

THE “MEDEVI SQUARE” – CLASSICAL SWEDISH?

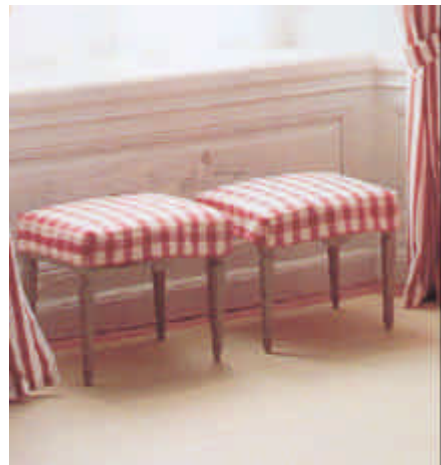
Through the death of king Charles 12th and military defeats during the early 18th century Sweden lost a large part of its earlier conquered land. As a result of this Sweden quickly lost its 17th status as a mighty nation with strong international influence and experienced a worsening economic situation. In the year 1771 Gustav III swore the oath as the new king. With his upbringing, strongly influenced by the lifestyle at the French court, his interest in culture in general and theatre in special (he became known as the "cultural king") style and fashion became key factors for the Swedish nobility.

Through extensive travels mostly through France and Italy, Gustav III brought home stylistic impression, which ultimately became a style of its own, a sort of Swedish version of rococo. A style later known as rustic-rococo or the "Gustavian style", basically a style consisting of a mixture of rococo style with strong influences from antiquity awakened by the finds of Pompeii and Herculaneum. It was characterised by interiors with furniture, draperies etc with all of at the time prevailing rococo features, perhaps with a little less abundance of details but a strive for refined elegance and for certain a litter lighter, or one can say a blond touch.

The amount of details and refinement of materials and craftsmanship of course matched the financial situation of the customer. Generally, though it can be said that the main features i.e. the lightness or blondness (as it is thought of and generally perceived as today) came through the use of available local Swedish material in combination with imported, exclusive materials. The result often was light and airy interiors dominated by light-green, grey, white and yellow colours.

Initially during the introduction of a new style adherence to it was mainly something found at the homes of the well to do. In Sweden thus mainly the nobility who, through the 16th century had accumulated wealth through service to the royal house. Wealth that, among other things, was invested in the building of castles, manors and fine- and applied arts. The 18th century chairs and fauteuils etc of the Gustavian style had embroidered cushions and seats of the finest imported (or simply stolen during the successful war years) silk, often strongly coloured red, gold or green through complex and exclusive methods.

Naturally the well to do of the times usually had a private palace in the capitol and one or more castles or large mansions in different parts of the countryside. This enabled them to make the most of what the different seasons had to offer. It also meant that a large amount of richly decorated and furnished living spaces stood empty for large parts of the year. As a result of this measures had to be taken to protect the exclusive goods, mainly from the bleaching effects of the sunlight but also against dust etc.



The best and easiest way was through making cotton covers which were draped over, or around the furniture as well as large covering curtains. Cotton which is a relatively cheap material and technically easy to dye, where at the time often dyed red or blue. Cotton is also easily woven, and a squared pattern is technically an easy pattern to produce: it almost weaves itself. This gave that cotton covers with a red and white or blue and white squared pattern were produced en masse, and became a standard feature of a Gustavian home.

Although the pattern mostly appeared on covers there were also Gustavian interiors and furniture where the squared pattern were used for its own qualities. An interior with this material and pattern could be found at the royal castle of Gripsholm, there can be no doubt that the aesthetically features of the pattern were appreciated.

Through changes in society during the 19th century the nobility lost much of its powers and positions to the upcoming bourgeoisie and industrialists. The costs involved in maintaining huge castles and manors with lavish interiors laid a heavy toll. In most of the cases money to keep a large staff just wasn't available, and naturally the question arose of what to do with the exclusive furniture with their fragile silk textiles.

One way cutting down the costs of maintenance that quickly spread, was to exchange the worn-down silk textiles with the red-white or blue-white squared cotton material that earlier was used to protect the silk. This solution had its obvious advantages; the squared cotton textile was easy to produce henceforth cheap, its presence had a long tradition even within the royal castles and was seen as aesthetically *comme il faut*. What actually happened was thus that the textile with its characteristic squared pattern, former mainly used as a decorative protective cover, in once became in itself became a major decorative part of a Swedish version of rococo-style; the Gustavian style.

Through the changing styles of the 19th and the early 20th century the Gustavian style fell into a sort of slumber, although at a certain level it was maintained at the mansion and castles of the nobility. This was due to a certain conservatism within the nobility and perhaps a - as we can call it - a sort of loyalty to the "great cultural" king, Gustav III. Who by many is regarded as one of the greatest gifts to the cultural Sweden whilst many in him see no more than a pompous, theatrical King out of touch with reality. For sure he was murdered by a conspiracy within the army.

During the middle and second half of the 20th century, again simplicity and lightness was sought after when it came to interior decoration. Under the device "in with light and away with the dark" sombre 19th century fashion quickly became out of date. What better to turn to classic, "national" Gustavian style. Although never really "dead" the Gustavian style has in the last 20-30 years gained an enormous popularity and momentum. Now, though the red-white and blue-white squared pattern, earlier used as protective covers has become a natural and visually strong part of the style.

Eventually one can say that it was IKEA, the truly global Swedish enterprise, that confirmed the squared patterns path from a peripheral role to a major decorative part of a “classical national” style. This was done through IKEAs special design-line “classical Swedish” consisting mainly of updated versions of Gustavian style furniture and textile, of course with the red-white squares.



“The Medevi-square”

The red-white square was labelled as the "Medevi square" after a spa opened in the 17th century which -of course- Gustav III visited. Nowadays it is not uncommon that when Sweden is presented abroad that the "Medevi-square" plays a visually upfront role.

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“The Gripsholm square”