

# Damask – Pushing the Limits

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(Definitions Provided at the 2000 Complex Weavers Seminar)

Damask: A firm lustrous fabric made with flat conventional patterns in satin weave on a plain-woven ground on the right side and a plain-woven pattern on a satin ground on the reverse side, made on jacquard looms usually of linen, cotton, silk, rayon, or combinations of these fibers, and used for household linen, interior decoration, and clothing.

*Webster's Third New International Dictionary* (1996)

(a) A rich silk fabric woven with elaborate designs and figures, often of a variety of colours. (b) A twilled linen fabric richly figured in the weaving with designs which show up by opposite reflexions of light from the surface; used chiefly for table linen.

*The compact Edition of the Oxford English Dictionary* (1979)

Damask: Figured textile with one warp and one weft in which the pattern is formed by a contrast of binding systems. In its classic form, it is reversible, and the contrast is produced by the use of the warp and weft faces of the same weave. By extension, two distinct binding systems may also be employed.

*C.I.E.T.A. Vocabulary of Technical Terms* (1964)

Damask: A self-patterned weave with one warp and one weft in which the pattern is formed by a contrast of binding systems. In its classic form it is reversible, and the contrast is produced by the use of the warp and weft faces of the same weave, usually satin. By extension this term is also used for weaves in which two distinct binding systems are employed.

*Warp & Weft: A Dictionary of Textile Terms* (1980) by Dorothy K. Burnham, p. 32.

*Damask* is a self-patterned weave which, like the Swedish dräll (twill or damask diaper), is based on interchanging areas of warp and weft emphasis. The patterning in damask is, however, freer and richer than the geometrical figures in dräll.

*Damask and Opphämta* (1984) by Lillemore Johansson, p. 9.

Damask is defined today as a simple weave – that is, a weave having one set of warps and one set of wefts. Pattern is achieved by juxtaposing the two faces of the same weave, such as the warp-float and weft-float faces of a 4-unit twill with an interlacing sequence of over three, under one; or the warp-float and weft-float faces of a 5-unit satin with an interlacing sequence of over four, under one. Such a definition does not take into consideration materials and diameters of threads. Nor does it specify if the warp and weft count of the fabric is balanced or has a warp count that is significantly higher than that of the weft.

“Damask: Definition and Technique” by Milton Sondag in *Riggisberger Berichte: Leindamaste* (1999), p. 113.

A damask woven textile, be it a piece of silk or a linen tablecloth, is characterized by its change between dull and shining surfaces... This typical alternation from dull to shining surfaces appears because both sides of an unequal-sided binding are used on the same side of the textile. A binding, for instance twill 1/3 or a satin, is called unequal-sided if on one side the warp predominates and on the opposite side the weft predominates... Technically the unequal-sided weave used in a particular piece of damask is called the *basic weave*. Satin weaves give the best result but in the early centuries the satin weave was not known and twill 1/3 was used.

*Pattern and Loom* (1987) by John Becker, p. 207.

More or less elaborate patterning produced by ‘turning’ or ‘reversing’ a weave structure (i.e. using both aspects of the weave on the same face of the fabric) is characteristic of *damask weaving*. Although the weave may be an *uneven twill* and the patterned fabric referred to as *twill damask*, the word *damask* is more commonly associated with fabrics patterned by the dissimilar faces of *satins weave*. In fact, it is often assumed that, as a technical term, *damask* refers to *satins damask* unless the use of some other weave is specified; whereas actually the term is quite commonly used with various other connotations. Often, for example, it is meant to indicate nothing more than that a fabric is patterned by variations of texture rather than color.

*The Primary Structures of Fabrics* (1966) by Irene Emery, p. 112.

Damask: A true damask (the same word in most languages) is a monochrome figured textile with one warp and one weft forming satin. The pattern is produced by reversing the binding so as to contrast the warp and weft faces of the same weave, thus showing different degrees of gloss. In its classical form, damask is reversible. Satin may be replaced by twill and, two different binding systems may also be employed. The name derives from the Syrian capital Damascus, an important centre of the silk trade and silk production.

*A History of Textile Art* (1982) by Agnes Geijer, p. 56.

DAMASK WEAVE (fr. *Damascus* in Syria). Damask weave is based on the same principle as all Turned Twills but the ground weave is satin, usually 1:4 since higher ratios require too many shafts. The blocks of pattern are obtained by reversing the ratio between weft and warp. As the simplest satin requires 5 shafts, a four-block damask calls for 20 shafts. For this reason Damasks are often woven with the Two-Harness Method.

*Encyclopaedia of Hand-Weaving* (1959) by S.A. Zielinski, p. 38.

Damask: Originally a silk fabric (made in Damascus) with a weft sateen figure on a warp satin, or twill, or plain ground. The cloth is now extensively used for household purposes, and is made in cotton, rayon, and linen yarns with the figure and ground in opposite sateen weaves; the figure usually being in weft sateen and the ground in warp satin... The weaves generally used are the 5- and 8-thread sateens, and the terms single and double damask are sometimes used in order to distinguish linen fabrics made in the respective weaves. The best linen damasks are woven with about 50 per cent more picks than ends per inch, and properly the term double damask should only be used for 8-thread sateen cloths which contain such an excess of picks over ends.

*Watson's Textile Design and Colour* (1975) by Z. Grosicki, p. 324.

Damask is patterned satin, the patterns formed by contrasting areas of warp and weft satin. The full satin threading is required for each block of the pattern, and the minimum size satin on five shafts is usually used... Damask patterns are subtle since they are light-reflection effects created through warp and weft emphasis. The greatest light reflection contrast develops when each satin has maximum reflection and this occurs when warp and weft are perfectly balanced. Therefore the best damask has exactly as many weft shots per inch as there are warp ends.

*Contemporary Satins* (1962) by Harriet Tidball, p. 12.

A *satins-damask weave* combines areas of satin and sateen construction and, more often than not, is self-toned. In jacquard patterns the basic damask is often combined with brocade and other weaves. Dense stripes of satin weave may also be combined with sheer plain weave.

*Fabrics for Interiors* (1975) by Jack Lenor Larsen and Jeanne Weeks, p. 85.

Damask: turned satin; a simple weave in which areas of warp-predominant and weft-predominant satin appear on the *same surface* across the width and length of the cloth. In some sources turned twill is also considered damask.

*The Complete Book of Drafting for Handweavers* (1993) by Madelyn van der Hoogt, p. 68.