

TAPESTRY THROUGH THE AGES

TAPESTRY METHODS

by Harriet Tidball

Weaving a tapestry, as with designing and producing any textile, requires that both artistic and technical problems be met. Since "tapestry" is a word which may be used in either a very broad, or several highly specialized senses, it is important that one knows at the outset what application of the word is intended. For the present article, "tapestry" may be defined as a multi-colored, patterned fabric of uniform texture, with warp completely covered by weft, in which the pattern or design is identical on both sides.

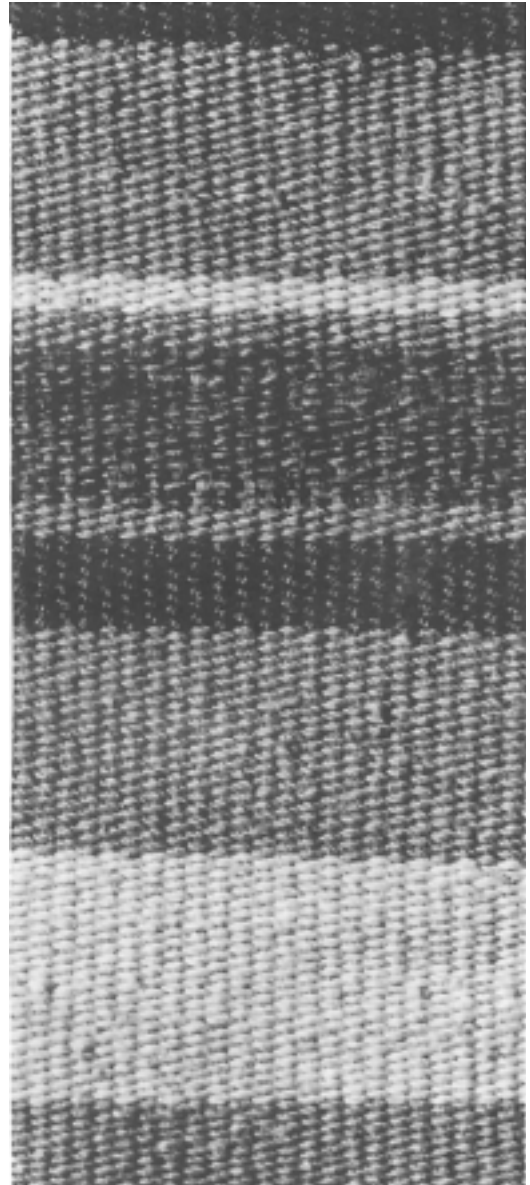
The simplest form of tapestry is illustrated by the pattern of weft stripes shown here. It is plain that the stripe pattern is achieved simply by changing the weft color at any desired point in the weaving. So this pattern presents no problem to the weaver who knows how to open a plain-weave shed, throw a shot of weft, and beat the fabric until the warp is hidden. The means for producing complex patterns with color boundaries lying on vertical, diagonal and curved lines is the subject of this article.

The problem at the outset is that of learning the various means for beginning and ending color areas which compose tapestry designs, and practicing them until the skills become habitual or automatic, and the mind is free for the artistic considerations. What are the technical problems which the weaver must master in approaching tapestry weaving? They are little different from the problems of any other weaving project.

Selection of suitable warp material, warp set, warp tension.

Selection of suitable weft material in the desired color.

Mastering of the methods for inserting the weft. The selection of warp and weft materials and determining the warp set is, as always, a problem of evaluating the purpose for the desired texture for the final fabric with reference to the weaving method. Therefore, these selections are determined by the weaver's experience.



In order to gain this experience, the weaver must start some place and the following plan for the learning samples is suggested.

A warp of heavy, several-ply linen (linen carpet warp is satisfactory).

Warp set of ten or twelve ends per inch (experiment will show which).

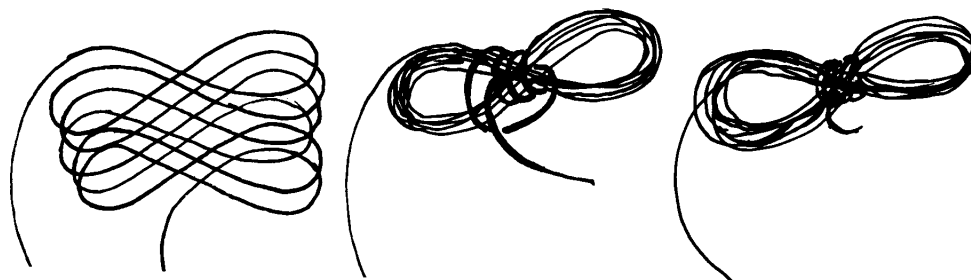
Weft of fine worsted (Bernat Fabri, Lily Weaving Wool, etc).

Warp tensioned firmly.

Weft placed in shed very loosely and beaten to cover warp.

Further details of the weaving are given in the article by Grethe Poul Poulsen, and need not be considered here.

The weft is used in comparatively short lengths and inserted into the sheds with the fingers instead of being wound on bobbins and carried in shuttles. Each different color area across the warp requires an individual weft. There are several ways in which the weft lengths may be prepared. In her April article Trude Guermonprez suggests small spools, which are used by the European professional tapestry weavers. The home weaver will probably prefer the little finger-wrapped ties of the Scandinavian weavers, usually called "butterflies," "dollies" or "finger-bobbins." These are wound criss-cross around the thumb and forefinger, wrapped around the center firmly and secured with a half-hitch on the final wrap, with the weaving end pulled from the center.

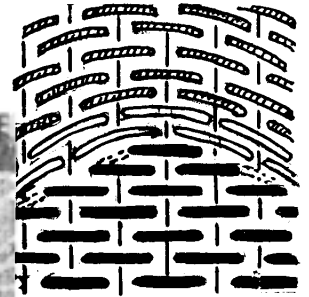


Beating is done with a small comb which has been a universal tool through the ages and has been made of wood, bone, ivory, silver, and probably in these days, of plastic. As explained in Mrs Atwater's article given in March, a table-fork can make a satisfactory substitute. Another substitute tool, and one which many tapestry weavers prefer, is the knife edge of a small belt shuttle which is inserted into the shed instead of combed through the warp.

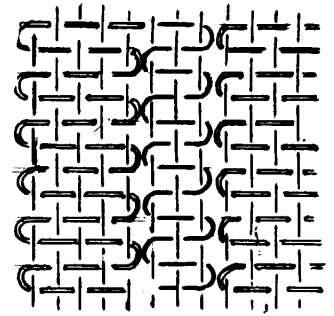
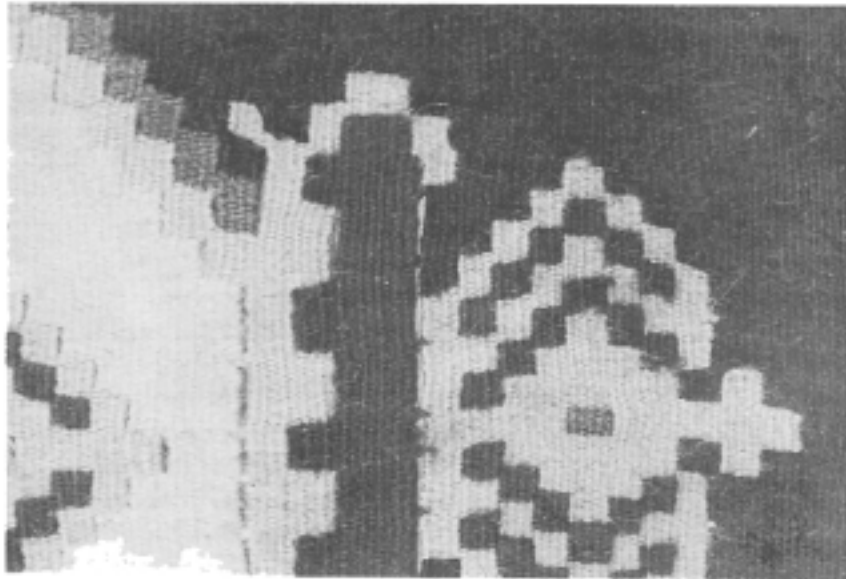
There are seven different methods for handling the edges of color areas in true tapestry technique. Some of these have been touched on in previous articles, though not systematically. All seven methods should be known by the tapestry weaver, who should develop skill in all of them, as each meets a different design need and several methods may be employed in weaving a single design.

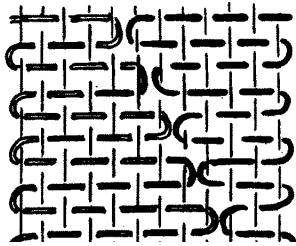
Since diagrams and illustrations tell more than words, the seven methods are presented thus. Although the diagrams show identical spacing of warp and weft, this spacing was selected to make the turnings clear, and in actuality the weft is beaten closely to completely cover the warp.

Tapestry Method I—LOW-CURVED LINES. The method for forming low curves is taken up in Mrs Atwater's article reprinted in the March SHUTTLE CRAFT.

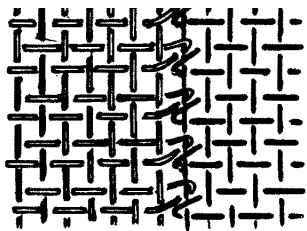
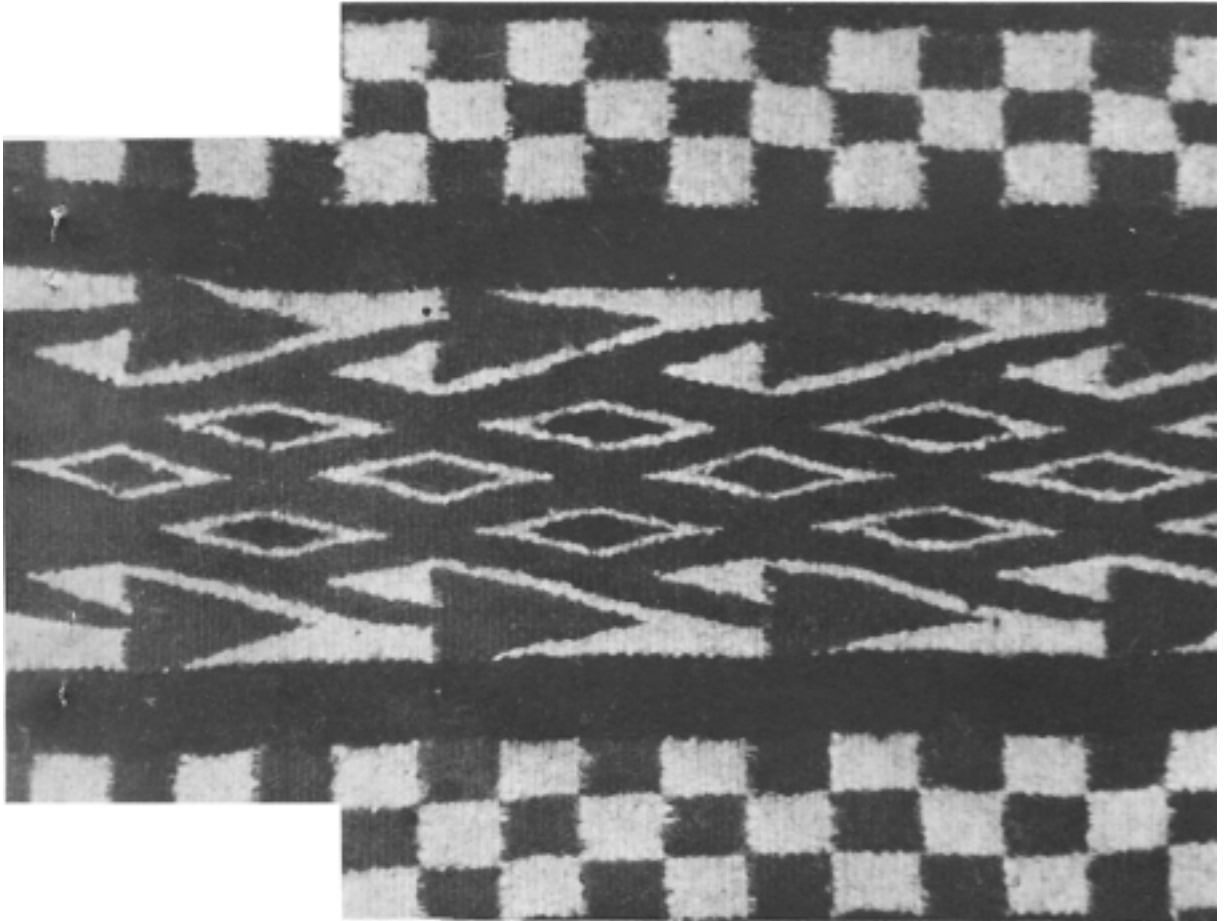


Tapestry Method II—SLIT TAPESTRY. By this method an opening or slit occurs in the fabric at every place where there is a vertical color change. For detail, see section on *kelim* in Miss Poulson's article. The illustration shows the way long slits are often sewed together after the weaving, to add durability to the fabric.





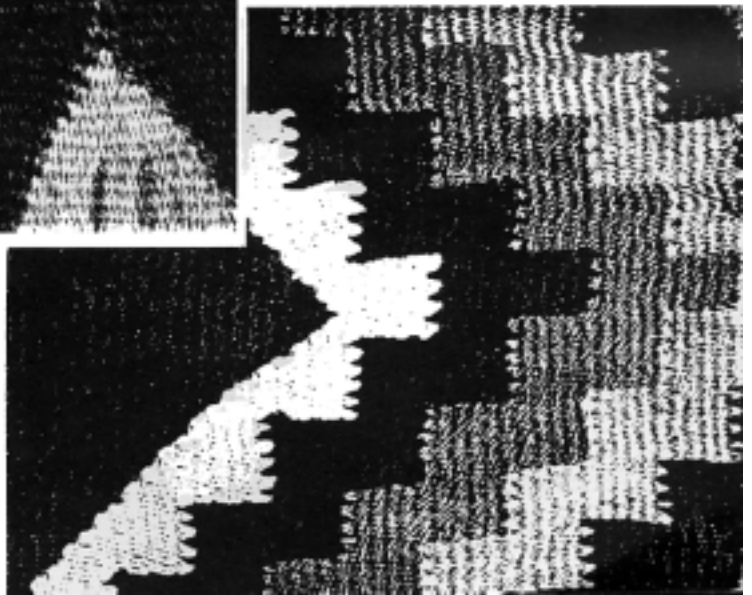
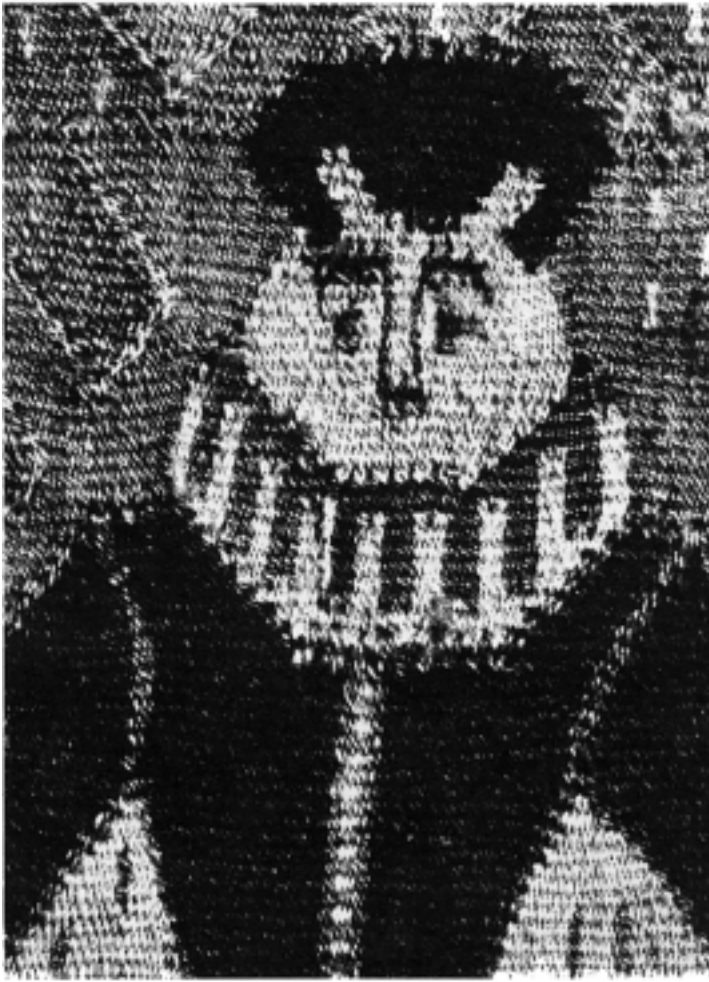
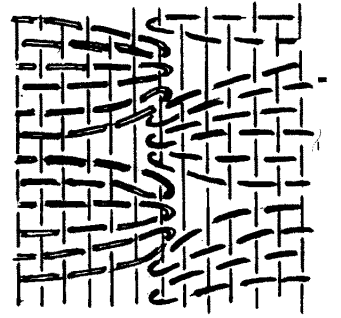
Tapestry Method III—DIAGONAL TAPESTRY. Diagonal color changes with low angles are made by decreasing the overlap by one warp thread in one color area, while increasing it by one thread in the adjacent color area, on each successive weft line. Except for geometric patterns designed especially for this technique (see the Guatemalan blanket border) the method has only limited application.

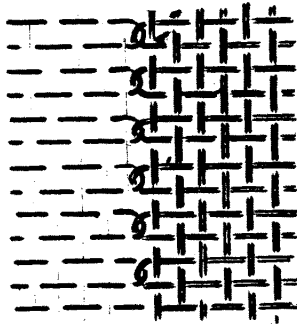


Tapestry Method IV—DOVETAILED WEFT. The method by which two adjacent wefts are carried around a common warp at the position where the two colors meet. This is the method used for the vertical joinings in the Guatemalan blanket border. Although simple to work, the thickening at the joining which the dovetailing causes makes the method undesirable in some instances.

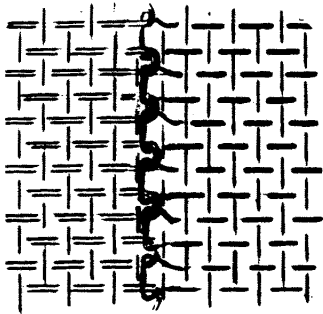


Tapestry Method V—MULTIPLE-DOVETAILED WEFT. By this method, several shots of one color are placed, then several shots of the adjacent color, both terminating around a common warp thread. This method obviates some of the thickening at the edges, but it also distorts the design by creating visible serrations. The effect is illustrated in the details from an old Norwegian tapestry and from a Precolumbian tapestry.





Tapestry Method VI—INTERLOCKED WEFTS. A practical and widely used system which is taken up in the Poulson article under the name *aklae*.



Tapestry Method VII—DOUBLE INTERLOCKED WEFTS. This method is taken up in the Poulson article under the heading *rollakan*. Although often used for tapestry rugs and other fabrics which require exceptional strength at the color joinings, this method is little favored otherwise because the patterns must be worked upside down, and because it is the only true tapestry technique which produces a textile with definite wrong and right sides. When used, it is used throughout, and not combined with the other systems.

In studying tapestries and photographs of tapestries, the observer will note that the design is often woven sideways or weftwise, so that the tapestry is oriented for hanging with the weft vertical and the warp horizontal. This places selvages at the top and bottom instead of at the sides. The direction is evident from the direction of the ribs on the tapestry surface, since the ribs are formed by warp threads covered by weft and they therefore run in the warp direction. Notice, for example, the two illustrations given for multiple-dove-tailed tapestry. The geometric Peruvian design has vertical ribs, showing that the design is composed for the normal, warp-wise orientation. The amusing face from a seventeenth century Norwegian tapestry has horizontal ribs showing that the design was woven cross-wise on the warp.

The "learner" of tapestry weaving must have the designs to follow, and these designs should be fairly simple. It is wise to follow already prepared designs while developing skill in manipulating threads and judgment about what can be done in tapestry designs. Therefore a group of border designs and motifs, drawn on cross-section paper with different symbols representing different colors, are shown here. It will be noticed that all of these designs may be woven using only horizontal and vertical color joinings, by weaving square "step-ups" for diagonals. Or some of the designs may be woven with diagonal color joinings if the weaver so desires. The conventionalized flowers with long stems are

most easily woven if the motifs are oriented sideways. In Grethe Poul Poulsen's *NYT TIL RAMMEV AEVEN* portfolio (see THE WEAVER'S BOOK SHELF) there are eighty four handsome patterns for motifs and borders, all beautifully drawn on cross-section paper.

