



Top Tips for Successful Patchwork

WORDS BY **MARIANNE ROBERTS**

With this issue of *Australian Country Craft and Decorating* being a patchwork special, we thought we'd take a timely look at the top tips for successful patchwork. Patchwork is just like so many things – it's the little details and how we execute them that can 'make or break' a sewing project. Let's take a look at the basics – there are some good hints to keep in mind.

1. USE THE BEST MATERIALS

Quality is remembered long after the price is forgotten is the Gucci slogan and it's well worth noting. You do get what you pay for, so buy the best quality fabrics, threads and tools you can afford.

2. CHOOSE YOUR THREADS

When piecing patchwork blocks, always choose colour thread to match the darker fabric as any stitching is less

obvious. Lighter-coloured thread tends to show up on the right side of a finished block.

3. CHECK THE SEAM ALLOWANCE

An accurate $\frac{1}{4}$ in seam allowance is the secret to successful machine-piecing. The fabrics, threads, machine and needle used, all affect the seam allowance. Before beginning a new project, cut four $1\frac{1}{2}$ in x $4\frac{1}{2}$ in strips from the fabric you'll be using and stitch them together on the long edges with a $\frac{1}{4}$ in seam. Press the seams to one side then measure the piece – it should measure $4\frac{1}{2}$ in from side to side. If it is less than $4\frac{1}{2}$ in the seam allowance is too big. Cut another set of strips and sew them together using a slightly narrower seam allowance and check the finished size again. If the first attempt is more than $4\frac{1}{2}$ in the seam allowance is too narrow, so a larger seam allowance is required. It may seem a bit of a 'fiddle' but it's worth getting it right before you begin. Being a little bit out on just one seam allowance can impact on a completed pieced block and make all the difference to how the quilt top looks.

4. PRESS THOSE SEAMS

It's worth the extra time and effort to press seams as you piece. To do this, 'set' the seam by first pressing it with the fabrics together, then open it out and press the seam towards the darker fabric.

5. TRIM THE SEAMS

When working with high-contrast colours, the darker fabric in the seam could show through the lighter piece on

