



WEAVING THE BASKET

After the weaver prepares all the materials that will be needed for a basket, she is ready to begin. The entire basket, including the size, designs, colors needed, quantity of materials needed, and its shape, has already been planned by the weaver. All of this planning is done mentally with no sketches or other diagrams of the designs that will be placed on the basket. Even a geometric design with repetitive figures is much more difficult to weave than it looks. The shapes must be adjusted according to the curve of the basket. Notice that the number of stitches varies when the basic design is placed in different areas of the basket. Now the weaver is ready to begin the weaving process. This will take quite a long time. A very small

basket can be done by an experienced weaver in a week, but the very large baskets can take as long as three years.

Nahuala is used for the interior of the coils, so the weaver begins by putting a few strips together for the



beginning flat part of the bottom. The number of strips of nahuala will increase as the basket grows in size, but the starting disk is small and fine; it is most usual to start with just two strands. In the village of Puerto Lara, the weavers add one additional step: they wrap the nahuala fibers with a wider, flatter piece of nahuala so it looks like a thin rope. They weave the chungá around this wrapped piece. The weavers say

that the result is a smoother surface. In the other villages, the weavers wrap the chungá directly around the bundle



of nahuala. The Puerto Lara weavers make a long rope of the nahuala before they begin weaving so they do not have to stop and continually add new wrapped sections. They do not make enough for the whole basket since they do not know how much will be required, but they do have a very long piece of wrapped coil fiber extending beyond the section they are stitching.

In all cases, the actual start of the basket begins when the weaver makes an overhand knot in the nahuala as the beginning foundation. The fine strands of chungá are actually sewn in a coil around this knot to form the foundation. The nahuala strips are the thickness of sewing thread, and a needle is used to very tightly wrap the chungá around the nahuala. The nahuala is curved in a circular shape, with each successive coil sewn to the previous one. Occasionally an oval foundation is used, but it is not common. The coils form a very solid piece so that if you hold the weaving up to the light, you will see no light penetrating the weaving. The bottom is made flat



so that the basket will sit solidly on a shelf or table. The range in size of the bottom piece is considerable. It can have a diameter of just a few inches or be almost equal in size to the diameter of the basket. If the basket has many colors, the colored strands of chungá are included in the coil so that they will be available when they are needed in the design. This gives the inside of the basket a more finished appearance. The coiling continues up the sides of the basket with the weaver constantly adjusting the coils to form a smooth, even, and well-balanced surface.

Weavers report that the most difficult part of the weaving process is getting the design evenly placed on the basket. This is much more difficult than it seems because of the basket's curved surface. Although many weavers like to work in social groups with their friends or family, precise concentration is needed, and weavers frequently



need to count stitches to place the design correctly. They cannot talk and weave the complicated patterns at the same time. For this reason, some weavers prefer to work alone in their homes. The work is very time consuming. One weaver of a large basket mentioned that it might take three days to go around the circumference of the basket one time. Although the weavers spend the majority of the day weaving, they do not do it without frequent breaks to do the other daily chores, including taking care of their children. When the basket is not being worked on it is stored in a case to keep it clean. A pillowcase is often used for this purpose.



When the basket is complete, some of the weavers polish the outside with a monkey pod nut to smooth the surface and give it a slight polish.





PATTERNS AND DESIGNS

The designs used on the chungo baskets today are vast in their variety and creativity. This, however, is a recent development. The first chungo baskets were plain or had extremely simple ornamentation, such as a basic stripe encircling the basket. The colors were minimal and were often just the natural color of the chungo and the design element dyed with jagua. The plaited baskets used in Wounaan and Embera homes were sometimes decorated with geometric designs, also with jagua-dyed materials. As the fine art baskets began to develop and the concept of earning more money for higher quality work began to take hold, designs from the environment and traditional culture were explored for use on the baskets.

Basically the designs used today can be grouped into two categories: geometric



An example of the line resulting from a horizontal design



Vertical design that eliminates the awkward line created by horizontal designs

and pictorial. Sometimes you can find a weaver who is creative enough to be able to use both types on one basket. Geometric designs were inspired by the designs used in traditional body painting. Although the designs have been used for a long time, they seem to have no particular individual names, and the weavers I talked to refer to them all as cultura. Ron Binder, who has researched traditional Wounaan basketry, reports that many of the patterns do actually have traditional names but that the contemporary basket weavers may not be aware of them. Not every pattern has a name, but many do. However, as the weavers become more resourceful in finding and creating new designs, the environment has been used to stimulate creative thinking. One weaver takes inspiration from the wavy pattern

found on the edge of a corrugated cardboard box, while another finds patterns in nature to inspire new geometric concepts. Often multiple designs are combined to add interest. Although some designs are totally innovative, they all have been grouped together with the designs used culturally for centuries and are referred to as *cultura*.

Many early geometric designs were formed by the weaver creating a repetitive motif that continued in a ring around the surface of the basket. More complex designs were created by adding rings with different patterns or putting multiple rings together to form a highly complex design. A problem occurred with these designs when the weaver completed stitching one revolution around the basket; when she continued the design one row up, a line formed that looked, to the unprofessional eye, as if the weaver made a gross error in planning. However, the weaver did not make a mistake at all. There is no way to correct for this phenomenon except to choose a different design that does not consist of concentric rings. In the days when Llori Gibson was helping the weavers to develop their skills, she suggested that they try to visualize a vertical pattern. She suggested that they picture smoke rising from a fire. When a vertical pattern is used, the

line disappears within the design. The same thing happens when a design is made of swirls.

Pictorial designs have evolved from simple animal designs, which have been popular pieces with tourists and collectors. Many tourists appreciate the vast diversity of life found in the rainforest and like to see it reflected in basket designs. Many of the plants and animals depicted are quite difficult to weave even though the patterns used are shared both formally through government-sponsored classes and informally among friends and relatives. New designs are constantly created as well as different ways of depicting an animal. For example, scarlet macaws are a popular design; most usually they are depicted from the side, sitting on a tree branch. A few weavers have changed the design by showing the bird flying. The following section shows a selection of popular themes for weaving. New and innovative designs are being added all the time, so the list is constantly being expanded.

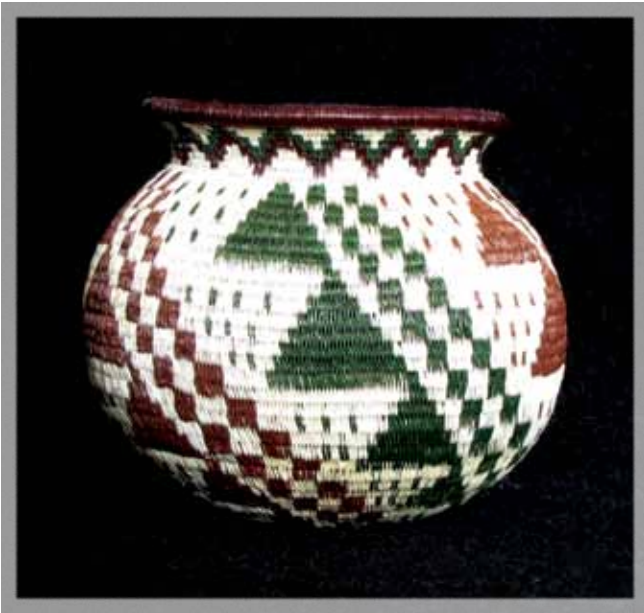
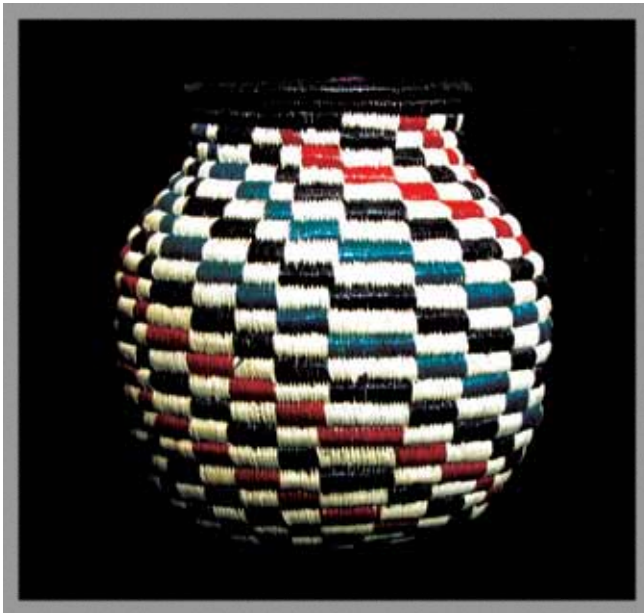
On the following pages you will be able to see the wide range of designs found on Hosig Di. While the list is far from exhaustive, and new designs are constantly being introduced, it exhibits the wide variety of designs being produced.



GEOMETRIC
TRADITIONAL













INNOVATIVE

