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# A Gathering Place at Warner Mountain Weavers

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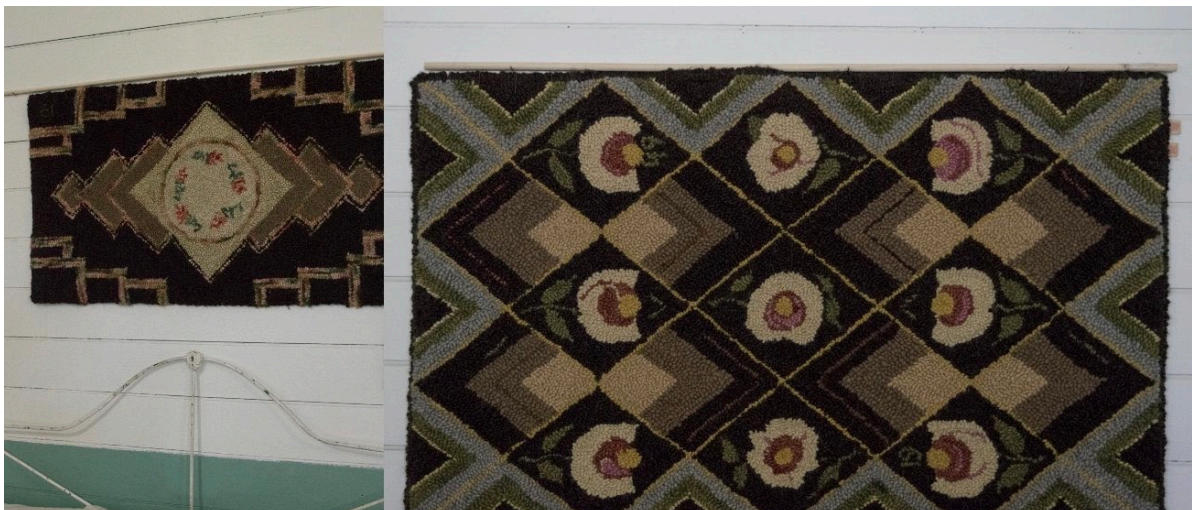
In the northeastern corner of California, the Warner Mountains run north through Modoc County into southern Oregon. To the west of these



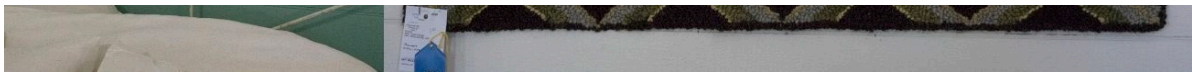
mountains is Goose Lake and to the east is Surprise Valley, the town of Cedarville, and a shop that bears the name of that range: Warner Mountain Weavers.



Located on South Main Street in Cedarville, the Warner Mountain Weavers sign hangs in front of a two-story building set back from the road. Once the Deep Creek Schoolhouse and then a Masonic Lodge, the building caught the eye of Bonnie and Richard Chase shortly after they moved to the area. “We were looking for a place out of the Bay Area to retire to and we found Cedarville,” Bonnie recalls. “I needed a place for my looms and I thought this (building) would be my studio.” Having helped her father build a house, Bonnie wasn’t intimidated by the time and labor this century-old building would ask of her. After two years of remodeling, Warner Mountain Weavers opened up as a weaving studio and showroom in 2000.







Walking through Warner Mountain Weavers twenty years later, it's apparent that the function of the space has shifted. While there are still looms warped and rugs displayed on walls, surrounding them are shelves of yarn, baskets of notions, and a second floor of roving and wool fabric. Smiling at this transition, Bonnie says, "I didn't set out to open a yarn store in Cedarville. As people started knocking on the door and coming in, I realized that if I was here, I might as well be open." Like so many niche shops, the store has become more than a business, it's now a gathering place.



Listening to Bonnie share her history, this shift from personal studio to studio and store seemed inevitable. Bonnie is a gentle, but persistent catalyst for building fiber communities. Her introduction to fiber work began in the late 1960's "I started out spinning before I did anything. My sister gave me her spinning wheel. Then, from the late '60s through the '80s, I raised sheep, natural dyed, and was a beekeeper in Washington state." To add to those skill sets, Bonnie took weaving classes at the Oregon School of Arts and Crafts in Portland. "It was a wealth of



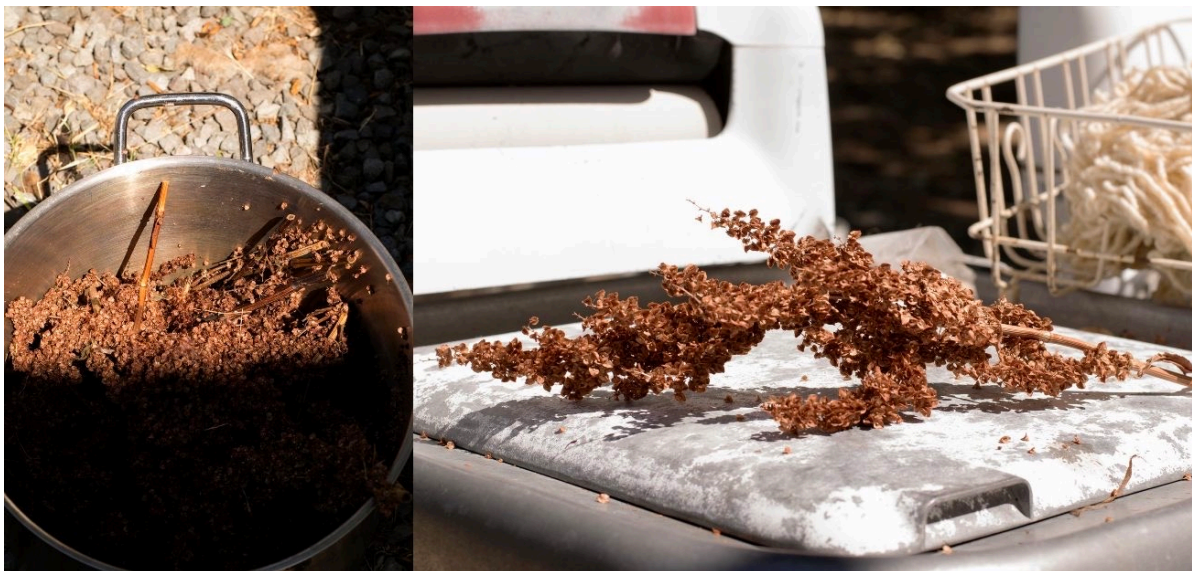
knowledge and I loved it. I bought my own loom and it just went along with raising the sheep and spinning and dyeing.”



In the mid-1970's Bonnie moved to Point Reyes Station, inspired to be in an area with so many fiber artists. While there, she helped found the cooperative Black Mountain Weavers (now Black Mountain Artisans) and worked for Dharma Trading Co in San Rafael. Her position at Dharma was contingent on learning to knit, so she took a beginning knitting class at the College of Marin. This, combined with her other fiber work skills, meant Bonnie was a trouble-shooting resource for customers. “Whenever someone had a spinning, weaving or natural dye question, they’d ask me. I ended up learning a lot from the customers. It was reciprocal. I learned a lot more about dyeing that I would’ve on my own being self-taught.”



Moving to Cedarville and having her own studio/store was a big leap from the cooperative and collective models Bonnie had been working within the Bay Area. While her studio was independent, Bonnie's interest in fostering a communal space hadn't diminished. Around the same time that Warner Mountain Weavers opened, Bonnie launched the now annual Woolgathering Festival. The idea was sparked after Bonnie attended the Trailing of the Sheep Festival in Idaho. As she recalls, "It was such a fun event that I thought, 'We could do this in Cedarville'. It's not the same, but it's a smaller version." The Woolgathering is a four to five-day event in September. The schedule varies each year but has included workshops on wool spinning, natural dyeing, and rug making as well as ranch tours and dye plant harvesting. This fall would have been the Woolgathering's 20th anniversary, but like so many events, it has been postponed till 2021.



Similar to the spaces Bonnie has contributed to, her work is not singular or isolated, but rather responsive to the plants, animals, and people she is surrounded by. Bonnie's custom line of yarn, Deep Creek Yarn, is a manifestation of this. The wool for this yarn comes from a flock of Navajo Churro sheep in Alturas, owned and shepherded by Bonnie's friend Patty Neubert. After the sheep are sheared, Bonnie gathers the wool, skirts it, separates colors, and does an initial wash to decrease processing weight before sending it to the mill to be scoured, carded, and spun. When the yarn returns, Bonnie allocates skeins to be dyed using plants from the area. Once dyed, some skeins get sold in the store, on the Fibershed Marketplace, and at fiber festivals. The rest Bonnie weaves into Fibershed



certified rugs.



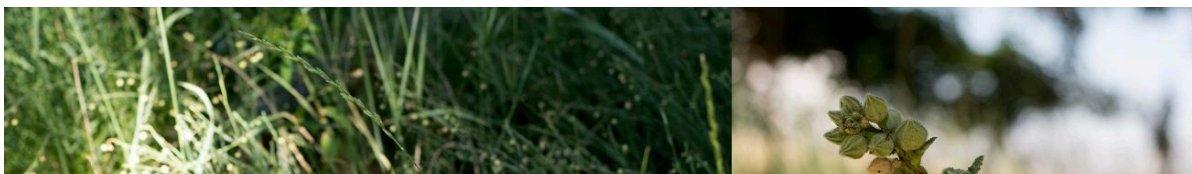
Another local yarn Bonnie collaborates on is Bare Creek Yarn. This yarn combines Rambouillet wool from Lani Estill's flock with Bonnie's dye studio. Like Deep Creek Yarn, the dye plants are all locally grown or harvested. The yarn line has developed as an extension of Lani and Bonnie's partnership and friendship. Having met years ago, their businesses now run complimentary to each other with Lani renting space at Warner Mountain Weavers for her wool goods. For Bonnie, Lani is a part of the upcoming generations of fiber producers and artisans in the area. Cross-generational learning is a guiding passion of Bonnie's: "I remember when I was younger and working at Dharma, Ida Grae was a customer. Ida Grae's book 'Nature's Colors' was like my bible. She was elderly then, but I got to talk to her and pick her brain. She was the past generation and my inspiration. We have to continue to pass it on."



Over the last twenty years, Warner Mountain Weavers have offered various opportunities for skill sharing. For years Bonnie ran an apprenticeship program where locals could learn to weave and then take on commissioned work for the shop weaving products like rugs, saddle blankets, and scarves. The mission of the workshop was “to support local artists and sheep ranchers alike”. As time went on, the seasonal and store commitments for Bonnie began to weigh her down. “I was thinking of retiring and everyone kept saying I couldn’t. So I have slowed down.” Now instead of an on-going apprenticeship program, Warner Mountain Weavers hosts workshops throughout the year as well as monthly gatherings for fiber artisans.



While Bonnie no longer owns sheep, her work still follows the seasons. The fall brings Woolgathering and fiber festivals. The winter is spent inside weaving and knitting. By spring the gardens need tending and come summer it's time to harvest plants and dye. Running through the year-round work, Bonnie laughs and says, “We came here to retire. Do we look retired?” But as she says that there is a passionate tone that reverberates through the shop and her work. It's quietly felt as dye pots simmer in the backyard of Warner Mountain Weavers, surrounded by plants in various stages of bloom and the Warner Mountains to the west.







Warner Mountain Weavers can be found online at [warnermtnweavers.com](http://warnermtnweavers.com). Their site features the current shop hours and COVID-19 restrictions as well as a newly launched webstore. Deep Creek and Bare Creek yarns are also available through the Fibershed Marketplace.

