

# The Sixteens

by Philis Alvic

The history of textile kit 74, *The Sixteens: Fabric for Clothing*, is a study of coordination, cooperation and communication. A sample exchange group requiring all samples be woven on a 16-harness loom, *The Sixteens* accumulated one notebook of 30 samples per year since its inception in 1978.

If I believed in fate, I'd say I was destined to be a member of the group from the first. During the Midwest Weavers' Conference of 1978, I joined a friend after lunch. Catching up on news, I mentioned that I had purchased a 16-harness loom. Overhearing me, a woman across the table handed me a sheet of paper. It was an announcement about the formation of a 16-harness sample group. From that moment on, I was committed.

That woman across the table was Marian Hoskinson, former HGA president and chairman of the HGA board. Serving as the first chair of *The Sixteens*, Marian instituted a system to rotate that honor on a yearly basis. This idea proved excellent. The work of the chair included selecting a topic, keeping the membership up to troop strength of 30, maintaining the waiting list and conducting all communications within the groups — a considerable task. A permanent chair would have burnt out fast. But with only a finite year to serve, the commitment appeared manageable.

From the beginning, we were divided into five regional groups. The chair of each sub-section eventually served as leader of *The Sixteens* in the proper year of rotation. The function of the regional groups was to select the topic of the year. This was done in any manner the group chose, but most elected to vote on suggested subjects.

Comparison of the swatches was a great education. For the first assignment, using a straight draw, Doris

Burgess and Irene Wood chose a fancy twill treadling. Doris's silk fabric had brown and natural warp stripes that allowed the pattern either to appear or to serve as texture when the weft was the natural yarn. Irene used similar linen yarns in natural for the warp and white for the weft to provide a ground for warp painting. Bold overshot chenille hearts were Kathryn Wertenbeger's contribution. My sample explored variable denting in the colored and natural warp yarns with a turned block treadling. Structural information was provided, but viewing samples suggested other applications. Being able to observe and handle the fabrics of different weights and fibers added immeasurably to a weaver's storehouse of possibilities.

Since a small segment of *The Sixteens* decided the project for the whole, many of the topics did not match with the interests and skills of the rest. But there was something to be said for being forced into action in an unknown area. When damask was assigned, I approached it with some fear. After extensive reading on the subject, I decided to rebel against tradition and approached damask from some of my strengths: the warp was sett at 15 e.p.i. and the random colored warp stripes were not coordinated with the three-block design. Given permission to use only 15 harnesses, I wove three blocks of 5-harness satin.

Others had similar thoughts. Rudi Fuchs, although using a traditional approach, used nontraditional colors. Marian Hoskinson made her sample a color study, producing a damask plaid.

Past exchanges served as an inspiration and a source of study. When double weave came around for the second time, I was at a loss for what to do, having used my one good idea for the first set of samples.

The research moved at a snail's pace. As the deadline approached, I renewed my commitment to a course of action. But after a frustrating week of trying to get something to work that was only partially understood, I abandoned the project. Then I pulled the first double weave notebooks from the shelf. Paging through it, a piece by Rudi Fuchs, combining plain weave and twill in double weave blocks, caught my attention. A design application of his material came immediately to mind. And I wove my samples. It took disaster to open my eyes to the excellent resource I had in my own library.

During the 13-year history of the group, almost 80 weavers have accepted the responsibility of membership. Because of the commitment of time and money, membership is limited to 30. Today, seven stalwarts of the original 30 persist as members. Textile kit 74, *The Sixteens: Fabric for Clothing*, depicting the samples for each year of the exchange group, is available through the Handweavers Guild of America, Inc. Textile Library. To be placed on the waiting list for *The Sixteens* exchange group, write to Mary Skoy, 7200 York Ave. S., No. 316, Edina, MN 55435.✻

## The Sixteens Projects

1979	Straight Draw
1980	Beiderwand
1981	Damask
1982	Double Weave
1983	Apparel Fabric
1984	Double Two Tie Unit Weave
1985	Double Weave
1986	Extending Bateman's Park Weaves
1987	Lace
1988	Combining 2 Weave Structures
1989	Pique
1990	Lampas
1991	(in progress) Twill Variation, Undulating, Cork-screw and Braided

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For more information on this and other available textile kits, write to the HGA Textile and Slide Kit Library.