

# notes of a pattern weaver

by Philis Alvic

Observation of people involved in crafts other than weaving has confirmed my theory that those deeply involved in a craft have a strong emotional attachment to the materials with which they work. Wood workers gently caress what to me would be just a board, potters working with clay delight in squeezing through their fingers what to my eyes is mud, and I've even heard a metal worker describe the beauty of iron. I believe that this response to material is largely a response to texture.

The difficult job for a craftsperson is to convey this pleasurable feeling to a viewer of the finished item. There are two major parts of this problem that weavers must take into account when practicing their art. The first part of the difficulty is that the viewer does not feel this appreciation of yarn, but must be brought to it by the skill of the weaver. Just presenting a beautiful yarn is not enough; the weaver must manipulate the materials to call attention to their particular attractive properties.

The second part of the problem of communicating our joy in materials is that texture is only one element of any finished piece in which either color or design may dominate. Texture is not sufficient to be the principal focus of a piece. A design can acquire definition through the skillful use of texture, and color can be enhanced. Alone, texture cannot carry much weight, but as a servant it can give depth and interest to color and design.

Surmounting these difficulties is a big order, but I know that I have been successful in preserving the integrity of the yarn I started with

when people want to touch my finished work.

The interrelatedness of textural decisions, both to the overall conception of the piece and to its other textural qualities may be examined by taking a very close look at texture as it is used in *Construction Blocks*. *Construction Blocks*, like most of my work, began with something that I saw that fascinated me and to which I wanted to call attention. In this case, the initial spark was viewing a woman dressed in red. She had not limited herself to one red, but wore a lovely mixture of warm and cool reds. Next, came the searching for the proper vehicle to present my ideas and the reworking of the design that I settled upon.

The first textural decision in the piece did not have to do with yarn selection, but with the choice of weave structure. For an artist who has chosen weaving as the vehicle for creative work, there is the ever-present question: "Why go to all the work of weaving when the color and design could be presented much easier in painting?"

There are, of course, many reasons for weaving instead of painting, but foremost among these reasons is the lovely surface of a woven item. The method in which the yarns are interlaced contributes to the compelling quality that draws the viewer to touch the piece. To render this particular design, the weave structure Summer & Winter was chosen for two reasons: flexibility in the usage of the blocks and the textural surface. Within this structure are little flecks of the weft color that appear in the warp block areas; the warp color is apparent as tie threads in the weft area. These

bits of color in the blocks of the other area generate a rich surface.

Moving from the planning stage into the actual execution of the piece, yarn selection for the warp was the next step. The color was the motivating factor, and to emphasize the contrast of warm and cool reds, I divided the piece exactly in half, with each red relegated to its own side. Within each color half, I wanted to enrich the surface with texture, but I was aware that often too many different varieties of texture have the effect of cancelling each other out.

There is the danger of having what was intended as a variously textured surface to appear only as confusion. Different yarns need to be carefully placed to call attention to their own unique textural qualities. To perceive the fullest effects of the materials, the eye must be able to compare yarns. Keeping all of this in mind, I chose smooth yarn stripes positioned next to bumpy stripes and alongside soft, fuzzy ones. The similarly colored stripes of textured yarns maintain the two distinct color areas while adding strength to the work.

Actual weft yarn selection seldom begins for me until the warp is on the loom, even though I usually have an idea of color in mind. Since a primary objective of the piece was to contrast the warm and cool reds, weft colors were chosen from those roughly opposed to red on a color wheel. I felt that it was important to somehow echo the warp stripes in the weft. Instead of just contrasting yarn type as I had done in the warp, another property of yarn was called upon. Because yarns are made from various fibers, they bounce the

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PHOTO: GARY SCHROEDER

*Construction Blocks, Summer & Winter* (quilted), 68" x 33", 15 e.p.i.

light back in different ways. The weft yarns alternate between wool stripes that absorb light (appearing matte and soft) and the other yarn stripes that reflect back the light. Again, the textural considerations play a secondary but very important part in the development of the total piece.

As a weaver, I never see the entire length of the piece until weaving is completed and cut from the loom. Then there is a serious post-weaving evaluation when I am always confronted with the reality of what I wanted to happen, contrasted with what really did happen.

In analyzing *Construction Blocks* I was disappointed that it lacked the power of design that I had hoped would be there. Even though the piece was finished with hanging boards and displayed, my dissatisfaction continued. Finally I settled on the idea of using quilting as a way to strengthen the simple rectangular design. The piece was blind quilted around the main blocks using layers of batting to form thick puffs. For me to commit myself to hours of sticking my finger with a needle, the basic elements of the work needed to be worth the effort.

*Construction Blocks*, adapted from a pattern shown in *Jacob Angstadt Designs*, illustrates the ways that texture can enhance the color and design of a piece. The weave structure, the yarn choices for both warp and weft, and the final quilting all hold their own important places in the overall conception of this piece. 

## Bibliography

Holroyd, Ruth and Ulrike Beck. *Jacob Angstadt Designs* (Self-published, 1976).