

TO WEAVE

THE SWEDISH WAY

New Techniques
and Modern
Projects





To Weave

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Arianna Funk

Miriam Parkman

TO WEAVE— THE SWEDISH WAY

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Arianna Funk
Miriam Parkman

PHOTOGRAPHY: Campher – Larsson & Ankarfyr


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For a long time we each harbored our own secret dream of writing a weaving book, and when we finally confided in each other, it seemed obvious that we should write one together. We attended the same weaving school, sat next to each other for years in the same studio, and weave with the same kind of loom. But what—and more importantly, how—we weave as professional weavers is completely different. There is more than one way to weave, perfection isn't required, and there aren't any rules about which techniques you should use. However, there are some ways of going about the weaving process that are commonly accepted, because they are logical and ensure a good result. In your own weaving practice, you'll learn from many teachers and role models, and you can adopt the way one of them threads their heddles and the way another beams on in order to create fantastic works from your own brain.

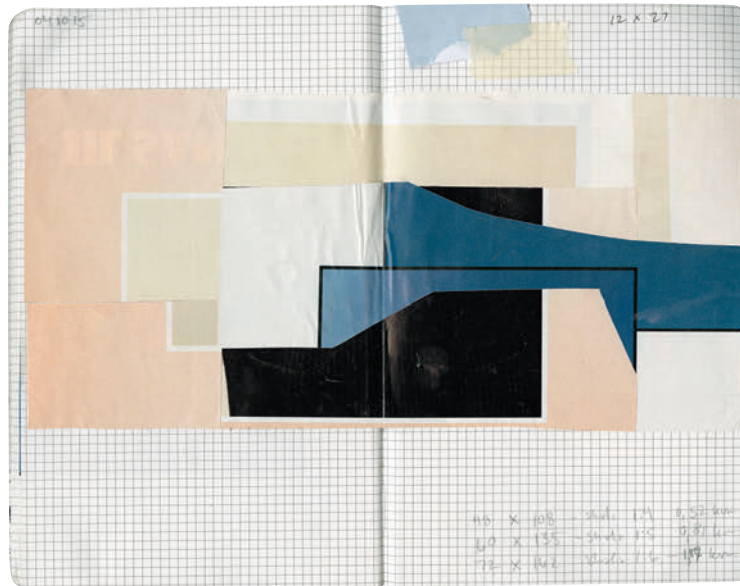
We gather much of our inspiration from older weaving books and traditional techniques, but we are forward-thinking when it comes to color, potential uses, and design. In this book, you'll find a foundation upon which to build your own way of weaving. We offer complete projects that you can follow to the letter, but also chapters on textile design and how to find and refine your own aesthetic.

ARIANNA: Weaving has been a part of my life ever since my mother asked my father to build her a quilting frame ... and received a Swedish-style floor loom hand-built by my father and grandfather instead. This was in the late 1980s in the US, and I have many warm childhood memories of visiting fiber festivals and Weaver's Guild meetings. As an adult, I first chose an academic career in fashion history and wanted to work with museum collections. But when I moved to Stockholm, I decided to go back to school yet again in order to create my own context in my new country. After weighing many options, I realized that three of the women I admire most were avid weavers, and I decided to apply to the Friends of Handicraft School. My first semester there, everything fell into place: weaving is what I am meant to do.

I mostly weave what are called *bruksföremål* in Swedish, a term I like to translate as "working textiles," and flossa, a knotted pile technique, is my favorite way to weave. I'm most energized by the weaving process itself—it's the techniques, drafting, problem solving, and throwing the shuttle that are the core of my interest. The craft, defined as mastery of technique and material, is what I value and focus on in my process.

MIRIAM: Textiles have held deep and important meaning for me as long as I can remember. Among my earliest memories is the agonizing feeling of wearing something in a color or shape that I didn't like. Both of my parents work for the Swedish Church, and when I was growing up, I often hung out in the vestry after the service and watched while my dad hung his stole and chasuble among all the other church textiles. I remember the colors and gold embroidery as clearly as the smell of cold stone and candle wax, of coffee hour with juice and homemade baked goods among the sturdy pine furniture and handwoven, hand-embroidered curtains and tablecloths. The minute the thrift store Erikshjälpen opened we would be there, and my mom bought piles of old handwoven bedclothes for 50 cents or a dollar each. I began to buy clothing at thrift stores in middle school, and I've collected clothing and objects from the 1930s to the 1960s ever since. When I found out about the Friends of Handicraft School a few years after I graduated high school, the penny dropped—weaving was the way I could express everything that was in my head.

I see the warp as a clean piece of paper to fill, using the magical equation where by itself a thread is only a thread, but many threads together become a unit. A woven piece can be decorative and philosophical at the same time, equal parts ancient and futuristic. That's powerful!



I often make sketches in collage for my rugs. This is the sketch for my very first flossa rug, seen in the picture on page 8.

therefore we used yarn made of Scandinavian wool as much as possible for the projects in this book.

COTTON isn't the most eco-friendly material, but it's easy to find organic cotton in Sweden (even if it's not produced within the country). Cotton is elastic, absorbs water well, and is relatively inexpensive. Great for towels and similar items you'll use often. Keep in mind that cotton shrinks quite a bit the first time it's washed.

LINEN has a beautiful shine and absorbs liquids well. It becomes stronger when it's wet. Linen is a sustainable material: good for the environment, long-lasting, and hard-wearing (as long as it's not creased too firmly).

TOOLS

■ LOOM

(we use countermarch floor looms in this book)

■ BENCH TO SIT ON

■ REEDS

Start with 8-, 10-, and 12-dent

■ SHUTTLES

Both boat shuttles and rug shuttles

■ BOBBIN WINDER

You'll also need bobbins or paper to wind yarn onto

■ WARPING MILL

Or warping board

■ THREADING/SLEYING HOOK

■ LEASING STICKS, BEAM STICKS, & TEMPLES

These should be able to cover 12 to 36 in / 30.5 to 91.5 cm

■ BALL WINDER & SWIFT

■ SEWING MACHINE & HANDSEWING TOOLS

Sewing needles, thread, pins for finishing

■ SCALE

For weighing yarns

■ SCISSORS

Larger scissors for cutting fabric and thicker material, and thread snips for cutting rya pile

MORE ADVANCED TOOLS:

■ FLOSSA RULER & FLOSSA KNIFE

■ FOR DYEING

Pots (that you use exclusively for dyeing), thermometer, dyestuff, chemicals, large spoons/sticks, drying rack, precision scale



Weave Tea Towels, Step-by-Step

The first project we will weave is a tea towel in a warp-faced twill, with cotton in both warp and weft. The description that follows is a set of general instructions for how to set up a weaving project, with details specific to this project used as examples.

To make the towel the right thickness and to make it absorbent and hard-wearing, I've chosen Ekelunds organic cotton 8/2 in two different colors. That way you can test both checks and stripes and see how the warp and weft colors meet in the weave structure. There will be 5 stripes of orange (#225) and 4 stripes of ecru (#1218) in the warp. A useful standard size for towels is $19\frac{1}{2} \times 27\frac{1}{2}$ in / 50×70 cm.



Warping on a warping mill. My spool rack is behind me, on the same side as the hand I use for warping.



The warp is placed in the loom. When spreading the warp over the back stick, you may have to take the cords on the back stick into consideration.

the furthest up and Shaft 4 is at the bottom. Shaft 1 is furthest from you, and Shaft 4 is closest to you, both on paper and while sitting at the loom (but not while IN the loom).

Begin on the right side, with the heddles grouped and waiting at your left hand; pull them back to center if you parted them when you beamed on. Then pull out one heddle from each shaft to work with. You can even place them slightly diagonally to imitate the black squares in the threading draft (see page 37). Pick up the first four warp ends with your left hand—the cross fulfills its destiny here and shows the order in which you should pick them up and thread them—and pull one thread through each heddle in order, 1-2-3-4. Repeat until you’ve threaded all the heddles. It’s helpful to make a loose slipknot with bundles of 8 threaded ends as you go along.

The draft on page 37 doesn’t show all of the stripes in the warp, since the threading is repeated over the whole width; we can instead write “x4” under the section that will be repeated. That means the indicated section should be threaded a total of 4 times, plus the last stripe = 9 stripes total.

SLEYING

When it’s in the beater, the reed is what beats the weft into the warp, but it also spaces the warp ends out evenly across the project width. We’ve chosen a 12-dent / 50/10 reed, and if you want 24 epi / 10 epcm, you should pull 2 ends through each dent. I hang a loop on each side of the upper shaft bar closest to me and place the reed there, so it hangs freely right below the heddle eyes and warp ends. Measure the middle of the reed, then measure out half the width of your project (in our case, 11¼ in / 27 cm) to the right of that center point. Begin to thread there, so the warp ends up approximately in the middle of the reed. Tie bunches of 20 sleyed ends (10 dents) together in a loose slip knot under the reed. 20 ends equals about ¾ in / 2 cm of width in the reed, which is a good measure for tying on with later.

If you have added extra ends as selvedge reinforcement, they should be sleyed together with the outermost “normal” warp ends. We aren’t using extra selvedge ends in our tea towel project.

Put back all the beams and crossbeams that you removed in order to thread and sley comfortably, and put the reed in the beater. Check that the warp is centered in the beater by measuring from the selvedge of the warp out to the edge of the beater (not the edge of the reed) on both sides. Adjust until the warp is equidistant from both edges of the beater.



Threading with a threading hook. The ends that have been threaded are to the right of my hand, and those waiting to be threaded are to the left.

One of many good reasons to make a sample at the beginning of your project warp is easy troubleshooting. Weave a few inches or centimeters and analyze the results. Maybe the “problem” is just a function of its handwoven nature? You get to decide if any mistakes you may have made are worth trying to fix. If so, here are a few tips.

THREADING MISTAKES: If you see that the warp and weft ends are not binding as they should, or in one section they don’t look the same as in the rest of the weaving, localize the warp ends that you think are causing the problem and check the threading. If the threading is wrong, undo the tie-on; pull the troublesome ends out through the sample, the reed, and the heddles; and re-thread (and re-sley). Then just re-do your tie on. The re-threaded ends will join the weaving after a few weft picks. You may have to tie in a few more heddles to make this work, but if you remove an end from a heddle, the empty heddle can remain throughout the project.

SLEYING MISTAKES: Issues with sleying can be caused by sleying too many ends in a dent or leaving a dent empty by mistake—or maybe both. Unfortunately, sleying issues are often time-consuming to fix. In order for all the ends to be correctly sleyed, in most cases you have to pull out all the ends, from the mistake out to the edge of your warp, and re-sley every one. Choose the closest edge; it doesn’t matter which.

A BROKEN WARP END: It’s no big deal if a warp end breaks! It happens all the time, especially with thinner or single-ply yarn. Localize the now-empty heddle and identify the corresponding dent. Gently lead the end of the thread that’s fixed in the weaving back and out of the way. Put a pin in the fabric horizontally, right under the broken thread, about 1 in / 2.5 cm away from the last weft pick. Measure out a length of the warp yarn 6 in / 15 cm longer than the length of the warp you have left to weave. Wrap one end of that piece of yarn in a figure 8 around the pin and stick the point of the pin into the weaving to fasten it in place. Lead that yarn through the dent and the heddle, and all the way back to your leasing sticks. Find the other end of the original warp thread that broke and tie it together with the new warp end in a bow. You’ll untie that bow and move it backward as you move the warp forward. The new warp end will be extremely long, and you can wind it around a bobbin to keep things orderly, if you’d like.







Rölakan is a flatweave technique in which the weft is picked up by hand instead of thrown with a shuttle. You use your hands directly in the warp and handle many wefts at a time across the width of the same open shed. The design can be geometrically perfect with exacting, calculated shapes, or intentionally unplanned. Countless effects can be created by varying the weft yarns and colors.

Rölakan is an age-old technique with its lineage and heritage extending back to humanity's earliest civilizations. The name is probably derived from the Swedish word *ryggglakan*, which is the term for the kind of traditional wall hangings that insulated log cabins from the cold winds that could squeeze in between the timbers and chill your spine. Surviving examples of rugs and carriage cushions from the 18th and 19th centuries, with advanced, detailed designs in rölakan, come mostly from southern and southwestern Sweden, but also from a few other areas across the country. In Oaxaca, they looked at me quizzically when I asked what the name of this technique is in Spanish; there, it's just called *la tecnica*, "the technique." However, during my internship, it was enormously helpful for me to be able to share some of my rölakan samples from school—the things I couldn't yet communicate in Spanish, I could communicate through weaving.

I love rölakan and am especially inspired by both carriage cushions from Skåne in "lightning rölakan," and North American "eye-dazzlers." More examples can be found in the Middle East and northern Africa. It's fascinating how the same technique can be a foundation for such broad variation in design, and at the same time so clearly belong to the same group.

TECHNIQUE

Rölakan can be woven in squares or in diagonals. I work mostly in diagonal rölakan, which is built on the principle that you advance every weft at least one warp end in one shed, and in the next shed only go back as far as the neighboring weft advanced. This creates a gradual progression in the form of a diagonal. A weaving with a turquoise background and a pattern in yellow would require three wefts (made into so-called "butterflies") in each shed: a turquoise butterfly on either side of the yellow. As long as the three butterflies are moved in the same direction in that one shed, the yellow line shifts through the turquoise area. When you suddenly change directions—that is, advance the wefts one warp end further in the opposite shed—the line is broken and a lightning bolt or a zigzag starts to take shape.



Now the arrows have assumed their characteristic shape. When the arrow is exactly half as big as you'd like it to be, switch directions and begin to advance the opposite direction to build up the other half. The rhombus has also reversed. Notice how my hand is truly IN the warp; this is what is meant by “picking up” the weft instead of throwing the shuttle.

DECORATIVE BORDERS

A common accompaniment to rölakan weaving is a shuttle-thrown border, perfect for beginning and ending your weaving. By using different colors in different orders, you can create a range of patterns. For example, “*dientes*,” a border pattern named for the vertical “teeth” that are created by throwing alternating picks of two different colors. In Sweden, these are often called *staplar* (“piles”), but I think the Mexican term is much more fun. In the photos, the *dientes* border is furthest down, in turquoise and yellow. Above that, I’ve thrown in other variations—for example, two picks of brown and then two picks of yellow for horizontal stripes (furthest up). Try it yourself; what happens when you mix two different colors in different orders?



TEAMWORK – What happens with a weaving project if two people each have a say in the process? In this project, Arianna chose a weave structure that Miriam rarely uses, and Miriam dyed the warp in a colorway that Arianna would never have chosen. The result is a great example of how much each person can affect the outcome, and it turns out that it can be fun and surprising to work outside your usual frame of reference. These patterns are for pillows that measure 20 × 20 in / 50 × 50 cm when finished.

ARIANNA: This technique is called *droppdräll*, or huckaback, and is traditionally used in a much thinner execution for carefully pressed tablecloths and napkins. But in one of my vintage weaving books, Maja Lundbäck uses what is supposed to be the fabric’s “back side” with much thicker yarns in the pattern picks to create a really interesting upholstery fabric. I was taken with this slightly unhinged version of such a dainty technique, and I’ve used it for everything from pillows to beach towels. The take-up in the warp is dramatic, so I always weave a bit of extra plain weave on either end of pillows in this technique to make sure that there is sufficient fabric to sew with.

MIRIAM: I dyed the warp before weaving to add an abstract color effect to the more rhythmic woven pattern. I made two warp chains, both snugly tied off in a few extra places before being removed from the mill. The dyeing was done with the help of many small dyebaths in different shades of the same base color. The warp chains, which can be soaked beforehand for softer gradations or kept dry for sharper contrasts, were then dipped like a long snake into the baths and dyed according to my instructions on page 123. Graphic vertical color transitions were created when the two chains were beamed on and the different colors of each chain met in the center. Horizontal patterns appeared like radio waves where the warp was tied off during the dyeing process.



A rya is a textile that has a tabby base and knots on top. *Nockor* is what the knots are called in Swedish, and they form a pile or fringe of yarn that can be long or short, but that is always longer and sparser than its tight, short cousin, *flossa*. Rya can be worked on a loom, sewn with a needle in a premade fabric base, or made with a tufting gun that shoots yarn into a premade backing. Rya weaves have a long history in Sweden and have functioned as comforters on beds (*slitrya* or *båtrya*), as decorative insulation on the wall, and as one of the trendiest interior design objects of the middle of the 20th century.

From the 1950s to the 1970s, rya weaves were extremely popular, and there was an abundance of ready-made DIY kits for sale where you followed a pattern drawn by a famous designer. I've heard countless tales of how young couples used to sit in front of the fire in their rec room and work on a rya weave together. My dream scenario can be found in a 1966 article in *Life* on "The Modern Craftsman." Photographer Nina Leens' images illustrate weaving's new popularity with a portrait of a young woman, wearing short black high-waisted shorts and a yellow top, sitting and working on a rya weaving in a green landscape that must be somewhere in California. The rya project she's working on looks like a deep blue or light purple flower bed in the middle of all that green, or a magic carpet of moss. The whole thing looks like it could just as well have been published today.

Despite that dreamy vision, I've still never made a rya weave on a premade base; the loom offers much more freedom, greater ability to choose, and better quality. Any image, feeling, structure, or shape can grow out of woven rya's tabby base. The freedom is in your hands.

The construction of rya is easiest to explain in terms of beads or pixels: every knot is one pixel, one bead. An image or motif is built up row by row, as on a perler board, and the more pixels you have per row, the clearer the picture—just like with digital photos, where higher resolution makes for a sharper picture and lower resolution, a blurrier one. Different thicknesses and types of yarn contribute a great deal of feeling to rya. A lighter section in the middle of a dark area can be accentuated by using a thinner yarn there, to contrast with the thicker, darker yarn surrounding it. The light section may even have shorter pile than the darker area, which creates even more depth and dimension. Because each knot in rya consists of a combination of yarns—a butterfly—the possibilities are endless for blending colors and tonalities.

In the following three project descriptions, I explain how I make rya pieces in three different ways. Knotting freely with stash yarn and geometric shapes for a cushion; following a sketch on graph paper for classic "floor rya"; and how to translate freely from a sketch to make a larger *slitrya* blanket.



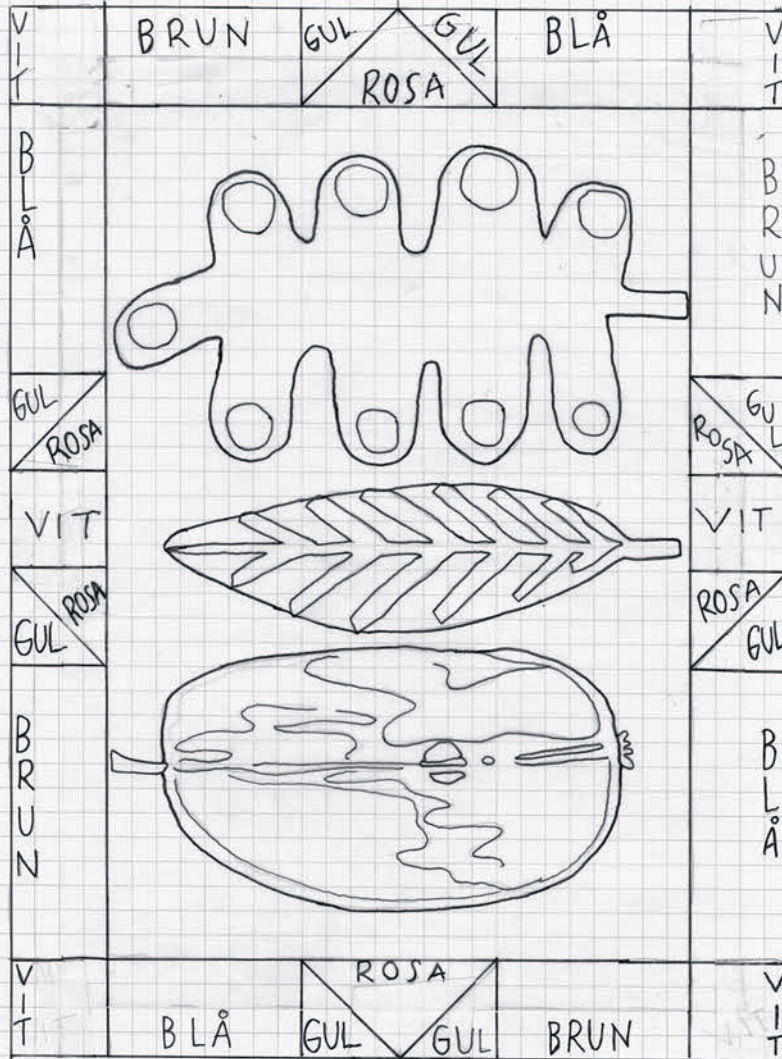
1. The butterfly is passed under one warp end.



2. The butterfly is passed over to the next warp end, then under that second end to make the knot.



Arb. skiss golvrya
"ATT VÄVA" / miriam parkman

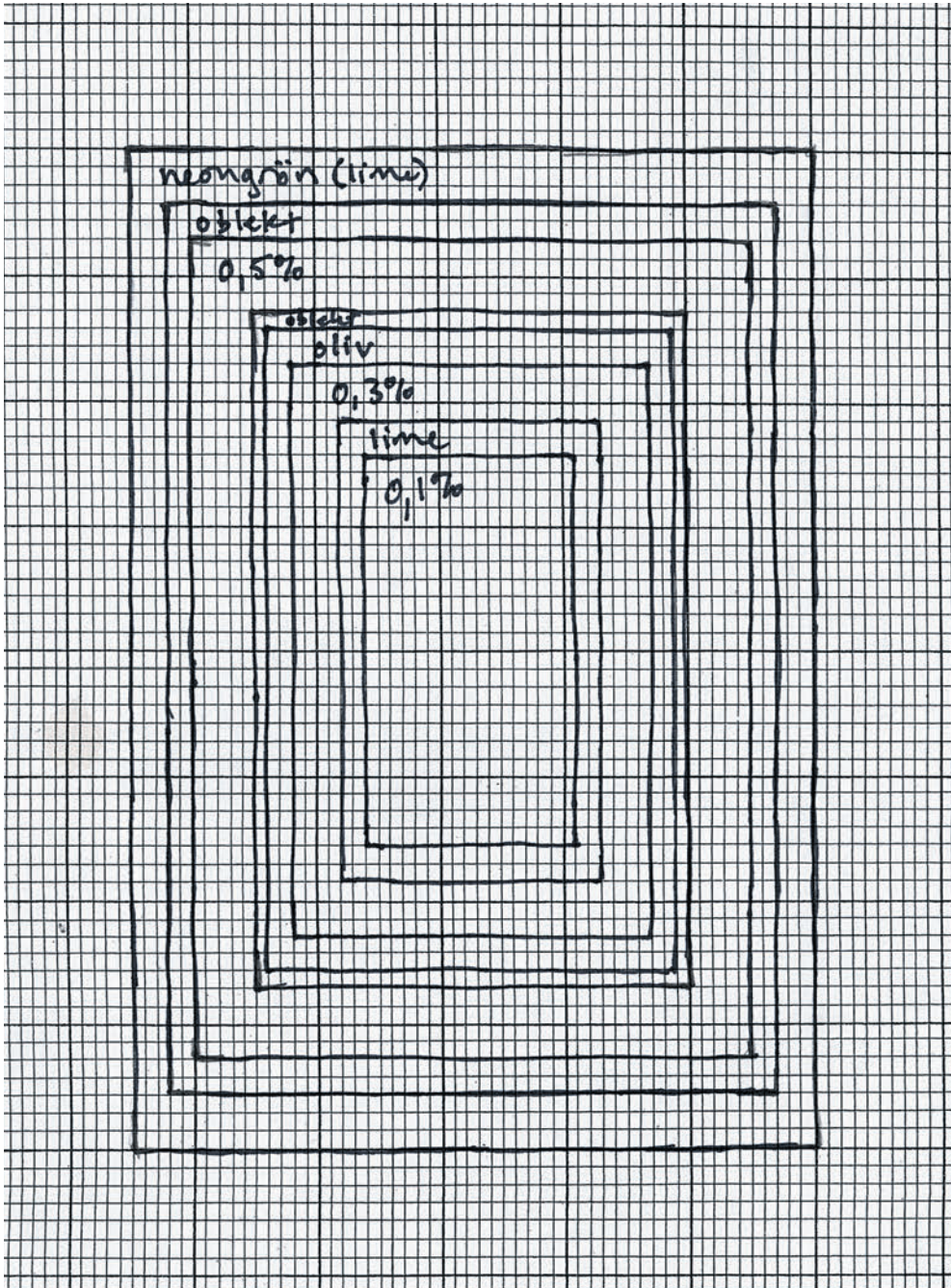


SKALA 1:5 2 RUTOR = 1 cm
1 cm skiss = 5 cm i väv

Note that the sketch (labeled in Swedish) was originally done on size A4 paper.







Another way to sketch rugs is to begin by making shapes on graph paper. Sometimes I don't even use any color, but instead see what yarns I have and work from there. This kind of paper is called "rya paper," and the squares have the "correct" measurements for the knot density I prefer, the same one I used in the bath mat project. The slightly rectangular squares allow for 1 square = 1 knot, and the sketch will actually look like the finished project.









MIRIAM: In the book *Trasmattor och andra mattor* [Rag rugs and other rugs], from 1958, the author writes: “It is a waste of money to put material and time toward unartistic patterns and poor fabric quality. Therefore, we offer you here patterns drawn by the well-respected artist Ingrid Dessau.” I love buying old weaving books at flea markets, looking at the funky colors in the analogue photographs and being enchanted by names like “Cuba,” “Harlequin,” and “Samba.” But, luckily, opinions about who is allowed to design and make textiles have changed quite a bit since then.

We want to do more than just offer new thoughts and ideas about weaving—we also want to present those thoughts and ideas in a different way. In this chapter I go over the elements and techniques I use to design textiles, and how you can dig even deeper and use what I call a “creative cycle.”

FOUNDATION: A LIBRARY OF FORM AND COLOR

For me, weaving offers painting-like possibilities: the warp is the paper, and the weft is the paint. Nothing except the simple, clean tabby structure needs to be decided beforehand, when you let your hand steer and your head follow. When I am asked about what inspires me, I usually answer that it is the aesthetic of the 1940s-60s, nature, and whatever is happening around me. A longer, but better and more detailed answer could be, “The movement of the yellow-green seagrass that sways against the cliffs where I lie, partially cold, partially warm, at the seaside in the summer on the High Coast.” Or “My friend’s outfit, suddenly matching a brightly sunlit wall, the colors blending into the same color spectrum, while at the same time the corner of a roof forms a sharp, angled shadow headed the same direction as my friend’s shirt collar.” Similarly, “orange and turquoise” is the short answer to the question of what my favorite colors are. The real answer is, “the shade created when two colors overlap”—any colors, that is, since the matte, gritty and endlessly deep, or completely light shade created when two colors are layered contain everything I dream about in terms of color. Colors find their way to different memories and feelings, and are spun together with desire in my brain, into a thread that is transported to my hand.

Ebba von Eckermann, “The Weaving Countess” whose handwoven skirts and blankets were extremely popular during the 1950s and 1960s, said that she “wove mostly during the winter, when [she] was hungriest for color.” Color is fundamental, so much more than something you just choose randomly. Color is mighty and infinite.





MIRIAM: Being able to dye your own yarn is a real asset in your weaving practice. You can create your own color scales, make magic with second-hand yarn of the wrong color, and add effects that make a big difference.

I learned how to dye at Friends of Handicraft School according to their well-documented process, which uses exact measurements of 1% solutions and 2% solutions mixed with 0.05% solutions in ratios of 1:7 and 7:1. Every step in the process is done in a precise order, and every chemical added at the chime of a timer. When I flip through my notes from those lessons, I am astounded by what a math whiz I apparently was back then—page after page of equations and ratios. It wasn't a bad introduction, and I ended up with a rich library of hues to use as a starting point. But in the meantime, I've developed my own method, which is not only less complicated but also better adapted to how I see and use color in my weaving. However, it should be said that my method is most suitable for dyeing for one specific work at a time, and with less than one kilo of yarn of each intended color. Dyeing many kilos of yarn of the same color at once is best done according to instructions from the production company for your dye; my dyes come from Färgkraft, and instructions for their dyes can be found on their website.

I never use dye recipes or scales. Instead, I begin by selecting the color categories and spectrums that are in the sketch or idea I'm basing my piece on. The color categories become the main dye baths that I use as a foundation. Instead of calculating exact percentages, I use two different methods to achieve different hues of each color:

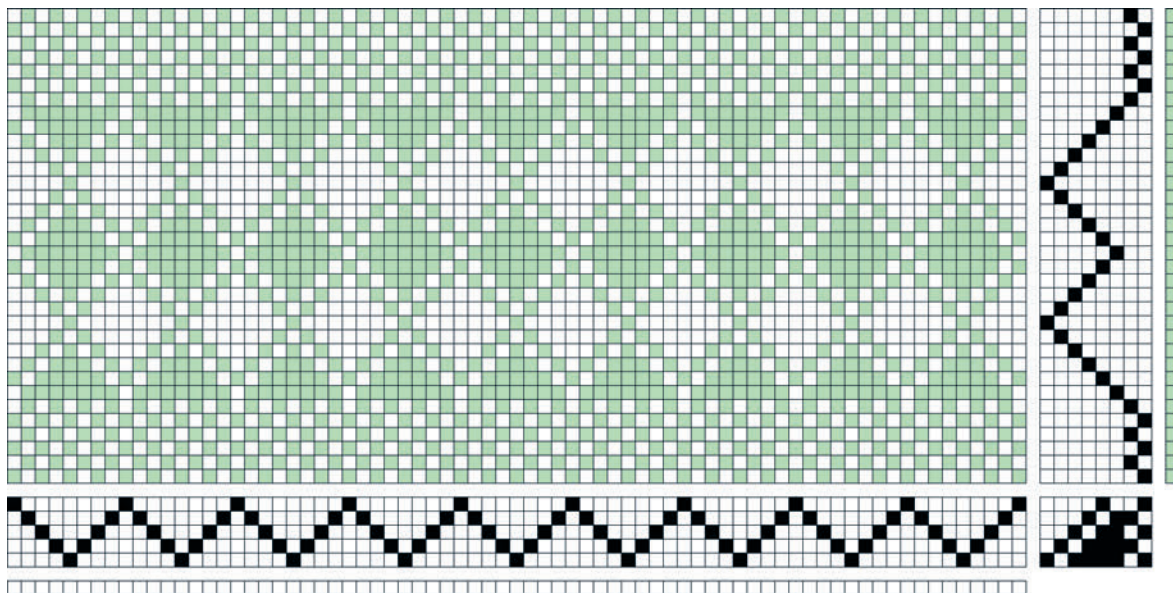
1. The different undertones of the yarns that are going to be dyed.
2. The natural gradation that occurs in the dyepot, from a dark and saturated first bath to a light and unsaturated last bath.

Dyeing different shades of white yarn, from chalk white to off-white and cream, in the same color results in a very authentic variation of hues. The different yellow tones inherent in the yarn affect the final color and contribute to the well-roundedness of the piece. Another example is deep greens, reds, and blues, which are best dyed on naturally brown yarn—in that case, you don't need as much pigment, since dark saturation is already present in the yarn.

If you make use of a dyebath from its darkest and most saturated to when there is barely any pigment left, you end up with a natural scale of the same shade from dark to light. For example, if you'd like a range from dark orange to very light coral pink, you begin by mixing up a saturated orange dye bath (by saturated, I mean that the bath is completely opaque). The yarn that will be dyed that darkest shade should be placed in the dye bath first and can pick up the excess pigment.



WAFFLE WEAVE:



BINDING: Waffle weave on 5 shafts and 8 treadles.
Note: Start and end the waffle lots on Treadle 3.



Oaxaca placemats and napkins; see page 52.

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Grandma Parkman (1932-2018). “My fingers are itching!” you said, frustrated, when I told you about my projects and you could no longer weave yourself. Thank you for the desire to create, and for the mountains; and thank you to all the generations of weavers who precede us and have passed on your knowledge and experience.



A COMPREHENSIVE GUIDE TO SWEDISH HANDWEAVING — START TO FINISH

From design concept to choice of materials, draft and tie-up to finished fabric—the contemporary weaver has a lot to keep track of and endless creative possibilities to consider. Arianna Funk and Miriam Parkman know this better than anyone; as professional textile artists and teachers, they're both thoroughly familiar and deftly skilled with every stage of the process of

developing a weaving project. And now you're invited to take a peek behind the curtain! Learn how to go from a design concept to a weaving draft, from a potential color palette to your own hand-dyed yarn, plus techniques ranging from plain weave and twill to tapestry weaving and Swedish rölakan, and develop the tools and the confidence to weave your way.

- 16 sample projects, showcasing methods including knotted rya, – waffle weave, huckaback, and more
- Examples worked by each of the authors in turn, showing how the same – basic pattern guidelines can turn out when worked by different weavers
- Tips, tricks, setup, and troubleshooting instructions focused on – counter-march looms, discussion of the creative process, and suggestions for ways to keep the inspiration flowing

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