

# Web Bonus Article: Working With Silk



By DENISE APPLIGATE-SCHOBER

## Silk Takes a New Spin with Quilting

Quilting with silk is fast becoming a trend in the quilting industry. The history of silk began in the 27th century BCE. The process of silk making and the silk road have always fascinated me. When attending school in Paris, France, I was able to take the bullet train to Lyon for a day adventure. Upon arrival in Lyon, my first stop was to venture over to Musées des Tissus et des Arts décoratifs, the Textiles and Decorative Arts Museums, located at 34 rue de la Charité, Lyon. They now have a wonderful website, [www.musee-des-tissus.com](http://www.musee-des-tissus.com), which is a must to visit if you want to learn more about the history and cultivation of silk. The process of producing silk fabrics has remained the same for over 100 years and is still going strong.

My tips for sewing and quilting with silk are listed below. Almost all of these tips are for both frame quilting and table top quilting. First, start with a sewing machine in good working condition with a new needle. Due to the nature of silk, you may need to change your needle more often than you would when using a quilter's cotton. The needle size may vary depending on the type of silk that you are using.

### Needle type to use for piecing all types of silk fabrics

Type: **Microtex or sharp**

Size: **60, 70, or 80**

Reason: **Slim and acute point**

### Needle type to use with your long-arm or mid-arm sewing machine

This depends on the specific sewing machine with which you will be quilting

Size: **90/14**

Separation of warp and weft will be noticeable for some of the silk weaves, particularly double weaves. This may occur when frame quilting more so than when table top free motion quilting.

### Thread type/tension

Silk, cotton, and polyester can all be used. Sewing machine tension should be a lower tension. If the tension is too tight, you can cut the silk fabric or mar the fibers of the fabric. Because all natural fabrics are alive at some point, their fibers will bounce back. If the fabric is marred, it will not bounce back. If you are not able to find thread that's the exact color of your fabric, pick a slightly darker thread color. I have always found that the thread color appears lighter when sewing with it. We used a 30 weight thread for our silk table topper.

### Batting

Silk, bamboo, and cotton are all usable. The choice of batting is dependent upon the expected use of the quilted item. If you are making a table top piece that will be used for hot items, you may want to look at Insul-Bright®, a batting made for potholders, runners, or other items that protect from heat.

### Stitch length—short

**2.0 for silk dupioni** because of its loose weave

**2.5 for silk noil** (a larger non-sheen fiber can use a longer stitch)

Stitch length for quilting the top, batting, and backing together varies depending on the thread that you are using.

## Stabilization

When stitching seams, use a tear-away stabilizer. This is very important when you are stitching on the bias. Silk tends to stretch in all directions. It is the nature of the fabric.

- A paper stabilizer, like Stitch & Ditch, does not distort the stitching or fabric. It removes easily by tearing or spraying lightly with water.
- A fusible stabilizer, like Easy-Knit Fusible, is used when you need to stabilize the entire piece of fabric or for appliqué.

## Types of silk

The silk fabrics marked with an asterisk (\*) work well in quilts. They have fewer stretch characteristics than others.

- \* **Brushed Silk** is used in the garment industry for shirts. It is produced by gently brushing the fabric surface to pull up fibers from the yarn, producing a luxuriously soft and downy feel. It has even been mistaken for sandwashed silk.
- **Charmeuse** is loved for its lustrous shine and sumptuous feel and is the most widely recognized of the silk fabrics. Wonderfully versatile, this elegant fabric is of medium weight and has some natural elasticity, making it perfect for skirts, dresses, eveningwear, nightgowns, and lingerie. This is my favorite fabric for draped blouses and tops.
- **Crêpe de Chine** has a matte surface, and the pebbled texture of this graceful fabric reflects individual pinpoints of light, giving it wonderful chromatic depth and striking eye-appeal. This luxurious silk has the additional virtues of great durability and excellent wrinkle resistance. Lightweight with a pleasing drape, designers choose it for elegant slacks, skirts, dresses, suits, and eveningwear.
- \* **Dupioni** is the fabric that we used for our table topper and is the most commonly used in the modern quilting world. This trend is due to the shimmer and luster of the silk. Dupioni is woven from two different silk cocoons that have nestled together. It is a great fabric for dyeing because it takes the dye easily. It is usually produced in bright shades, enhancing its beautiful iridescence. It has a moderately crisp drape, subtle luster, and slightly pebbled texture, though not so much as crêpe de Chine. It is produced in mid- to lightweights and is found in fine suits, dresses, tops, and more.
- \* **Georgette** is a soft and lustrous fabric which drapes very fluidly and falls easily into soft ripples. It has a grainy texture and sheer feel that is reminiscent of crêpe de Chine. It is durable and greatly favored for elegant eveningwear, dresses, skirts, and gently fitted blouses and tops.
- \* **Habutai** silk is soft, lightweight, and lustrous with a graceful drape and smooth surface. It was first used to line kimonos, and the word "habutai" actually means "soft and downy" in Japanese. Today, habutai is used to make everything from jacket linings to bed quilts, as well as blazers, skirts, lingerie, and more.
- \* **Noil** has a great texture. It is one of the first silks that I used (in an art quilt which I made in the early 90s). Called raw silk by some, noil is particularly distinguished for the subtle flecks that are actually particles from the silkworm's cocoon. A muted sheen gives the fabric its elegant patina. Noil resists wrinkles and travels well, making it an excellent choice for knit sweaters. When woven, noil is a favorite for suits, jackets, and slacks. It has a casual feel with natural elasticity—better than linen and without the wrinkles.

## Weaves, twists, and knits

These silk fabrics are good candidates for quilting or garment construction:

- **Herringbone**—often seen in brick layers' patterns and suiting fabrics
- **High Twist**—georgette fabrics are made using high twist threads
- **Interlock**—knit silks are interlocked just like the t-shirt fabrics in the garment industry
- **Jacquard**—a textured style of weaving. The front and back have a different sheen
- **Matka**—specialty weave often found in the home decorating industry and in garments
- **Twill**—your blue jeans have a twill weave

## Cutting silk

Many fabric stores tear silk yardage when it's being purchased. This creates a straight-grain (crosswise grain) edge. The frayed edges can be trimmed very easily with scissors. You will not want to try to break these fibers with your hand. Silk has some attributes that make it slide while rotary cutting. Layer your silk with tissue paper to help prevent the sliding of the layers. We have also used laser-cut silk kits that leave no waste and no fraying.

## Pressing

Use a dry iron and the silk setting. Do not use starch or water when pressing silk to avoid the chance of water spots.

## Cleaning instructions

Dry cleaning is recommend for most silks. Some silks can be machine washed. Once you have washed your silk, you'll want to use this same process to care for your finished project. Use the gentle or hand-wash cycle with warm water. When drying, use a permanent-press or delicate cycle for the best results.

## Give it a try!

Don't be afraid to venture away from cottons and try a new spin with silk in your quilting. Start small with a table topper or if you are adventurous, go for it and start with a quilt. You will be amazed at what silk will do to your world.

# Web Bonus Pattern: Getting Started with Silk



Designed by DENISE APPEGATE-SCHOBER

**SKILL LEVEL**  
**CONFIDENT BEGINNER**

**Finished Table Mat Size**  
24½" x 24½"

**Number of Blocks and Finished Size**  
4 A Blocks 6" x 6"  
4 B Blocks 6" x 6"

**Fabric Requirements\***

Gold solid (piecing, blocks, binding)	¾ yd.
Red solid and blue solid (blocks)	¾ yd. <b>each</b>
Backing	32" x 32" piece
Batting size	32" x 32"

\*All fabrics are dupioni silk.



**Planning**

Silk brings elegance and sheen to your table in this fast and easy design. The solid colors highlight the machine quilting done on a frame using the QBOT™ Automated Quilter. For tips on working with silk, see Denise's article, [Silk Takes a New Spin with Quilting](#), on pages 1 and 2.

**Cutting Instructions**

(cut in order listed)

☒ =cut in half twice diagonally

Gold solid

3 strips 2½" x width of fabric (binding)

1 square 12½" x 12½"

2 squares 5½" x 5½" ☒

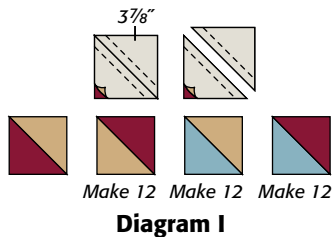
12 squares 3⅞" x 3⅞"

Red solid and blue solid—cut from each:

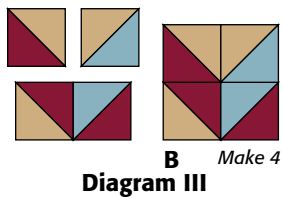
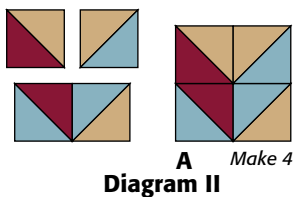
12 squares 3⅞" x 3⅞"

### Piecing the Blocks and Corner Triangles

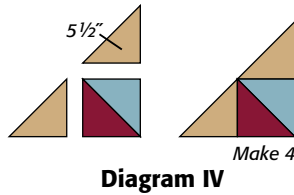
1 Draw diagonal line on wrong side of gold  $3\frac{7}{8}$ " square. Referring to **Diagram I**, place marked square on red  $3\frac{7}{8}$ " square, right sides together. Sew  $\frac{1}{4}$ " seam on each side of marked line; cut apart on marked line. Open and press to make 2 pieced squares. Make 12. Make remaining pieced squares in color combinations and quantities shown.



2 Referring to **Diagram II**, sew together 4 pieced squares in color arrangement shown to make A Block. Make 4. In similar manner make 4 B Blocks (**Diagram III**).

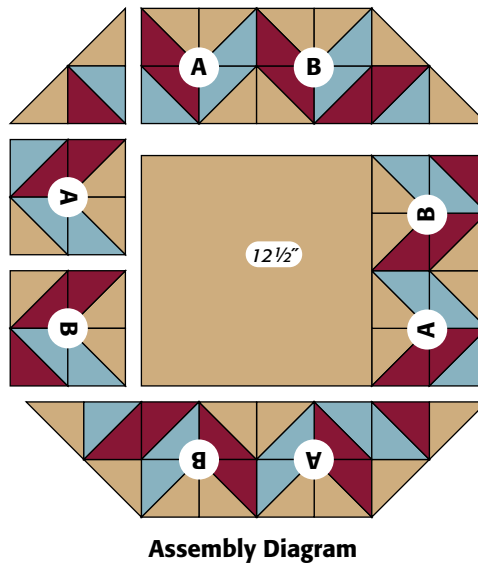


3 Sew 2 gold  $5\frac{1}{2}$ " quarter-square triangles to pieced square (**Diagram IV**) to make pieced corner triangle. Make 4.



### Assembling the Mat Top

4 Referring to **Assembly Diagram** and watching orientation throughout, stitch together 1 each A and B Blocks in orientation shown to make unit. Make 4. Sew 2 to sides of gold  $12\frac{1}{2}$ " square. Stitch pieced corner triangles to ends of remaining units and sew to top and bottom.



### Quilting and Finishing

5 Layer, baste, and quilt. Denise machine quilted her Silk Henna design (download at [myqbot.com/pages/patterns.html](http://myqbot.com/pages/patterns.html)) using a frame, longarm machine, and QBOT. Bind with gold solid.

#### Further Information

For more information on automated quilting, please visit [myqbot.com](http://myqbot.com).