

FROM THE LAND COMES THE CLOTH

Ian Lawson's photographs



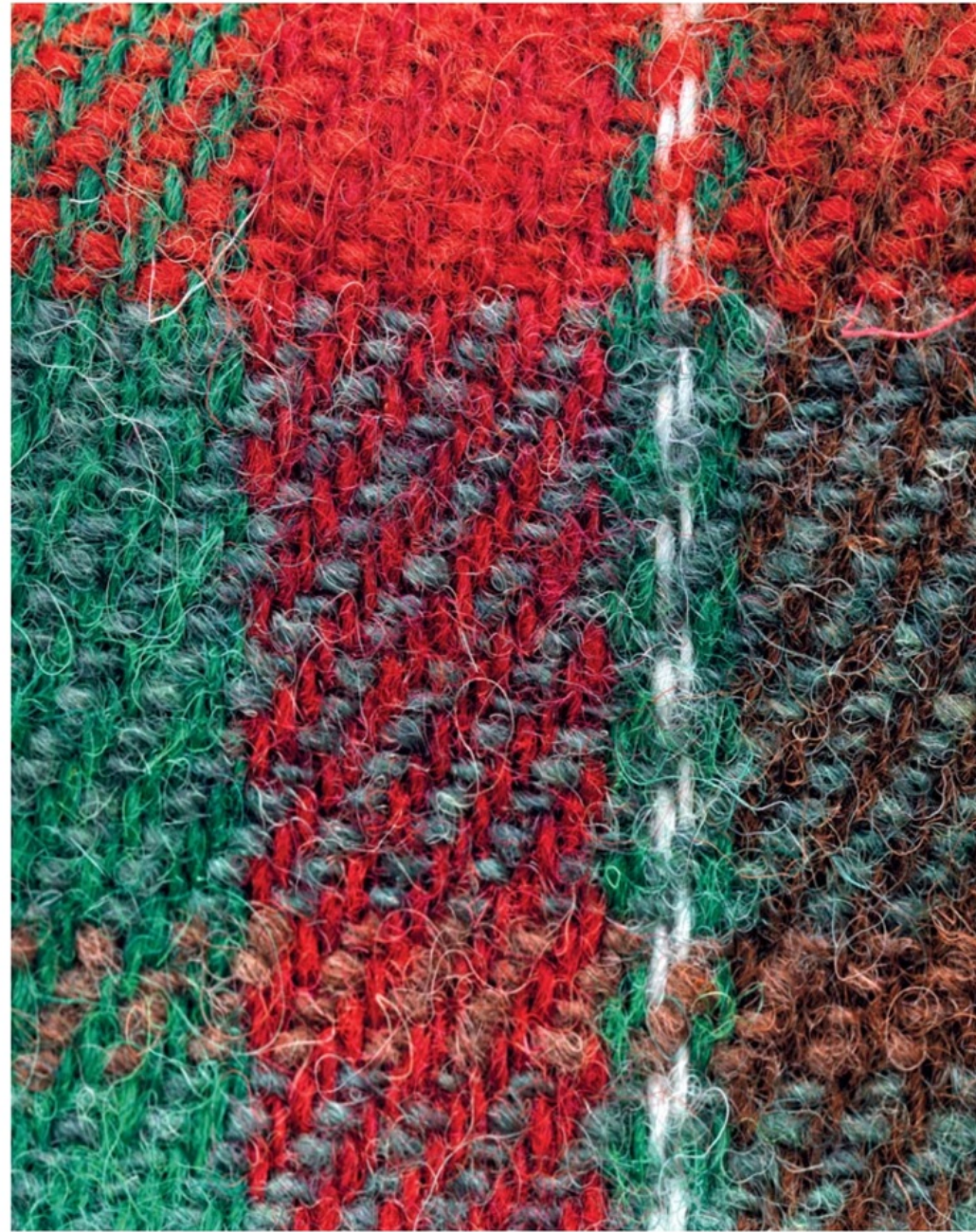
The colours of Harris Tweed come from the land. For hundreds of years, islanders have skillfully coloured handspun yarns using natural dyes derived from the plants and lichens found on their crofts or on the seashore. Today, synthetic dyes have largely replaced original plant dyes: but the landscape of the Outer Hebrides remains a source of endless inspiration for contemporary weavers.

Colour reflects our moods and the seasons; it calms and excites the senses. Different textures add depth and definition. The light and shadow of the Outer Hebrides and its unique landscape of ancient stones, mountains, loch, machair (a fertile low-lying grassy plain), moorland, beach and ocean slowed me to a standstill. As I began to photograph the landscape, the people and the tweed, I started to see patterns emerge. A beat began and the rhythm of Harris Tweed flowed into my consciousness and into my pictures.

Herringbone, hounds tooth, basket weave, bird's eye, glen check, windowpane: evocative names for original Harris Tweed patterns. This is the only tweed in the world that uses fleece dyed before it is spun, and yarn composed of up to eight different blends of yarn.

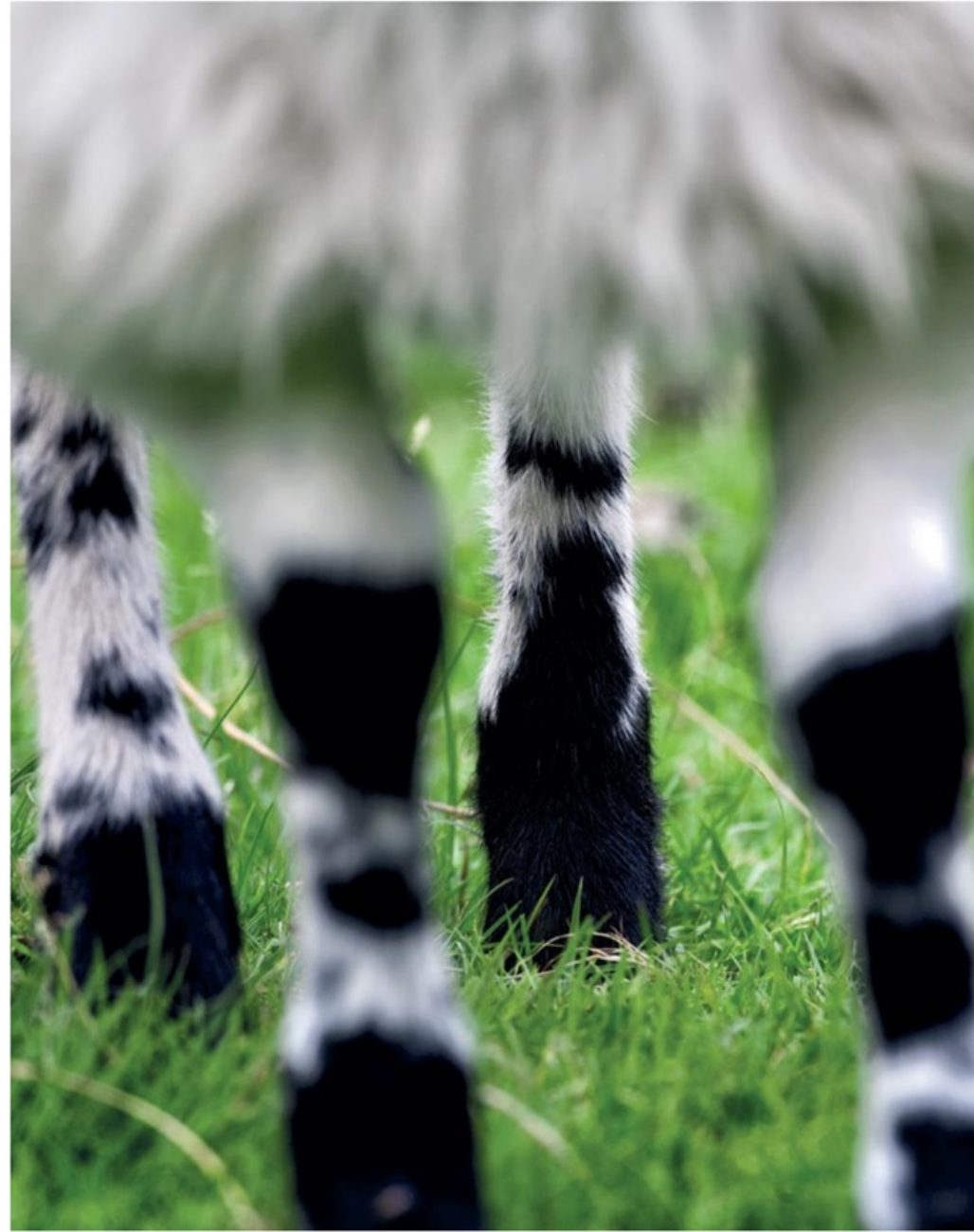
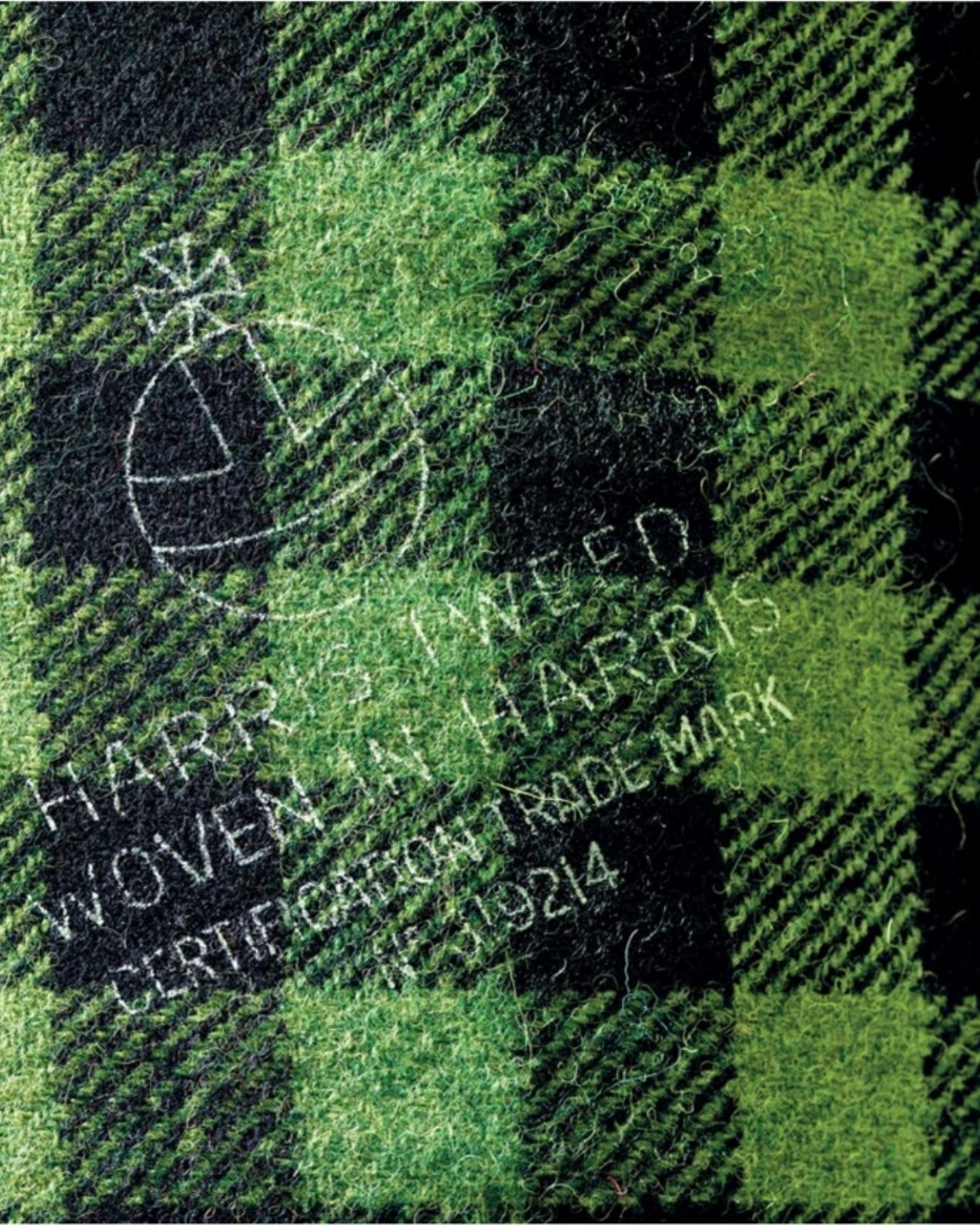
A piece of Harris Tweed is a work of art. Caught up in the warp and weft is a combination of inherited tradition, individual imagination, craftsmanship and skill. This artistry and ingenuity in the weaver's work is a genuine appreciation of the land, told in wool. The closer I look, the more beautiful and complex the patterns become. ▶







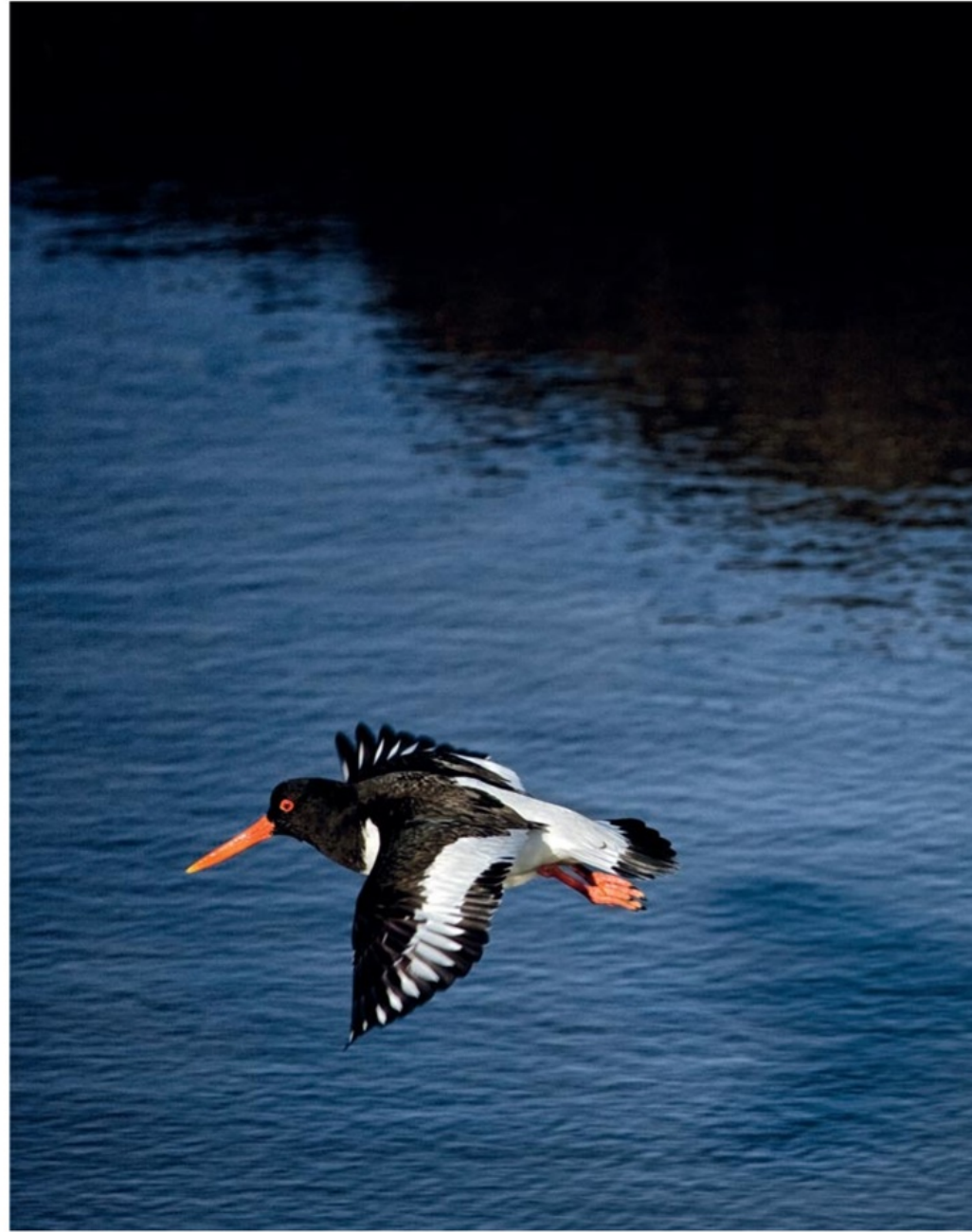












What makes Harris Tweed so special? It is arguably the most famous fabric in the world. It is certainly the only cloth that is protected by an Act of Parliament.

For centuries, the people of the Outer Hebrides have woven An Clo Mòr – the Big Cloth – known as Harris Tweed. While Scotland’s textile industry was transformed by technological advances during the industrial revolution, in the Outer Hebrides tweed continued to be made along traditional lines.

In the mid-19th century, North Harris Estate was owned by the Earl of Dunmore. Lady Dunmore took a keen interest in the lives of her tenants, and the hard-wearing woollen cloth they produced on hand-looms. Recognising the potential of the cloth, she introduced it to her London acquaintances and the fledgling Harris Tweed industry was born.

As demand for the cloth increased, small looms were replaced by larger fly-shuttle looms and the industry prospered. But success led to imitations, prompting the formation of the Harris Tweed Association in 1909. The Orb trademark was devised to authenticate genuine tweeds and ensure the industry retained its reputation for quality. In 1910 it was granted to the islanders and continues to be held in trust by the Harris Tweed Authority on their behalf. ●●●

From the Land Comes the Cloth, Ian Lawson, ISBN-10: 0956872409, Classic Edition £125, Selvedge readers will receive The Art Postcard Collection, worth £27, as a gift and free postage and packing within the UK, to order email mail@ianlawson.com or visit www.fromtheland.co.uk

