Notes of a Pattern Weaver

Borders

by Philis Alvic

I LIKE BORDERS and often use them in my work. A figure plunked into the middle of a lot of open space looks lonely to me and I feel the need to enclose it within a border. If I were a painter, I would confine my objects within a frame. Weaving can also be relegated to a frame, but to me it looks awkward: The substances from which frames are made are not, I think, compatible with the surface textures of fabric. Part of the problem with conventional frames is the tendency to squash the three-dimensional qualities of fabric under glass. The presentation of a piece should enhance all aspects of that piece as much as possible. With this in mind I have rejected all external frames and created my own within my pieces through the use of borders.

The border, as I use it, serves three major, interrelated functions: 1) it confines the activity of the piece, 2) it separates the piece from the wall on which it is hung, and 3) it acts as a transition between the piece and the wall. These functions work together to make the piece look more complete within itself. Also, a border says to the viewer—"Here is something special, look at it!"

In studying the slides of the collected work of Philis Alvic, I discovered that I use many different types of borders. I will limit myself here to solid borders and leave the patterned ones for another time. My examples here are in Tied Lithuanian, but the principles are applicable to any of the other block weave structures with only slight modification. I have broken down the types of borders I use and their method of construction into categories for clarification.

The first example is a solid color border that runs completely around the edge of the piece (*figure 1*). To construct this border, two separate operations were required as well as a little preplanning. First, when planning the warp colors, I determined that I might want a border. Note that there are light colored stripes at either end of the warp in the fringe. The two blocks on each side of the piece were activated for the side bars of the border. The top and bottom bands were woven with a light colored weft held in place by the tie thread alone. I could have raised the side blocks for the top and bottom bars too, thereby extending the vertical bars the full extent of the piece, but I felt that it gave a more effective visual stopping point to have the horizontals in a solid weft. Even though the horizontals and verticals of the border are constructed in different ways and are slightly different colors because of the yarn interlacement in the weave structure, they are perceived as a unit confining a central figure.

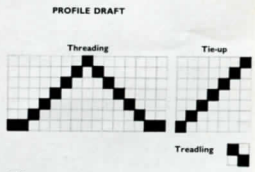


Figure 1.

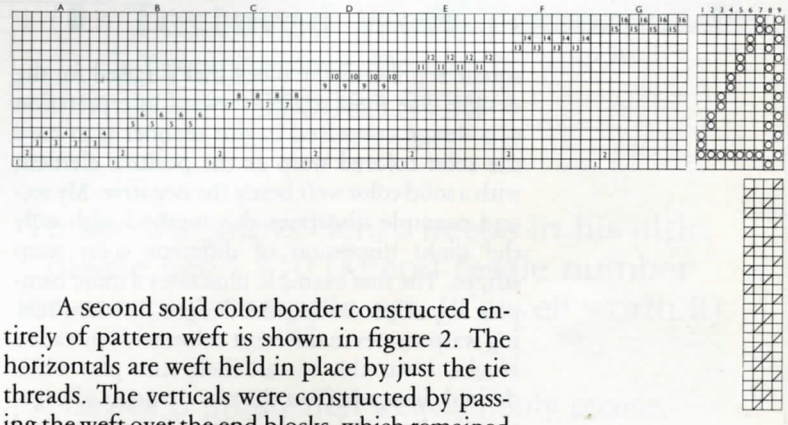
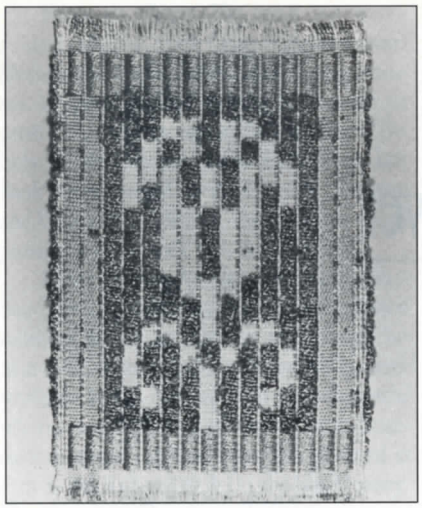


Figure 2.

A second solid color border constructed entirely of pattern weft is shown in figure 2. The horizontals are weft held in place by just the tie threads. The verticals were constructed by passing the weft over the end blocks, which remained down. This method provided a homogeneous band of color around the piece, but applications for this technique are limited.

To explain why I find this method of creating a border limiting, it is necessary to describe the method that I employ when designing these pieces. All of the designs have only two elements, either positive or negative, and these are represented on graph paper as either a darkened square or a blank one. To me, the darkened



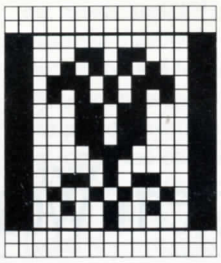


Figure 3.

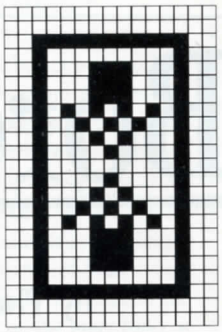
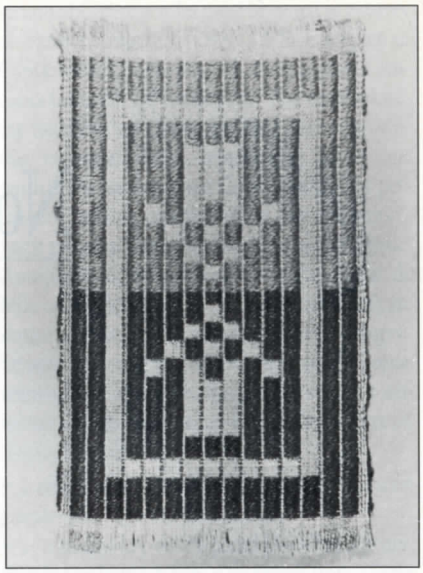
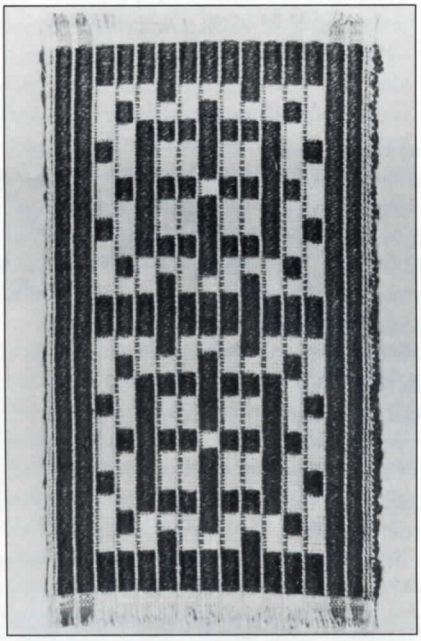


Figure 5.





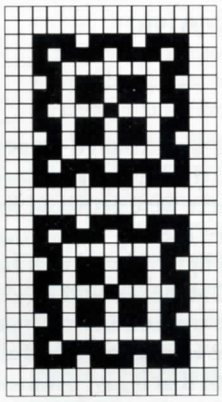


Figure 4.

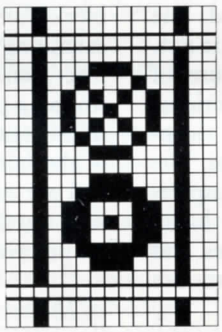
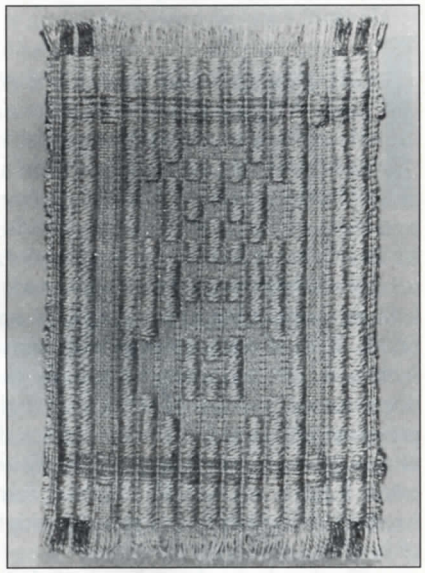


Figure 6.



square represents the block that is raised for the design. The most straightforward interpretation of a design conceived in this manner is to have the solid colored warp as the positive element with a solid color weft being the negative. My second example illustrates this method with only the slight digression of different color warp stripes. The first example illustrates a more complex way of presenting the design. By coordinating warp stripes in different colors with threaded blocks, I was able to call them into play when desired. Instead of just the two elements of negative (background) and positive (figure), a third element, the border, was created through the use of color. When I am dealing with only negative and positive spaces and my border is the negative block, then the positive space must be the area adjacent to it. This then leaves the negative for the main figure or an alternation between negative and positive areas, as in my second example.

In figure 3, the same method of thinking of the design in only negative and positive terms is applied. But in this example, the border is recessed rather than at the edge of the piece. This border-within-a-border is made up entirely of activated blocks. For the horizontals, all of the blocks across the piece were raised except the ones at the very ends. The verticals were a single block that was always activated on either side, while the main figures were created. In this version, the outside border and the background were made up of the pattern weft forming the negative part of the design. The inside border and the arrow figures were the positive activated warp blocks.

The next example is also a recessed border, but one that has extended arms (*figure 4*). I like this version because of its spatial quality: The entire border seems to float above the background. The horizontal is constructed by a weft pattern block in the same color as the warp blocks that make up the verticals. Again, by careful planning of the warp colors, I was able to introduce this third design element.

Each of the four examples given here has its own distinct appearance. I enjoy having a range of choices to adapt to different design problems.