

Instructions for Kawandi

Workshop by Martha Scott

Kawandi, which means quilt in Hindi, is a traditional craft in Western India brought to the region by migrating Africans. It was initially called Siddi quilting. The Siddi are persons of African descent living in modern-day Western India, brought to the area as slaves, who are unfortunately still seen as outsiders despite having lived in the area for over eight hundred years.

Their culture combines local Indian customs with their original traditions, which is reflected in Kawandi. Nowadays, people continue the tradition by using scraps from old saris, used clothing, and whatever other miscellaneous fabric is available. Usually, the middle layer is a piece of light fabric rather than batting.

The patches are hand-sewn to the backing with all edges folded. The quilt is assembled from the bottom up in layers, starting from the top right corner and continuing in a counterclockwise spiral with patches of different sizes. Each piece is (traditionally) hand-sewn with white thread using a method similar to Japanese Boro quilting.

Some quilters use a machine for a faster, more modern approach that is less strenuous on the hands or colored thread to match their fabric. Regardless of the stitching method, stitchwork is measured by a finger's width and follows the concentric pattern of the patches.

As you start from the back, the layering ends with the uppermost patch in the center, often incorporating a particularly ornate fabric or symbolic meaning via inlay (rice as a blessing). Small decorative triangle-shaped pieces called Phula (meaning flowers), are added at each corner. According to the Siddi quilters, the quilt is naked without them.

Supplies Needed:

- A light batting. This can also be a scarf, or another fabric, though the instructions will refer to it as batting.
- A variety of fabrics (or scraps) in your choice of colors and patterns. *(Note that a fabric with a looser weave is the best choice, as the layering can make it hard to sew through areas of overlap when using a tighter weave. It is not advisable to use bedsheets due to this.)*
- A heavy thread of your choice. I use 40 weight and recently started to use 12. Sachiko thread works wonderfully for Kawandi. Floss is also an option. *(Please note that the thicker your thread, the harder it is to work with.)*
- Scissors or another implement of your choice to cut the thread and materials.
- An embroidery or Sachiko needle.
- An iron to press the edges, or a wood or metal roller.
- A lot of pins!

Optional (but recommended):

- To keep the edges of the Phula from unravelling, you may wish to use pinking shears.
- A small pair of needle-nose pliers may be necessary to pull the needle through heavily layered areas, particularly if the fabric used is of a tight weave (such as batiks), and the thread chosen is thick.
- A ruler (or other straight edge) and a temporary marking tool of your choice (Frixion pen, chalk, or other marking pens), to ensure your stitching is straight.

Note that these instructions are for hand sewing, though a sewing machine can be used for a similar effect if you are unable to hand sew for whatever reason.

To Start:

Begin by deciding the size of your piece. This technique is best suited to straight-edged shapes with 4 sides (squares and rectangles), though the actual dimensions are very flexible.

Cut a backing piece measuring the desired size plus 1 inch added to each length. Press the edges in, wrong side to wrong side (so that the right side is sitting on your work surface) by 1/2 of an inch on each edge. Cut the batting to the desired size to fit under the first row of scraps tucked inside the 1/2 inch fold.

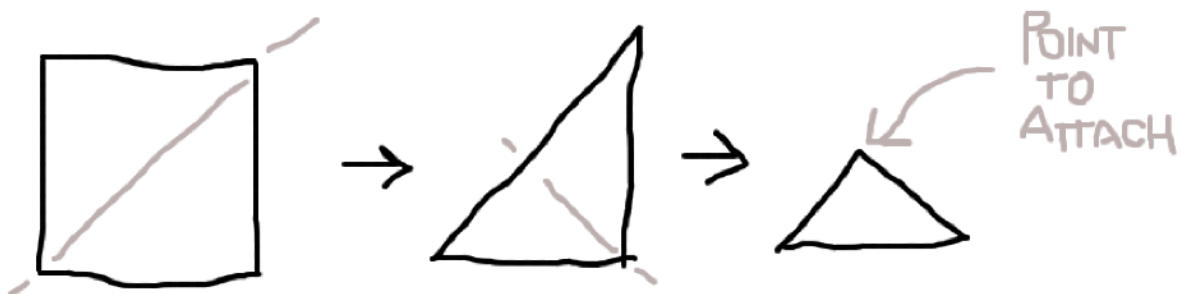
At this time, you may (optional) wish to plan your Kawandi by pinning the fabric to the backing without sewing. I find it best to do this, then take a photograph of the layout with my phone so that I can reference it when assembling the quilt. Remember that the quilt

should be assembled from the outside in, in concentric “rings”, with the final piece being the uppermost one.



An example of a planned quilt.

At this time, you can also cut the Phula. The Phula are the four flowers decorating the corners of the quilt. They are very simple, a square folded in half (corner to corner), then in half again (with the fold at the center of the long edge). I recommend cutting the edges with pinking shears so as to ensure they do not fray.



Prepare all the scraps by folding 3 of their edges in by *at least* $\frac{1}{2}$ of an inch and pressing, do not skimp on the excess. There should be no raw edges visible on any of the pieces involved in a Kawandi, save for the Phula. Press all 4 edges on the top-most “final” scrap.

At the top edge, begin stitching your scraps for the outermost ring to the backing fabric, with the stitches as close to the edge as possible, making sure to connect the layers

where the edges are pressed. Follow along the edges, attaching the Phula when you hit each corner, until you have made a complete ring around the edge.



This “ring” should now be flipped out, so the batting can be inserted.



From here, continue to place the scraps in a concentric manner, working from the outside in until you reach the center, you may chose basting stitches to secure the pieces as you go along.

The quilting follows the same outside-to-in spiral as the scraps. Traditionally, these lines were spaced one finger's width apart, but this spacing can be altered to your taste. I sometimes prefer to put the "rows" more closely together. It is helpful to mark where you'd like the stitches to be, as they should all be spaced evenly from one another.



Care should be taken to ensure that each piece is well-secured, and that none of the pressed edges have come untucked as you move along.

Congratulations, you now have a finished Kawandi! ☺



Now that you understand the basics, you can use them to experiment with size, shape, and stitchwork- or try using a sewing machine for a different feel, but an easier time on your hands. Here are some examples of a couple machine quilted Kawandi:



If you choose to use a machine, the stitches should be lengthened, and it would suit the Kawandi to use a topstitch needle in order to sew with thicker thread.

Happy sewing!