

# COLOR IN SUMMER AND WINTER

by Philis Alvic

Summer and Winter is a weave structure made up of predominantly warp faced and predominantly weft faced areas. Designing for this structure is done by combining positive blocks and negative blocks. In my work the predominantly warp areas are the positive blocks in the design while the weft becomes the negative or background. The simplest approach to color in Summer and Winter would be to have the warp in a solid color and the weft in a contrasting color. This would produce a strong positive-negative piece closely resembling the paper draw-down of the design. Now, this is something I have never done. It is not because I am adverse to easy solutions, but there are so many interesting ways of working with color in Summer and winter.

Before I begin an accounting of the various ways in which I manipulate color when using Summer and Winter, I want to call your attention to a characteristic of the weave structure. In Summer and Winter neither the warp-faced areas nor the weft-faced areas are exclusively their own color. Each has small flecks of the other area's color. In the warp blocks small dots of the weft color are present and in the weft blocks the tie threads add some of the warp color. Some weavers find this very distracting and put up with it only as a necessary evil of the weave structure. Maybe it is just a difference in attitude, but I like the visual effects of these bits of alien color in the major color area. I feel that it makes a much more interesting surface than a weave structure such as double weave that has exclusive positive and negative color areas. Also, I enjoy the hints of warp stripes always apparent in the weft-faced areas and the linear weft stripes suggesting themselves in the warp blocks. In Summer and

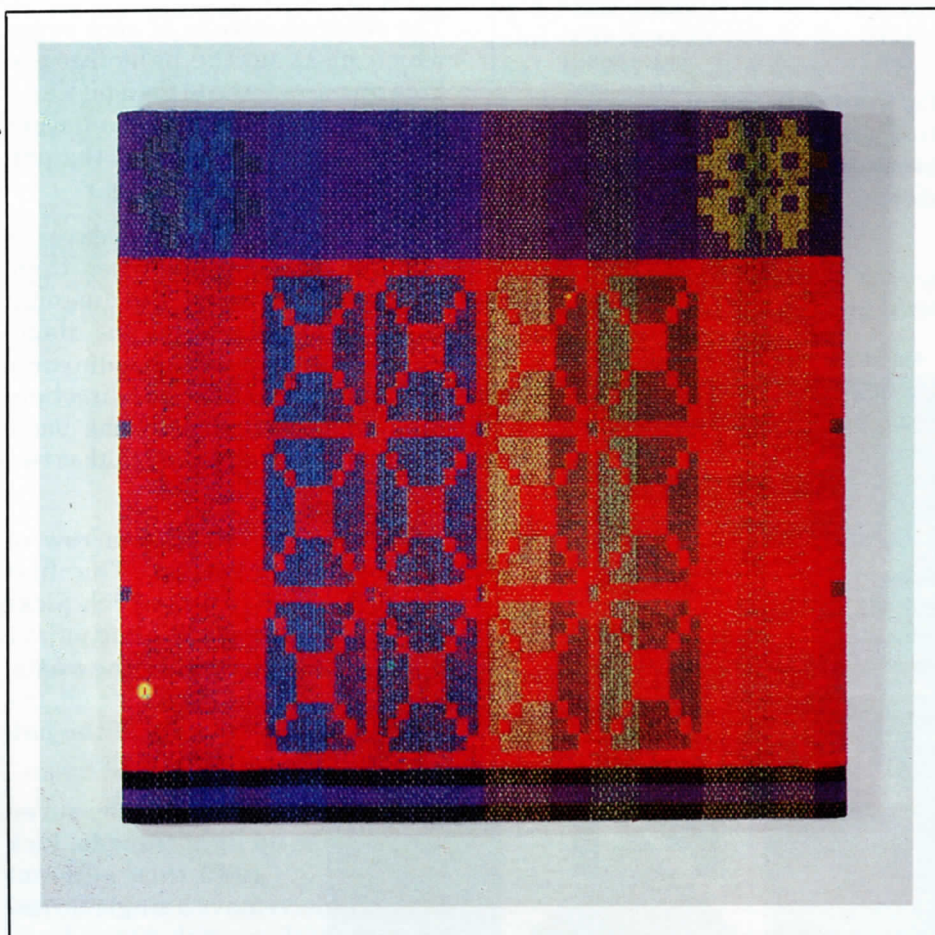
Winter with both warp threads and weft threads visible, the structure is evident. There is no getting away from the fact that the finished piece is made up of many elements interlaced. As an artist who has chosen weaving as my medium, it is important to me that my work look woven and not just something that I could have painted more easily.

In preparing a warp, the weaver has two choices as to color: either a solid color or stripes of different colors. As I have stated before, I have rejected the solid color option. Even within stripes I have rejected the single color as meaning only the same yarn repeated. Within a single color stripe I usually have four yarns repeated to form the width of that stripe. All four yarns

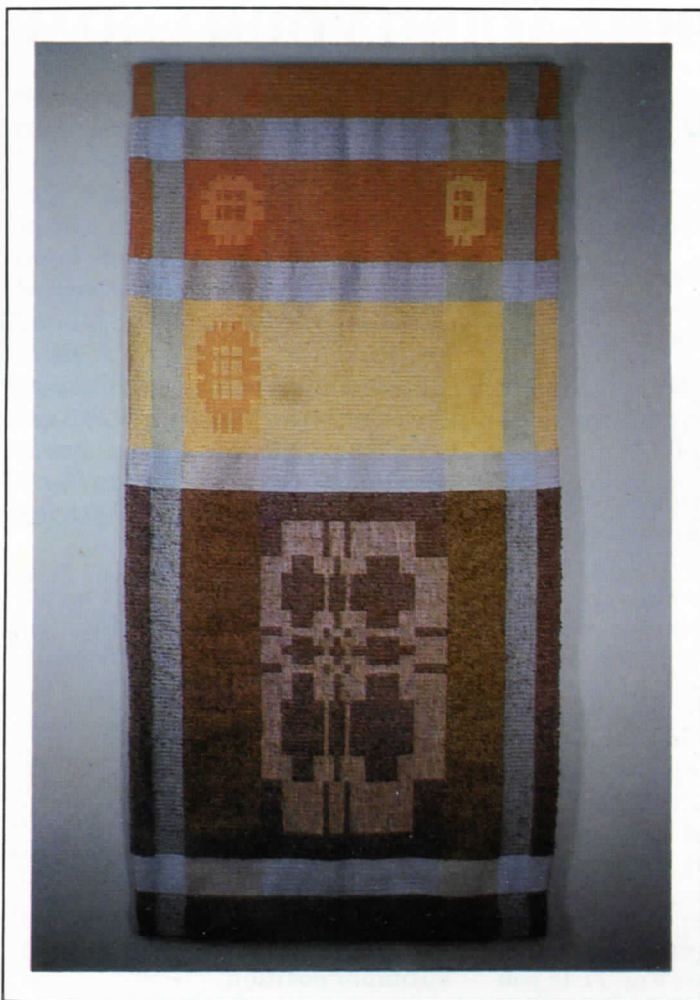
are similar in color, so they read visually as a single color stripe, but in reality they alternate between a smooth and a textured yarn. The smooth yarn is threaded to the tie-down shafts and the textured to the pattern shafts. The textured yarns reveal themselves very nicely in my warp block pattern while the tie threads are kept to a necessary minimum.

There are several ways of handling the striped warp: large color areas, stripes co-ordinated with the design, and stripes random to the design. "Red Dozen" is an example of the large area approach with one-half of the warp blue and the other half green. Within the major divisions I could not resist some variety in color and texture, and therefore let several different blue stripes comprise the blue half and a similar mixture make up the green side. With the two sides of the design symmetrical, the warp color variation becomes a powerful ingredient of the piece.

Gary Schroeder

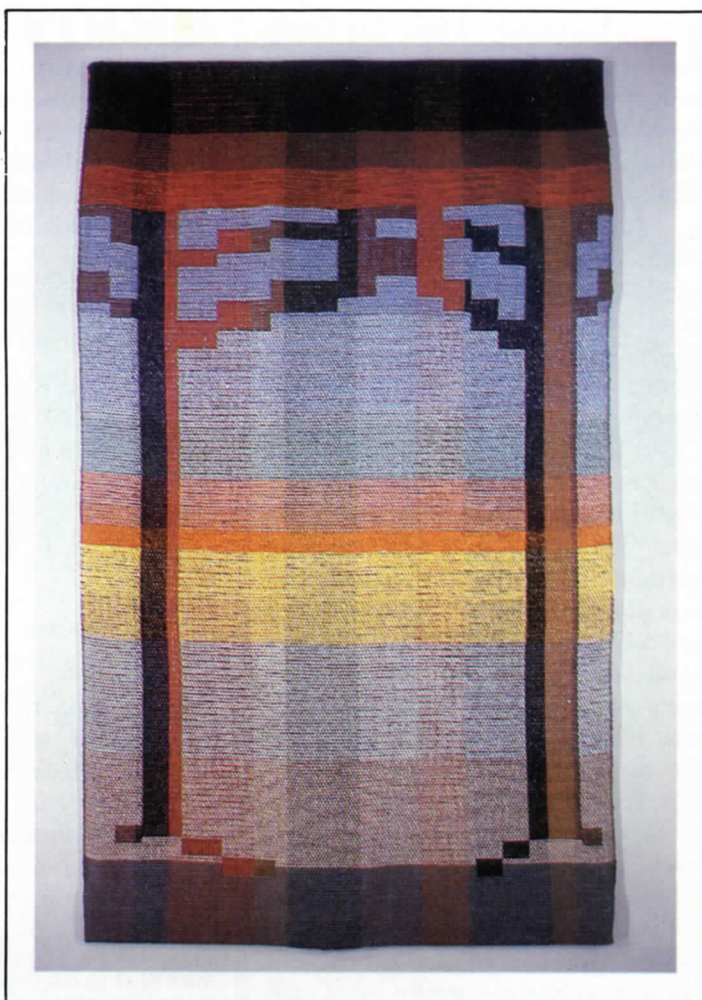


"Red Dozen", 34" X 34½" woven by Philis Alvic



"Sensible Position", 82" X 41" woven by Philis Alvic

Gary Schroeder



"Winter's Day Sunset", 67" X 40" woven by Philis Alvic

The warp stripes are obviously coordinated with the design in "Sensible Position." Each figure is a different color: orange, pink, or yellow. The vertical border is a separate color warp stripe, too. This technique of using a separate color for each design figure gives individual importance to each item and can have many compositional uses for the artist. In my pieces, I often use the contrasting border that is a warp stripe. Sometimes it is at the true edge of the piece, but more frequently recessed, as in the example shown. There are two reasons for my reliance on the border. First, the artistic reason for it, is that it contains and unifies many sometimes unrelated figures. The second is a practical weaver's explanation; many different textured weft yarns produce an uneven selvedge and the strong vertical line on each edge visually helps to straighten the unevenness.

Many different colored black,

brown and dark green stripes are varied at random in regard to the two trees in "Winter's Day Sunset." This was done because I did not want the vertical stripes of the warp to dominate the branching of the tree limbs. As an unexpected bonus, the mixture of colors in the tree trunks gives them sustance. Many very nice visual effects happen with random striping of the warp. I particularly like to use it when I am working with a rigid symmetrical design figure. A word of caution, however. Keep the colors somewhat related to one another, also without strong light-dark contrasts. If there is too much variety in the warp, it will be impossible to choose a weft yarn that produces a distinguishable pattern figure.

Although the warp in any piece is very important and should be thought of as a working partner, the main color manipulation is in the weft. Now, it is considerably

beyond the scope of this small article to delve into the artistic reasons for color selection. But, I will note a few of the ways a weaver can enhance weft color. The most common weft choice for any weaver working in Summer and Winter will be a color that has a great contrast to the warp. It would be very silly to spend hours threading an intricate pattern if the results are so subtle that the figure fades into its ground. Because the weave structure has flecks of the opposing color in both positive and negative areas, there is real danger of shapes melting together if too-similar yarns are chosen. Looking again at the piece "Sensible Position," the weft color is changed and separated by a border stripe for each figure. This is very straightforward, but something happens that gives visual impact to the piece. When the yellow weft stripe crosses the yellow warp stripe, the figure seems to disappear. Of course, the figure is still there and

can be detected when standing close to the piece. Usually it is undesirable to have a figure swallowed up in such a way, but occasionally it can be a valuable tool for emphasis in a piece.

Often in the weft, when I want a single color effect, I will use many small weft stripes of very similar colors. This adds a richness to the surface and also allows me to introduce different textured yarns. It is a technique similar to that of the French impressionist painters modulating color within a single area. There is really quite a wide range of colors that a viewer can look at and still report that the area is red, for example. Mixing random sized weft stripes, similar to the warp striping, of many different reds imparts added interest without disrupting the figure definition. Another technique that has a lot of visual pay-off for almost no work, is to change the color of the tabby thread in different areas of the same piece. Most of us choose the warp color for the tabby, but there is no real reason to limit oneself to a single color. Even two very different colors in the warp and tabby will be mixed optically by the eye when only a short distance from the piece. Variety and vitality can be added to a piece by simply changing the tabby color. Also, it can be used to draw attention to a particular figure. The two orange figures in "Sensible Position," for example, appear to be slightly different colors because the tabby changes from orange to yellow.

In working almost exclusively with Summer and Winter over a six year period, I think that I have discovered many ways of working with color to the best advantage of the weave structure. The flexibility while maintaining control pleases the artist in me, while the weaver that is also a part of me is excited by the wide range of possibilities. In all likelihood, the balance of my creative work over the next several years will continue to be produced in Summer and Winter. ■