

# Sculptural furnitures from surplus stock

**F**URNITURE DESIGNER Maja Svensdotter trained at Carl Malmsten's school and Konstfack. She knows how a piece of furniture is put together, the kinds of demands placed on functional artefacts. Nevertheless, she does ask the question, why make yet another chair when there are chairs around and in surplus?

Second-hand furniture is what she goes for instead, rebuilding pieces and giving them a new lease of life. When we met up at her Stockholm flat, she showed us her *Sitting on birds* series. The bird motif is one she regards as folk art legacy, whether Mexican or Swedish: she is familiar with both traditions. As a student she spent some time in Mexico, while Swedish folk art was absorbed with her mother's milk. And there is an abundance of inspiration online.

Maja has always, as she says, worked with leftover materials. Her mother, Lillevi Hultman, ensured that her children were all equipped with fabric, cardboard, wood – and were kept busy.

So later on, when training as a furniture designer, it was quite natural to bring recycling into her design work. Her finals project at Konstfack was an upholstered piece of furniture with furry textured cuddly protuberances.

SWEDISH TEXTILE FOLK ART imagery is often displayed on rather luxurious textile artefacts, such as seat cushions and huge coverlets. That's the way her furniture is also meant to be seen – as one-offs, missives

from a particular person. Aside from their symbolism, birds have much to offer in appearance and form. And they certainly hold their own here, wings outstretched, swooping over the forms.

At the base is a stable piece of furniture, preferably a wooden construction which can withstand being drilled, screwed and nailed. The piece needs to last and this is where her professional skills come into play. She expands the piece, creating new forms for the next stages of “dressing” the furniture. The padding often consists of old clothing.

ONE OF THE CHAIRS is just like a wild, shaggy rya. The back and seat had warp ends stretched over them, made of fleece fabric – by choice – for strength. Cut into 3 cm wide strips, they are as good as impossible to pull apart. A staple gun is used to secure the warp ends, one by one. The picture of the exuberantly coloured bird, head held high as it takes off, was densely knotted around these warp ends. She used a variety of black textiles, woven and knitted – all from a friend's wardrobe clear-out. The footstool was constructed in similar fashion.

A rocking chair was given a whole new makeover – a throne-like wing armchair with the rockers retained. The covering for this piece was stitched first before upholstering. Quilted and soft, so the sitter sinks down into the bird motif.

THE CHAIR WITH THE GROWN-ON rounded back sports a motif with white birds flapping their wings on both the back and

seat, woven on stapled warp ends. Here too, black cloth was used as the base, some from her friend's old clothes, supplemented with some from the recyclables room. As the shape of the furniture bends round, the weave gets woven a bit tighter, reinforcing the curves.

*How do you see your professional identity in this creative work?*

– I think it is important that professionalism is part of the picture when it comes to creative work with recycled material. There have been several good examples of this lately, which means that more people take the work seriously.

One of Maja's recent commissions was to create a set of furniture for the St Anna youth hostel. They wanted the colour scheme to tie in with the colourful sea buckthorn growing there: it became apricot-black and bright orange.

*What are the advantages of working with recycled and reclaimed materials?*

– First and foremost economical. These materials are basically free. If I want to test something, I can be quite lavish with the materials and see what comes out. In addition, there are plenty more shades and qualities that I would never find to the same extent if I were to buy new materials. All is there, just waiting. But I'm not someone who is after a political stand with my work, I am not into creating manifestos. I'm attracted by the aesthetic aspect and the idea of upgrading a piece of furniture, making it more interesting and unique through the way I work with it.



Maja Svendsdotter on one of her unique pieces of furniture. Above / Set of furniture for the St Anna youth hostel. Right / Furniture series, *Sitting on birds*: easy chair with knots, chair with extended back and woven tapestry, rocking chair with quilted covering.