

Photographing Quilts

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I am not a professional photographer, but I am convinced that just about anyone can take decent pictures of their own quilts. You spend many hours creating your quilts. It doesn't matter if it is a gift for your family, a donation quilt for charity or a work of art that you plan to enter into a show. It may soon be gone, so many of us would like to have a photograph of it to include with our documentation.

Any photographs that you take are certainly good enough for documenting your quilts and/or sharing them on social media. In most cases, you can take pictures good enough to enter quilt competitions. Personally, I've only had one of my quilts professionally photographed; and that was one that was included in Debbie Caffrey's "Blocks and Quilts Everywhere!" book. So, there is certainly a time and place for the professional photographer; but the tips I'd like to share with you today are ones that you can use to take reasonably good photos of your own quilts.

If you are planning to enter a quilt in a major quilt show, you will need good photographs of it just to have a chance for it to be accepted for exhibit. (I have heard several judges say that most quilts that are juried are rejected because the photographs submitted of questionable quality. No matter how good your quilt is in person, if the photograph of it is poor, it will more than likely be rejected.)

Things you need to know to get great pictures of your quilt:

- **Know your camera.** Even the simple point-and-shoot cameras have many options on it. The various settings can dramatically affect how your quilt will look once it has been photographed. Most cameras come with an instruction manual or you can usually find one to download on the manufacturer's website. I personally use a Nikon D70 for most of the digital photographs that I take. You certainly can take fairly good images with your smart phone or tablet, but there are some limitations depending on the quality of photographs you wish to take. For me, my phone doesn't have a tripod socket, so it's difficult to get the camera in the phone parallel to the quilt. (I like a camera with at least 5 megapixels of resolution.)
- **Find a good place to hang your quilt so there are no distractions.** If there are distractions, you can always crop those items out of your photograph. You can use a bare wall, a design board, a display stand etc. If you're photographing outdoors, you'll want to make sure you do that on a calm day so that the wind won't blow your quilt around.

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- **Use a tripod.** One of the best tips I can give you is to always use a tripod! This will help ensure a nice, crisp photo. Although I don't use one for every quilt I photograph, the use of a tripod will allow you to get a quilt square in the viewfinder or display screen. If the lens of the camera isn't aligned with the quilt, you will get a distorted image (called keystone in photography). It's basically an issue with perspective. Is this a bad thing? Not always.
- **Position your camera correctly.** To minimize distortions, adjust your tripod so your camera lens is pointed at the middle of your quilt. If you need to, use a tape measure. Check the distance from the middle of your quilt to the floor and then move your camera so that the center of the lens is at the same height. Next, adjust your camera so it is parallel to the design wall. When your camera is not parallel, you get wonky photos. I take quite a bit of time looking at the view screen of my digital camera to see if the edges of my quilt are parallel with the edges of the view screen.
- **Lighting.** I rarely use the flash on my camera. I use side lighting to be able to capture the relief (highs and lows) of the quilting. If I photograph a quilt outdoors, I avoid areas with full sun and prefer to photograph them in open shade. For even lighting without completely washing out the quilts, I place the lights so they are at 45 degree angles (or less) to the quilt. Sometimes I'll place one lamp on either side of the quilt. I can usually get the best coloring that way. After a few shots like that, I'll either turn off one light or place both on the same side. That way I can create shadows and I can usually get a good shot of the relief created by the quilting stitches. Also experiment with moving your lighting closer or further away to see what shows off your quilt best.
- **Take lots of pictures.** This is made much easier and more cost effective with digital cameras. You can simply delete the ones you don't wish to keep. I usually take several pictures of each quilt. I keep changing the lighting, I zoom in different amounts, and I take full shots and detail shots. My goal is to give myself many options so there is a greater potential that at least one is really good.

I hope a few of these pointers might help you take better pictures of your quilts, even if those pictures are just for your own personal documentation.