Drafting: A Personal Approach

by Philis Alvic

When I was a weaving student in an art school, I discovered that I was far more adventurous when designing on paper than I was when designing on a loom. During my half hour bus ride to school, I would sit filling in squares on graph paper in preparation for that day's weaving. In school I was known as a sample maker. I never wanted to do anything over the six or eight inches required to see pattern relationships. Although I spent two years doing samples, I never tried anything really different; I wanted my samples to be *nice*. My teacher believed in teaching drafting right along with the loom weaving, so, from the very first, I could draft everything that I could weave. But as I was not as confident in the area of design, I began to work out possibilities in draft form. The bus as design studio worked rather well because I could focus exclusively on design.

Many years have passed since I was in school, but patterns (no pun intended) were established and I now buy graph paper by the ream. I no longer have long bus ride to spend designing, but I do set aside time to curl up on my loveseat with a clip board and several sheets of graph paper. During the last five years, the focus of my work has been multi-harness block weaves. My darkened square on the graph paper now means a block or group of threads that will always work as a unit. The short draft behaves similarly to other draft forms. Each darkened square in the drawdown has two coordinates controlling it — directly above in the threading, and directly across in the treadling.

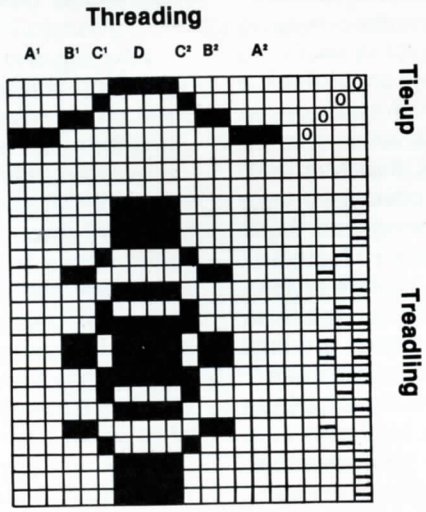
The following are some of the major principles governing the way blocks function. I weave on rising shed looms, so I visualize the darkened square on the profile draft as a raised warp block. In my way of working, the figure is raised in a warp block pattern and the weft fills in the background.

A block, as indicated in the *warp* threading:

- can be one threading unit (*Block C*), several units (*Block D* is four units), or in some rare cases, half a unit.
- functions in the same way always (*Block A* will always be three units wide and cannot be two units and one unit).
- may exist on the same set of harnesses at different places in the threading and function together (B_1 and B_2 will always be activated at the same time).

A block, in the treadling for the *weft:*

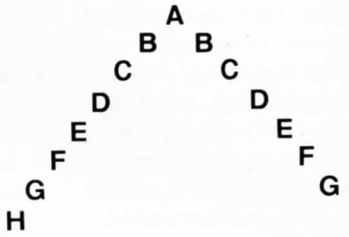
- may be repeated to form any desired height (*Block D* is one unit high and also three units high).
- may function independently of the other blocks (*Block C* raised alone).
- may be taken in any order (*Block C,* then *B,* then *D*).
- may be combined with an adjacent block to form a larger block (*Block C* and *D* raised together).
- may be raised with another block not on adjacent harnesses (*Block B* and *D* raised together).
- may not be raised and thereby become a part of the background (*Block A* is never raised).



The profile draft can be used in any number of weave structures, including multi-harness block weave structures, which I will discuss in a future article.

My approach to design on graph paper is not always consistent. At times, I start with an idea, draw it out on graph paper, and then figure out the block disposition. Often the design has to be altered because of the limitation of number of harnesses available. The arrows in *Follow the Arrow* (Photo A) developed in this way. I developed the idea, drew arrows on graph paper, and let that determine the block placement.

Another major design approach is to start with the blocks in place and then figure out what to do with them. In *Weaver's Fancy* (Photo B), I began with eight blocks arranged in a point:



Each block consisted of one threading unit. I repeated the point structure 11 times in order to produce 11 identical figures in a row. Because of the point, all of my figures were symmetrical. Leaving *Block H* as the space between the figures, I still had seven independent blocks within a figure of 13 blocks. Filling in squares on graph paper, I soon found out that I could produce stars, diamonds, flowers, circles and *X's.* One variation suggested another, and soon I had a major task of eliminating and arranging my many figures into a coherent piece.

My third approach to design is actually a combination of the first two. A picture on graph paper determines the block placement and that placement then determines the other figures in the piece.

Advancement (Photo C) is included to demonstrate that I don't always follow my own rules. The bottom four sets of irregular chevrons were not figured out on paper before weaving. Because of the arrangement of the blocks, I knew I could get some sort of pointed placement of rectangles. I decided on the size of the weft blocks on the basis of the interplay of color and texture in the weft yarns. So, I don't always figure an

entire piece on paper before weaving. I feel free to plan part of the piece and let the rest develop as I weave.

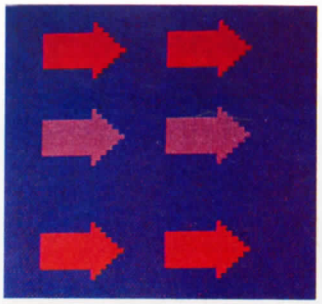
By reading about the way I work in designing hangings, I hope you have seen the possibilities available in using graph paper as a creative tool, and that you will try it yourself. Rather than inhibiting, I find that working on paper encourages ideas. And, as you have seen, you always have the option of diverging from your plan if other avenues present themselves.

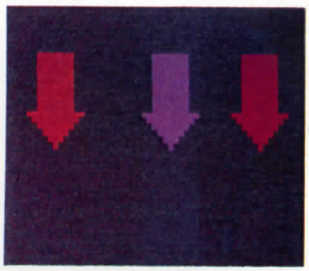
Bibliography

Frey, Berta. *Designing and Drafting for Handweavers.* The MacMillan Company, New York, 1958.

Kurtz, Carol. "Designing Block Weaves." *Shuttle Spindle & Dyepot* (Spring 1980) 42: 5-9.

Philis Alvic, an HGA Certificate of Excellence in Handweaving winner, currently produces commissioned textiles.





***Follow the Arrow,* 28″ × 30″; 27½″ × 24½″; 27½″ × 42½″. Beiderwand, 33 e.p.i.**

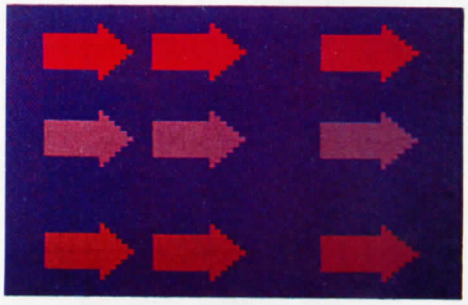


Photo: Gary Schroeder

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***Weaver's Fancy,* 68″ × 38″; 42″ × 28″; 25″ × 38″. Summer and Winter, 15 e.p.i.**

Photo: Gary Schroeder

***Advancement,* 68″ × 41½″. Summer and Winter, 15 e.p.i.**