

The Magic Meditation Shawl by Janet Phillips



I was recently asked to weave a meditation shawl. It is always exciting to receive a commission but this one turned into an imaginative and emotional experience.

I had a call from an American lady who lived nearby to me. Her sister and brother-in-law had bought one of my multicoloured Shetland wool sofa throws when they were visiting England a few years ago. This blanket had taken pride of place in their home and had even become their 'alchemy' as good things had deepened within their marriage since its introduction to their home!

As a celebration of their life together the brother-in-law wanted to buy his wife a meditation shawl. It had to be hand woven by me because my weaving had unique magic powers of harmony and love. The brief for the commission was 'a celebration of life - and a piece that reflects the colours of the earth but predominantly dusty pink'.

Initially I was daunted with the depth of feeling that was expected to emit from the piece and yet I felt confident that the very simple, straightforward essence of weaving would bring out the required grace.

Silk seemed the appropriate fibre. Light and warm. I had some Shantung silk (10/1) which I had used before for scarves, which my local client particularly liked. It was a spun silk with a rough fluffy finish to it. In the raw it was very matt but it dyed beautifully and finished with a delicate sheen. It was not a flashy, smooth, rich silk, more a thread of the earth.

Good records of past dyeing enabled me to assemble a range of colours that reflected the essence of the earth. Muted yellows, greens, brown and greys. Very little blue but pinks in a wide range of dustiness. I used acid dyes and fibre reactive dyes to achieve the required colours.

I decided to make the warp in five bold panels, depicting the five ages of life. In simple terms :- childhood, youth, young adult, middle aged adult and elderly adult. I warped the five warps separately, laid each one in a long gutter and random dyed them with Fibre Reactive dyes. I wanted the length of each panel to undulate and move with the different experiences of life.

The five panels were separated by four ends of solid colour.

The weave structure was 1/3 twill and 3/1 twill in narrow vertical blocks. (20 ends wide by 32 picks deep). These two weaves create warp dominated and weft dominated areas. It requires eight shafts to weave them in combination as a chequerboard. The two weaves were joined together on opposite lifts to ensure that there were no ugly long floats in warp or weft at the joins. The weft was to be a deep dusty pink. One block was 32 picks of solid pink. The next block had narrow bands of the earth colours woven across in the following proportions:- 4 picks colour, 10 picks dusty pink, 4 picks colour, 10 picks dusty pink, 4 picks colour (32 picks in total). There were 5 earth colours, which were each used in rotation. The sett of the cloth was 28 ends and picks per inch.

Weaving was a joy - not one break of warp.

The warp in loom measured 47". I had half inch selvages which were threaded double in the heddle and double in the reed. I used a temple to ensure the width remained straight. I felt I was weaving a rainbow. The solid coloured wefts changed in tone, hue and depth as they crossed the five panels and interchanged between the warp dominated and weft dominated blocks. Each section creating a myriad of colour combinations of glory and grace.

I wove 84" in loom to ensure that there was plenty of length to wrap around the meditator. The fringe was finished as small tight twists and then the piece was hand washed, spun dried and ironed while still damp. The shrinkage in warp and weft was 5%.

The finished piece was practical and alluring. I wove two lengths - similar yet different for my client to choose her favoured one. The response from the States was enthusiastic initially but six months later the news came back across the Atlantic that the magic was working - Love and Harmony was felt when the shawl was worn!!!

Weave

	x	x	x					x	t 8
x	x	x		x					
x	x		x		x				
x		x	x					x	t 8
	x			x	x			x	
		x		x		x	x	x	
x				x	x	x			
	t 5			t 5					

								x	8
							x		7
					x				6
				x					5
			x						4
		x							3
	x								2
x									1
	t 5			t 5					

Treading

t 8												•	
t 8							•					•	•
						•							
8		x	x	x									x
7	x	x	x			x							
6	x	x		x			x						
5	x		x	x						x			
4		x				x	x					x	
3			x			x			x	x		x	
2				x			x	x	x	x			
1	x					x	x	x					

Threading

Pedal tie-up

Key: t5 = repeat 5 times
 t8 = repeat 8 times
 x in weave diagram and pedal tie up = warp end/shaft raised