

Linda Ligon: Why I love to weave (or, Don't try this at home...)

I've always been enchanted by doubleweave and all the clever tricks you can do with it. Cloth twice as wide as your loom! Pleats! Pockets! Tubes! You can make tubes!

I was messing around with a warp on my loom while working on a doubleweave book manuscript by Jennifer Moore that Interweave will publish in 2010. One thought led to another, and I decided to weave a little pillow. I'm going to tell you how I did it, and I'm going to tell you right up front: this is not how you should do it.

First, I wove a little hem on the top layer only, leaving the bottom layer unwoven. This I would turn under later and stitch in place, enclosing the unwoven warp threads within it. Then I changed layers, bringing the lower layer to the top.

Next, I wove a pocket the full width of the warp and about an inch and a half tall. Into this pocket, I inserted a length of fat piping—two inches in diameter it was. Then I closed the pocket. This formed the bottom edge of my pillow.

I proceeded to weave a tube a little longer than my fourteen-inch pillow form. At this point, you might be thinking, "How is she going to get her pillow form into that tube? She forgot to leave a slit on the side." Good question. But I didn't forget. I had delusions.

I loosened the tension on my warp, pulling it forward through the heddles and reed. And then, Dear Reader, I treadled to separate the two layers and took my pillow form and stuffed that sucker into the tube. Now try to imagine it. On my loom, there are maybe ten inches between the beater and the breast beam. I have crammed a fourteen-inch-square lump into the tube I've just woven. I am struggling to re-tension my warp so I can close the tube by weaving to join the layers. I am winding a whole pillow forward over the breast beam. It is like wrestling a small hippopotamus with a handful of shuttles. (Did I remember to mention that I'm weaving log cabin so I'm using two shuttles?)

Well, eventually I got the monstrous wad under control and, with the aid of a tapestry beater and much vigor, closed the tube, wove another little pocket for the final strip of piping, and wove the end hem. And then I cut the whole thing off my loom and laughed and laughed.



Doubleweave pillow (in front) and pillow from Morocco (behind).

That is why I still love to weave, after some forty years. I can respect the limits of my loom and weave lovely cloth, or I can defy the rules and weave a funky pillow that, magically, has no seams whatsoever. It's why I still love working on this magazine after thirty years, too. I can think back on the shared experience and wisdom of literally hundreds of contributors, and take from them what I choose. I can think to myself, "I would never make that!" or I can think "I wish I had thought of that." I can look to better designers than I for color combinations, weave structures, and finishing details, or I can "improve" on what I see to suit my own taste or whim.

Humans have been devising ways to interlace thread to make fabric for eons, and the range of invention is mind-boggling. If I'm still weaving thirty years from now (let's see—at 96—why not?) I won't have scratched the surface of what's possible.

I look at the Moroccan pillow that was my color inspiration next to my little one and think of the elegant complexity of the former—all accomplished with intricate manually picked-up patterns on a primitive frame loom—and the latter, accomplished by going ape on a contemporary floor loom, complete with treadles, heddles, and shafts. All I can think is, "What next?"

(In case you were wondering: I handstitched the hems, threw the whole thing in the washing machine, and then dried it and dried it and dried it. The pillow casing, woven of Harrisville Shetland at 10 epi and ppi, shrank to fit the pillow. I may or may not embroider a reminder to myself on it: "Leave a slit, dummy".) 