

# ARTIST SPOTLIGHT

## Traudi Bestler



What began with a simple potholder loom is taking Traudi Bestler all the way to Italy next summer, making it safe to say – pardon the pun – that she is truly a dyed in the wool weaver.

Traudi's mother and grandmother were needle workers and started Traudi embroidering at an early age (she thinks it was just to keep her out of their stuff). Since then, she's had threads of one form or another in her hands. Yet it was a small square potholder loom and the tidy over-and-under process of it that sparked Traudi's lifelong passion of weaving. It is that joy and love that she so effectively shares with her students each week in the fiber studio. (Ask any photography student next door; those weavers have FUN!)

"Weaving is rhythmically satisfying," Traudi explains. "We really have to get into both sides of our brain. In the planning phase, we need to be creative and get an idea started. Then we have to be very mathematical to set up the looms. It taxes us on both sides of the brain and it's a two-handed motion. With the rhythm of weaving, you can really get into a zone. Sometimes the class goes by so quickly!" Traudi began taking classes at the



Weavers Guild of Minnesota in 1976, starting as a floor loom weaver. It wasn't long until her curiosity and adventurous spirit pulled her into other aspects of the craft, extending her proficiency to spinning wool and working with natural plant dyes. Raising two children, she soon realized that spinning and knitting were much more interruptible and chose those activities over weaving for a while.

When it was feasible, Traudi returned to weaving through Weavers Guild classes and fed her fascination by traveling to regional, national and international conferences. She was able to study with authors of favorite books, working in-depth for days with artists whose work she respected at these conferences and at the Weavers School in Coupeville, Washington, and the Siever's School of Fiber Arts in Washington Island, Wisconsin.



The weaving program began at Minnetonka Center for the Arts with an anonymous donation of six looms in the early 90s. Traudi began teaching here in 1993 and some of her first students are still weaving with her classes today! The fiber studio now has about 30 looms and solid class enrollments.

"The student loyalty is amazing!" says Traudi. "Students start as strangers then the classes turn themselves into families. They've spent hours together each week for years and now get together to do things outside of class. I love seeing that happen!"

She teaches here, at the Grand Marais North House Folk School and travels to guilds around the region and country, such as the Fiber Arts Guild of the Red River Valley in Grand Forks, North Dakota. The love of fibers perpetuates but teaching is now the highlight. Traudi lights up as she talks about her students, the joy of "watching the light bulbs go on" and how every week students amaze her with new ideas. The love goes both ways. Last year, Traudi's students here and at her other teaching venues "ganged up" on her, writing to *Handwoven* magazine in significant enough numbers to vote Traudi Bestler one of the 10 best weaving teachers in the country!

After a class last summer at the Peters Valley School of Craft in Layton, New Jersey, Traudi has added tapestry weaving to her artistic journey. Tapestry is not just a weaving that hangs on the wall. Technically, weaving is a continuous weft created by throwing the shuttle across the warp, whereas tapestry weaving has many wefts at one time traveling back and forth. You're not only creating the image but you're creating the cloth with tapestry; the two cannot be separate.

Traudi has augmented her weaving and tapestry with both a drawing and photography class at the Art Center, refining her skill with shapes, color and light. And she embraces the current trend toward computer-assisted looms which speed up calculations, increase accuracy and allow the artist spend more time weaving.

Even with the advent of technology, weaving is an ancient craft. "I enjoy history and that's one of the reasons I weave," says Traudi. "Rather than just admiring something that was done thousands of years ago, use that technique and create something new. That's what we do in our classes."

And it's that passion for weaving and history that is propelling Traudi Bestler to Italy this summer to set up a historical loom and organize a plethora of textile tools in a castle that doubles as a winery and conference center. It's an unexpected adventure for Traudi Bestler, yet a thread that was first spun in her childhood.