

FINISHING HANDWOVEN FABRICS

By EDMUND A. LUCEY

IN THE PREFACE to her book "Hand Loom Weaving for Amateurs" Kate Van Cleve of the Fellowcrafters Guild writes, "Weaving is not a difficult art and the pleasures derived from accomplishment will far outweigh the hours spent in learning technicalities which must precede efficiency." And Harriet C. Douglas of the Shuttle-Craft Guild, writing in reference to her course in weaving, notes "Some members weave for pleasure—some for a creative outlet—"

Why Not More Handweavers at Work?

It surely is a pleasure to weave. It is fun to see the pattern form—to watch the yards come down. Now because we know these things are true it is hard for us to understand why a larger number of people do not buy looms and learn to weave. It is harder still for us to understand why people who do own looms do not turn out more yards and more patterns. We have tried in our small way to find the answer and have been given a number of reasons by various individuals who have limited their weaving. The number of weavers we could see compared to the total is small and therefore the number of reasons that we have considered may be small compared to the total that could have been given. One of the things that surprised us was the fact that so few people gave as a reason—lack of time. We can name three reasons that stand out quite boldly in the list of reasons given for not doing more weaving: 1—not wanting to spend the time necessary for preparatory work; 2—the high cost of yarn; 3—lack of knowledge of finishing operations. Many individuals who love to weave just cannot force themselves to start another warp. They do not like to make a warp either on the old warping frame or on the newer sectional warper and they will not agree that the great pleasure they get from the operation of weaving can force them to spend the time that it takes to warp, to draw the threads through the heddles on the harnesses and through the slots in the reed. The fact that there are now companies ready to do this preparatory work should be good news to those people who do not care to do it themselves.

Factors Influencing Cost of Yarns

Weavers complain about the high cost of yarn and the resulting high cost of any fabric that they weave. It is a fact that the prices we are asked to pay for yarn are very high but there is a reason for it. We all help to make it continue high. Stop to think of all the types and qualities called for. Multiply that by the number of counts or sizes and then multiply the answer by the number of colors and see what the total is. The amount used for a color of any certain type and count of yarn in handweaving is small and you cannot manufacture a small amount of anything cheaply. The number of hands that any yarn passes through after leaving the mill is also too high. Each has its overhead and

a profit and all help to push the cost up.

Something surely will be done to relieve the yarn situation. As the number of people weaving increases, the amount of yarn used will increase. Then it will be worth while for a few good companies to specialize in handweaving yarns directly to the weavers at a very modest profit in an attempt to build up a volume business. We are pleased to be able to state that we know such plans are already under way.

Some weavers after spending quite a lot of money and time in producing a piece of fabric find that they just have a piece of sleazy cloth without life or substance—certainly not what they had in mind or not like the piece that they tried to reproduce. They usually know that the fabric needs finishing but do not know how. The sleazy piece does not look worse than some felted, shrunken ones that resulted from improper finishing.

Finishing Cotton and Linen Fabrics

Textile fabrics are finished for the purpose of removing dirt, oil, starches and all impurities, for shrinking to the point where the number of threads and picks per inch will be what the fabric was designed to have, for improving the hand or feel, for smoothing out wrinkles and straightening the cloth so that warp and weft are at right angles to each other and for giving the fabric a dull, a semi-lustre or a high lustre appearance. There are many things that the workers at a mill or finishing plant can do to a fabric that the handweaver cannot attempt to do at home.

In cotton finishing the mill can singe, size with various starch mixtures and then calender through the nips of any number of hot or cold cylinders of varying weights and end up with anything from a soft muslin to a stiff cambric, all from the same type of plain woven cotton cloth. In addition the mill can dye the fabric or print it with a number of beautiful colors.

In woolen finishing plants mills can felt if they want to make a flannel or a billiard cloth, raise a nap of varying lengths, shear to even the length of the nap or cut the nap off close to the surface and decatize to set the finish.

You can do enough finishing on cotton, linen, and cotton warp-linen filling fabrics at home to give them a very good appearance and that really is all you should want to do. After taking such fabrics from the loom they should be brushed, then inspected to locate imperfect places and mended if possible, sewing in yarn by following the weave. Next you should scour in hot water with a good mild soap to remove dirt, oil and any sizing that may have been in the yarn. In the same bath you will shrink the fabric by bringing up the threads and picks as close to each other as you want them. The longer you leave the fabric in hot water and soap and the more you agitate it the closer you will make the

weave. It is easier for you to set the fabric so that it will not shrink afterwards than it is for the finishing plant. The plant's chief difficulty comes from handling long lengths and from pulling or dragging from roller to roller and machine to machine. This action lengthens the cloth warp-wise and narrows the width. It has been only in recent years, after the Rigmel and the Sanford processes were perfected that guarantees against shrinkage could be given.

If the fabric is to be left in the natural state or if it has been woven with colored yarns you follow the scouring with several rinses to make sure that all the soap is removed. If you want to change natural to white you can bleach with Javelle water or any of the standard chlorine bleaches sold at your grocery store.

Importance of Proper Drying

After rinsing from the scour or bleach, the fabric is put through the wringer or spun as dry as possible and hung outdoors to dry. It is best to hang it by one selvage and if the clothesline is not long enough for the full length it can be looped between clothespins. After drying to damp dry use a hot iron to remove wrinkles and to press smooth. If you have woven figures or have a raised pattern on the face the fabric should be ironed face down on a Turkish towel and pressed on the back only, so that the figures will not be flattened.

For cotton and for linen curtains, draperies, and for fancy open woven fabrics some weavers simply press face down

on a Turkish towel. Sooner or later these goods will soil and will then have to be put into the tub. Therefore it is best to weave them in such a way that they can at least be given a light scour. Scouring can be done without much shrinkage and this slight shrinkage can be offset by designing your fabric and weaving it so that it will be just what you want after having the slight shrinkage. The fact that any linen fabric woven with a plied yarn in either warp or filling will feel stiff and wiry when it comes from the loom but soft after scouring may influence you in your decision to scour or not to scour.

Finishing Woolen and Worsted Fabrics

The processes in finishing woolen and worsted fabrics at home are not much different from finishing cotton fabrics and are done for the same purposes, i.e., for improving the appearance and for making the fabrics serviceable. In starting to finish first brush to remove loose dirt and threads, then inspect for imperfections. If there are any places where there are threads out you should sew in pieces of yarn following the woven pattern. Any bunch knots should be removed or reduced in size but ordinary weaver's knots (if you made them small and neat as you should have done), are best thrown from the face to the back through the intersection and then the opening closed tightly by working the threads and the picks close together with a needle or the pick end of the burling iron.

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The Craftsman's Fair of the Southern Highlands



Sponsored by the Southern Highlands Handicraft Guild, will bring the craftsmen from North Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia to Gatlinburg, Tennessee for six days of sales and demonstrations, July 24 through July 29. Here Mrs. Mary Sandlin, Berea College student, is demonstrating finger weaving for Allen H. Eaton, author of *Handicrafts of the Southern Highlands*, who is teaching at the Crafts-Recreation Workshop at Gatlinburg, sponsored by the Pi Beta Phi School and the University of Tennessee. Spinning flax, Mrs. Emma Conley of Penland, North Carolina, carries on the traditional activity of her mother and grandmother. She now teaches at The Penland School of Handicrafts.

THE GADRED WEAVERS — QUALITY OR CHARITY?

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(a word I hate), and who, in turn, will give the distasteful object away as soon as a recipient can be found. This, in itself, is bad for everyone.

In the first place, the man who makes it feels within himself that the thing he is doing is not good. He needs no one to tell him this, he senses it because he has an unsatisfied or empty feeling. There is a standard within each one of us, and to produce something below that standard gives us this sense of failure. It is bad for the institution which holds the sale, for they know, when they stop to think about it, that they are asking far more than the article is worth, and that in the final analysis there is little difference between their act and thievery, except that, in this instance, the Robin Hood myth is attached to it. It is equally bad for the purchaser. The expense is probably of minor consequence, but she again senses that she has encouraged something which in itself is not good, and she also knows down deep inside that perhaps her more honest feeling is not one of generosity, but, rather, is one of self-satisfaction because in this way she has unburdened herself to a slight degree of the feeling of responsibility that accompanies being a little more fortunate than the next fellow.

Again, the blame does not rest on the man or woman in the hospital, any more than it rests on the weavers whose work you saw the other day. The fault lies solely with the teachers, and those who trained and employed the teachers. The crafts are not lost, time is still on our side, and if we look beyond—such a little way beyond—our immediate limits, we can uncover craftsmanship which is almost unsurpassed. Materials may have changed, we may not be able to weave the fine linen of ancient Egypt today, but the essential knowledge of the basic crafts still exists, and the possibilities in working with today's materials are practically limitless. To me, the ignorance on the part of many handweavers is hard to excuse. The knowledge has been preserved throughout the world for centuries without number, and although the custodianship of that knowledge has, to a large degree, passed into the hands of the power loom people, it is still available to us today, and it has been enriched by what the power looms have contributed to it. I cannot stomach the handweaver who thinks he is something special because he does it by hand! Handweaving can be beautiful, far more beautiful, I think, than anything yet done by a machine, but the mere doing of it by hand does not make it beautiful. Machines cannot duplicate the beauty of the brocades from Damascus, and yet, if something can be done better by machine, by all means we should let the machine do it! The planning, the respect for and knowledge of the tools and materials, the historical aspect of the craft, the human element, all these things contribute to the beauty of the woven article. All this the power loom people know, and the handweavers will have to recognize, if they are going to do good weaving.

Were the standards to be raised, the individual pursuing

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the craft would gain immeasurably. He would have a purpose which under the present standards he lacks, and he would be constantly striving to improve his technique. The institution would gain, because the integrity would be beyond question, and the sales would be larger because of the quality of the products. Mrs. So-and-So would buy something because she really wanted it. Since she bought it because she really wanted it, it would remain in her home, a proud example of what "her" hospital was capable of producing

This has completely run away with itself, but now you know how I feel about quality vs. charity!

Chasey

Finishing Handwoven Materials

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After mending and improving the weave as much as possible you are ready for scouring and fulling. At this point we feel that we should go into some detail in order to be sure that you know what fulling is and why it is done. Some people speak of fulling or felting as though they were the same thing. While you may get a little felting in the operation of fulling you certainly do not full with the idea of felting. Fulling means just what the word implies—to bring the threads together until they touch—to fill the space.