

## *The Evolution of the Multilayer Cloth Designs*

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Ever since I wove and exhibited the first generation of my multilayer designs, I have been asked where I got the idea for this technique. The truth is, inspiration comes from unexpected sources, and the outcome of inspiration doesn't necessarily coincide with the original concept. So, here's the story behind the multilayer cloth.

I participate in an Internet-based discussion group made up of weavers from all over the world. The discussions are conducted via email

In late 1999, one of the members of the group reported having attended a lecture about the work of the Nuno Studios weavers. Nuno Studios is one of Japan's foremost textile think-tanks, and the textiles they produce are cutting-edge and very exciting. I owe a great debt of gratitude to Jane Eisenstein, who posted her report!

Jane said she had been fascinated by a shawl worn by one of the guests of honor. At that time, the discussion group was limited to text-only messages. So instead of a picture, Jane used standard keyboard symbols to describe the shawl.

Here's an approximation of her description. "The cloth is woven in blocks. Some of the blocks are plain weave, some float as a group from one woven block to the next, either jumping over or slipping under one another. It looked sort of like this:"

+   -   +   /   +  
-   +   /   +   -  
+   /   +   -   +

In her message, Jane used a plus sign to represent a block that is woven, a vertical bar to indicate a lengthwise (warp) float, and a minus sign to indicate a widthwise (weft) float.

Well, this description got my brain cells activated and I decided I just had to give it a try.

I design all my cloth on a computer, and the computer then tells the loom what to do next. But I had to get what was simmering in my imagination onto the computer before I could weave anything. My

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husband can attest that the air around the computer was blue for several days as I tried to get my idea into weavable form.

My first design was a two-layer cloth woven in grey and natural white Merino wool. I managed to convince the computer to accept two different designs. In one, the two layers changed places in a diagonal line, first the white on top of the grey, then the gray on top of the white. You'll see some two-layer scarves in my collection that use a similar scheme. In the second design, the layers changed places in large squares. Again, I have some two-layer scarves that use this type of arrangement of blocks, in somewhat smaller form.

In the Spring of 2000, I entered one of these shawls into an event at the Conference of Northern California Handweavers. Jack Lenor Larson did a critique of all the pieces entered in this event, and was fascinated with my shawl. He said it wasn't true double-cloth, but rather two half-cloths! Paul O'Connor (the god of double-weave) says the cloth follows the basic rule of double cloth, because it has two separate sets of warps and wefts: warp A only weaves with weft A, while warp B only weaves with weft B, never A with B.

Over the next year, I developed several more variations on the design, playing with different ways to interlace the two layers. Pretty soon, I was feeling pretty cocky about having conquered two layers, and decided to tackle three layers. Air around computer blue again for a while... By the way, I still hadn't seen the original cloth from Nuno Studios.

In 2002, one of my three-layer scarves was entered in an exhibit at Convergence, the biennial conference of the Handweavers Guild of America, and won both a second prize and the coveted HGA award. At that same conference, when touring the various pre-conference workshops and admiring what each class had produced, I saw a book of fabric swatches collected by Yoshiko Wada (textile expert and author of *Memory on Cloth: Shibori Now*, among other books). Among these swatches was the original! I recognized it at once from Jane's description.

Oddly enough, although the original is structurally the same as mine, it is quite different in character. In the original, both layers are natural white, where I use color to help differentiate the layers. Also, the cloth is allowed to move a lot during the final wet finishing, so that the woven blocks form oval shapes and the floats become felted together into almost rope-like groups — a very organic look. By contrast, I go to great lengths to keep the rectilinear shape of the blocks, to retain an architectural feel to the cloth. It just goes to show that our imagination can take us on a journey far, far distant from the spark that started the trip.

Since then, these designs have won more prizes for me. At Convergence 2004, a small framed three-layer piece won another HGA award, and a 5-yard length of cloth was awarded first place in the Yardage exhibit. The latter has two layers that shrink during finishing, and one that does not, so it has to twist and distort around its now-smaller neighbors.

It is the intersection of the layers that both ties the layers together and forms the graphic design. So far, I have created nine different two-layer designs, and seven different three-layer designs. Do I see four layers on the design horizon? Hmmm...