made lace. It is expensive, but a little goes a long way. Allow for approximately 25 percent shrinkage.

Left, Swiss cotton batiste; right, domestic cotton batiste

Left, Swiss cotton organdy; right, silk organza
3. Sew more pintucks alongside the first one. Pivot each row of pintucks at the point where the stitching line crosses the miter line.

Use just a few rows of shaped pintucks to prevent too much distortion - three rows are often best.

4. Soak the fabric to remove markings. Turn the pintucked fabric upside-down on a towel; starch and press.

**Corded Pintucks**

For corded pintucks, place a soft, heavy thread or cord under the fabric and between the needles. The needles stitch on both sides of the cord, and the zigzag of the bobbin thread sort of couches the cord on the wrong side of the fabric. The cording makes the pintucks more defined and rounder.

Size 12 pearl cotton works well for 1.6/80 needles and a seven-groove foot. Size 8 or 10 works for 2.0/80 needles and a five-groove foot. Some machine throat plates have a small hole just in front of the foot. With these, the ball of pearl cotton can be placed under the front of the machine, with the cord threaded through the hole and pulled between the needles and behind the foot. Colored pearl cotton can be used to create shadow-colored pintucks.
Suggested Quilting

Layer the backing, batting, and quilt top; baste. With invisible thread, stitch in the ditch of the sashing seam lines. Stitch along the lace zigzag stitching, shadow appliqué stitching, outer rows of pintucks, and all decorative stitching.

With matching thread, stitch ⅛" outside the shadow appliqué hearts and ¼" outside the shadow appliqué scallop stitching, adding loops at the peaks of the scallops. Stitch scallops halfway between the shadow appliqué scallops and the pintucks. Stitch scallops ½" outside the pintucks, with three loops at the peaks of scallops. Stitch a three-loop motif above the hearts. Stitch around the motifs in the embroidered eyelet insertion. Stitch a cabled border outside the decorative stitching in the center panel and sashing.

Add binding to finish the raw edges of the quilt.
Designed, sewn, and quilted by the author  50" x 50"

Violet Heirloom