

*The Textile Eye on Designers*

# SHINING EXAMPLE

*A quest to “ignite the senses” results in a celebrated body of work.*

“Go for what you want, not what you think is possible.” This inspiring advice was given to Lori Weitzner by a close friend at a crossroads in her career. She has gracefully embodied the mantra through her decades in the textile industry, moving forward with quiet determination and a commitment to kindness.

Long before Weitzner became an internationally known textile designer, she thought she might be a fashion designer.

Growing up sickly, she spent hours sketching models and their clothes. The silhouettes were never her focus; she always concentrated on coloring in patterns for the imaginary fabric. In one illustration, she added pom-pom trim to the fabric, a prescient sign of the career to come.

Weitzner’s family was a source of support. On Sundays, her father would drive them from the suburbs of New York City to the Metropolitan Museum of Art, which inspired her future as a creator, and perhaps as a quiet rule-breaker.

This spread: Fairytale by Weitzner Limited



## LORI WEITZNER STUDIO

Est.1990  
New York, New York

**STUDIO SIZE**  
4-5

**MARKET LEVEL**  
High-end

### SELECTED PRODUCTS & WHERE TO FIND

Wallcoverings - Weitzner Limited  
Textiles - Weitzner Limited  
Passementerie - Samuel & Sons  
Rugs - Perennials  
Jewelry - Lori Weitzner Studio



“Whenever the guard wasn’t looking, I would take my hand, and I would touch the painting,” recalls Weitzner. “Because I believed that if I touched the painting, I was touching the artist’s hand. And that somehow I would get the energy from the artist and be able to be as creative as the artist—and I touched them *all*.”

Weitzner earned a BFA in Textiles from Syracuse University, where feedback from a teacher that she should abandon her dreams of becoming a painter and instead explore textile design was both shattering and beneficial. Moving to Europe after graduation in 1983, she enjoyed success as a freelance designer with clients like Missoni and Swiss bedding house Schlossberg. She returned to New York and eventually set up on her own. Lori Weitzner Studio provided broad-ranging design services including packaging, pattern, and color consultation.

Jack Lenor Larsen had long been an idolized influence, and when she got an offer to join the firm as design director in the early 90’s, she was torn: while she wanted to take the position, she also felt committed to her own practice.

Weitzner took her quandary to a wise friend. Impressed by Weitzner’s enthusiastic vision, her friend encouraged her. “Ask for what you want, not what you think is possible.”

“So I went in to talk to him,” Weitzner recalls. “Jack was a man of few words, and I made my case: let me propose this and that, and I’m going on and on, telling him the whole thing. And he’s not saying anything, and I just keep talking until I have nothing else to say. So I just stop and I look at him, he looks at me, and in his Jack voice says: that sounds fine, Lori.”

Weitzner remembers Larsen, who died last year at 93, with warmth for his generosity to her. They worked well

together. “He would do what he does—those intricate, amazing weaves. But I was a print designer, so I was coming at it in a whole different way. He respected it. He used to say, “Lori looks at the big picture and then decides what she’s going to do, whereas I start with the structure and then decide what it’s going to be.” In 2007, their work was showcased in a Minneapolis Institute of Art special exhibit entitled, “The Jack Lenor Larsen Studio Part II, The Lori Weitzner Years 1992-1995”.

Her next move was to be a guest designer for luxury textile producer Sacho. Here, Weitzner played on a global stage, filling a niche with products conceived from her distinct point of view, which the company’s European owners termed “modern romantic.”

She spent twelve happy years designing for Sacho and might never have started Weitzner Limited if it weren’t for the call of another muse. After failing to convince the managing director to let her launch wallcoverings for them, she decided to do the collection herself. The endeavor meant shifting away from only providing design services into operating a full-blown company, inventory and all.

“I had a fire in my belly,” recalls Weitzner. “I went to JP Morgan

Chase, and they had a Women In Business program where you get a \$100,000 revolving credit loan within 24 hours. I started Weitzner Limited on that.”

Though she secured the loan, things did not go smoothly at first. “I made a mess of it because I based my inventory on the average fabric order, which is eight to 12 yards, FYI,” shares Weitzner. “But I was doing wallcoverings, where the average order is 30 to 40 yards. My \$100,000 credit didn’t last very long.”

“I had launched these designs and they took off right away because I had distribution through Sacho,” she adds. “But



Weitzner's childhood sketchbook





Lori Weitzner and Jack Lenor Larsen

Jack Lenor Larsen, États-Unis/United States  
 Tissu/Fabric, *Magnum*, 1970  
 Mylar, coton, vinyle, Nylon et polyester/  
 Mylar, cotton, vinyl, Nylon, polyester  
 136.5 x 140.7 cm  
 Musée des Arts décoratifs de Montréal,  
 don de/gift of Jack Lenor Larsen

LORI,  
 FAIR EST OF THE  
 FAIR A GROW  
 NEW WORLD OUT  
 THERE!  
 JACK

Card from Jack Lenor Larsen to Lori Weitzner

the TEXTILE EYE



Solace by Lori Weitzner, for Larsen, 1993, Minneapolis Institute of Art



Jacob's Ladder by Lori Weitzner, for Larsen, 1993



Sahco



Sahco, Faberge Filigree, Minneapolis Institute of Art

then I didn't have inventory and without inventory you're not going to stay in business." Thanks to her mother, new funds were secured, so Weitzner was again on her way and the wallcoverings sales took off.

For six years, Weitzner Limited enjoyed growth and success, but Weitzner was pulled to the business side and longed for more design time and less logistical stress. Enter her merger with Pollack: "They are brilliant, operationally, and I needed brilliant operations so that I never had to think about it again, and could go back to doing what I do best, which is creating product and colorwork."

The merger also allowed for the launch of her own textile collection, a long-held dream. Today, Weitzner and her studio design the Weitzner Limited collections and also work with a range of clients, including Samuel and Sons (passementerie) and Perennials (rugs). A textile-driven jewelry line is the latest addition, and highlights the abilities of artisans Weitzner has worked with to make wallcoverings and trims. It's full circle from when she was with Larsen, who sought out indigenous artisans to produce contemporary designs.

"It started with Jack," Weitzner acknowledges. "He was the first in the '50s to travel all over the world, and find these artists and communities and figure out how to mass produce and sell their work in America. That was incredible."

"After listening and watching and being with him, it inspired me that whatever I do, I want to make sure at least part of it always involves artisans," shares Weitzner. "It's a very big part of our company. But Weitzner is a contemporary company," she adds. "So I don't want to just replicate the past or do a traditional thing, I want to take those traditional techniques, but do something modern with them."

Innovation and a commitment to sustainability shine in a series of wallcoverings made using discarded magazines and newspapers. The pages are stripped and processed into "yarns"—by folding or twisting—then handwoven into panels. Newsworthy and Kodiak are examples of this ingenious technique.

Working with artisan communities requires a lot of effort, but

Weitzner is driven by her commitment to cultural sustainability. “For me, [sustainability] means that I get to work with artisans who have age-old techniques and traditions, and try to support them in doing those things,” she says.

Weitzner enjoys collaborations closer to home, too. In 2019, she worked with visual artist Lisa Hunt to create *Reverie*, a collection based on Hunt’s art on paper. “I saw an article in *Luxe* magazine on Lisa’s artwork. I looked at it and I thought—this is going to be beautiful for wallcovering and textiles! And we’re going to continue to do more with her. She’s wonderful.”

Weitzner has achieved a skillful balance between the business and the creative, with a robust studio practice centered on hand work. “Everybody who works here paints and draws and creates with their hand first,” says Weitzner. “We get messy and do photo cyanotypes, or potato prints or color, pencil, pastel, whatever it is. Then we decide, what are we going to do with this? Are we going to embroider it? Bead it? Do a digital print? A cut velvet? That’s the process.”

Weitzner’s studio also offers a glimpse into her affinity for color: books are arranged in an appealing spectrum, drawers and bins are devoted to different shades, and trays display vignettes exploring new palettes. She lays out her nuanced approach in her 2016 book *Ode to Color* which is at once a memoir and manifesto on the healing power of color. Her belief is that different palettes address different issues; finding colors that resonate can spark creativity, incite action, or soothe anxiety.

Like most people during the COVID-19 pandemic, the normally globetrotting Weitzner was not able to travel. “While it’s true that travel—the visuals, smells, tastes—provides inspiration for products that we do, what I realized in this last year is that inward, quiet meditation, peace, and calm, opens and creates space for us to have ideas.”

“I was here [in New York] and I have never felt more inspired,” she says. “I spent a very isolated time in my studio. And every day I came here I played music and I just had ideas of things I want to do, maybe textiles or maybe something completely different.” The ideas keep coming, and with them a graceful resolve to continue being kind, being creative, and asking for what she wants.



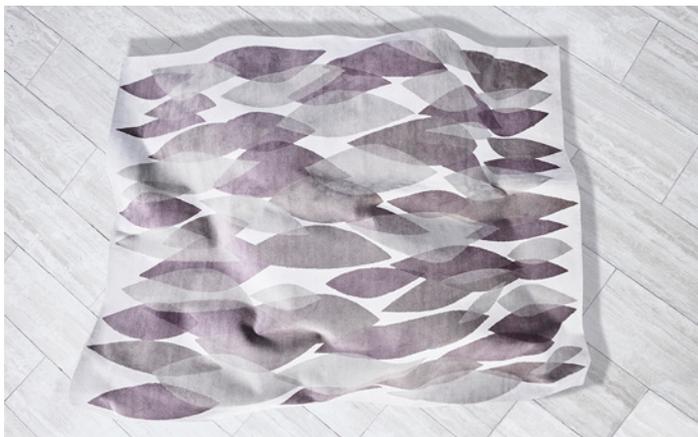
Lisa Hunt, original art for Olympia from the Reverie Collection



Chair: Roulette, Wall: Olympia, by Lisa Hunt for Weitzner Limited



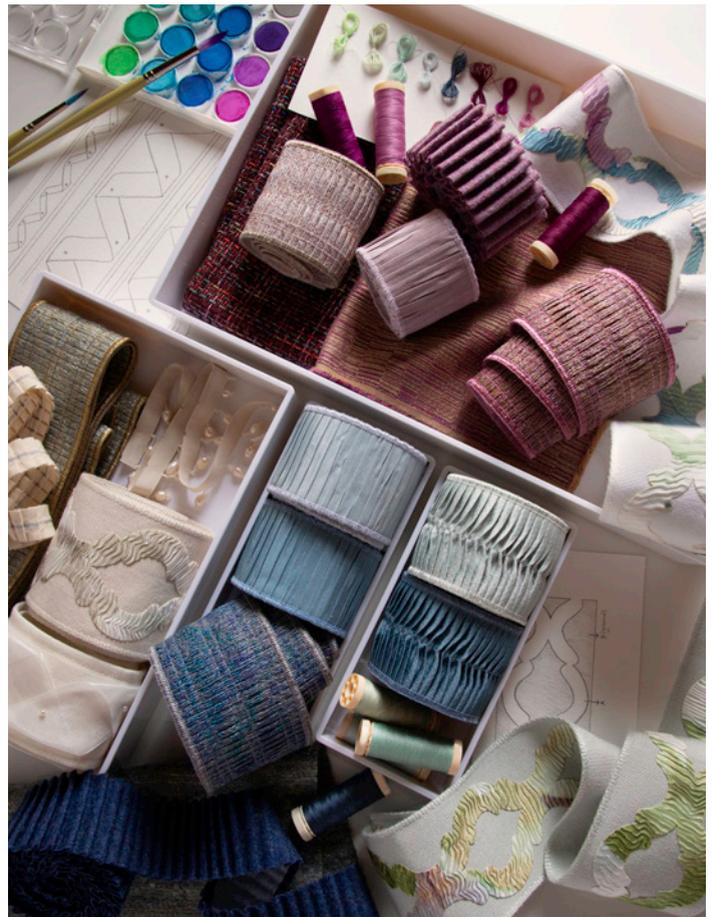
Skylight by Lori Weitzner for Perennials



Silhouette Tibetan Knot rug by Lori Weitzner for Perennials

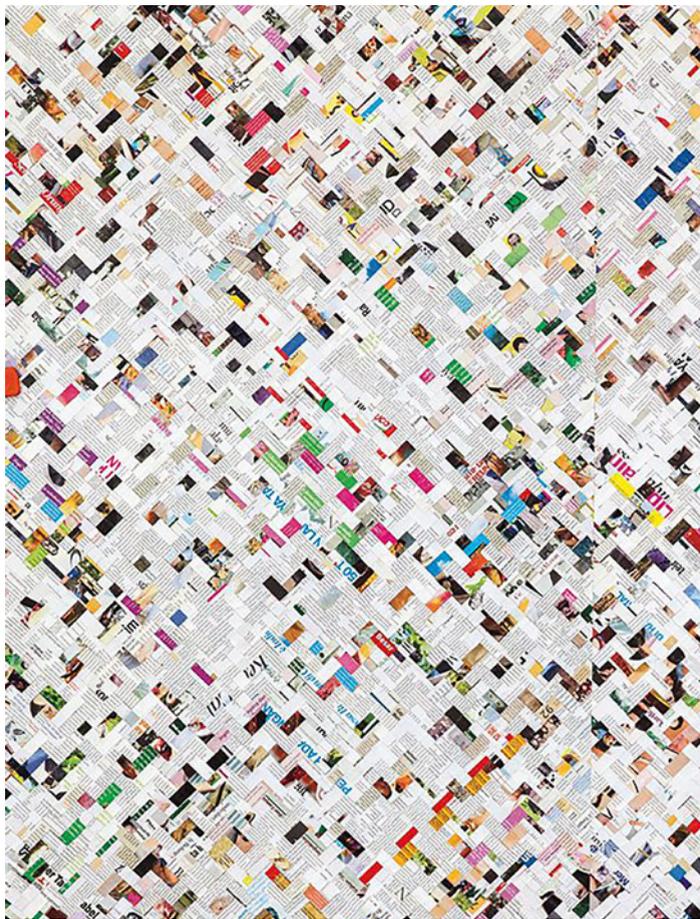


Carolina Ombré Brush Fringe by Lori Weitzner for Samuel & Sons



Encore collection by Lori Weitzner for Samuel & Sons





Kodiak by Weitzner Limited



Ambient by Weitzner Limited



Mira by Weitzner Limited



Magnetism by Weitzner Limited