

WEAVE FOR YOUR KITCHEN

A practical way for the beginner to learn new techniques on useful articles

By BERTA FREY

PERHAPS it was Florence Webster's lovely kitchen in Woodstock, New York, that first made me realize how the kitchen has made the complete cycle from heart of the home through neglect and back to importance again. Look through the pages of any of the home magazines today and see how many of the pictures, whether in advertisements or feature articles, play up colorful and attractive kitchens. The high fashion magazines have added Household Hints for this age of fewer servants, and even the *Saturday Evening Post* had some tongue in cheek hints in a recent issue, one being: "The best way to keep children's muddy feet off the clean kitchen floor is to unlock the front door."

But to go back to Florence's kitchen. Some twelve years ago, Florence bought and remodeled an old farm house. Impossible as it may sound, the kitchen is so placed that it has exposures on all four sides so that it can always catch a breeze in summer and even the smallest ray of winter sun. The walls are paneled in California redwood and the open shelves of the same wood hold a fascinating collection of dishes, pots and pans. I spent several months with her, and even though there are two living rooms, a dining room and a smaller study on the first floor, we found ourselves eating in the kitchen and, after the dishes were cleared away, sitting around the table that always seemed to have room for any number of guests. In this kitchen, certainly it would have been a sacrilege to have used ordinary towels, so Florence has woven her own towels with just the right colors. And once when she wanted to experiment with lace weaves, she set up a warp about twelve inches wide of heavy cotton and wove

dozens of samples, some good, some bad, and some indifferent. She learned which kinds of lace weaves she liked and the variations possible on each. Then the samples that she did not care to keep she made into dish cloths and if you think there is nothing that will lighten the chore of dishwashing—just try a handwoven dishcloth!

Weaving for the kitchen can be a practical method of learning to weave. Dress the loom for a dozen towels and then set about learning to handle the shuttle properly, to develop an even beat and a good rhythm. Speed will

come automatically with the proper rhythm. If the first towel is not a perfect one and leaves much to be desired in the way of edges, it does not matter too much; it can be just as useful and will be a challenge to weave the next one better. The last one on the warp should be as nearly perfect as anyone could wish, with an even beat and perfect selvages. Anyone who can set up a loom, following a given draft, make twelve border arrangements and weave twelve towels can weave anything. All the catastrophes of weaving—broken warps, stretched pedal cords, disappointing



Florence Webster's kitchen, with redwood paneled walls.
(Photograph by MARIE FREY)



"Costume" apron—many colored novelty yarns, rayon, metallic materials, chenille weft; black warp. Mrs. H. J. Frey, weaver.



Cocktail apron—white cotton warp and gold and cotton novelty yarn used in weft.

color combinations, and any number of things—can happen in the space of a dozen kitchen towels; the weaver who can conquer these minor tragedies, develop a sure touch on the beater, and attain an even rhythm has mastered the mechanics of the loom. Then Imagination can take the helm and it will be a thrilling journey to the degree of Master Weaver.

Whether dish towels should be cotton, linen or a mixture is a matter of personal preference. But in using cotton, remember this: do *NOT* use natural or unbleached yarn. Unbleached cotton is not absorbent and the towel will be more than half worn out before it is any good. Bleached or dyed cottons are a must for absorbency. Linen may be natural or bleached or dyed; any linen is absorbent. Rayon is not suitable for use in towels unless perhaps a single strand for an occasional trim or color accent.

Here is a suggestion for a practice warp. Use a very soft "bedspread cotton" (the softest is usually the least expensive) and colored cotton size 20/3—this is about the size in the small balls of crochet cotton from any five-and-dime store and has various

trade names—Silkateen, Sansilk, etc. It is a rather soft crochet cotton and comes in a variety of colors. Buying in this way is not the most economical, but these small balls are easily obtainable almost anywhere and the colors are generally boil-proof. Several colors can be used to make borders along the selvages and the center may be either white or colored. Bedspread cotton is easily available too; it comes in 600 to 800 yard balls or skeins and costs from 25 cents to 40 cents per ball or skein. Make a 10-yard warp using alternate ends of the white bedspread cotton and the colored crochet cotton. Sley this at 20 ends (10 of each) per inch and make it about 15 inches wide. This warp should cost approximately two dollars. For weft, use 8/1 slub linen. This linen comes in natural, white and several good colors. It should beat about 14 to 16 picks per inch and one pound of it will weave up most of the ten yards of warp. Set the loom in Rosepath—it can be woven either as a tabby or a twill and in many variations; it is also adaptable to "pattern" borders.

There seems to be a general idea around that a beginner should not use a linen warp. The only objection to a

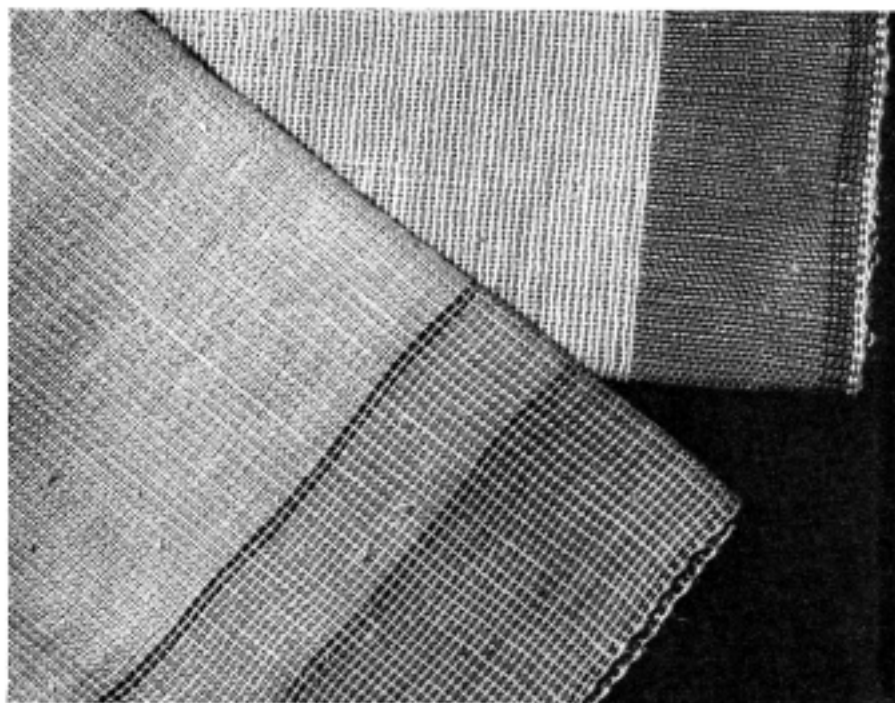
linen warp for a beginner, so far as I can see, is the cost. Any warp will be troublesome if not handled properly, and different yarns require different handling. Generally speaking a single ply linen is harder to manage than two or three ply yarn, but it makes a much softer fabric. A single 10, if well twisted and of a good quality of fibre, will make splendid towels when sleyed at 20 per inch. A vigorous workout in the washing machine improves any linen fabric.

Modern kitchens are more than kitchens—they often have a dining area or a breakfast bar. Place mats are optional. They add color, but they also add laundry, so the problem is to make mats that will add color and cheer but no extra work. This is chiefly a matter of materials. Naturally, one thinks first of the plastics but so often they do not weave well. A colorful warp may be woven with long pine needles or thin strips of wood, or small dowels and then shellacked or lacquered. Lacquer is less likely to change the color than shellac and if properly applied will not be too obvious and yet will be water-proof and easily cleaned with a damp cloth. Cotton, linen or rayon can be

sent to the corner cleaning establishment to be "waterproofed." A waterproofed fabric does not stain and is easily wiped off with a damp cloth. The waterproofing process has little if any effect on the color or general appearance of the fabric.

Like kitchens, aprons have gone the full cycle of style. Aprons have long been symbolic of social position and have been an accessory of dress rather than a utilitarian protection from dish-water! Until recent years, the unmarried peasant woman of Romania wore one very elaborate woven or embroidered apron, while the married woman to show her superior (?) status, wore two aprons. In Majorca it was once the custom for the farmer's wife to invite girls from miles around to help in the sausage making for Christmas; and she presented each guest with a handwoven apron to be worn during the process. Naturally the most popular girl had the largest collection of aprons and was the envy of her friends. And so it is that today we find the apron is again an accessory of dress. Today's hostess, who quite likely does not have a maid, dons a colorful apron to add glamour to that "basic" black dress.

Of course, we have always woven aprons, but mostly they have been on a white warp and have had a border of



Towels with cotton warp and slub linen weft—lavender, rust and rose with white and natural. Photographs by Edward Schwartz.

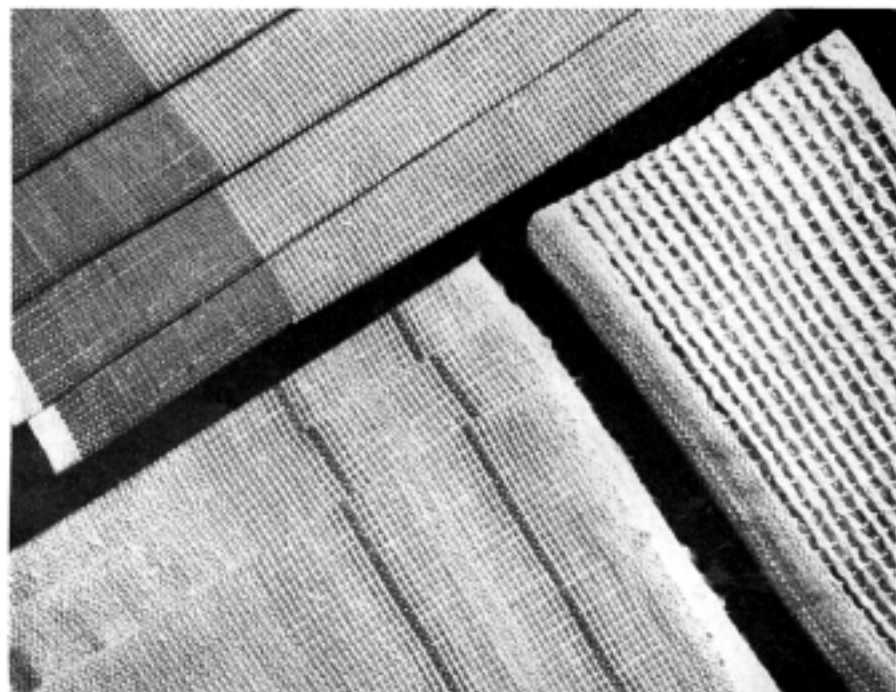
many shades or colors along the bottom edge. Usually the pattern has been Rosepath, or that old standby, Honey-suckle. But today, aprons are made to add interest to a dress, not to hide it. The stripes are of many colors and many textures, but NO pattern. Naturally, an apron made of chenille, silk, rayon, and gold is not a washable article, but anything as definitely a fad as these

aprons is not made to wear for the rest of our lives.

The making up of an apron is always more of a task than weaving it. At the Pi Beta Phi Arrowcraft Shop, they have a very clever way of weaving in a heavy cord which is pulled up to make the gathers and then the ends are braided to make the ties. Another easy method is to weave in several strands of elastic cords; after the top and bottom hems are put in, the elastic is pulled up to make the gathers across the front and a wide grosgrain ribbon is used for the back belt. The bottom may be turned up to form a deep pocket for cigarettes and lip stick—nothing so prosaic as the pot holder that was the inevitable companion of the old-fashioned kitchen apron.

For those who wish to be traditional and weave white aprons, try No. 50 sewing thread at 40 per inch and weave in a lace weave—Bronson for a harness weave or one of the lenos for a picked-up lace. Sewing cotton makes a more crisp fabric than the more orthodox weaving cottons. And don't forget—Bronson is most uninteresting on the loom; it demands laundering to show to best advantage. Laundering and other finishing processes are important not only for Bronson but for other weaves as well.

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Dish towels woven in reddish, burnt orange, and yellow tones with white to blend with the redwood walls of the kitchen. Textured dish cloth.