

SHAGTASTIC!

They are modernist, luxurious and superbly stylish, with such rich textures, bold colours and abstract designs, it's no surprise that Rya rugs are working their way back into today's modern interiors

By Karyn Sparks

RYA RUGS are easiest to recognise due to their pile – much like the 70s shag pile carpets we're all familiar with. Thanks to the appeal of Mid-century interiors and the more recent Hygge epidemic, vintage Scandinavian rugs are making a strong comeback.

Surprisingly, there is very little written about the history of the Rya rug, but we were fortunate to cross paths with 20th century modern design researcher and dealer, Julia Salisbury, who shared her knowledge of their history, and her passion for the Danish carpet producer that defined an era – Ege Rya.

HISTORY OF THE RYA

Dating from the 15th century, the first Scandinavian ryas were coarse, long-piled, heavy covers used by seal hunters and deep-sea fishermen instead of furs. Later the rugs became lighter and more ornamental, and in the 19th century were often splendid festive tapestries regarded as valuable articles of inheritance.

By the mid-20th century the rya had become a sort of painting in textiles, with the individual artist identifiable by the colours, patterns and techniques in much the same way that one identifies a painter's canvas.

By the 1950s and 60s, rya rugs with their deep, luxurious pile, geometric and abstract designs made a big impression on the American market. Postwar families were together again, furnishing contemporary homes that needed the warmth of colourful and modern furnishings. Scandinavian modern furniture and furnishings featured big in the department stores, and Nordic countries sent travelling exhibits to tour the USA. In New York City Georg Jensen featured Scandinavian design and awarded prizes to the best designers, whilst home magazines featured them. There were 30 articles about Rya covered between two magazines in the 1950s and 60s – no wonder the American's fell head over heels for this look.



Today, the rya bears witness to a culture in which the cosy indoor warmth is a vitally important complement to an often-severe climate. And still today, are often displayed on a wall during the warmer summer months and taken down for use on the floor or even the bed during the cold Scandinavian winters.

EGE RYA

Ege Rya is a subsidiary of Denmark's largest and most prestigious carpet manufacturer Ege Tæpper. Based at Herning in Jutland, Ege Tæpper was set up in 1938 by Mads Eg Damgaard, and the company flourished during the 1940s despite the shortages of raw materials associated with the Second World War, by introducing products made from alternative materials such as paper-based fabrics.

The Ege Rya subsidiary became Denmark's most successful rug producer in the 1960s, a position it acquired and held throughout that

decade thanks in no small part to an advertising campaign that created a surreal Ege Rya world in which the rugs were presented as part of the outdoor landscape.

The series began in 1962 with a bride stepping from her wedding coach onto an Ege Rya conveniently placed on the muddy lane below (evidently indicating that the rugs would make an ideal wedding gift), and took on an increasingly offbeat and bizarre character as the 1960s progressed. Both rugs and locations embraced the psychedelic space age aesthetic as bold patterns and colours were introduced into the rugs, and futuristic-looking models posed in lunar-like landscapes, culminating in a return to a more Nordic-looking environment with the introduction of the Ege Rya de Luxe range in 1970. The adverts that mention 'Vægrya' are 'wall' ryas.

The standard size of a 60s Ege rya was 140 x 200cm, the smaller Ege rya size was 70 x 110cm, and there was also a less common supersize 250 x 360cm. Much less common again, and confined to the Ege de Luxe range, were the circular ryas with a diameter of 200cm, and rarest of all were the magnificent and elusive 250cm diameter Ege de Luxe circular ryas.

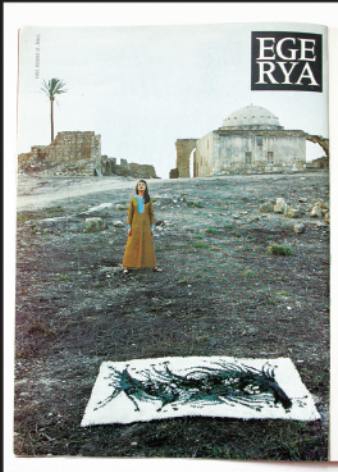
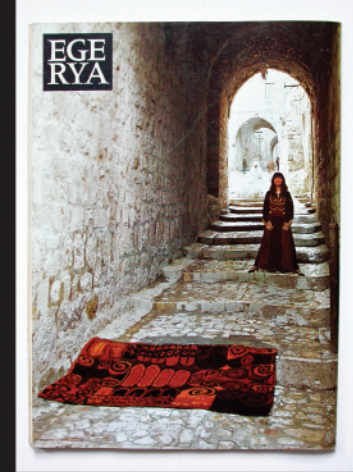
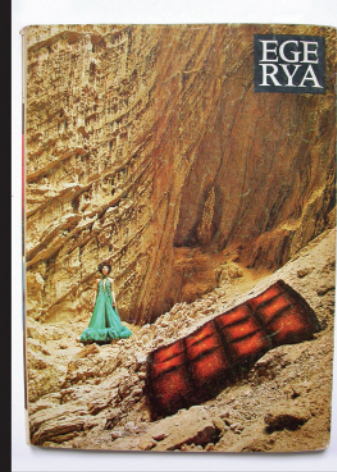
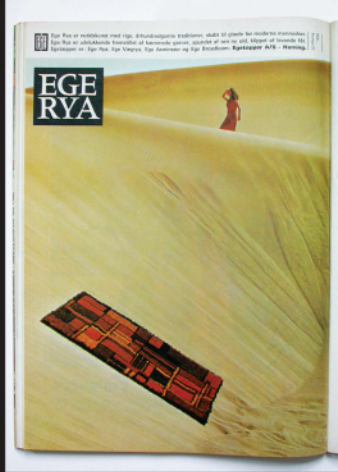
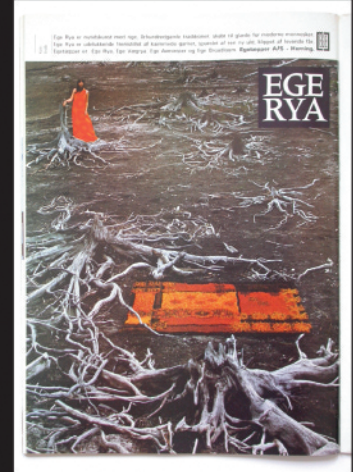
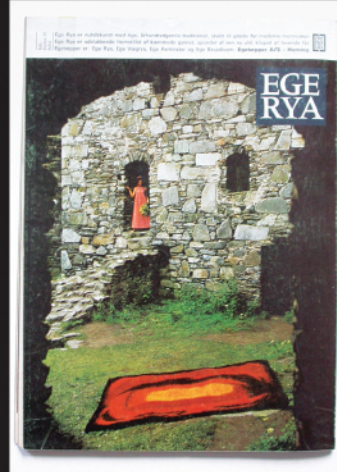
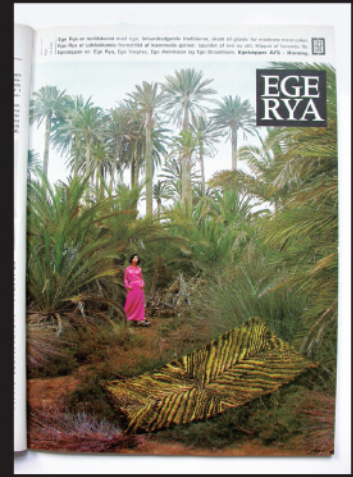
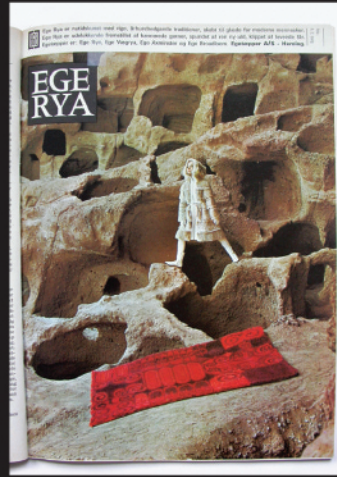
It is the artistic nature of the design together with the deep and dense shag pile that characterises the mid to late 20th century rya. Ege's striking ryas of the 1960s and 1970s were machine-made to very high quality in 100 per cent pure wool with a 2.5cm pile, with moth-proofing and colour-proofing to ensure that the rugs would have a long lifespan, and a 25-year guarantee to that effect. Their quality is reflected in the fact that some 15 years after the guarantee period, a high proportion are still bright and intact! The company's expansion continued through the decades, and they are still producing high quality rugs to this day.

Thanks to Julia Salisbury: www.classic-modern.co.uk
www.danish-modern.co.uk / www.danish-lights.com
www.midmodmedia.com



Danish Ege Rya Rug - Snefnug Bla or Blue Snowflake. Available from www.molecula.co.uk





OTHER RYA PRODUCERS

ALTHOUGH WE'VE ESTABLISHED that Ege Rya are probably the most prolific of rya producers of the period, there were plenty of others out there – and even individuals who made their own.

C.U.M Textile Industries Ltd are one such producer – yes, really! Based in Copenhagen, Denmark, they produced around 780 different high-quality CUM yarns, which were made specifically for handweavers, and they had dealers all over the world.

Whilst researching for this article, we were lucky to find an original CUM weaving book from the 1970s that featured a number of period rya rugs, a selection of pages from the book are shown below.

The pattern book boasts: "It is quite easy. When you have decided what to weave, write or phone your closest CUM dealer and order the yarn in question. As CUM dealers always carry a stock of yarn, you will in a few days receive the yarn wanted so you can get started at once."

An advert from the book suggests: "Make a CUM Rya – and make it a hobby for you and your family. You will receive a complete supply of materials consisting of a woven rya backing in the size required, Asborya yarn of 100% wool, a gauge for the knotting, the number of rya needles required, pattern and easy directions to follow."

CUM was awarded 14 Gold medals at the International Textile Exposition in California in 1967, 68 and 69. All the designs shown here are from this book and were exhibited in Charlottenborg Art Gallery in Copenhagen, and at the HGA Convergence 74, in San Francisco.

I wonder how many people around the world took up the CUM challenge?

SO, WITH A STIFF UPPER LIP, we move swiftly on to a couple of rugs we have in the VE office, made by a British company based in Kidderminster, Quayle and Tranter Ltd. They produced NORSK rya rugs in the 1960s, designed most famously by Robert Dodd. Dodd was a hugely influential post war British textile designer who worked for Edinburgh Weavers in the early 1960s and also Heals. He was a contemporary of Lucienne Day, Hilda Durkin, John Fairleigh, Marian Mahler, Robert Tiemey, and Hugh McKinnon, Hans Juda and Hamilton Fraser.

His British made, Danish modern rugs – such as the one seen here – are still a rare find, and if you're lucky, will come complete with the 'Norsk Rya' label which states the construction as woven Axminster, surely one of the most famous names in British carpet makers.

Right: 1960s Modernist Norsk Rya rug by Quayle and Tranter Ltd. Interestingly, we have two of these stunning rugs at VE headquarters – one bought in the UK, the other picked up on a buying trip around Sweden. Have rug will travel! Both are available to buy from www.molecula.co.uk



WHY CUM YARNS?

- CUM yarns are specially made for handweavers
- CUM has handweaving yarns for any purpose
- CUM has a large selection of yarns – 783 different colors
- CUM customers will always benefit from CUM's long experience in handweaving
- CUM yarns are always of high quality.

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Sales: CUM-GEN, Copenhagen, Denmark
Largest selection of handweaving yarns in Scandinavia

daemon rya 2 ft. 8 in. x 4 ft. 4 in.

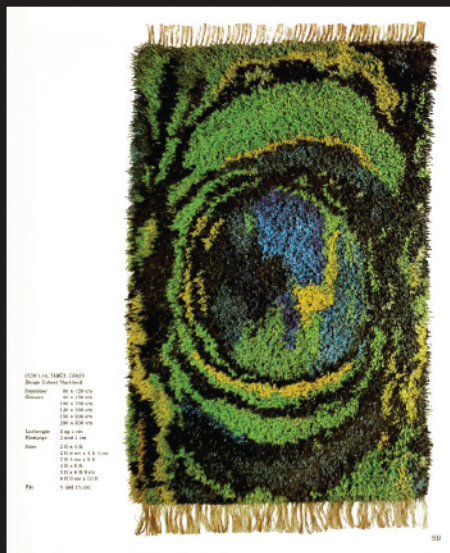
CUM RYA

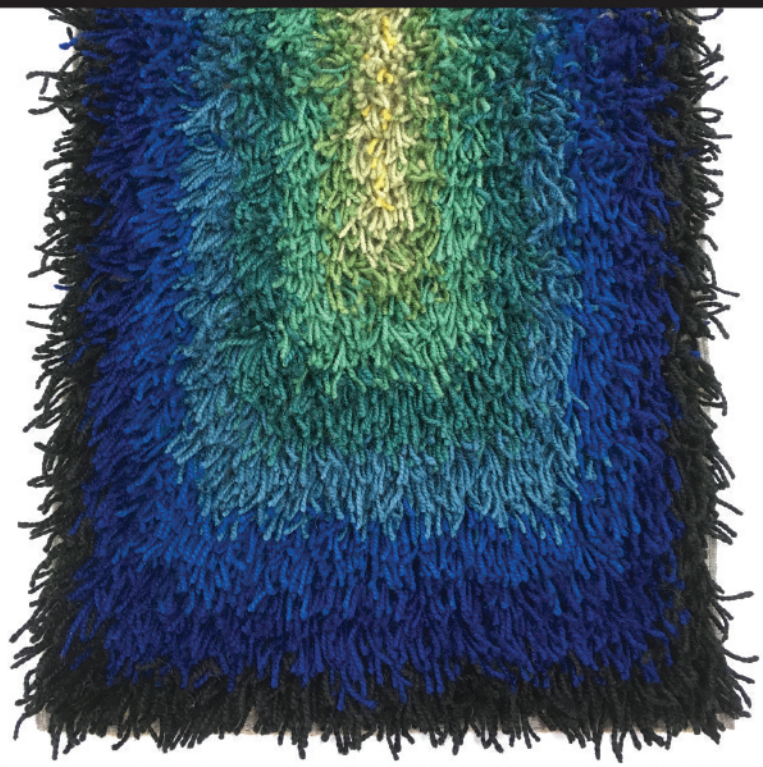
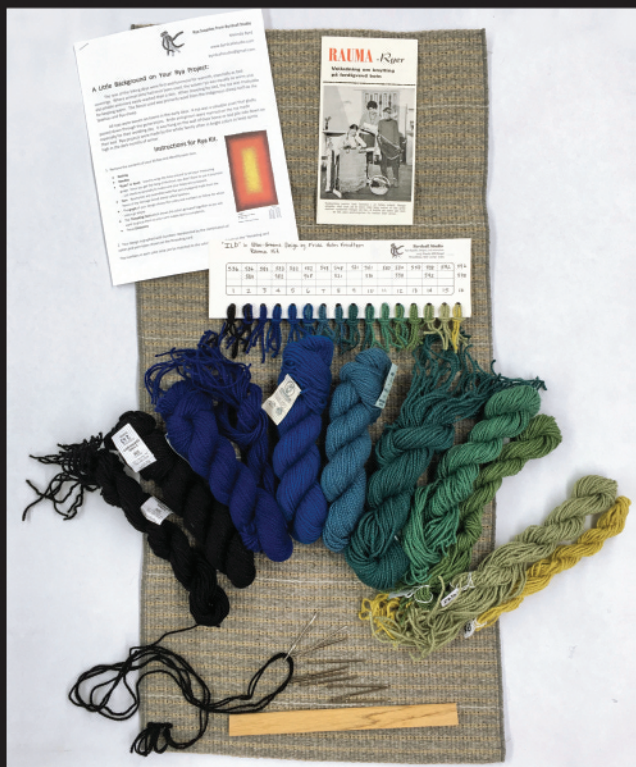
11-87
COLOR COMBINATIONS

1	0001-0018-712
2	0002-0021-4909
3	0003-0023-763
4	0004-0025-510
5	0005-0027-4088
6	0006-0028-4897
7	0007-0029-4086
8	0008-0031-4884
9	0009-0033-4867
10	0010-0034-710
11	0011-0035-4076
12	0012-0037-770

EACH KNOT CONSISTS OF 3 THREADS OF EACH OF THE ABOVE COLOR COMBINATIONS

Start here 1 square = 1 knot. design by Per Dybbø





A RYA CHALLENGE

MAYBE MAKING YOUR OWN rya rug will be the next big thing? We discovered an interesting lady in America who is doing just that - Melinda Byrd, who runs Byrdcall Studio (www.byrdcallstudio.com).

"I was born into a rya rug family" she explains, "My grandparents, Angie and Bill Lundgren imported rya kits and supplies from Sweden from 1955 to the 1970s. I worked there as a designer and 'helper extraordinaire' in the late 1970s, and bought their business in 2013.

"I have been designing and making rya rugs since I was in the sixth grade, so my new thing is to make a Rauma Rye (Norwegian for rya and pronounced the same) kit rug from Norway - and an easy one at that. For me the challenge is to not ad-lib or substitute the kit's colours. Why am I holding back on my own creativity you may ask? The reason is I have been selling these kits for over a year now but I have never made one! So now I am putting myself to the test. I am also putting Rauma to the test and it's coming through with flying colours. Many of my questions are now answered. Although I realise that most design-kits have been available for decades, if there ever were any 'bugs' they surely would have been worked out by now.

"The neat thing is: I am totally loving making this kit called 'ILD' which means 'Fire' in Norwegian. I have seen a photo of a completed ILD in gradations from black-purple-reds-orange-yellows. But this one is in cool blues-greens, but I didn't know what they would look like together.

"Two evenings ago I started knotting ILD while watching a Netflix movie (*Sully*). So sitting on the couch with the rya in my lap I knotted the bottom six inches within two hours. Now, two days later, I am almost half way done and I can't stop! The colour combinations are amazing. This is a great starter kit - just 16 by 32 inches - it is totally symmetrical, and reasonably priced at \$206 (£175 from my Etsy shop) for all supplies. And now it is the only kit of all my Norwegian offerings that is personally test-driven by me!"

Here at VE we're also going to take up the Rya challenge - will you? Send us a photo if you do. **ve**

