

Sampling is the path from A to Z

For most of us, weaving is a hobby. We do not spend all our time at the loom. We also volunteer, demonstrate spinning and weaving, take care of our family and friends, go to work, garden, and pursue other interests. With so many activities filling our busy lives, there's only so much time to weave.

This is why the projects in *Handwoven* are such a gift. You don't have to figure anything out. The designer has done it all for you, and all you have to do is warp and weave. You also know when you begin weaving what your end product is going to be like. When you follow project instructions, you're almost always guaranteed success, leaving you free to enjoy your time at the loom and the fabric of your labors.

I'm not sure why, but historically weavers have looked down on what is sometimes referred to as "cookbook weaving." This is strange to me. I don't understand why it is fully acceptable to follow a knitting pattern stitch by stitch, but when it comes to weaving we're expected to be designers, too. To me, what matters is that we *weave*; it isn't important whether we use a pattern by someone else or make up our own.

Sometimes you have to alter the project instructions. You might see a set of dish towels in the magazine but need them in a different color. Now you're tiptoeing into designing. You're using the basic instructions as your beginning point but modifying them to suit your needs—much like using a knitting pattern but changing the colors or yarn. Modifying a project allows you to achieve what you want without having to "do it all." You save time, eliminate failures, maximize success.

Other times, though, you have something in mind and you can't find a project very close to it. You have to create it on your own. It's still a good idea to find instructions for a project that is at least a little bit similar to help you speed up the process, like one that uses the same yarn in a similar weave structure so you can check the sett, shrinkage, and get an idea of its drape.

Once you're on the path to designing, I'm convinced that the only way to get to the vision you have in your mind is to do a sample (or two, or more!). Would you ever start a knitting

project—especially if you are using a substitute yarn—without first doing a stitch gauge?


Weavers are sampling adverse! I say, "Get over it." The argument I most often hear against sampling is that it wastes time and materials. No doubt about it, sampling takes time—and yarn. But is it not better to sample and succeed than not sample and fail? Be honest. How many projects are there in the reject box you keep under the bed? What's a bigger waste, a sample that didn't work or the failed blanket?

For me, sampling is the path from A to Z. Through samples I find the solution to design problems. It's also where my greatest weaving fun lies. Sampling, like a good mystery novel, is full of suspense. Seeking the answer to "What if?" keeps me turning the pages.

The idea for the set of samples shown here came from a magazine photo of a pillow. Among the weft colors I tried were palettes from *Handwoven's* Fabric Forecast for Fall/Winter '07-'08. Altogether, I wove five samples before choosing the colors I used for the pillow (see *Handwoven*, May/June 2007 pages 64–67). An additional benefit is that as I wove, other color combinations gave me new ideas for future projects.

If you are a weaver who loves throwing the shuttle and following the project instructions pick by pick,

I hope you'll embrace doing that with enthusiasm and without apology. Projects with explicit instructions allow you to forego sampling . . . and weave! There is nothing wrong with this; there's actually a lot right with it, especially if it keeps you weaving.

If, however, you are the kind of weaver who wants to make up your own designs or use the project instructions as stepping stones to get there, then sampling is something you gotta do. The only way to get to the vision you have in your mind is through trial and error—*sampling*. 



Five samples helped determine the color and structure for these pillows.

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