

Weaving magic

Traditional Persian motifs are being replaced with vistas of the cosmos and the faces (and bodies) of fashion designers as the rug gets a 21st-century makeover

WORDS LUCY UPWARD

PHOTOGRAPHY ANIA WAWRZKOWICZ

STYLIST EMMA KAY



Rugs, clockwise from far left:
Ephemera II wool and silk mix rug, £8,820 (\$14,112), Tai Ping; Cloister wool and silk mix carpet, £7,418.40 (\$11,869), Tufenkian; Bishop's Cape Red wool and silk mix carpet by Diane von Furstenberg, £17,102 (\$27,363), The Rug Company.

Furnishings, left to right: Step Mini folding chair by Design House Stockholm, £339 (\$542), Skandium; Deconstructed Windsor dining table by William Warren, £1,195 (\$1,912), Heal's; Ilse black glass bowl by Georg Jensen, £120 (\$192), Skandium; Spar floor light by Jamie McLellan for Resident, £1,680 (\$2,688), Viaduct.



“These days, contemporary is the most dynamic area of the entire rug market.”
Matthew Bourne

Rugs, from front to back: Key Shadow wool rug by Suzanne Sharp, £4,763 (\$7,621), The Rug Company; Space 1 wool and silk mix rug by Jan Kath, £17,850 (\$28,560), FRONT London; Space 12 wool and silk mix rug by Jan Kath, £17,850 (\$28,560), FRONT London.

Furnishings, left to right: Ladder in ash wood by Charlie Styrbjörn Nilsson, from £485 (\$776), Gebrüder Thonet Vienna; Kubus small black bowl by Mogens Lassen, £104 (\$166), Skandium; Thin Black Table by Nendo, £840 (\$1,344), Cappellini; Masculo chair by GamFratesi for Gubi, £690 (\$1,104), The Conran Shop.

In 1949 prominent Russian anthropologist and archaeologist Sergei Rudenko found what is now referred to as the Pazyryk carpet in the grave of a Scythian prince in the Pazyryk Valley, in Siberia's Altai Mountains. Radiocarbon testing indicated that the Pazyryk carpet was woven in the fifth century BC, making it the oldest surviving example of an entire rug ever discovered.

Far from being primitive in construction, the Pazyryk has a highly sophisticated weave, design, and finish; it is woven in the same way as rugs being produced today. The production process of handmade carpets has, in fact, changed little in 2,500 years. There is, however, nothing antiquated about the booming contemporary rug market – a thriving industry able to keep up with every aspect of cutting-edge interior design. James Ffrench, former head of the carpets department at Christie's New York, now at Beauvais Carpets, explains that the past 10 years have seen a dramatic shift “from a concentration of interest in antique carpets to new-production carpets.” Matthew Bourne of Christopher Farr, which has stores in both London and Los Angeles, agrees: “These days contemporary is the most dynamic area of the entire rug market.”

A much-needed change of perspective with regard to floor coverings is being led by the people designing and creating important interiors projects. As Fabrizio Cantoni, owner of Milan-based rug company cc-tapis, observes: “For a long time, architects wouldn't include the rugs in their projects,

considering them a minor issue the client could fix alone. Luckily things have evolved, and rugs finally have the place they deserve in a project.” The profile of rugs has today risen to that of an integral part of an interior scheme. Michael Mandapati, founder of New York-based luxury carpet brand Warp & Weft, whose rugs can be seen in The Ritz-Carlton hotel in Boston and Park Hyatt hotel in Bangkok, adds that “interiors have become increasingly inventive and eclectic, calling for a wider range of styles, patterns, and colors.”

REINVENT, REWORK, REMODEL

The choice of floor coverings available is indeed better than ever. Whether you want your rug to be made of cashmere, linen, hemp, or silk, feature Swarovski crystals or LED lighting, have a traditional or contemporary design, or a mixture of both, there is a rug for every taste.

Numerous global brands set out to turn our notions of what a rug is on its head. German designer Jan Kath has reinvented the traditional rug by reworking designs like the Mamluk and Bidjar carpets with effects such as graffiti, distortion, overlaid designs, and pattern disintegration, to produce pieces that are truly show-stopping.

Artists in other media are bringing their influence to bear on this new appreciation of what rugs can do and be. Christopher Farr, who set up his eponymous store with Bourne in 1988, was one of the first figures to ask artists to design rugs; The Rug Company later brought the idea to a »

Rug: Cracked Glass wool and silk mix rug by Marilyn Minter for Henzel Studio, £10,188 (\$16,301), Frozen Palms.

Furnishings: Bong table, £876 (\$1,402), Cappellini; black bottles, £1,200 (\$1,920) for a set of 12, Akiko Hirai Ceramics.

INTERIORS

wider, more celebrity-savvy audience. It recently announced a new collection with red-hot fashion label Rodarte. And Swedish company Henzel Studio recently undertook the Henzel Studio Collaborations project, which saw artists from Juergen Teller and Richard Prince to Helmut Lang and Marilyn Minter designing rugs based on their artworks. Teller's nude portrait of Vivienne Westwood woven into a grand rug has caused a particular stir. Similarly attention grabbing was the Underworld carpet by cutting-edge Belgian design duo Studio Job for Italian brand Nodus.

TO HAVE AND HAVE KNOT

So what is the price tag of a one-off rug? Depending on the materials used (silk being the most expensive) and knot count (a standard nine-foot by 12-foot rug can have 1.5 million knots), prices for a high-end custom rug can range from \$500 to several thousand dollars per square meter.

And what are clients looking for? The consensus is clear: quality, design, and the option to customize. Carol Sebert, co-founder of Toronto firm Creative Matters, regularly works with clients to develop designs used in the production of custom rugs. "It is a process that takes between six and nine months," she says. "The computer allows us tremendous creative flexibility. We usually offer our clients numerous options along a certain theme. Working with Photoshop (our usual design tool) allows us to create different versions and we can try different colorways, motifs, scales... it's a very

creative way to work, and is great fun too." Interestingly, while rescaling and coloring can be done digitally for speed, most rug designers still prefer to draw, etch, and do other bits of design work by hand.

From all sides there is a clear message of what constitutes a great rug. It is a matter of sourcing the finest wool, which is hand-carded, hand-spun, and then dyed using high-quality natural dyes. Judiciously chosen tools and techniques then make everything possible, as Jürgen Dahlmanns of Rug Star explains: "We try to be as authentic as possible in all parts of the production to ensure we get the best out of this art form. The design – but also special finishes of the completed rug – can help to keep it fresh and contemporary."

Much luxury rug production now happens in Nepal, but other centers of weaving are re-emerging in areas previously known for rug creation: India, Turkey, Iran, and even Afghanistan, where companies Ariana and Amadi produce their rugs, and where the AfghanMade campaign to promote and revitalize traditional industries focused its efforts.

And with developments in design technology advancing every season, the bespoke services offered by rug makers will only get better. As French so eloquently puts it: "Some really wonderful things are being made that should ensure the continued existence of a vibrant carpet culture." Here's to another 2,500 years... »

Lucy Upward is editor of Cover magazine and senior editor of Hali magazine.



Rugs, top to bottom: Cyclops wool rug in Cezanne Navy, £4,020 (\$6,432), Tim Page Carpets; Trilogy No.02 wool and silk mix runner, £5,616 (\$8,986), Knots Rugs. Furnishings, left to right: P22 armchair by Patrick Norguet for Cassina, £3,048 (\$4,877), Heaf's; Saarinen marble-top side table by Eero Saarinen, £996 (\$1,594), The Conran Shop; Kaiser Idell table lamp by Fritz Hansen, £427 (\$683), Skandium.



"The computer allows us tremendous creative flexibility... allowing us to create different colorways, motifs, scales..."
Carol Sebert

Rugs, top to bottom: Paris wool rug, from £8,182 (\$13,091) per square meter, Luke Irwin; Red Meander wool rug by Anni Albers, £9,000 (\$14,400), Christopher Farr. Furnishings, left to right: Square Weave basket, from £33 (\$53), Darkroom London; String light by Michael Anastassiades for Flos, £410 (\$656), Viaduct; SM05 wire chair by Cees Braakman for Pastoe, £430 (\$688), Viaduct.



ON THE MARKET

*Homes with
rug-ready floors*

Round Hill Estate

Greenwich, Connecticut, USA

A magnificent limestone entrance hall is the perfect canvas for a show-stopping rug, while the 45-foot living room with wide-board teak flooring provides an equally alluring backdrop for soft flooring.

\$65,000,000

Contact: David Ogilvy & Associates

info@davidogilvy.com

+1 203 869 9866

Scandinavian retreat

Kalvøysund, Norway

Use a mix of rugs to divide the light and airy living area at this waterfront home into distinct zones, or choose one statement piece to create a central focus.

Price upon request

Contact: Joachim Wrang-Widén

jwrang-widen@christies.com

+44 20 7389 2374

Rugs, clockwise from top: Artwork 21 wool and silk mix rug by Jan Kath, £12,937 (\$20,699), FRONT London; Script wool rug by Janis Provisor and Brad Davis, £3,000 (\$4,800), Fort Street Studio; Serpent wool rug by Kelly Wearstler, £5,470 (\$8,752), The Rug Company.

Furnishings, left to right: Mantis BS1 floor lamp by Bernard Schottlander for DCW, £890 (\$1,424), Viaduct; PK71 nesting tables by Poul Kjaerholm, £1,394 (\$2,230) for a set of three, The Conran Shop.

Stockists: www.akihohiraiceramics.com, www.cappellini.it, www.christopherfarr.com, www.conranshop.co.uk, www.darkroomlondon.com, www.fortstreetstudio.com, www.frozenpalms.com, www.gebruederthonetvienna.com, www.heals.co.uk, www.knotsrugs.co.uk, www.lukeirwin.com, www.skandium.com, www.taipingcarpets.com, www.therugcompany.com, www.timpagecarpets.com, www.tufenkian.com, www.viaduct.co.uk, www.wearefront.com