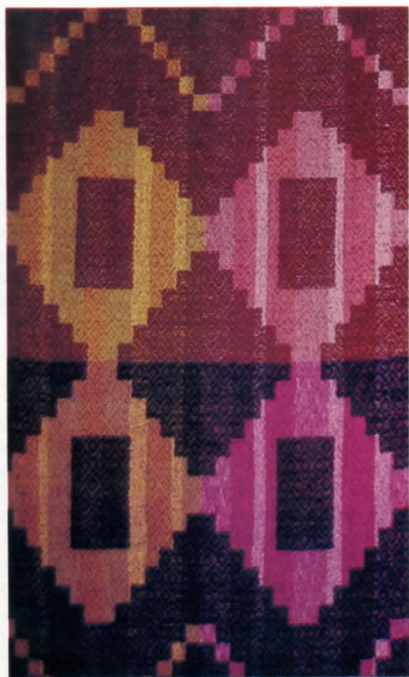


Tabby Color

by Philis Alvic



Different Diamonds, Bergman, 15 e.p.i.

Artists continually seek techniques that offer considerable visual impact for minimal effort. Tabby color is one such factor. It is so simple and familiar that pattern weavers often overlook its visual power.

Weavers commonly choose for tabby the warp yarn or a lighter-weight yarn in the warp color. Because the tabby is usually considered simply a vehicle for holding things together, weavers try to make it as inconspicuous as possible. Planning centers on the dominant pattern weft, while the tabby is relegated to the role of silent working partner.

But with a little change in mind-set the tabby can become a valuable, though minor, element in the piece. Sometimes the disappearing warp color is desirable, but it should be the result of a conscious choice and not because it was overlooked. When the tabby in warp color is woven into the warp, the resulting color is, of course, the warp color.

When a color other than the warp color is chosen for the tabby, optical mixing of the vertical and horizontal

elements occurs, producing a third color. From even a very short distance away, the eye blends small points of color.

As a child I used to stand in front of Seurat's *Sunday Afternoon on the Island of the Grande Jatte* and marvel at the millions of dots of color that this huge painting comprises. But the real miracle occurred when I stepped back and saw the dots blend themselves into people, trees and grass. Seurat's "pointilism" was one method the post-Impressionists used to blend colors. When viewed from a distance, dots of blue and yellow appeared as green grass, or blue and red dots combined to form purple. This ability of the eye to mix color works equally well for the weaver as for the painter, if the bits of color are small and viewed from a distance.

In *Different Diamonds*, all eight diamonds appear as different color areas. The warp is half-gold and half-pink, with slight variations within the halves. In the top halves of both panels, the tabby color is yellow and changes to pink in the bottom half. When the warp is woven with the two tabby colors, optical mixing oc-

curs. The yellow and gold combine to form bright gold; yellow crossing the pink warp creates a peachy color; and in the lower section, the pink blends with the gold warp to produce a warm, orangy gold. Combining the two pinks intensifies their color. That explains the variation in four diamonds, but why do all eight appear different?

An additional factor in the pattern weft color also affects the perceived color of the diamonds. The piece was woven using the weave structure Bergman, which has small flecks of the weft pattern color in the warp block areas. (See "A Personal Approach to Drafting," Part II, *SS&D* 50, Spring '82.) The additional dots of color present in the warp blocks figure in the optical mixing, too. The brown weft lends a softer, warmer feeling to the neighboring colors, while the black makes things brighter and richer. The brown and black alternate with the pink and gold of the tabby to produce eight different color areas.

Did this piece take any longer than it would have if another visual approach had been used? Conceptualizing the interplay of slight color differences in the diamonds took time, but I am not sure it took longer than any other planning method. In the weaving, the only extra work was the changing of an extra bobbin in my shuttle, which means that I obtained maximum visual effect for the amount of time and energy expended. *Different Diamonds* demonstrates the impact that changing tabby color can have, because the color changes are integral to the piece and involve only the two warp colors and two pattern weft colors.

By changing the color of the tabby, you can create the illusion that the warp has changed color. On the end of your next block-weave warp, reserve a few inches for an experiment of stripes in a range of tabby colors. I think you'll be pleasantly surprised at the way the colors change. Remember that optical mixing occurs at a distance from the surface, so for maximum effect get up from the loom to see the new colors you have created. ■