

Shuttle-Craft Bulletins: Weaving with Linen

Mary stated in the December 1930 and March 1932 Shuttlecraft Bulletin issues that weaving with linen was on the minds of many Guild members.

In 1930, Mary systematically responded to questions about linen and using it to weave towels; the difficulties in using it; how much would be needed for towels; what weaves were most satisfactory; what about color and how should hand-woven linens be finished.

Linen has no stretch and is easier to work with if kept damp. Mary would wrap the warp beam in a damp cloth for 24 hours before weaving and dampen the warp with a sponge from time to time while weaving. She recommended releasing the warp tension while not weaving and to use several light blows to pack in the weft. She also specified to take care to not let the warp draw in to avoid broken selvedge threads.

For linen towels she recommended huck, Ms and Os, Bronson, Summer and Winter and crackle weave structures, as well as twill, particularly birds' eye and goose eye twills. As far as color, she wrote that linen is resistant to color and unless a commercially dyed linen is available, it is best to stick to the natural or bleached options.

As far as finishing linen woven towels, she gave detailed instructions to soak the woven piece several hours, allow it to hang until it stops dripping and then start pressing until it is dry. This is a big investment in time, but she wrote that the change that results from this treatment is well worth it. Handwoven linen pieces are known to become softer and more attractive with repeated washings. Drying the linen in the dryer is not recommended to extend the life of the piece. Mary did not write this last recommendation, but it is what I have been told.

Mary recommended proportions for woven towels in the 1930 issue. For example, guest towels should be 16" x 26", while large towels should be 20" x 32" in size. The best way to plan them is to cut a paper pattern to size, marking off the hem and border to see if the size works.

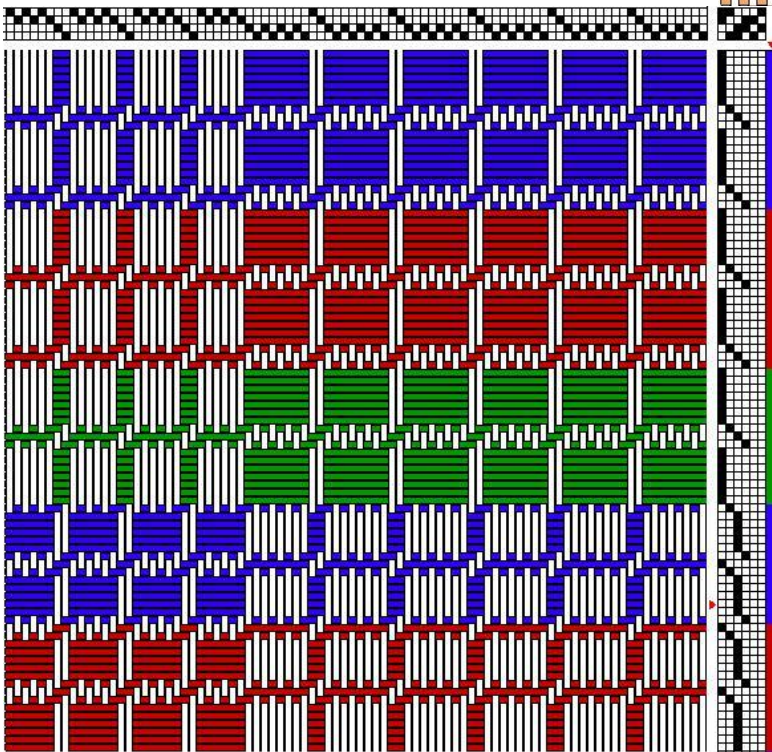
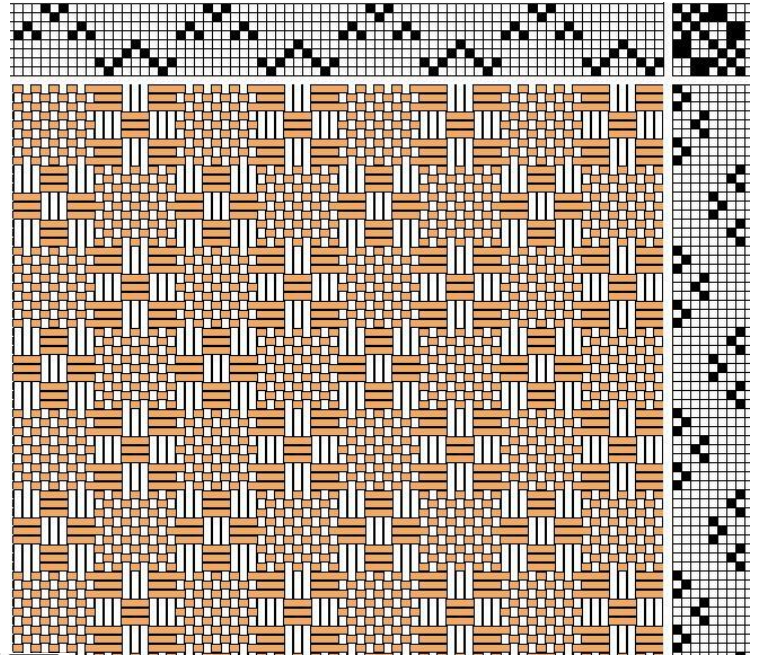
Mary wrote in 1932 that six factors contribute in varying degree to the success of a piece. They are listed here.

The use of the fabric may determine the importance of one of these over another. For example, the design of the figure may be more important in a coverlet woven in overshot, while for upholstery fabric, color may have more weight in the planning. Mary wrote that good workmanship applies to all weaving and should be taken for granted.

Using linen as the weaving material has characteristics that must be considered: it lacks elasticity but has a cool firm hand and beautiful sheen. Mary described 2 classes of linen: 1. round or ply and, 2. singles or line linen. Round linen is made up of several strands twisted together, while line linen is a single strand, drawn out and slightly twisted. Fabrics woven in line linen are softer than those done in plied. Winding on the warp with consistent tension and getting the correct sett will help. If line linen is used as warp it should be dressed or sized and kept damp during warping and weaving, as she wrote earlier in 1930.

1. *Pattern, in the sense of figure*
2. *Design, in shape and dimension*
3. *Color*
4. *Texture*
5. *Workmanship*
6. *Finish*

Mary included a few weaving drafts for linen, to include a spot Bronson weave, bird's eye twill and a lace pattern.



She also provided instruction on weaving table linens with an overshot border, using Monk's Belt or a two-block pattern such as Sugar Loaf or Window Sash. This draft is found in Mary's book: *The Shuttle-Craft Book of American Hand-Weaving* and shown here in 3 colors.

Sugar loaf or Window sash overshot