

Fabulous Rag Rugs from Simple Frames

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Rugmaker's Handbook No. 2

Fabulous Rag Rugs
from Simple Frames

*written and illustrated by,
Master Rugmaker
Diana Blake Gray*

Rafter-four Designs
Cocolalla, Idaho

Rugmaker's Handbook No. 2 Fabulous Rag Rugs from Simple Frames

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Dedication

To my grandmother,
Grace Maria Converse Blake (1905-2001),
a magnificent teacher with the soul of an artist.
With love.

Contents

Preface *xiii*

How to Use This Book *xvii*

Introduction: *Frame Made Rag Rugs in Context*..... 1

PART I: NON-TENSIONING METHODS USING A PEGGED FRAME

Chapter 1: Making and Warping the Frame 2

 Preparing the warp

 Putting the warp on the frame

 Warping an old Frame

Chapter 2: Knotted Shag Rugs 7

Knotted shag rug technique

 Knotting

 Removing from the frame

 Knots too loosely packed

 Making a rug without a nap

 Working with very light or slick fabrics

 Adding extra fringe to the sides of the rug

 Joining small sections to make a large rug

High-Speed Knotted Shag Rugs

 A note to weavers using rug looms

Chapter 3: Those Darned Rugs.....	20
How to avoid “waisting”	
Basic Darned Rug Technique	
Worked one row at a time	
Worked back-and-forth	
Figure-8 Darned Rug	
Fine points of Darned Rugs	
Darning continuously back-and-forth in rows	
To change strip in middle of a row	
Removing the rug from the frame	
Finishing the rug	
Joining darned sections to make a large rug	
Making large darned rugs in a single section	
Chapter 4: Amish Knot Rugs.....	33
FrameAmish knot technique	
Fine points of Amish knot rugs	
Working continuously back and forth with the Amish knot	
Removing the rug from frame	
Finishing the rug	
Insetting a design in an Amish knot rug	
Seed Corn Rugs	
Chapter 5: Bess Chet Rugs.....	40
Basic Bess Chet technique	
The fine points of the Bess Chet rug	
Making a reversible rug	
Raised Bess Chet rugs	
Tambour Bess Chet Technique	
Chapter 6: Twined Rugs	49
Basic Twining	
Needlewoven (Shortcut Twining Worked Straight)	
Chapter 7: Locker Hooking	56
Locker hooking technique adapted for frames	
The fine points of locker hooking	

Chapter 8: Advanced Techniques with Non-tensioning Methods	64
Making large rugs in a single section	
Weaving warp strands back into the rug	
Combining non-tensioning techniques	
Inlays	
Free Standing Patterns, the Padula duck, the spider mum, the calico rainbow	
Freeform shaping of rugs	
Shaping three dimensional projects	
 Chapter 9: Non-tensioning Methods Worked Vertically	 77
Flat Wrap	
The fine points of the flat wrap	
Figure-Eight Wrap	
Two-Strand Figure-Eight Wrap	

**PART II:
NON-TENSIONING METHODS
USING A BI-DIRECTIONAL WARP**

Chapter 10: Modified Taaniko and Soumak	86
Creating the frame and bi-directional warp	
Modified Soumak	
Working patterns into the rug	
Modified Taaniko	
Using multiple strands	
 Chapter 11: Rya Knotting on a Bi-directional warp	 93
 Chapter 12: Modified Hooked Rugs	 98
Hooking technique for frames	
Using the anchored loop technique for rugs	

**PART III:
WEAVING TECHNIQUES
FOR USE WITH FRAMES**

- Chapter 13: Weaving on a Pegged Frame 101**
Using a pegged frame as a “walking frame”
Method for weaving longer projects
What do I do with the side pegs?
Using combinations of techniques to avoid tension problems
- Chapter 14: Straight Weaving on a Flat Frame 109**
Constructing and preparing a flat frame for weaving
Fabrics used for weaving on flat frames
Straight weaving
For a fringed end or side
For a finished end or side
For a bound edge
Making a rug longer than your frame
Diagonal weaving
Simple twill and tabby patterns
Using fabric and yarn together
- Chapter 15: Frame Braids 118**
Frame wrapping
Creating a frame braid
For a finished end
- Chapter 16: Wagon Wheel Rugs in
Round and Oval Shapes 123**
Round rug technique
Adding warp strands
The fine points of wagon wheel rugs
Making an oval wagon wheel rug

**PART IV:
WEIRD AND WONDERFUL WARPS**

- Chapter 17: Twisted Warp Techniques 130**
Using a flat frame with twisted warps
Using a Pegged Frame
Using a Hanging Frame
- Chapter 18: Spider Web Warp 140**
Creating square and rectangular warps
- Chapter 19: The “Fifth Stick” Frame 145**
Easy tension control for tied warps
- Chapter 20: Suspended Warps on Pegged Frames 149**
Creating a ¼-inch spacing with pegs on one-inch centers
- Chapter 21: The Cheater’s Warp**
Using fabric for a one-piece warp
Attaching fabric to straight frames
The fine points of the cheater’s warp
Making odd-shaped rugs
Using the cheater’s warp with light fabrics on a hanging frame
- Chapter 22: Scroll Frame Warps 158**
One-way continuous warp
Reversing a continuous warp

PART V: HANDBOOK

Tools Needed in Addition to a Frame	163
Lacing needles, locker hooks, cutting tools, basic sewing tools, folding tools	
Tips for Handling Large Frames	165
Fabric Selection and Preparation	166
Light woven cottons, single-knit fabrics, heavier and lighter knits, wool fabrics, novelty fabrics, denim, canvas and other heavy cotton fabrics	
Estimating Fabric Consumption	170
Tearing vs. Cutting Fabrics	171
Joining Fabric Strips for Rug Making	172
Overlapping bias joint, regular bias joint, no-sew ways to add strip or change colors, the bow tie joint	
Spinning Warp or Weft Strips	175
Double-folding Warp and Weft strip	176
Triple-folding Strips for Flat Profile Rugs.....	179
Using Alternate Materials for Rugs	179
Lacing Rug Sections Together	181
Using a “Pinned” Frame	185
A Miscellany about Frames.....	187
Caring for Frame Rugs	189
Key to the Rugs on the Covers	191
Afterword	193
About the Author	195

Preface

I receive dozens of letters each year, which read something like this. “I really want to weave a rag rug but I can’t afford (or don’t have room for) a loom. Can I make one on a frame?” It is for those folks that this book is written. Not only can a wonderful rag rug be woven on a frame, but there are many types of fabulous rugs that can be made on a frame that just can’t be made on a loom. I know that statement will seem like heresy to many dedicated weavers, but it is true.

It’s not that I don’t love weaving on a loom. In fact, weaving was the first formal textile training that I had when I was still a teenager. What I came to realize though is that a frame and a loom are two completely different tools and what works on one of them doesn’t necessarily work on the other. So if you have ever suffered from “loom-envy,” you can now approach rug making without apology, knowing that with a simple frame, you can make rugs that *can’t* be made on a loom.

This is the first book to treat the frame as a distinct tool and explore the range of its potential. A frame is not just a pseudo-loom, nor should it be regarded as a substitute for a loom. It was the precursor of the loom, of course, and with the advances in weaving in the past centuries, the basic frame—and its uses—got lost along the way.

Most of the techniques here have never appeared in print but I won’t claim to have invented them. Considering the vast pre-historic use of frames for textile construction, it is much more likely that I’ve simply rediscovered these methods. In developing the techniques in this book, I strove to apply the same logic in solving the same problems that faced ancient peoples all over the world. The result is a whole range of techniques, some so intuitive as to have been undoubtedly worked in ages past. Others are the result of the cross-pollination from other textile and rug making traditions.

Because the number of rug making methods appropriate for a frame is quite large—and there are limits to the size of the book—I didn't attempt to cover the so-called “off-loom weaving” methods that have already been heavily documented. Instead this book focuses on the frame methods that are new to modern fiber artists.

If you are interested in such off-loom techniques as back strap weaving or card weaving, there are many books available. If you are interested in weaving rugs on a loom, I can't recommend any books more highly than those of Peter Collingwood and, of course, for a full exploration of twined rugs, Bobbi Irwin's book “*Twined Rugs*” (Krause Publications, 2000) is the one you want.

On the other hand, if you are interested in exploring some new (ancient) techniques for making rugs, or you just want to put grandma's rug frame to use, this is just the book for you.

Acknowledgements

I want to thank everyone who has been so patient waiting for this book to reach completion. Your reminders and gentle nagging kept the project alive when so many others demanded attention. I hope the four years has been worth the wait.

I couldn't write a book about weaving in any form without thanks to Peter Strauss, who taught me to weave nearly forty years ago. His generosity in sharing the skills handed down through the hundreds of years of his family's weaving profession had a profound effect on this impressionable teenager. His dictum "Hand made should never look home-made" has guided my own work and been passed on to my students.

Finally, my thanks to Peter Collingwood in England for showing me that being a textile structuralist is at least a *respectable* form of insanity.

How to Use This Book

This isn't a "craft" book—instead it is a handbook for the textile explorer. You won't find instructions to make just one rug. Instead this book is a teaching tool and reference. You'll learn how to do each technique and then make it your own with color, design and variations. You'll probably find one or two of the rug methods are more attractive than the others and want to specialize and explore those methods yourself. Each technique has a world of possibilities.

Because this handbook includes so many different methods, it has the potential to be overwhelming to a first-time rug maker. Nearly all of the techniques can be done by a beginner, and for those that are more complex, I've suggested another method to start with as a preliminary step to understanding the process.

This also isn't a book about weaving as such. You won't find the weaver's jargon used very often—although I do refer to the structural strands of the rugs as "warp." You do not need any particular textile experience to make these rugs.

There are five parts of the book. In each of the first four, rug making techniques are organized by the characteristics of the method (tensioning or non-tensioning), the type of frame, and the style of the warping. You do not need to begin in Part I and work progressively forward (although the easiest of the techniques are there). If you are more interested in making a Wagon Wheel rug for example, begin with Part II instead.

The parts of the book include:

- **Part I: Non-tensioning Methods Using a Pegged Frame.** Although these non-woven rugs can be made on any type of frame, pegged frames are used for the beginning rug maker, since the warp spacing is fixed by the pegs. These techniques use the pegs on only two sides of the frame, and many are simple enough for children to work.
- **Part II: Non-tensioning Methods Using a Bi-directional Warp.** These non-woven structures use pegs on all four sides of a frame.
- **Part III: Weaving Techniques for Use with Frames.** These are woven rugs, which are adapted to several types of frames, for those who do want to weave a rug—including round and oval rugs.
- **Part IV: Weird and Wonderful Warps.** The textile explorer will have a lot of fun with these techniques from spider web warps to the cheater's warp.
- **Part V. Handbook.** This is the general reference section with information that applies to all of the rugs. It is suggested that you look through the Handbook before you begin on any of the rugs, just to get an idea of the information that is available there.

The rugs in this book are an all-fabric construction making them very strong, thick and durable. However, they can also be adapted to other materials (yarn, cord, etc.) so if you don't have the time to devote to fabric preparation, you can still make most of these rugs. The Handbook section includes a discussion of appropriate substitutions of materials.