

HAND-WOVEN FABRICS FOR UPHOLSTERING

By RUTH BOLINGER

THIS is the story of my adventure in renovating old furniture and covering it with hand-woven material. After a hunt of months for some good pieces of old American furniture, imagine my delight at finding in a barnloft a set of four pieces and an odd chair of about the 1860 period.

The design and lines of the furniture were right, but as I scraped with my knife it seemed almost impossible that I would find the wood I hoped for—black walnut. I went through a layer of black lacquer, another of varnish stain, and finally a coat of red Jap-a-lac—relics of times when many believed that the beautiful grain of natural wood should be covered with thick and shining stuff.

With each coat of crime that covered the beautiful wood was an upholstery that fitted well in ugliness and lack of imagination. Little wonder that the last owners had discarded these pieces as unworthy when Grand Rapids bestowed on America its garish masterpieces.

When the furniture had been removed to my work shop and before work on it had progressed very far, an acquaintance stopped in one day and wondered why I was wasting

my time on "that stuff." Before long however the beautiful soft brown velvet of old walnut, with its darker grain—giving it character and dignity—began to show up. The same person came back later to marvel and admire when the furniture was completed as shown in Illustration No. 1.

Of course for me the only covering for this fine old furniture was hand-woven material. It is by far the most beautiful and durable cloth that can be used in any number of places, but more than that, it was the eminently suitable material to be used for these chairs and the settee.

The furniture was to be used in a large room, 24 x 14 feet, with a fireplace at one end and a huge window on the porch side, which looked toward the distant mountains. Opposite the window would hang a large Kashmir tapestry, intricately woven of red and blue and gold, with other colors in lesser quantities. The combination of colors used in this hanging was such that in most lights the predominating shade was a rich warm wine, although not a bit of this color yarn had been used. This mirage color should be the one used for the odd chair, a nice old fashioned rocker. Of the colors actually woven in, a beautiful blue predominated.



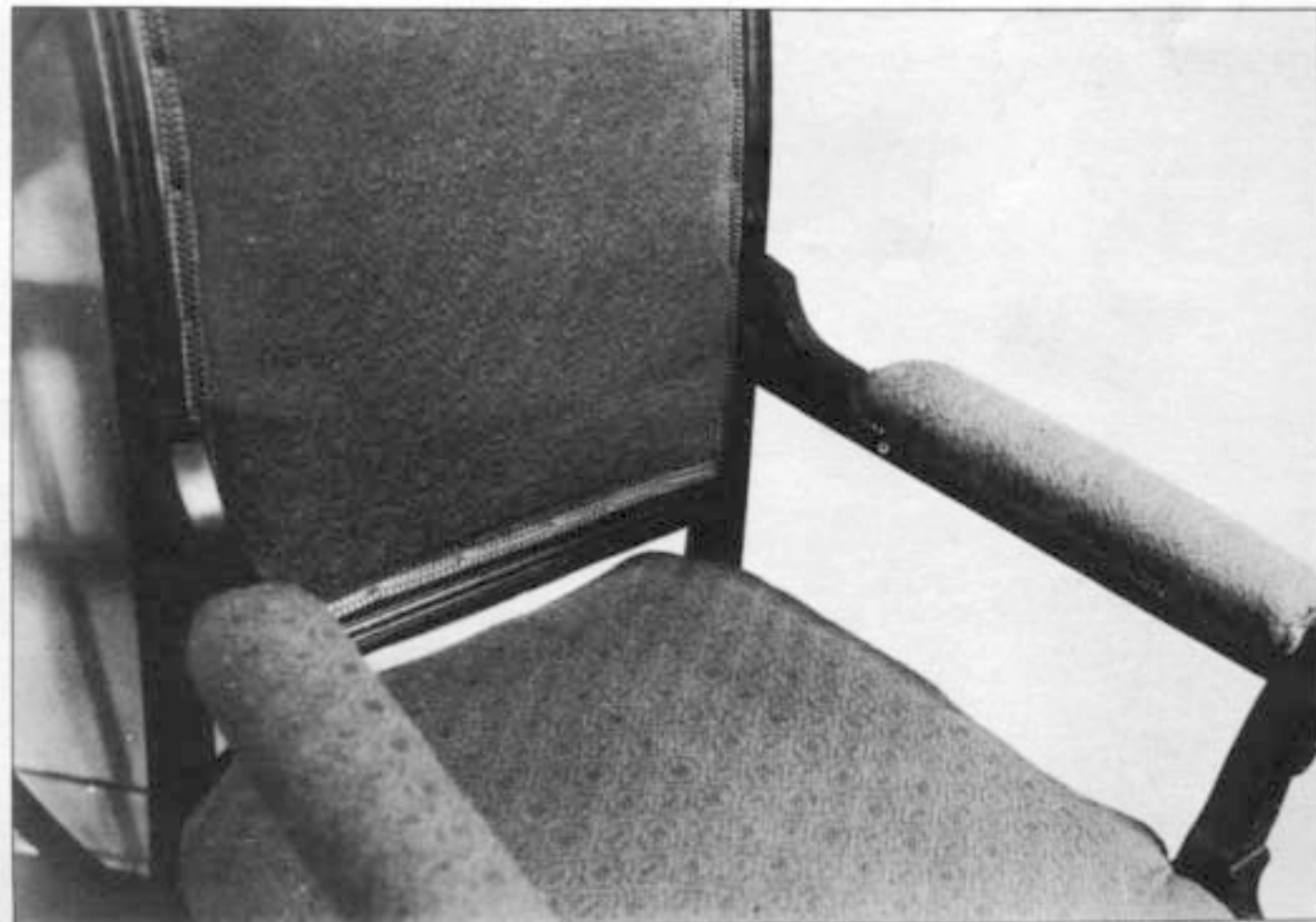
This blue, then, would be the color of the upholstery for the four pieces—a 4-foot settee, an arm chair, and two straight chairs. According to the Bernat color cards it was a Colonial blue.

The upholstery should be a tightly woven material of good body but not too heavy. I decided on Weaving Special for the warp and Homespun for the weft, and planned to set it up at 30 threads to the inch. I needed 10 yards of finished material, 32 inches wide, so planned to have the warp measure $10\frac{1}{2}$ yards, 35 inches in width. This meant that I needed 11,025 yards of warp. I arrived at the yardage thus:

30	threads to inch
35	inches wide
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1,050	threads
$10\frac{1}{2}$	yards in length
<hr style="width: 50%; margin: 0 auto;"/>	
11,025	yards of warp

Weaving Special contains 4,000 yards per pound. Dividing the number of yards of warp by the yards per pound, or 11,025 by 4,000 made a little over $2\frac{3}{4}$ pounds. I ordered three pounds to be safe, and when my warp had been measured there was one skein left.

Since Homespun is a little thicker yarn, I figured that it would run about 27 threads to the inch as weft to the 30 threads to the inch of the Weaving Special as warp. I figured the amount of Homespun I needed as follows:



32 inches wide
 37 threads to the inch

864 threads in 1 inch
 and
 864 yards in 1 yard
 (Divide by 36 to get no. of yards in
 1 inch and multiply by 36 to get no.
 of yards in 1 yard)

864
 10 yards of woven material

8,640 yards of Homespun needed

Homespun runs 2200 yards to the pound. Dividing this amount into the yardage needed—8,640—gave a little less than 4 pounds, which is the amount I ordered. I finished weaving the last of the ten yards of material with the last bit of Homespun yarn.

To decide on the pattern was the next step. I wanted a rather small but distinct all-over design and finally chose one of the Swedish upholstery patterns for an eight-harness loom. The threading, tie-up, treadling, and a drawing of the pattern is given here. I have written the draft in a little different form than the one I worked from. The way I have drafted it is in the form most of us use, I believe. The pattern, as pictured in the book I found it, was absolutely square, as would have been the case if the same weight of material had been used for warp and weft. Each of the small patterns in my material was a wee bit longer the long way of the material, since there were less Homespun or weft threads to the inch than there were Weaving Special or warp threads. Illustration No. 2 shows the material on the loom. A close-up of the pattern is given in Illustration No. 3.

The odd rocker was to be the ephemeral wine color of the hanging. After looking over the yarn cards for the exact color I desired and finding the shade, I remembered a wine colored suit—a skirt and three-quarter length coat—that I had woven in 1928. It had been worn for several years and then carefully put away. I found the suit was exactly the right color and there was enough material to cover the chair. It was still a perfect piece of cloth even with all that wear, which speaks well for the durability of hand-woven material it seems to me. It was woven of rather heavy yarn, about the weight of glorine, and in a plain weave. Perfect—the hanging with much design, the blue chairs and settee with a small all-over pattern and this rocker of a different



color in a plain weave. I also found some material of the same yarn but in a different weave, one of the Danish 4-harness patterns, that was left from another suit I had woven for someone. This I used to cover a small stool.

I ordered the gimp for the blue upholstery from regular commercial stock. I decided to make the gimp for the wine material for the rocker with card weaving, and found an exact match in a thread called gimp. It was a heavy hard twisted silk thread. In looking over my card weaving patterns they all seemed to have quite a lot of design. It seemed to me that the gimp should be quite plain and flat. In using all four holes in each card the strip woven is the thickness of four threads. I wanted the gimp the thickness of just two threads, so worked out a pattern using just the A and B holes of each card. The first two threads were put through from the top of the first card; the next two through the second card from the back; the third set of two threads was put through the third card from the top; and the next two through the fourth card from the back, etc. Twelve cards were used, which made the gimp one-half inch wide. I used the same thread for the weft and turned the cards all in the same direction as long as it was possible and then turned them in the opposite direction. Illustration No. 4 shows the gimp being woven.

By the time the material was off the loom the furniture had been cleaned, sanded and re-glued. The upholsterer then began his work. I thought it wise to be present to make sure that he ran the pattern the right way and put it right side out. At my insistence he finally agreed to stitch the cut edges, which otherwise might have raveled. I would advise any weaver of furniture-covering material to choose an upholsterer who is not only skilled in his craft but also open to suggestions on handling this kind of material. One more skillful than I might have done the upholstering herself, but I found it a good investment to have a competent workman do the job.

