

16th International Fungi and Fiber Symposium
9 – 14 September 2014
Otepää, Estonia

Report for: International Mushroom Dye Institute, by Anna Powers

The 16th International Fungi and Fiber Symposium was attended by eighty participants from all regions of the world: Norway, Denmark, Sweden, Finland, Scotland, England, Belgium, Luxemburg, Australia, Spain, Italy, Canada and USA.

I found out about the conference from my friend Carla Sundström. We are both originally from California but live in Sweden. We both traveled to the conference from Tallinn with the mushroom group from Sweden. After arriving in Tallinn, we traveled by bus to Tartu, where a committee member was waiting with a bus to ride further south to Otepää. As we got closer to Otepää the scenery became more majestic and serene, as more lakes and forests were prevalent.

In total it was about a three-hour journey by bus to Otepää.

After lunch, we set out in two buses to pick mushrooms in the nearby forest.

The forest area was fairly flat and trees were spread out which made it easier to find and recognize mushrooms. **The two groups found a huge amount of mushrooms, as this was an exceptionally good year for mushrooms due to the record warm summer.**



The opening night dinner was a sumptuous banquet with traditional Estonian delicacies and other various dishes to accompany meat and potatoes. There was Estonian produced Vodka on all tables as part of our welcome celebration and welcome toast. The Tartu Art College presented a fashion show called “Magic Forest” which modeled wool handcrafts including wool scarves and shawls created and modeled by students. It was very lively as the models danced and twirled to Estonian music. Next came a local men’s choir, dressed in tuxedos to sing traditional Estonian songs acapella. This first evenings dinner was a most enjoyable and uplifting event.

As a first time participant in the symposium, I found it to be both fun and an extraordinary experience since my education is in textile weaving.

My background in textiles began at the University of Oregon where I studied applied art. Through a college level exchange program called Scandinavian Seminar my second year consisted of studying at Manger Folk High School in Norway, a school tucked away on an island outside Bergen with a focus on liberal arts. With my newly gained fluency in Norwegian, I was able to apply to Norway’s Textile College (Husflidsskole) in Lillehammer, Norway. The textile study was an intense study of all aspects of textile weaving and included natural dyeing. At the end of the school year all our textile work was examined under microscope by the state board. After graduation I worked as an apprentice at Sweden’s most prestigious weaving studio in Stockholm, Handarbetets

Vänner. This was a real feather in my cap, to say the least! It still impresses anyone in the field of textile to this day as a renowned champion of textile tapestries, Edna Martin, led it. She put the studio on the map by securing large commissioned works that were huge two-year projects each for a pair of weavers.

The projects were very impressive large tapestries; commissioned by the government, embassies and corporations. Many works took two years of two weavers working full days together. All of the wool used in the tapestries had to be dyed on the premises. This weaving experience was considered the best one could get and I realized much later how extraordinary our weavings were and why they were considered the best in all of Sweden. Each piece was a piece of art and actually a duplication of paintings by Sweden's most prestigious painters at the time. We were most fortunate as they came to the studio often to check on the progress of the weaving. Our looms were as wide as 5 to 6 meters and clearly could not be managed by one person.

With this background, I found the process of finding mushrooms in the forest, Preparing yarn and dipping it into pots of boiling mushroom baths exciting!

The colors produced by the mushrooms during the symposium ranged from natural mushroom hues to bright colors. Our take home samples of all the colors we dyed during the symposium totaled forty-five.

The mushrooms we used for our forty-five samples included:

Cortinarius .semi-sanguineas stems
Cortinarius .semi-sanguineus
Cortinarius sanguineus
Cortinarius semi-sanguineus caps
Cortinarius bolaris
Phellodon niger
Hapalopitus rutilans
Suillus variegatus
Tapinella atrotomentosa
Pisolithus arzhicus
Phaeolus schweinitzii
Thelephora palmata
Sarcodon squamosus
Inonotus radiatus
Boletopsis grisea
Tapinella atrotomentosa
Phellodon niger
Cortinarius armillatus
Hapalopilus rutilans



The process started with preparing the yarn to absorb the color, These formulas included alum and copper and untreated.

The yarn color takes in color according to the pre-treatment and color of yarn dyed. **We dyed Estonian 2 ply yarn in both natural and gray.**

I used natural yarn prepared in baths of both alum and iron. My yarn produced a soft hue of orange

– *C. semisanguineus* (co),
Rust – *C. semisanguineus* (co)
and yellow - *Phaeolus schweinitzii* (alum).

I dyed my yarn on the last day with the leftover dye baths.

We used mushroom dye on silk for *Shibori*, a Japanese technique taught by Karet Altpere, where you sew and bind sections of silk scarves, to absorb dye in patterns. It reminded me of tie-dyeing in the 70's. It was the same principle.

The silk was pre-treated before being dipped into a mushroom dye bath to produce a soft hue of pinkish beige with *C. semisanguineus*. The silk scarf remained white in sections that were tightly wrapped.



I also learned the technique of **etching and dyeing chiffon fabric** taught by Liina Kool, art teacher from Tartu Art College. For this project we used chiffon, a stiffer fabric often used in fancy party dresses. For this technique we folded the fabric on the ironing board and using the iron to hold the fold. We used wooden blocks tightly wrapped with string to act as a clamp. The fabric was pre-treated with washing soda before being dipped into the mushroom dye bath to produce a rich amber brown color - *Pisolithus arzhirus*. The folded sections produced a nice pattern of a gold hued color; there was no white original color.

I attended needle felting taught by Liis Pihlik, daughter of an extraordinary felt artist who creates sculptors of people's faces in great detail.

I found that needle felting takes time and patience. It took the class nearly three hours of concentrated work to complete our project of small bears. The class assignment was to create a little bear and the wool in natural colors that was pre-carded. We each created our own unique bear. It was amusing to see the various personalities. As individuals we created our bears with our own imaginations. It was inspiring to see what could be created from wool and felting needles.

The teacher brought her mother's creations, which were displayed in the lobby. They were people's faces, very detailed and were exceptional examples of what one could create with needle felting. They were phenomenal! I couldn't imagine before how anyone could create such lifelike faces. The artistic quality of these pieces is a standard of Paris, London and New York.

Other classes during the symposium were:

Nuno felting: a technique where wool and silk are felted together.

Roosimine: traditional Estonian knitting technique for glove decoration.

Macramé: a form tying knots to create a pattern. The teacher made necklaces using silk combined with natural materials.

Mushroom Gathering: an outing into the surrounding forest to gather more.

Spinning the Estonian way: using classic Estonian spinning wheels.



Fish skin dyeing: taking fish scales, skin and bones and dyeing with mushrooms.

Everyone was allowed to wander and observe the other classes, which gave us an overview of what the entire symposium offered. Not all of us were able to get into our desired classes.

A few enthusiastic participants took off on their own to find even more mushrooms in the surrounding forests.

One participant from Sweden found an extraordinary amount and started right away to dry them in electric drying appliances she set up.

The local mushrooms found in the Estonian forest by Ann-Charlotte Fonselius of Goteborg, Sweden:

Listed in both Latin and Swedish names:

Fomes fomentarius - fnöskticka

Paxillus atromententus - sammetsfotad pluggskivling (it has a new Latin name: *Tapinella atrotomentosus*)

Hydrphoropsis aurantica - narrkantarell

Boletus edulis - karljohansvamp

Suillus grevillei - lärksopp
Suillus variegatus - sandsopp
Suillus bovinus - örsopp
Chroogomphus rutilus – rabarbersvamp
Tricholomopsis rutilans - prickmusseron
Tricholomopsis decora - stubbmusseron
Thelephora palmata - busksvamp
Sarcodon imbricatus - fjällig taggsvamp
Hydnellum ferrugineum - dropptaggsvamp
Cortinarius violaceus - violspindling
Cortinarius sanguineus - blodspindling
Cortinarius malicorius - grönköttig spindling
Cortinarius croceus - gulskivig spindling
Cortinarius semisanguineus - rödskivig spindling
Cortinarius armillatus - rödbandad spindling

The symposium included a day for an excursion to Setomaa, Suvahavva Wool Factory and other interesting sights of Polva County.

We visited a traditional farm museum where we had a traditional Estonian lunch and were entertained by traditional music. **The Estonian Women's singing group who entertained us was in full Estonian traditional dress singing traditional folk songs and sometimes danced as they sang.** We got to join in with some of the dances. Their dresses were very extravagant so it was interesting for them to explain the meaning of the different parts of the costume including the headdress and silver neckpieces, which were a prominent feature of their dresses. We visited a traditional farm museum depicting the typical lifestyle of 18th century farming families.



Built with an outer façade, a typical style in those days, it opened up to a well organized arrangements of buildings for: measuring and storing grain, storing food and processing dairy products like butter and cheese, a clothing storage, carpentry, farm equipment and the house for cooking and sleeping.



We visited a series of bat caves where in the 18th century sandstone was mined. Today the caves are still active with bats but only one cave is open to the public in order to show the extraordinary arches within the cave that looks like an underground cathedral with its high arches. The surrounding area around the caves was a preserved geological site and included a nature preserve for certain species of reptiles.

On the last day of the conference we were entertained by a folkdance group which amazed us with their energy and vibrant performance.

They were extremely talented as they performed high lifts and jumps, which were strenuous moves not always seen in folk dancing.



Our last meal on Saturday night was a surprise celebratory dinner at the exclusive golf club of Otepää. When our buses arrived, the three hostesses in their long formal gowns bid us welcome and ushered us into the lobby, which had a tier of fruit, pink champagne and live piano music. Such an elegant event one could never imagine - it only got better as the evening went on. After a sumptuous buffet dinner fire dancers entertained us as we watched from the glass balcony overlooking the front entrance area where they performed. What a magical performance on this warm fall evening; we all felt excitement in the air. Afterwards we ignited Chinese lanterns and sent them up into the clear night sky, as a “good omen” to the next symposium, which to this point had not been announced. It was before cutting the cakes, a specially made creation of a local recipe, decorated intricately with mushrooms, that the next symposium was announced. The next symposium will be held in October 2016 in British Columbia, Canada.

Speeches and presentations as part of the evening made us both cry and laugh.

Airi Gailit was delightfully emotional when she received praise for chairing the organizing committee. We all were moved as the presentations and speeches were read.

The participants were deeply appreciative of how well organized the Estonian Symposium committee was in every detail of the event, to create a truly memorable Symposium experience for everyone involved.



Estonian organizing committee:
Airi Gailit, Katrin Jurimae, and Mirjam Murmla.

*Submitted by: Anna Marie Power, Dala-Floda, Sweden, November 2014
Photos courtesy of Nancy Trissel, Fort Bragg, CA*