



TEXTILE LIFE-LINES

LISELOTTE MALMSTEN'S CREATIVE MIND AND CAPABLE HANDS ARE BEHIND THE PRODUCTION OF MANY CARL MALMSTEN FABRICS, HER OWN TEXTILE ART AS WELL AS TEXTILES FOR INTERIORS.

With WWII over, Liselotte Bourcart qualified in 1947 as an interior architect at the equivalent to Konstfack in Zürich, headed by the likes of Johannes Itten¹, as of the Bauhaus movement. Through her studies she had become acquainted with Swedish and Danish interior design ideals, namely light furniture, artistically produced textiles and airy rooms, a far cry from where she had come with heavy furniture and dark wood preponderating. She and a friend set off northward bound, first to Denmark where they had some friends and then on to Sweden.

She had taken along three addresses of places where she would like to work: NK-bo, Svenskt Tenn and Carl Malmsten. During her interview with Carl Malmsten it came out that she was thinking, amongst other things, of cycling to Norway to see friends. "Good for you!" was Carl Malmsten's response: she got offered a job. For Liselotte, this in-

itially meant making clean copies of architectural drawings. Later she was to learn more about textiles and Sweden was where she learnt to do a whole gamut of weaving techniques. She married Vidar Malmsten, Carl Malmsten's son, and they had four children as well as a close working partnership that gave rise to many classic designs for interiors.

We met up in Liselotte's home, Övre Karlsro² on Pipers Way in Solna. This house was where her in-laws, Carl and Siv Malmsten, used to live. Other houses in the area were inhabited variously by members of the family at different times. There are some similarities with the creative Larsson home, Lilla Hyttånäs in Sundborn, but this place is not a museum. Visiting the house is like taking a trip into the history of Swedish furniture and interior design history starting in the early 20th century, when Carl Malmsten was 'discovered' in the process of furnishing Stockholm City Hall, 1916-23. Throughout the 20th century

p 20 The Carl Malmsten chair, *Vardag*, with its handwoven upholstery designed by Liselotte Malmsten.
The Malmsten clock, *Vidar*, painted by Liselotte Malmsten.
Sketch for a rya rug by Liselotte Malmsten, who lives in the house where Carl and Siv Malmsten used to live.

Liselotte Malmsten

born 1922 in Switzerland.
Came to Sweden in 1947.
Worked for many years at Carl Malmsten, where she designed curtains, upholstery and interior textiles. In her own art practice she employs a variety of techniques: tapestry, appliqué, embroidery and painting. Unique painted cabinets constitute one of Liselotte's signature products and each of the many she made is unique. The latest purchase of artwork signed Liselotte Malmsten was made in 2018, when Solna municipality acquired two pieces.



and even now, Carl Malmsten's furniture is a byword for craftsmanship, quality materials and function.

The house is full of Malmsten furniture. Liselotte Malmsten settled herself on a high-backed chair designed by Vidar Malmsten for elderly folk. All the edges, according to Malmsten principles, are rounded off at the corners, with characteristically soft shapes and an ergonomic form. Vidar and Liselotte's two daughters also took part in our conversation. The oldest of the siblings, Gudrid and the youngest, Annika. Liselotte Malmsten is now 97 years old. Her eyes sparkle with wisdom and exuberance as she speaks. Now and again her daughters chimed in. To have grown up in this home was amazing, they said, even if in their teens they thought their home was rather different to their friends' homes. Their friends in turn found the setting really lovely and creative. And indeed it was, affirmed the two. Annika's daughter Eira is following in her grandmother's footsteps and studying at Capel-lagården, the craft school founded by her mother's grandparents Carl and Siv Malmsten and where her grandmother Liselotte used to teach. Liselotte is delighted and follows what is going on with great interest. Eira had started weaving a rag rug on a loom. Keeping the textile line going.

Walls are adorned with Liselotte's textile art: tapestries, embroidery, appliqué and textile prints. These are just one strand of her multifaceted artistic oeuvre alongside all the major interior design commissions executed with Vidar, not to mention the furnishing fabrics, rugs and interior textiles she composed.

Liselotte has always done drawing, taking paper, pencils and watercolours along on trips and excursions. Inspiration comes through nature and people. She did a narrative tapestry of the Bergshamra allotments in the neighbourhood. The throng of people includes her near and dear, her children and grandchildren. The depiction of an idyll, with gardening, flowers, fun and play. A motif she has also painted. Her way of working is to paint a detailed sketch, then weave

or embroider it. This applies both to tapestries as well as her decorative double weaves, rugs and furnishing fabrics. The sketches, with their gentle vibrancy and fine feel for colour, serve as life-filled originals for her textiles. Ryas drawn in pastels with fuzzy, soft contours and colourplay, rölkakan rugs with geometrically constructed patterning in her highly personalized ranges of colour, double weaves with precise designs, where different materials are discernible in the sketches – such as brilliant white linen and warm red and violet tones of woollen yarn. Sketches that can be used for weaving straight off. Silk paper, painted on, served as a curtain design: the transparent quality already given in the paper.

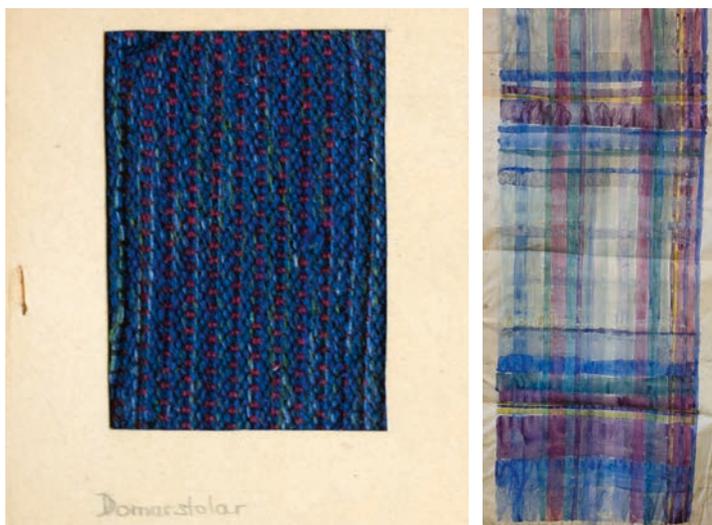
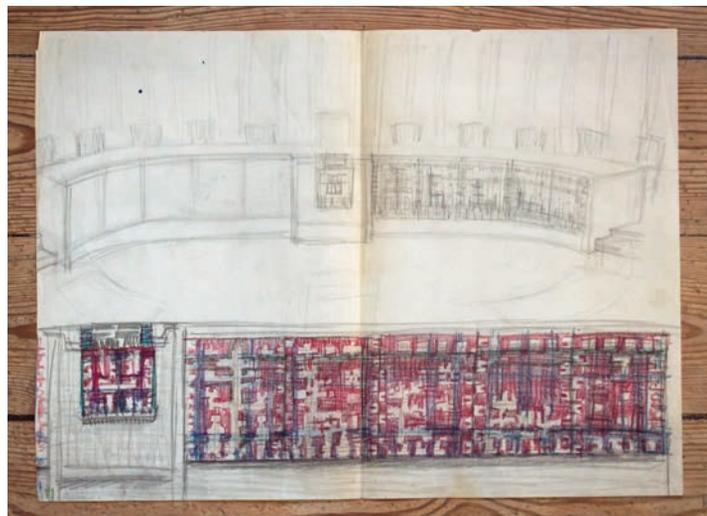
Several of the major interior design commissions are well documented, with sketchwork and samples. We took a closer look at one of them: a 1950s commission for Skellefteå District Court. The bar has two long panels of pick-up double weave, marked as Finnweave on the drawings. A smaller weave mounted centrally, in front of the judge. The furniture and other fittings are signed Vidar Malmsten; the textiles were created by Liselotte, but, interjected her daughters, they for sure collaborated closely. Mum and dad did a lot together, experimenting too, there was a lot of play with colour and material.

The District Court interior is typical of its time. Function and quality are intimately connected. Durable materials have been used for both furniture and textiles. Sober, elegant design. The red colour scheme gives a warm impression, the circular form of the judge's desk has an embracing and inclusive feel to it. In a room where many a difficult dilemma needs to be dealt with and a lot of pain attended to. Two humanists, Vidar and Liselotte Malmsten, were given the task of furnishing this room. And do it justice!

The textile furnishings are still in place, while the furniture unfortunately has been removed and replaced with high-backed black chairs.

Liselotte has composed many curtain fabrics and the designs for a considerable amount of handwoven furnishing fabrics that became

Liselotte Malmsten with her husband Vidar Malmsten designed the interior for Skellefteå District Court at the end of the 1950s.



part of the signature Carl Malmsten furniture. Several of the designs made by Carl Malmsten were given their colourways by Liselotte. Carl Malmsten had great confidence in Liselotte's ability to see colour and in her feeling for colour schemes.

The Malmsten archive in Sickla, Nacka contains a large number of preserved samples in an impressive variety of techniques, qualities and colourways.

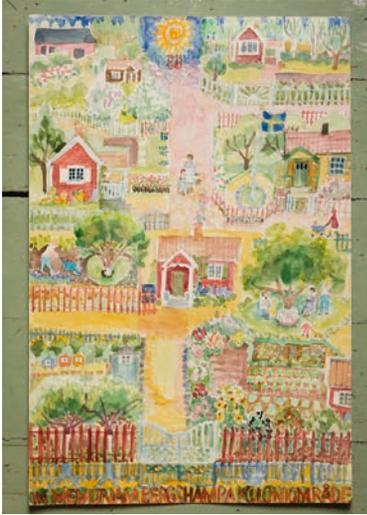
We observed the importance of integrated design work. An upholstered piece of Malmsten furniture is only properly finished once the fabric is in place. And this is at its best when handwoven. Nowadays the ability to produce handwoven upholstery cloth does not exist as it did formerly. Maybe in the future. Liselotte certainly hopes so: there is a huge amount of source material in the Sickla archive to explore.

In the kitchen she has a beautiful, functional chair upholstered with handwoven cloth. The flooring under the chair was painted a turquoise-grey, a shade picked up by a stripe in the upholstery cloth. Intuitive flair applied to day-to-day life, to what belongs in the home

and the "little" world as well as in the creating of large public interior designs. How did she manage to do what she did? The sketches we saw were just a fraction of everything made. And then there was her own practice. All the special painted furniture. Four children. Liselotte smiled and after a while commented.

– Yes, that's me!

Liselotte Malmsten's artistic oeuvre has to date not been given the attention it deserves. Perhaps that has to do with the space occupied by the men. Her father-in-law. The great Carl Malmsten and her husband Vidar. But also since textiles tend to have more of an unassuming role. Like at the time of the Bauhaus, when the men held the positions as architects and designers of furniture and interiors. The women were tucked away in the textile workshops. Now with the Bauhaus movement celebrating its centenary, it can be seen in different exhibitions how textiles have their place. And only when the whole context, with the architecture, furniture and textiles, gets presented do we find a compelling wholeness. Like here in Liselotte's artist home in Solna.



Painting and tapestry of Bergshamra allotments.



¹Johannes Itten (1888-1967) published a number of books, including *Kunst der Farbe* (The Art of Colour), in which he presented his ideas about colour.

²Övre Karlsro, one of three buildings erected by Karl XV, also called Carl Malmsten's house. Carl Malmsten bought the house around 1920 and built on an extension for a studio space. This is where he lived for most of his life. The building has been listed since 1993.