One of the great things about the sewing and quilting community is just that: **community**. The connections we make with others who love to create are always inspirational and fun. Heather Jones is someone we met years ago, and who we've been thrilled to watch develop into one of the brightest stars in the world of Modern Quilting. Heather has a great love and respect for the traditional art of quilting, is an avid collector of vintage quilts, and loves to bring a modern twist to traditional patterns. We feel very special and lucky that she found the time to create this awesome Guest Tutorial on one of her specialties: Straight Line Quilting.

Before diving head-first into the information below, I'd like to gush just a bit more about Heather Jones – and make sure you know about some exciting new things coming up for her this summer and fall.
She is the founder and former president of the Cincinnati Modern Quilt Guild. Three of her original quilts were chosen as winners of the Modern Quilt Guild's Project Modern Challenges, a year-long national quilting competition, and she is a two-time finalist for the Martha Stewart American Made Awards. She's also a wonderful Mom to two cute kids who already show signs of following in her (and her artist/painter husband's) very creative footsteps.

If you can, take a few moments to visit her newly updated website, HeatherJonesStudio.com, which includes links to buy her beautiful quilt patterns... even better, these PDF patterns are all on sale right now! There's also a full list of her available classes and workshops along with a current teaching schedule.
You’ll want to take an especially close look at the amazing retreat she’s teaching with Amy Butler this July. Hosted by A Gathering of Stitches at the gorgeous Point Lookout resort in Maine, *A Quilter’s Color Weekend* promises to be two days filled with bright ideas, personal attention, and sewing action.
We're also super excited for the Fall release of Heather's first book, *Quilt Local: Finding Inspiration in the Everyday,* published by STC Craft | A Melanie Falick Book, with a forward by Denyse Schmidt.

You can follow Heather on her blog as well as on Instagram, Pinterest and Twitter.

Without further ado, take it away, Heather ...

Straight line quilting is my favorite type of quilting. I love the clean, modern feeling it gives to a quilt design, and I especially love dense quilting, with lots and lots of lines. I'm excited to share some of my tips on straight line quilting with you today.
To get started, you’ll need a quilt top, a quilt back, your choice of batting (I prefer cotton), thread, safety pins, blue painters tape, and a walking foot for your sewing machine. Straight line quilting can be done without a walking foot, but in my experience, things go a lot more smoothly with one. It has built-in feed dogs that help move the top layers of fabric through your machine, while your machine’s own feed dogs move the bottom layers through. This helps ensure the layers don’t shift while you are quilting.

We’ll start by making a quilt sandwich, which consists of three layers: the quilt back, the batting, and the quilt top.

First, lay the quilt BACK on a flat surface, right side down. Use the blue painter’s tape around the perimeter to hold the edges in place. Using your hands, smooth out any wrinkles or air bubbles that may occur, pull the fabric taut, and secure with pieces of tape.

NOTE: Your backing piece should be a few inches bigger than the size of your quilt front, just in case there is some shifting of fabric during the quilting process.

Next, place the batting on top of the quilt back. Again, smooth out any wrinkles or air bubbles with your hands. The batting should also be a few inches larger than the quilt top.

Finally, lay the quilt top on the batting, right side up. Once again, use your hands to smooth out any wrinkles or air bubbles in the fabric. This diligence to remove air bubbles and wrinkles from each layer reduces the amount of puckering that may occur in the quilting process.
Pin baste all three layers together.

NOTE: You can use regular safety pins, but I prefer to use special quilter's pins, which have a slight bend in the part of the pin that pushes through the fabric. This little bend in the metal makes pinning through all of the layers much easier.
Once you have pin basted the quilt sandwich, carefully remove the painter's tape that is holding down the quilt backing.

We're almost ready to begin quilting! I say, "almost," because before I start to quilt, I always use a couple scraps of fabric and a scrap of batting to make a swatch sandwich to test my stitching. By testing the stitching on a swatch, I can see if I need to adjust the tension of my sewing machine, the stitch length, etc.

Simply place a piece of batting between two pieces of fabric (the same fabrics and batting that you are working with) to make a mini quilt sandwich. If you're using cotton batting, you don't really need to pin baste this together because the fabric will stick to the batting.

Before you even start stitching on the swatch, change your sewing machine needle! I always like to start with a new needle on every project, especially when I am going to be quilting. I've seen my friends here at Sew4Home make this recommendation as well, and I want to emphasize its importance.

Below is a picture of one of the machines I use to do my sewing and quilting. It's an older Janome; it's not computerized, and it's not fancy at all, but I love it. It's a real workhorse and makes beautiful stitches.

When I am straight-line quilting, I always increase my stitch length and decrease the pressure of my presser foot. Not all machines can make these adjustments, but if yours can, I highly recommend you do both before you start to quilt. By decreasing the pressure of the presser foot, there will be less chance of the layers puckering during the quilting process.

With your new needle in place and your machine settings adjusted, it's time to start quilting on your swatch. Run a few lines of test stitching, then look at the stitches both on the front and back of the swatch. Make any adjustments needed to the tension and stitch length, and keep re-testing until you are satisfied with the quality of your stitches.
I always quilt using gloves, which are readily available at your local fabric store or online. They are cotton gloves with small rubber dots all along the palm side. The rubber dots help grasp the fabric, making it easier to move all of the layers through the machine. If you’re in a pinch, rubber kitchen gloves or clean gardening gloves can also be used.

Let's start quilting!

On small quilts, I always start on one side of the quilt and work across the width of it, until I have quilted the entire piece. Also, I always backstitch at the beginning of each line of quilting to lock the stitches. When I start quilting, I use the edge of the fabric as a guide, keeping my walking foot placed along it as I stitch.

Go slowly as you begin to move the fabric through the machine. Be sure to remove the safety pins as needed. This should be done when your machine is stopped with the needle in the down position so the fabric doesn't shift.

Keep quilting in a straight line until you get to the end of the quilt top. Lock your stitches at this end as you did at the beginning.

Remove the quilt from the machine and clip the thread tails close to the fabric at the beginning and end of the stitching. This will keep them from getting caught in the next line of quilting.

I use the previous line of quilting as my guide for the next line, keeping the edge of my walking foot against it while I work on the next line of quilting. Quilt each line moving in the same direction.
NOTE: If you want to do straight line quilting, but not as dense as my example, you can mark lines on the quilt front with a marking pen to use as a guide. If this is your choice, use a water soluble marker to draw on the quilt front, marking out your quilting design before you create your quilt sandwich. You can also use a quilt bar attachment for your walking foot, which is like an "outboard ruler" that runs along the previous line as a spacing guide for the current line of stitching.

Straight line quilting, especially the dense variety I love, takes a lot of thread! If you run out of bobbin thread in the middle of a line of quilting, don't worry.

Just fill the bobbin with thread and replace it, re-thread your machine, and drop your needle back into the quilt, a few stitches above where the quilting stopped (ie. where you ran out of thread).

Make two to three stitches there, and then backstitch to lock the stitches. Then, continue quilting as before. After you finish that line of quilting, take your scissors and snip the tails of the thread.
Another tip that helps with both straight line quilting, as well as other types of quilting, is to use quilt clips to roll up the quilt sandwich as you work.

Quilts can be kind of bulky to move through your machine and these plastic clips can really help reduce that bulk. Just roll up your quilt, slide the clips on, and place your quilt on the machine. Much easier to handle! Adjust the clips as necessary to unroll as you quilt.
Straight line quilting is seldom perfect, and if you're not happy with a line of stitches, don't be afraid to rip it out. Just use your favorite seam ripper and carefully remove both the top and bottom stitching.

I use a lint roller to pick up all of the excess threads before I begin to quilt again. Quick and slick!

Before you know it, your beautiful quilt will be done!
I'm putting a bit of a positive spin on things. In all actuality, straight line quilting, especially as dense as I prefer to work, takes a lot of time. Be sure to take as many breaks as you need. Get up, stretch your arms and your neck, and remember... you don't have to finish the quilting all in one session.

Even though heavy, straight line quilting does take a lot of time, I certainly think it's worth the effort! I love the look of it, and it is honestly my very favorite type of quilting. You'll see there are little imperfections in the lines, and most are not perfectly straight, but I think that adds to the character of the quilt. It's one of the things I love most.

When you are finished quilting, trim off any excess batting and fabric from the back, and bind the quilt as desired.
Sewing Tips & Tricks

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