

Quilting Around Tote

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Quilt your flat fabric first, then cut out the panels to stitch up this tote in a flash. To make it even easier, you'll be quilting around the designs already printed on the fabric.

Finished Size: 13" x 16" x 3"

Materials

Use 45"-wide cotton fabrics except where noted.

5/8 yard of medium- or large-scale print for exterior

3/4 yard of coordinating print for lining (5/8 yard without optional binding; see instructions)

1/4 yard of coordinating print for band

23" x 45" piece of batting

Threads for quilting and construction

Quilting

1. Cut two strips, 2" x the width of the fabric, from the lining and set them aside to use as binding (optional).
2. Make a quilting sandwich from the remaining lining fabric (wrong side up), batting, and exterior fabric (right side up). Use a basting spray or safety pins to hold the layers together.
3. Set the machine for free-motion quilting. Thread needle and bobbin with coordinating thread colors.
4. Quilt around motifs in the fabric print. Stitch the entire area of the fabrics together. Try to begin and end lines of quilting at the fabric edges so that tie-off stitches aren't necessary. It's okay to travel from one motif to another without breaking the line of stitching.
5. When the quilting is complete, proceed to the cutting instructions. You'll treat the quilted fabrics as one layer when constructing the bag.

Cutting

From the quilted fabric, cut:

2 rectangles, 18 1/2" x 16"

2 rectangles, 3" x 21 1/2"

From the band fabric, cut:

1 rectangle, 5" x 31 1/2"

Note: If you are fussy cutting the band, adjust the 5" dimension to work best with your print. Cut the top and side edges straight, but shape the lower edge as desired. Remember to include 1/4" seam allowance on the lower edge if you adjust the dimensions.

Instructions

Seam allowances are 1/4".

1. Fold a 3" x 22" rectangle of quilted fabric in half lengthwise with wrong sides together, and sew the long edge. Press the seam allowances open. Turn the handle right side out, centering the seam on the back side, and press flat. Topstitch 1/4" from each long edge. Make two handles.
2. Measure and mark the top edge of each 18 1/2" x 16" rectangle 4" from each side edge. Pin a handle to each rectangle, with raw edges matched and the seamed side of the handle against the wrong side of the bag, centering the handle ends on the placement marks. Baste 1/4" from the raw edges to hold the handles in place, stitching back and forth twice to further secure the handles.
3. Sew the two tote rectangles together along the side and bottom edges.
4. Press the 2"-wide strips of the lining fabric in half lengthwise, wrong sides together. Pin one folded strip to a tote side seam, matching the raw edges, and stitch the seam again. Fold the pressed edge of the strip over the seam allowances and stitch it by hand or machine to bind and finish the seam allowances. Repeat to bind the second side seam and the bottom seam of the tote.

Note: If you prefer, you can skip the binding. Use a serger or an overcasting stitch on your machine to finish the raw edges.

5. Fold the tote so that one side seam is aligned with the bottom seam. Draw a line perpendicular to the seamlines and 1 1/2" from the corner point. Stitch on the line to box the corner. Trim the excess fabric 1/4" from the seam and repeat step 4 to bind the seam allowances. For a cleaner finish, turn 1/4" of the binding strip to the wrong side at each end before attaching it.
6. Reposition the tote to align the second side seam with the bottom seam and repeat step 5 to box the second corner.
7. Press 1/4" to the wrong side along the lower edge of the band rectangle. If you have fussy cut the band to follow the fabric print, clip the seam allowances as necessary to press the edge flat.
8. Sew the short ends of the band together and press the seam allowances open.
9. Pin the band to the top edge of the tote with the band's right side against the wrong side of the tote. Match the band's seam to one tote side seam. The handles will be between the band and tote fabrics. Stitch around the top edge, using a 1/2" seam allowance.

Note: The wider seam allowance helps keep the handles secure.

10. Flip the band to the right side of the tote and press the top seam firmly, turning the handles upward, away from the tote. Topstitch the tote 1/4" from the seam (optional).
11. Smooth the band into position on the tote's right side and pin the bottom edge of the band. Edgestitch the band's lower edge to secure it on the tote.