

Workshop Report

Instructor: Sharon Alderman

Title: "More for Your Money: Loom-controlled Double Weave and Color-and-Weave Effects"

Date: July 28, 2009 – August 30, 2009

Although I registered comparatively late (for a MAFA member--mid-January), I was lucky and managed to get into Sharon Alderman's class just before it filled up.

Sharon is a fantastic teacher, extremely knowledgeable, systematic, and thorough. The amount of material she covered was enormous, but she was careful to make sure it was clear to the class before she moved on to the next topic. She also made sure she circulated around the classroom during the hands-on portions of the class, checking, reassuring, demonstrating. This is particularly admirable not only because it's good teaching technique but also because it was quite a challenge. The classroom was filled to capacity, and it was difficult to navigate around all the looms and accoutrements. In addition, Sharon is scheduled for foot surgery in the very near future, and it is painful for her to walk or stand. Clearly, when she makes a commitment to teach, she doesn't let anything get in her way!



Sharon Alderman demonstrates techniques to her class at the 2009 MAFA Workshop Weekend.

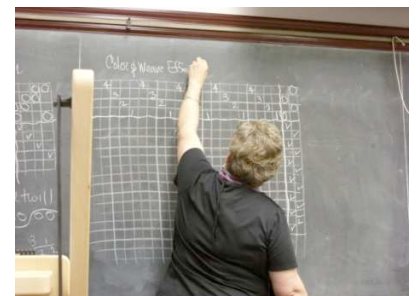
When I was trying to decide on which class to take, and had posted online for advice, someone had warned me that Sharon might not be the best instructor for beginners. I'd argue that she'd be a fine instructor for beginners... but some of the topics that she covered in my class would be an absolute misery for a beginner, or to anyone who wasn't comfortable with drafts and drawdowns.



Sharon brought a suitcase full of swatches. Particularly intriguing were the ones that showed how doubleweave creates cloth that has distinctly different sides. The striped jacket fabric is fuzzy mohair on the outside and smooth, non-shedding, non-itchy wool on the inside. Clever!

My favorite part of the class was the portion on loom-controlled doubleweave. I had never done doubleweave before, and it is quite delightful to play with two layers of cloth at the same time and see how tubes and doublewidth cloth develop. Sharon's cross-section diagrams and shaft-lifting notation took the mystery out of what was happening without taking away any of the magic. As is often the case in workshops focusing on structure, having a table loom with front levers is a great help—it forces you to really think about what the shafts are doing. For example: "I have to get the top layer out of the way, so I lift the odd-numbered shafts: 1, 3, 5, 7. Add the first shed for the bottom layer: 2, 6." In contrast, thinking "Next pick: treadle 3" may give the same result in the cloth, but doesn't do much for your understanding of what's going on.

The most valuable part of my class involved learning how to take a design idea and translate it into a color-and-weave structure. Like many things that are worthwhile and challenging, it wasn't particularly *fun*. There were moments that I felt like banging my head against the breast beam, because I just wasn't getting it. I wasn't alone in this, because the consensus in my class was to ask Sharon to do a second walkthrough of the process. But ... if something is easy and fun, the chances are good that you'll learn it on your own. For something as mind-boggling as inventing your own weave structures (see p. 227 and following in Sharon's book, *Mastering Weave Structures*), you really need the discipline of a class, and a very good instructor. Of course, a very determined, self-motivated



The materials list for this class included graph paper--and it was necessary! Sharon has a special chalk holder designed for drawing musical staffs, and uses it to draw grids for drafts.

person can learn anything she sets out to learn. Personally, I'm not that disciplined, so taking classes is necessary for me to stretch my horizons in directions that are of benefit to me, but where I would not venture on my own.

Sharon does something in this class that I initially thought was both sneaky and cruel: In this class, the way you use the same warp for both doubleweave and color-and-weave is to cut it off after the doubleweave and rethread (*argh!*), tossing unneeded threads out of the way back over the back beam. She glosses this over in the class description, and deliberately neglects to mention threading and sleying hooks in the materials list (though she does mention lease sticks, which in retrospect probably should have tipped us off).

In my case, I had decided to interpret the pre-workshop instructions loosely, and had used four colors in my warp rather than two. This had the desired effect of letting me see some color interactions in doubleweave. However, since I wanted only two colors in my color-and-weave gamps, I had to remove a lot of warp threads. (So many, in fact, that I ended up pulling the whole warp forward, stripped out the threads no longer in use, re-tied onto the back apron rod, and then rebeamed the warp.)



From right: Reverse of doubleweave sampler (inset). Doubleweave sampler finished in class (right). Pile of warp threads removed in the course of rethreading for color-and-weave gamps (center). Plainweave and straight-twill gamps (left). Notice the solid light and solid dark bands in gamps' warp and weft. This is a trick we learned in Sharon's class—it allows you to easily "read" the color order of the gamp even if you lose your notes.

I still think Sharon is sneaky. However, I now have the plainweave and straight-twill gamps that I wanted for years, but never worked up the energy to sit down and weave. Other members of my class used their rethreaded warps to play with structures of their own design. Sometimes, the best thing a teacher can do for reluctant students is to give them a good hard shove in the right direction. Sharon is obviously a master of this technique.