

Weave Classic Crackle & More by Susan Wilson*

Reviewed by Sandra Hutton, Ph.D.

This masterly work by Susan Wilson traces the roots of crackle (*jämtlandsväv*) in Sweden and its adoption, revisions, and renaming in North America in the early 20th century. Wilson applies the same organizational and logical skills demonstrated as a workshop leader to help the reader of her book understand, design, and weave the crackle weave structure.

Wilson takes the time to describe the characteristics of crackle and how it is similar to and different from other weaves such as overshot and summer and winter. She clearly describes units, blocks, incidentals, and normal tieups and treadlings. She defines the differences between “tabby” picks as used in overshot, summer and winter, and traditional crackle and “ground” picks as used in classic crackle. Susan relates how she got hooked on studying crackle by a 1961 statement by Harriet Tidball who described classic crackle’s chief design advantage as the color blending and gentle movement of the dominant color from block to block according to the pattern the weaver desires. She studied classic crackle in depth and her studies resulted in her achieving the Master level Certificate of Excellence from the Handweavers Guild of America.

Wilson shares how she designs by usually starting with a profile draft. She leads the reader through wonderful color illustrations demonstrating the power of designing and weaving with one warp and three possible wefts (i.e., four colors). The reader is exposed to possible treadling variations including twill (point, rosepath, Ms & Ws, advancing), overshot, summer and winter, lace, and numerous other treadling possibilities useful when weaving crackle.

Polychrome is defined as a weft or treadling effect whereby two or more (or more than two) colors interact. Wilson wisely sidesteps the controversy about whether the “poly” in polychrome refers to two plus or three plus colors. She devotes a full chapter to treadling crackle with two, three, or four colors woven side by side which create a polychrome effect due to the unique structure of crackle. The ability to blend colors with the classic crackle structure explains Susan’s general interest in the study of color. Wilson addresses the design process throughout the book and demonstrates the differences between traditional crackle as woven in Sweden treadled overshot (with tabby) versus classic crackle which is woven as drawn in (“tromp as writ” or “as threaded”).

Susan opens possibilities of weaving crackle on more than four shafts. When weaving on more than four shafts, crackle retains the pattern and background blocks and introduces a third element she calls “background” blocks providing a plain weave, or nearly plain weave, background for the familiar blocks of four shaft crackle. What was known as background blocks in four shaft crackle she terms “reverse pattern” blocks in her discussion of eight shaft crackle. It is unfortunate that the name given for a specific block on four shaft crackle needed to be changed in the description of multishaft crackle.

Wilson develops threading keys for eight shaft crackle and discusses differences in the use of incidentals for skipped blocks in crackle on more than four shafts. She provides a variety of tieups and treadling draft patterns for crackle on multiple shafts for both traditional and classic crackle. On page 83, it would have been helpful to include a repeat of tieups b and c or at least refer the reader to the tieups on page 72. On page 72, it would have been helpful to clearly state that these three tieups would be used repeatedly throughout illustrations in the remainder of the book. This section of the book is enticing for weavers with multiple shaft and computer assisted looms.

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