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The Social Fabric: Deep Local to Pan Global

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Timberline Textiles: Creating a Sense of Place

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This article looks at the restoration of Timberline Lodge textiles from the perspective of postmodernism, where fact and fiction trade places, and representation becomes reality through the mirror of shared perceptions. We will see how certain materials themselves become less important than the experience they are meant to convey. It is a story of ingenuity, adaptation, and image-crafting using the language of textiles to create a sense of place like no other.

Figure 1. Timberline Lodge. Photo courtesy of Timberline Lodge, Mt. Hood, Oregon.

Timberline Lodge sits at almost 6000' on Mt. Hood, about 60 miles east of Portland, Oregon (Figure 1). It is considered one of the great lodges of the Western United States, built in 1937. It helped establish Cascadian style architecture, named after the biggest mountain range of the Northwestern United States. Made of massive hand-hewn wood beams, hand-forged wrought iron, and locally quarried rock, the Lodge was the product of the Works Progress Administration's attempt to put people to work during the Great Depression. To that end, they employed hand labor for every aspect of its construction and furnishings. Men used ropes, pulleys and hand saws to build the Lodge and women were tasked with creating all the interior fabrics by hand. These textiles were made out of locally produced fibers and fabrics under the direction of designer Margery Hoffman Smith, and included handwoven upholstery fabric, hand appliquéd curtains and bedspreads, and hand hooked rugs.

What makes Timberline unique when compared to other Cascadian lodges are these original textile designs. No other Western lodge has such distinctive textiles designed specifically for the place. The appliqué motifs mostly represent wildflowers growing on Mt. Hood, and nearby mountain landscapes. Colors reflect the natural environment. The project used whatever materials were at hand, including linen yarn grown and spun in wet Western Oregon fields, wool yarn sourced from dry climate Central Oregon sheep, and worn woolen blankets cleverly repurposed from other government-sponsored Oregon work projects (e.g., the Civilian

Conservation Corps) to make hand hooked rugs. After the Lodge's grand opening, attended by President Roosevelt in 1937, it was closed during World War II. Post-war use of the Lodge was harsh and unregulated until R. L. Kohnstamm became the area operator in 1955. Waxed skis and cleated climbing boots were standard gear for guests to bring into the Lodge, along with cigarettes. Over time, the original textiles wore out from hard use and were removed.

Fast forward forty years to 1975 when a textile restoration project began to replace almost a thousand yards of original handwoven upholstery fabric, hundreds of hand sewn draperies and bedspreads, and 119 hand-hooked rugs for the 40,000 square foot building, most of which had disappeared by then. They could have simply replaced the textiles with commercial equivalents, but the handcraft movement of the 1970s meant that there were many Oregon craftspeople eager to recreate these unique textiles. Coinciding with this interest was a funding source due to a mid-1970s economic downturn called CETA (Comprehensive Employment and Training Act), a U.S. government agency reminiscent of the 1930s Works Progress Administration. R. L. Kohnstamm, retired banker Jack Mills, former Portland Art Museum director Dr. Francis Newton and curator Rachel Griffith created a non-profit organization to manage the Timberline Textile Restoration Project, and Portland artist Marlene Gabel was selected to oversee this ambitious endeavor (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Timberline Textile Restoration Workshop, c. 1977. Photo courtesy of Friends of Timberline.

At that time, the only known record of the original designs was a book of watercolor paintings that the designer Margery Hoffman Smith had created in the 1930s (Figures 3 and 4), indicating her concept for each part of the Lodge. Working off of these paintings, weavers, stitchers, and rug hookers began restoring the Lodge to its earlier glory. However, it was not simple to recreate the past, and thus began the slippery slope of adapting historic restoration to current realities. The linen and wool industries of Oregon that had supplied yarn and fabric during the 1930s were beginning to shut down by the 1970s, so these had to be sourced from outside the region.

Figure 3. Watercolor painting by Margery Hoffman Smith showing Solomon Seal pattern. Courtesy of John Wilson Special Collections, Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon. Photo: Annin Barrett

Figure 4. Watercolor painting by Margery Hoffman Smith showing Phlox pattern. Courtesy of John Wilson Special Collections, Multnomah County Library, Portland, Oregon. Photo: Annin Barrett

Margery Hoffman Smith's watercolor designs didn't indicate texture, just color and pattern motifs. No weave plans had survived, so makers had to research historic fabrics and reinvent them from scratch. For sewn designs, no original instructions were available. Synthetic fabric blends were becoming the norm, and sourcing heavyweight 100 percent linen or cotton cloth suitable for appliqué was difficult. After the restoration project began, researchers discovered that *Life* magazine did a feature article of Timberline Lodge in the late 1940s with full-page color photographs of the lobby, lending more accurate information about the colors and patterns of upholstery and drapery. Marguerite P. Davison's *A Handweaver's Pattern Book*, first published in the 1940s, provided typical four-harness weave plans used during the Depression era.

By late 1978, the Timberline Textile Restoration Project had recreated the lobby drapes, rugs and upholstery, dining room drapes, mezzanine drapes and upholstery, and just a couple of fireplace guestrooms when Comprehensive Education and Training Act funding stopped. While fundraising efforts began to complete the rest of the 70 guestrooms, it became apparent that textile restoration would need to be an ongoing project. Even commercial fabrics wear out after five years of heavy use in typical hospitality sites and Timberline endures extreme conditions. Intense sunlight at 6000' feet elevation reflected off of snow through original single pane windows wreaks havoc with natural fiber textiles. And the number of visitors using these textiles has grown exponentially, from hundreds of thousands to now over two million people a year! Keep in mind, it is not a museum but a fully functioning ski lodge.

It has also been a movie set. While textile restoration work continued, Stanley Kubrick's film *The Shining* was shot at Timberline Lodge in 1980, sparking a genre of alpine horror films, and giving Timberline worldwide exposure. There are even *The Shining*-themed weddings and company retreats at the Lodge. It became evident that the Lodge held a special place in the public's imagination and that it was a continually evolving icon of Northwest mountain experience.

Figure 5. Linny Adamson, curator, at Timberline Lodge's front door. Photo credit: William White

With the Lodge's growing popularity, Linny Adamson (Figure 5) was named curator of Timberline Lodge and took over managing the Timberline Textile Restoration Project and other duties in 1979. By this time, the mission had changed somewhat from the project's inception. Now, the work involved reinterpreting the Lodge for increasing numbers of visitors while adapting handmade textiles to be made "in the spirit of the original." But the notion of "original" has had to shift over time. A prime example of this, where the image becomes more important than the actual historic object, is the restored lobby drapery.

One of the first reproduced textiles, made in 1976, were handwoven lobby drapes. The weavers faithfully copied the pattern and colors of similar 1930s drapes but only later found evidence that the 1937 lobby drapes were handstitched applique instead of being handwoven. These 1976 version lobby drapes are thick and sumptuous, qualities that suit the Lodge well and are much admired for their design. The fact that they are not accurate reproductions is lost on most people who imagine them to be replicas of the remembered past, if not the originals themselves. These draperies are the most often photographed items in the entire Lodge and there would be a public protest if they were replaced (Figure 6).

Figure 6. Lobby handwoven drapes and upholstery, commercial rug. Photo courtesy of Timberline Lodge, Mt. Hood, Oregon.

This reimagining of Timberline textiles continued as the restoration project went on. Since linen and wool yarn became impossible or too expensive to source locally, it had to be imported. The practice of repurposing donated materials (like had been done with worn wool blankets in 1937) was used to complete certain textiles. Pendleton Woolen Mill provided wool flannel for the hand-hooked rugs, and Wildflower Fibers supplied lots of yarn. Some acrylic and polyester blends found their way into Timberline upholstery and bedspreads, again undetectable to the untrained observer.

Does it matter? Not to the millions of visitors a year who make the pilgrimage to Timberline Lodge. For them, the handcrafted surroundings remain true to their experience of the place. These textiles provide them with rich backgrounds for countless wedding portraits and vacation pictures on Google and Instagram, symbolizing the Lodge itself. Ironically, this popularity has had an adverse affect on the textiles, wearing out handmade rugs and upholstery made of all natural fibers too quickly to be feasibly reproduced in the original way. Acrylic backing on upholstery and factory-produced rugs became the compromise out of necessity.

The fact that bedspreads require frequent laundering meant that the original hand stitching was quickly changed to machine work by the restoration project in the 1980s, then completely replaced by commercial Pendleton blankets in the 2000s. Although Pendleton blankets have been produced locally since 1910, they were not part of the original Lodge textiles. But it seems like a logical choice and most visitors accept them as original replicas without question. Pendleton Pioneer Camp blankets and Yakima Camp blankets (Figure 7) look similar to the

striped alternate bedspread patterns that Margery Hoffman Smith designed, not Pendleton's more well-known Southwestern Native American-inspired designs.

Figure 7. Guestroom Pendleton Yakima Camp blankets with appliquéd pillows and drapes. Photo courtesy of Timberline Lodge, Mt. Hood, Oregon.

In fact, most Timberline Lodge textiles have an absence of direct reference to Native American motifs. More influence shows on appliquéd curtains from 1930s-era Camp Fire Girls appropriated symbols, with similarly proportioned triangles and zigzags on a plain background. It is the romanticism of Native American culture that informs this geometric design. In the book *Playing Indian*, by Philip J. Deloria, the author explains how widespread adoption of Indian-inspired geometric motifs serves as a visual code for whites to interpret the “authentic” lost natural world of America. It is a relationship of substitution and erasure that illustrates the embedded meaning of images.

Even before visitors arrive at the Lodge they are introduced to its textiles by images. A virtual tour on Timberline's website shows throw pillows made from the repurposed appliquéd bedspreads on top of striped Pioneer Camp Pendleton blankets. These pillows did not exist at the Lodge before the 1990s but they do not often need washing and retain the idea of original hand stitched bedspreads without being destroyed by the sheer number of guests. It is an example of how original patterns have successfully evolved to survive in the guestrooms. With these adaptations, the spirit of the Lodge lives on in its textiles. Remarkably, all upholstery fabric is still handwoven by local weavers, and appliquéd drapery is still handstitched by women living on the mountain, a testament to curator Linny Adamson's ongoing work.

Many of the appliqué pattern motifs originally designed by Margery Hoffman Smith are based on wildflowers that bloom on Mt. Hood: Trillium, Blue Gentian, Mountain Phlox and Skunk Cabbage. But by the 1980s, most of these native plants were gone from the area around Timberline Lodge. An extensive natural landscaping effort led by architect Barbara Feely, and partly inspired by these appliqué draperies (Figures 8 and 9), reintroduced some of these same wildflowers to Timberline. As in any good postmodern story, the representation becomes more real than reality. The drapery pattern motifs kept the presence of these wildflowers in place for decades until they could be replanted.

Figure 8. Trillium pattern guestroom drapes.
Courtesy of Friends of Timberline. Photo: Annin Barrett

Figure 9. Skunk Cabbage pattern guestroom drapes.
Courtesy of Friends of Timberline. Photo: Annin Barrett

These textiles literally document the history of the Lodge in their designs. They symbolize the uniqueness of the place, and provide guests with a specific sense of “Timberlineness.” Whether seen in person, in movies, wedding photos, or a virtual tour, Timberline Lodge remains an icon of Cascadian architecture by giving visitors an experience informed by its textiles, “in the spirit of the original.” Timberline textiles are survivors, not always in their purely original form but in a way that keeps them alive in people’s imagination today.

More than a hundred people have been involved with the Timberline Textile Restoration Project. The following list (Figure 10) attempts to name them all. Please contact the author if you know someone else who should be included.

Jack Adamson	Barrett Cummings	Mitzi Hallin	Sharon Gowdy Lindner	Aulikki Neimi	Julie Stevens
LaVern Adamson	Nedra Cummings	Sis Hayes	Vida Lohnes	Dr. Francis Newton	Leslee Sturbel
Linny Adamson	Bethany Dalton	Howard Herminson	Mary Marker	Barb Novinger	Nancy Summer
Carol Alhadeff	Geri Davis	Jean Hoffman	Lenore Martin	Gail O'Neill	Shelly Tarbett
Sue Allen	Bette Swan DeLong	Joan Hoffman	Marychris Mass	Jon Olmsted	Larry Taylor
Andy Anderson	Cynthia Dixon Rogers	Pat Horn	Fred Matilla	Jimmy Onstott	Margaret Thierry
Bill Bachhuber	Rose Sabel Dodge	Linda Hunter	Julia McCarl	Pam Patrie	Dawn Tilgner
Annin Barrett	Joanne Di Benedetto	Jan Jaqua	Bridget McCarthy	Schatzie Perkins	Marilyn Trocino
Lai Benjamin	Gretchen Douglas	Jeff Jaqua	Diane McKinnon	Jane Pittman	Sandra Troon
Jill Benish	Thelma Dull	Kathleen Jaswick	Maria McNally	Lynn Powell	Denise Tuel
Jackie Bingham	Chrystal Felix	Suzi Jones	Judy McNeill	Renate Powell	Betsy Valian
Luzon Birdsong	Kay Flynn	Jim Kelly	Jackie Meier	Nel Rand	Maureen Vermiliya
The Bishop Family	Linda Frizzell	Lucille Kelly	Leann Meyer	Lynn Richards	Tammy Villali
Helen Bitar	Sandra Funk	Gorel Kinersly	Liza Mickle	Erin Riggs	Jean Vollum
Randi Black	Candice Funkhauser	Sarah Kinersly	Jack Mills	Cynthia Rogers	Maria Weiner
Dana Boussard	Marlene Gabel	Larry Kirkland	Phyllis Mills	Teresa Ruch	Allie Wenzel
Fran Boyington	Dotty Gannett	Nancy Kloss	Jenny Moody	Chris Salazar	Janelle Werner
Pam Brett	Karen Gelbard	Patty Knott	Audrey Moore	Elysbeth Salazar	Mrs. Wheeler
Sharleen Bridge	Norma Gillette	Jeff Kohnstamm	Leslie Morehead	Goldann Salazar	Judy Wick
Jaye Campbell	Kaye Gomes	Molly Kohnstamm	Ann Mounteer	Yolanda Santillan	Ladella Williams
Sue Clark	Joan Green	R. L. Kohnstamm	Sherry Mowatt	April Schetker	Anne Williamson
Tracy Colby	Luada Green	Robin Korybski	Sarah Munro	Anna Schoenberger	Kathy Winkler
Peter Collingwood	Catherine Greer	Colleen Krieger	Nonnie Natani	Monica Setziol-Phillip	Marge Wintermute
Christy Covington	Rachael Griffin	Julie Brogionti Lawrence	Barbara Nedrow	Phid Simmons	Vicki Wooten
Diane Crane	Jere Grimm	Carolyn Lee	Elsie Nedrow	JoAnn Snead	
Marge Crane	Russell Groff	Pat Lee	Marilyn Nelson	Cheryl Snow	
Pat Crane	Helen Gundlach	Nancy Lindberg	Rosalie Neilson	Jody Sterne	

Figure 10. A list of weavers, appliqué stitchers, rug hookers, and textile restorers who worked on the Timberline Textile Restoration Project from 1975-2018.

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