

Heidi Adnum author of [The Crafter's Guide to Taking Great Photos](#) available now from Interweave Press

Advice on photographing quilts flat to show their full size:

It sure can be difficult to photograph large-scale items like quilts with the aim of showing their full size. Styled shots are lovely, but often it's good (and sometimes necessary) to show the full size and pattern/design of a quilt. Positioning the quilt flat against a surface is the only way to compose this shot and, therefore, is often done on the floor or a wall. When the quilt is large and it's hard to get into the right position, climbing up a ladder and shooting downwards to get the shot can be the only option but, as you fairly point out, it can be a hazard. If you choose the wall instead, it's then a challenge to affix and keep taut to stay ripple-free and retain the clean lines of the edges. Unfortunately, there's no solve-all tip, but there are some key points and a few things you can try.

Before you begin photographing a quilt at full size, there are some points to note:

- The quilt must be placed on a flat surface such as a floor, wall or table. This is necessary to show the full size of the quilt and to keep it flat.
- The background must be bigger than the quilt. When the background is too small, the result can be a photograph that contains too many distractions and looks messy.
- The lens of the camera must be aimed directly at the centre of the quilt. Here, you're dealing with perspective and distortion. When the lens is positioned in the centre of the quilt and the camera is straight-on to the quilt, it will appear in the photograph in proportion and perspective. Distortion presents itself in a few different ways, a common example of which is a tapering or rounding of the edges of a photograph.

How you approach the full size photograph will probably depend on the size(s) of the quilt(s) you craft and then the space you have available to you.

If you regularly photograph small to medium-sized quilts:

- You could benefit from investing in a mid-range professional tripod that features not only a vertical column but also one that will rotate and lock horizontally at 180 degrees. They aren't too expensive; see one example, click [here](#). This will make it easier to photograph your quilt straight-on when it is placed on the floor or other flat surface. That is, you can set up your shot with the camera locked onto the tripod and facing straight-on to the centre of the quilt, turn on the timer, pre-focus and press the shutter and walk out of frame. This horizontal lock option will only be helpful if the arm can extend far enough to reach the centre of the quilt.
- A sturdy and tall tripod can also make photographing a larger quilt on the wall easier as you can raise it up to position the lens at the centre of the quilt.

For those who regularly photograph large quilts:

- The mid-range pro tripod option may also be helpful for you; the tripod's vertical extension may be tall enough to reach the centre of your quilt when it is on a wall. You may still have to use a step ladder to pre-focus and take the shot but you won't have to do the precarious hold-and-angle-the-camera-and-look-down-at-the-same-time manoeuvre.

- You may have to take a closer look at your lens. A wide-angle lens - generally 50mm and below - is going to be most helpful to you, as it will allow a wider field of view. This means that you will capture more of the quilt in the photograph. A wide-angle lens will still cause some distortion, though.

- To minimise distortion caused by a wide-angle lens, try allowing a buffer around the sides of your quilt. For example, an additional foot or so of extra background. Then, in post production, crop out the excess background. The distortion will be mainly present in the corners of the photograph and you will have just cropped them out.

- It is easier to photograph large quilts on the wall than on the floor. But it can be difficult to affix a large quilt to the wall and keep it flat. Something to look into is a set of aluminium picture rails and wire hangers. They often come in affordable DIY kits, are white in colour, subtle and useful to have around the home (you can use them for framed artwork when you're not using them for photography). Affix the rail, clip the hangers into place and then clip on the quilt. If there is any sagging, try using a few more hangers. If you don't like the look of the hangers/cords in the photograph, paint them the same colour as the wall.

- Once you find a suitable wall, you then have to find a position straight-on to the wall to allow you to aim the lens into the centre of the quilt and capture its full size. If you simply don't have a wall/room that is big enough for this, you could commission a local woodworker to make a custom frame. The frame would need to be at least as wide and high as your largest quilt - even larger would provide a nice background to frame the shot and it would also minimise distortion - made from sturdy but lightweight and cheap wood, and be on castors so you could slide it into place (similar to a [vintage chalkboard on wheels](#)). For a rustic look, leave the frame unpainted, or minimise distractions by painting it white. Roll it into your scene, attach your quilt to the frame using clear clips (or pins, if possible) and photograph from straight-on. Use the extended tripod if necessary. Professional backdrop stands are available but can be expensive, have bulky feet, don't have a firm back/wall, are hard to disguise and don't align in with the handmade aesthetic.

- If you've found a suitable wall and hung the quilt but can't keep it flat, look into double-sided tape. Some are available with low-tack on one side and high-tack on the other, such as exhibition tape. This allows you to low-tack the most delicate side (this may be your quilt or the wall - that's up to you!) without leaving a residue or mark. If you're using the frame option, you could try Velcro dots. Try a test piece first to ensure that the tack won't leave a residue on your fabric or damage it.