

COVEY RISE[®]



WHERE TWEED BEGAN

A stop at the home of tweed in the rolling hills of Hawick, Scotland, reveals how this historic fabric is made today—just as it has been for two hundred years.

STORY BY COVEY RISE STAFF
PHOTOGRAPHY BY TERRY ALLEN

The story of tweed dates back about 200 years to a Scottish Border weaver, a London cloth merchant, and a fortuitous mistake. At that time, the traditional woolen cloth made in the town of Hawick (locally pronounced *Hoick*), in the Scottish Border country, was known as “tweel.” Six bales of this cloth were shipped to James Lock in London and the delivery note was misread. When the time came to reorder, either from poor penmanship or an ink blotch, the “l” was read as a “d” and the London clothing clerk ordered “tweed” for his next consignment. In the modern world of intellectual property rights, the mill owner undoubtedly would have rushed to his lawyer. He didn’t—and the name tweed fell into common usage to describe this richly colored and hard-wearing cloth. Today, Lovat Mill, dating back to 1882, continues as the sole producer of tweed in Hawick. The company is dedicated to traditional manufacturing standards and quality practices, through decades of great change.

When Stephen Rendle and Alan Cumming were looking to establish their own weaving business in the 1990s, they heard that the tradition of weaving tweeds in Hawick was soon to be lost by the impending closure of the mill. “This mill, with its amazing history, was about to close and die. We spoke to the owners and assured them that closure was not the only option, and we struck a deal. Since that time, we have restored the mill’s fortunes and have ensured its place in the world once more,” says Rendle, Managing Director of Lovat Mill. Design Director Alan Cumming continues: “At its core, the company had an amazing client list as it specialized in the weaving of estate tweeds—part of a long-established tradition of estates having their own patterns worn by employees and landowners. The list of clients was impressive. How else would they get their tweeds? The imperative was to rebuild the business.”

The other type of cloth for which Scotland is known is tartan—but tartans are linked to families, whereas estate tweeds are linked to the land. “Tweed designing is not limited by a strict pattern, as tartan is, and this gives our design team much latitude,” says Rendle. “In all, we weave about 170 individual estate patterns, which are solely for the use of each estate—none ever copied. We weave for private sporting estates and regimental tweeds—for the Scots Guards, for example, or the Royal Regiment of Scotland for official use.”

Lovat Mill continues the heritage of designing distinctive tweeds for use as camouflage for stalking deer and other field sports, such as wingshooting. “As estates are occasionally sold or divided, a new estate tweed design may be created, based on previous designs or something completely new. Owners may send us images of their land in the shooting season or ask us to incorporate family color from armorial designs,” Rendle says. “Being protectors of the centuries-old craft of tweed making might seem like a daunting responsibility, but the truth is, it’s good fun. We enjoy it. Creating a new tweed is something to savor. Lovat Mill tweeds have a wonderful way of showing off the subtlety of the color mixtures. This sets us well apart from the field.”

Stephen Rendle of Lovat Mill says they have the three elements important for making tweed: water (from Scotland’s River Teviot), sheep, and the right people.

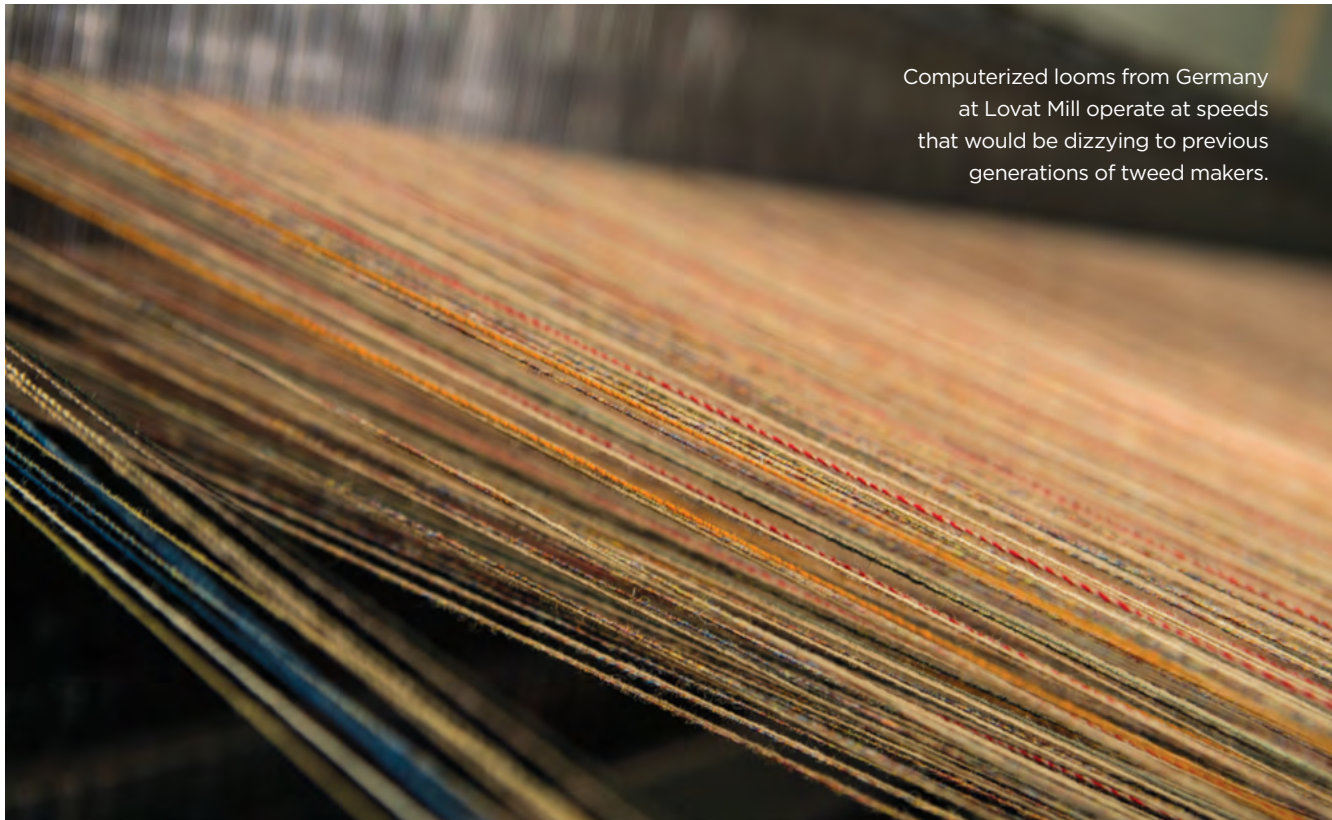
FLEECE FARM
(OPENING SPREAD AND THIS
PAGE) Farmer Norman Laing on
his farm Twislehope, near Hawick
in Scotland, with his South Country
Cheviot breed of sheep, used for
the wool in Lovat Mill tweed.



HISTORIC PRODUCTION

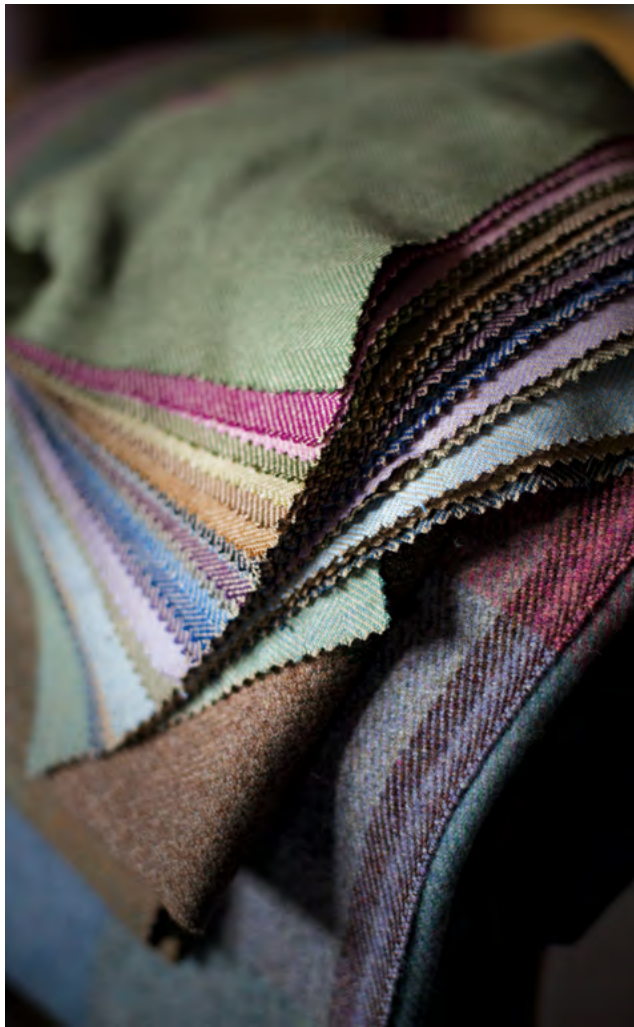
Tweed is still woven as it was 200 years ago, and Lovat Mill makes fabric to the original specifications, as many of the cloth's famous qualities remain unchanged from the mill's days in the 1880s. The latest technology in looms allows higher speeds, yet the mill's yarn twisting is kept slow and gentle to preserve the "kindness" of the wool. Weaving at the mill is a 24-hour operation and demand for Lovat products has kept their business vibrant. Managing Director Stephen Rendle says they give tweed modern performance advantages by weaving stretch and washable tweeds, applying Teflon finishes, and using very high-tensile aromatic polyamide fibers when high performance is needed.





Computerized looms from Germany at Lovat Mill operate at speeds that would be dizzying to previous generations of tweed makers.





BESPOKE MATERIALS
Lovat Mill also weaves luxury fabrics
in cashmere and rarer fine wools,
creating products for the world over.

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