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Teaching with towels

HERE'S A GREAT PROJECT FOR A WEAVING CLASS. STUDENTS EXPERIENCE THE JOYS OF WATCHING COLOR INTERACTIONS AS THE TOWELS GROW ON THEIR LOOMS. THE AMAZING TEXTURE OF WAFFLE WEAVE ADDS MAGIC TO THE MIX.

STRUCTURE

Waffle weave.

EQUIPMENT

4-shaft loom or 8-shaft loom, 16" weaving width; 12-dent reed; 4 shuttles or 2 shuttles, 4 bobbins.

YARNS

Warp and weft: 8/2 unmercerized cotton (3,360 yd/lb) in four colors, border/frame color, 935 yd; waffle colors A and B, 880 yd each; waffle color C, 440 yd.

WARP LENGTH

383 ends 5 yd long (allows 10" for take-up, 34" for loom waste).

SETTS

Warp: 24 epi (2/dent in a 12-dent reed).
Weft: 22 ppi.

DIMENSIONS

Width in the reed: 16".
Woven length (measured under tension on the loom): 34" per towel.
Finished sizes:
four hemmed towels
15" × 25" each.

Weaving classes are especially rewarding when students take home real pieces instead of samples alone. Towels are fun and quick to weave, and using them keeps their lessons current in a weaver's mind.

Designing a general weaving class can be a challenge because of the different levels of knowledge and interests among the students. I've been teaching at the Oregon College of Art and Craft for twelve years and have worked with both those wishing to return to weaving after a long hiatus and others who have never used a loom before—in the same class!

Last fall, I designed a class open to all levels that I called Towels for the Holidays. Although I originally planned to include twills and other weaves, waffle weave clearly earned the greatest interest, so it became the focus.

CHOOSING COLORS

A great advantage to a weaving class is that everyone in the class can see what happens on a diverse number of looms. In some classes, you might have each student choose a different weave structure so that everyone learns about structure. In this class, all students used the same structure but with different colors, so color became the learning experience.

8/2 unmercerized cotton is an ideal yarn to use with weaving classes. It is inexpensive and comes in a wide range of colors. I had purchased an assortment of 8/2 cotton over the years, so I could put twenty-four cones of different colors in front of my students for their color choices.

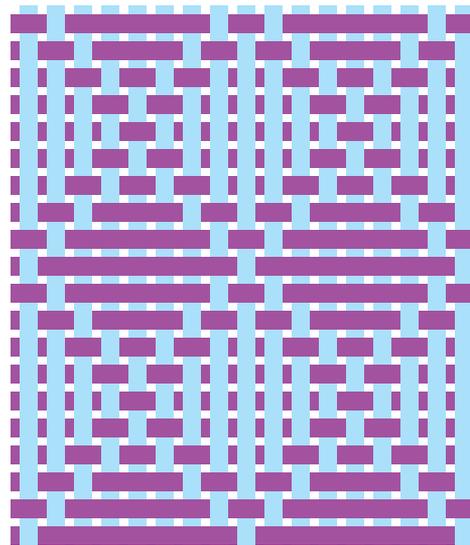
DAY 1

Each weaver selected four colors: one color for the borders and frames around the waffle-weave squares and a separate color for each of the three waffle-weave squares. It's easy for most of us to gravitate towards one color, but trying to select four that go together is a challenge.

I asked them to think of color values rather than just hues (brilliant vs pastel vs dark). The next task was to arrange the colors. What will be the order of the three waffle colors—lightest one in the center? Darkest? Brightest?

1. Waffle-weave interlacement

1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1





Each weaver wrapped 1½" strips of cardboard with four groups of 10 strands each of the border/frame-color alternating with 25 strands each of the three waffle-weave colors. We pinned the wraps to a wall so everyone could stand back to assess the arrangements. The students then began winding their 5 yd warps using the color order in Figure 3, page 4.

DAY 2

The second class started with a theory session. What exactly is waffle weave and why does the structure look like a series of honeycomb cells? To understand the structure, we used twenty pieces each of two colors of ¼" x 6" paper strips. Strips of one color were taped to a sheet of paper and labeled according to two repeats: 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 2 3 4 5 4 3 2 1 (Figure 1, page 1).

Using the other set of strips as the weft, weavers placed the first weft strip under the two warp strips marked 1 and over the others, the next weft strip under warp strips marked 2, and continued, following the treadling order in Figure 2, page 4.

When this task was completed, everyone finished winding their warps.

DAY 3

The students beamed their warps and threaded the shafts following Figure 2. In our class, 8-shaft looms were available to all. An alternative draft for four shafts with two treadling options that produce waffle weave throughout is provided in Figure 4. The colored borders and frames will therefore show as waffle weave.



DAYS

4-5 (+)

Weaving then began for the first towel using the weft color order in Figure 5. For the remaining three towels, students used other colors or varied the color order.

Color choices became very spontaneous by the fourth towel! Students asked: What will happen when I mix brilliant hues with pastels? What will happen when I change the border color? I believe that it was an interest in what happened with color changes that lured the weavers to the end of this weaving project.

Then came the magic transformation of waffle weave during wet-finishing. Each towel was machine zigzagged between hems, cut apart, and then washed. The final hemming took place after the towels

emerged from the dryer. Some

students took their

towels out of the dryer while still slightly damp to iron the hems before sewing; others let their towels dry fully before removing from the dryer. Shrinkage was about twenty percent in the warp direction, a bit less in the weft direction.

I think the one lesson everyone learned was this: All colors go together unless proven otherwise! Given enough colors at their disposal, weavers are bound to find more successful combinations than could possibly be predicted

The happy towel weavers in this class were Ali Gradischer, Amanda Brennan, Margaret Jeppesen, Melissa Laird, Mitzi Hallin, and Sheila Schaeffer. 

