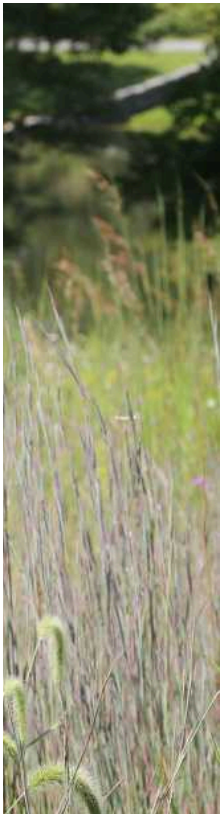


## Modern Nomad

### Betil Dagdelen on the hunt for inspiration

By Anna Carnick



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Photo © Giada Paoloni for L'AB/Pamono

Betil Dagdelen can't stop thinking about patterns. She sees them in the stacked stones of a wall tracing a countryside road, the ebb and flow of rolling hills and daily rituals, and the constellations of her own intricately woven furniture designs. The Turkish-born designer is ever conscious of the natural and constructed patterns that surround her; mindful of those she wishes to emulate—and those she'd rather break.

"It's all one—my work and my life," she says to me as we wander the grounds at [Storm King](#), a humbling, 500-acre sculpture garden an hour north of New York City. Dagdelen sees the act of exploration—breaking routines and seeking out inspiration—as inextricably bound to her creative process. Navigating Storm King's woodlands, fields, and hills dotted with towering sculptures by some of our era's most acclaimed artists, [Dagdelen](#) is like a kid in a candy store. In contrast to the peaceful atmosphere of her colorful, Williamsburg loft-studio, today she is excited and her eyes intense as she soaks in our surroundings. "Nature and history are my greatest inspirations. I like the idea that we're each just one tiny piece of these larger puzzles."

Dagdelen's furniture designs honor that notion of connectivity as well. "I believe everything you make and the materials you use have an energy to them," she says. For that reason, she primarily repurposes midcentury, iron rod chair frames, into which she expertly weaves yarn seats, backs, and armrests. She gathers her yarn from traditional Turkish and Native American weavers. Because Dagdelen works within

fixed frames (as opposed to a loom, where, she explains, “I’d have more tension control”), she switches between thinner and thicker threads to give each piece its solidity. The results are soft, pretty, and impressively strong. And every piece features patterns—mainly Navajo-inspired—that ultimately break or shift at least once, drawing the eye in unexpected directions.



Reeve Chair in Betil's Studio  
Photo © Giada Paoloni for L'AB/Pamono

The self-taught designer (“I have a pretty impressive collection of old, how-to-weave books”) explains her pattern variation this way: “Once I fully understand and am comfortable with a particular pattern, that’s when I present a new one. It’s quite hard, because you know it’s going great, you know it looks beautiful, and you know you do it well. But that’s the moment you *must* change. You must present a new challenge and form a new pattern. It’s just an ongoing process. In the end, collages of patterns are far more interesting. And again, not just in textiles or drawings, but in our lives as well.”

She goes on, “For every pattern to form, there must be a set of rules. My whole life, I’ve felt challenged by the number of rules out there—some unspoken, some spoken—and it’s a big part of the reason why I left my country and I’m happier in America; not that there aren’t rules here, but they are different. I’ve realized that to break a pattern, you must really understand it. So in my work and life, I make my own patterns and then I break them.”

To that end, Dagdelen has embraced an increasingly off-the-grid lifestyle over the past several years, driven by her need for inspiration, self-reflection, and self-betterment. “I don’t commit anymore to any one place,” she says. “I honestly feel like I live everywhere.”

# “Weaving reflects where you are; my work is very much a diary of my life.”

Dagdelen was born in the beach town of Izmir, Turkey. She moved to New York in 2001, and began working as a production and set decorator for films, music videos, and fashion photography (a highly collaborative role that nicely complements her relatively solitary weaving practice). She travels frequently, but continues to use New York as a base. Notable stops along the way have included a house and studio in Saugerties, New York (“where I hand-built my first Navajo loom”) and two years living in a home built from shipping containers in Socrates Sculpture Park.

Overlooking the field with Pyramidian, 1987/1998, by Mark di Suvero  
Storm King Art Center: Gift of the Ralph E. Ogden Foundation, Inc. Photo © Giada Paoloni for L'AB/Pamono

In 2009, in the dead of winter, finding herself alone in her then apartment with several boxes stuffed with leftover yarn from a photo shoot, Dagdelen decided to try weaving, just for fun. She covered the tops of two metal, round-topped stools with brightly colored yarn, and knew right away that she'd found a lifelong passion.

Not long after, she decided to make her first chair, and spent months working away on what became the *Reeve Chair* in her upstate New York studio. As soon as it was complete, Dagdelen put herself to the ultimate routine-change; she packed up her car, her Basset Hound Fred, and a teardrop trailer to drive cross-country. She made her way south and then as far as Taos, New Mexico, where she spent time with traditional Navajo weavers, learning their weaving and dyeing techniques and bartering her assistance in exchange for some materials and a place to stay. She went on to Santa Monica, where she found the chair frames that would become part of her next series, the aptly titled *Desert Weave Chairs*. She camped in the Malibu hills while she painted the frames, and then proceeded to Joshua Tree, where a friend (sculptor and installation artist Andrea Zittel) lent her space to work. Ultimately, almost a year later, she made her way back to Brooklyn.

This nomadic approach to life and work directly inspires Dagdelen's woven patterns; she can easily cite each of the people, places, and concepts that have served as catalysts for specific designs. “Weaving reflects where you are in life,” she notes. “My work is very much a diary of my life.” And later, “I can understand if someone hears what I do and thinks, she's all over the place. But for me, every piece and place feeds into the whole. I'm better at all of it *because* it is varied.”

What further adventures could the future possibly hold? “One of my dreams is to have a studio in the desert. And also, one day, to even hire a boat and a captain and sail up the Mississippi River, so I can weave all the way as we go, letting my surroundings inspire the patterns. That sounds incredible to me.” But Dagdelen's not in any sort of rush. “One thing always leads to the next,” she says knowingly. Whatever will be, one thing's for sure; the furniture will continue to tell the story.

**Text by**

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Anna is Pamono's Managing Editor. Her writing has appeared in several arts and culture publications, and she's edited over 20 books. Anna loves celebrating great artists, and seriously enjoys a good picnic.

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