



It has to do with Values

ANNE ELMDAHL ALLOWS THE CREATIVE TEXTILE WORK SHE DOES FOR HER COMPANY, TWISTIN' TO TAKE ITS TIME. TIME FOR THE DESIGNING, THE WEAVING, THE BECOMING WHAT IT IS MEANT TO BE. LONGEVITY IS THEN GUARANTEED.



Anne Elmdahl

1980–1982 Foundation textile studies (handweaving and sewing) at Gamleby Folk High School.

1984–1985 Advanced handweaving course, Textile Institute, Borås.

1988–90 Advanced Handicraft Diploma at HV, Friends of Handicraft.

1996–2006 tutor in charge of weaving at Gamleby Folk High School with Elisabeth Johansson

2011 Anne Elmdahl and Elisabeth Johansson set up Twistin' of Sweden.

Shop and product developer in a variety of commissions for the Swedish handicraft movement. Most recently, for the Sörmland Museum shop.

Her key words: quality, the knowledge of the hand, uniqueness.

When Anne Elmdahl and Elisabeth Johansson started their business, Twistin' of Sweden, often shortened to Twistin', they went for a clear profile: top quality, well designed handmade textiles. Made to last – to be both seen and used. We met up again after almost eight years and a lot had happened. Both for Anne in her own business and in our time.

So to go back to the beginning: the first thing Anne and Elisabeth did was to get a name that would work, both on a national and international level – a name that conveyed something and was easy to remember. There was a bit of to-ing and fro-ing with the Patents- and Registration Office before the name was approved. But it was worth it, in Anne's view. Laying the foundations, thinking through

what you want are vital at the outset and pay off in the long run.

Twistin' can be interpreted variously: the type of weave called twist, where two different coloured wefts create vertical stripes, a plot twist – with a surprise, twist in the way strands are wound into a thread.

Their first weaves came about as the result of a commission they received through a contact in New York. That company creates interior textiles, amongst other products, and wanted some transparent curtaining of linen and hemp in handwoven qualities. Yarn samples from the Italian wholesalers, Linificio, arrived and swatches were woven up. The commissioners were happy with the qualities but not the prices. So the order did not go through. But those swatches led them on to more qualities in transparent lace weaves – the start of Twistin's first collection.

Their product range grew, more textiles were added and the business began to expand. It was time for a bit of pruning. They then created their *Symphony No 1* collection, which was shown in several places including the Milan Furniture Fair. That came up through their connection with designer and interior architect Mikael Löfström. He also produced a stool for Twistin' sporting a variety of handwoven qualities and textures.

Designer Tini Warg created some new products for them at the Milan Fair, interior textiles as well as outfits, based on Twistin's cloth creations.

– 'That's the Twistin' way of working: a weave can become curtaining, a throw, a wearable. The qualities themselves determine the outcome, said Anne.

At the Milan Fair they were met with knowledge and interest. That collection was

also shown at fairs in Eindhoven and Stockholm.

A few years ago Anne and Elisabeth went on their separate ways but still collaborate in a variety of projects.

And after 5 years, almost all the Symphony No 1 textiles are still in the collection. They work. Newer textiles that come into being find their place. Nothing gets forced. Things have to be allowed the time they need. Then they last. The key to this is sustainability.

– Seeing now how aggressive textile production destroys humans as well as the natural world means rethinking things. Instead of consuming the amounts we do in our part of the world, we need instead to buy better quality and less of it. This is where craftsmanship plays an important part. Crafted products cannot be produced in huge quantities and require more thoughtfulness.

For Anne, making in general and weaving in particular had to do with the times she lived in as a young adult when deciding on the path she would take in life. This was in the 1980s, when the green movement got going. At that time she lived in a house on the family farm in Blackstad, Småland. Wove her own clothes and functional items: handtowels, throws, furnishing fabric. She aspired to be self-sufficient.

– Those were important years and instrumental in forming my values.

Now, investing her time and energy in earning income through handweaving as she does, setting the price is all part of it. Another important aspect is the story around the production – the brand and where the products are shown.

– For example I choose not to do markets, she said, clarifying this by adding that where you choose to be visible is all part of the brand.

Who are the customers for these handwoven textiles?

– Very often these are not in the wealthy bracket, as some seem to think. It has to do with values. That is a matter for each individual. When I was young and did not have much money, I could still save for something really special, cost what it might.

So when she gives a talk, she raises this

"My driving force is finding the perfect balance. The balance between warp and weft. And in the material. That's where you get the cloth quality."

very question. What do we buy? What does our money go on? How do we value different products?

– Initially when I state that curtains for two windows cost 15,000 Swedish crowns, I often get strong reactions. When I then continue and compare this to what a mobile costs, the response is "well you need that". Yet if you change it in two years' time, the total cost will be the same as for curtains that last 30–40 years. Food for thought, said Anne.

How do you go about getting the cloth quality you are after?

– All the cloth is first woven by me. I want to know how it works, how long it takes and that it will turn out the way I want it, then it is easier to get some idea of the cloth quality and what it ought to cost.

Development is always going on within craft practice, she stated. Keeping going, becoming more polished, getting it right. It takes time. It is only with the actual practice of weaving that you improve.

– Perhaps you are at your best after the age of 70? There is something inspiring about that, she said.

– My driving force is finding the perfect balance. The balance between warp and weft. And in the material. That's where you get the cloth quality.

The product range also includes machine woven twill handtowels, produced on a loom with a punchcard mechanism. The handtowels are woven by Helena Kumlin in Lammhult.

– Preserving small scale textile production is important. The cloths made here have the same selvages as handwoven cloth and are of a fine quality. They complement the handwoven products really well, said Anne.

A couple of years ago, Anne Elmdahl began

some collaborative work with photographer Jonas Sällberg. They have exhibited together in various contexts – with both images and textiles. Two non-verbal expressions. The word, spoken and written, manifests in the form of discussions and ideas about what quality in our time means.

– Words are important. They build sentences and narratives. I am drawn to that.

It was through Jonas Sällberg that Anne got in touch with designer Jonas Bohlin, who fell for Twistin's textiles. Out of that came a commission, which involved embroidering parts of a love letter on handwoven transparent cloths that were later exhibited in his major show at the Vandalorum Museum of Art and Design in Värnamo. Elsie Johansson and Kerstin Fridén did the stitching and Anne herself wove some of the cloth. Everything got done in a couple of months.

Working with the word, words, brought fresh impetus. Expression in typefaces. Letter combinations building up words, meaning and context.

In their latest collection, *Hold dear, Hold on, Hold out*, Anne and Jonas Sällberg have collaborated again, this time with image, weave and word. Three panels made of linen and hemp embroidered with words constitute the mainstay of the show, along with many of the textiles made earlier on. Anne elaborated on the meaning of those words:

Hold dear – make careful choices and enjoy the textiles you surround yourself with.

Hold on – cherish the textiles so they last a good while.

Hold out – opt for what will last in time. Good quality, both in the technique and design, does not get outdated.

Right now Anne and her husband Per are renovating the house where it all started in the 1980s.

This involves manageable rental costs for premises, peace and quiet for working and concentrating, she explained. Looking ahead, she would like to work with sustainability issues. And words.

We agreed that the times we live in have a lot in common with the 1980s, but now things are more in earnest. More hurried: making choices is more important than ever.

Top from the left, Rag inlay rug, *Turquoise wedge*. Curtain, *Visibility wool*.
Virvel (vortex). Created for Jonas Bohlin's major show at Vandalorum in spring 2017. Photo: Jonas Sällberg.
Below from the left, Handtowels in twill, *Rosary*, handtowels in lace weave, *Bra o fin* (Good and fine).
 Napkin container, paper yarn and leather.

