

The Rug Shop

Vision since 1974



Keep walking

Though there's no place to get to.
Don't try to see through the distance
That's not for human beings.
Move within
 but don't move the way
Fear makes you move.

 Today, like every other day
We wake up empty and frightened.
Don't open the door to the study
 and begin reading.
Take down a musical instrument
 and begin playing.

Let the beauty we love
 be what we do
There are hundreds of ways to kneel
 and kiss the ground.

Jalaluddin Rumi

Persian Sufi Lyrical Poet & Mystic 1207–1273

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The Oriental Rug A Brief History

circa 5000–BCE

First Wool Weaving

Off-loom textiles such as felt, knitting, and macramé preceded the loom. By the middle of the first millennium BC, the Persian Empires had developed and refined the art of spinning, dyeing, and weaving to an extent unsurpassed to this day.

7th–10th century AD

Advent of Islam

The nomadic and peasant tribal cultures, which dominated life from the Mediterranean to China, had no written history and few permanent buildings. The Arab invaders gave the region a common language and facilitated urban expansion; women as the newly exclusive housekeepers and home-weavers became the de facto custodians of tribal lore expressed via the designs they wove.

16th–17th century

Rise of Europe

The Renaissance was matched by a concomitant flowering in Central and West Asia with a new emphasis on powerful and wealthy sedentary city-states and kingdoms: the Ottomans in Turkey and the Safavids in Iran, the Central Asian dynasties in Herat and Samarkand, and their cousins in India, the Moghuls. This is the period of the advent of the realistic floral rug. Graph paper blueprints began to be drawn first, moving creative intent from the weaver to the designer. Whole teams of artisans became involved. As with European Renaissance painting, the first fashionable decorative carpets were made in ateliers under the name of a great designer. Traditional home-based weaving continued. The first large-scale rug exports to a broader Europe are reflected in paintings of the period.

late 19th century

Revival

The rise of western economic power following the industrial revolution causes a massive upswing in demand for the oriental carpet. The first western run manufactories were set up to supply the increasing demand. This new demand primarily came from the nouveau rich and was exclusively for the floral, Imperial style of court weaving. Meanwhile the traditional feminine home-based weaving art with the meaningful apotropaic and shamanistic symbols begins to decline with the advent of the cash rug economy, synthetic dyes, and machine-spun worsted yarns.

20th century

Decline in Quality – Increase in Quantity

By the last years of the 20th Century, the end of five thousand years of great domestic weaving was being confidently predicted as Oriental Carpets reflected the momentous changes of the last one hundred years. The discovery of synthetic dyes was a by-product of the research into radium and they spread virulently through eastern carpets like a cancer. The new rich of the wealthy industrialised nations vacuumed up existing stocks of antique carpets and the rush was on to weave more quickly. Increasingly, the traditional symbiotic relationship of weaver to wool producer and dyer became undermined by a new commercial imperative, which separated this age-old nexus.

The importance of Mid-East oil brought western economic politics into the equation. By the end of the First World War the degeneration was in full swing. The weak Persian government tried to halt the degeneration and took extreme counter-measures like proclaiming the death penalty for using inferior dyes. Tribes living in or around sensitive oil producing areas were forcibly settled. The chivalrous age of cavalry became obsolete as lines of oil powered lethal armoured tanks choked the migration routes. Motorised ground and air transport and international politics turned even the most far-flung reaches of desert and mountainside into the pawns of questionable international interests. Welcome to the 20th Century.

Virtually the whole of Central and Western Asia was carved up to suit European equations. The Bolsheviks annexed the remaining large areas not colonised by the Czars. Of course Stalin had no interest in individual cultural expression and the idea of a home-based private enterprise did not fit the uniform collectivisation model. Equally destructive was the western taste for cheaper carpets. The demand for rugs increased steadily and the only consideration of worth also became a European equation: construction. The noble traditional aesthetics reduced to simple technique, with the number of knots-per-square-inch the new benchmark. The beauty of the antique rug, with its glorious and naturally harmonious colours and spontaneously poetic design became a thing of the past. This new world order of anonymous mass production and multinational finance saw looms set up in poor countries outside traditional rug-making lands. The reasoning was if the construction was the prime benchmark then anyone could do it.

21st century

Revival

The denouement to this ugly sad tale is however surprisingly wonderful. Changes have taken place in the last twenty years and especially the last five years, which show that not only all is not lost, but also the future looks brighter than ever. Especially for the weavers, shepherds, and dyers returning to the traditional relationships. For instance the weavers weave at home. They weave in their own time around the householders' tasks of having and feeding babies and being the glue that holds large families together. The weavers will be related by extended family to the sheep growers, the spinners, the loom makers and the dyers. In this way carpet making takes on a soul and everyone has a meaningful part to play in what is essentially a value added home-industry. This is the traditional co-operative way those glowing antique carpets were made before the deleterious effects of 20th Century modernisation.

In 1982, the published research of Bruggerman and Boehmer identified many plants growing in Turkey today with compounds that cross-matched with dye compounds in antique carpets. Co-operatives were set up and much research was done into the actual recipes. The first of these was the DOBAG project

(DOBAG is the Turkish acronym for Traditional Turkish Village Weaving Co-op Project) which had a mixed reception because of the typical lowland west Anatolian lacklustre wool. Woven Legends, formed imaginatively by a Kurdish woman and her western antique rug dealer husband set up dye works and used the existing weaving skills of the Kurds of Eastern Anatolia. This high-altitude high lanolin wool came closer to the handle and feel of antique rugs and many people across the globe saw the possibilities. In Southern Iran many of the existing weavers, with German finance, started producing a new modernist type of rug called Gabbeh. With their clear natural colours these coarsely knotted thick Gabbehs were hugely popular worldwide, but Gabbeh simply means 'woolly' in Persian and reflects the local attitude to them, although there are some finer and more traditional.

Afghan Turkomans were still weaving traditional designs and still owned grazing land that produced some of the most lustrous wool in the world, but their dyeing had degenerated. So, they were ready for a change. The first group was called 'Cultural Survival' and antique carpet specialists who had sadly watched their stock of nice old Turkomans dwindle, supported it wholeheartedly. With the great Turkoman weaving tradition behind them many others followed suit.

This return to hand-spinning and hand-dyeing wool shorn from sheep belonging to weavers' relatives, and dyed with plants growing locally, had died out during the 20th Century. The return to more traditional methods started in Turkey and spread to Iran and Afghanistan. Antique and art connoisseurs reject all other contemporary carpets, which supports further re-generation of tradition. A by-product of this demand ensures the future in the west of specialist antique rug dealers because the very nature of the trade, the personal scale, denies access to chain store operators. There however remain a greater bulk of cheap copies and ersatz types.

Carpet lovers everywhere rejoice in seeing more spontaneous, alive and vibrantly better carpets made by clan and family groups. Or as some people say, "made under the original conditions".

For many years we antique carpet specialists pontificated that unlike other sections of the antiques trade "never will we stock new carpets" as if a new carpet was a reproduction. But the stunning quality and adherence to tradition has made us more circumspect. These new oriental carpets are not reproductions or recreations but complete originals.

The future? Comparisons have been made with other tribal people like the Australian Central Desert painters: tribal people finding their voice after a century or more of colonisation. As the Californian architect Chris Alexander said at an earlier stage of this revival, it is "a foreshadowing of 21st Century art".



Islamic Timeline

- 570 Birth of Prophet Muhammad, Makkah
- 610 Muhammad's first revelation
- 622 Muhammad & Muslims emigrate to Madinah; Year one of the Muslim Calender
- 630 Muslims return to Makkah
- 632 Death of Muhammad. Beginnings of Shia, the supporters of Ali bin Abi Taleb, Muhammad's son-in-law, and one of the first Muslims. The Sunni supported Abu Bakr, Muhammad's close associate.
- 656 Ali becomes caliph
- 661 Ali murdered by the Syrian Muawiyah. Shia sect developed. Umayyad caliphate established at Damascus by Sunnis with Muawiyah caliph.
- 680 Ali's son Hossein killed at Battle of Karbala. Shia formation completed.
- 691 Dome of the Rock, Jerusalem
- 711 Muslims enter Spain from Morocco
- 750 Abbasid caliphate established, Iraq
- 794 State-owned paper mills established in Baghdad
- 800 Harun al-Rashid embassy to Charlemagne
- 825 Kwarizmi writes concept of zero in maths
- 850 Early treatises on the astrolabe
- 900 Tales of 1001 Nights
- 1010 Firdowsi presents The Shahnama at Afghan Ghaznavid court
- 1258 Mongols sack Baghdad
- 1325 Ibn Battuta leaves Tangier for China
- 1370 Tamerlane rebuilds Samarkand
- 1429 Ulugh Beg completes observatory at Samarkand
- 1453 Ottomans take Constantinople, becomes Istanbul
- 1498 Vasco da Gama and his Arab navigator set sail from Portugal
- 1502 Persian Safavid dynasty established with Shia the state religion
- 1526 Mughal dynasty established in India
- 1722 Afghans defeat Persians
- 1732 End of Safavid dynasty
- 1747 Afghanistan founded by Ahmad Shah Durani
- 1869 Suez Canal
- 1922 Ottomans end. Modern Turkey begins.
- 1932 Saudi Arabia founded
- 1967 Aga Khan foundation established
- 1970 Hasan Fathy's "Architecture for the Poor"
- 1978 Islamic Revolution in Iran
- 1979 Abdul Salam, Nobel Prize for Physics
- 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan
- 1983 Muhammad Yunus founds Grameen Bank, Bangladesh
- 1988 Naquid Mafouz, Nobel Prize for Literature
- 1998 Petronas Towers, world's tallest building, Kuala Lumpur
- 1999 Ahmed H. Zewail, Nobel Prize for Chemistry
- 2014 Maryam Mirzakhani awarded the Fields Medal



Abrash on The Randomness of Colour

"I tend to reflect that handmade objects give off a life force, an indefinable resonance, that mechanically produced objects cannot match". Giles Auty, *The Australian*.

And Jon Thomson, the well-known English Turkomaniac, said, "It was an education for me to witness the amazement and disbelief of an educated Persian carpet dealer, recently arrived from Iran, when he saw the price paid at auction for a Kazak, a coarsely woven, crude looking village carpet with a bold pattern and strong colours. 'They (tribal/village rugs) are so coarse and ugly, how can they pay so much money?' He was genuinely distressed. For him the ideal of beauty and desirability was a rug with a perfectly ordered, detailed pattern, finely worked in evenly balanced colours without any mistakes."

Abrash is from the root abra meaning silky and evanescent. This Persian word has entered the English language because there was no existing term to explain the wonderful changes in the intensity of colour often seen in good rugs. Abrash is mostly caused by the weaver using wool from different dye batches or dyed at different times in the vat.

In the sorting and carding process, natural greys and browns mix with the ivories and this produces a different abrash, more usually seen in the darker colours. Many 20th Century rugs show the changing use of dyestuffs. Two hanks of dyed wool may be the same hue at the loom, but after many years it becomes apparent one hank had a cheap chemical dye mixed to enhance the colour and it has faded. This can be attractive in tribal and peasant weaving and is approached from the point of view of Japanese Raku pottery.

Strands dyed towards the end of the process are normally lighter than those dyed at the beginning when the dye has been freshly prepared and is at full strength. With indigo blue the rate of drying affects the oxidisation to blue, and this varies within the hank and how it is hung. Abrash can be an indication of authenticity as it rarely occurs in mass-produced rugs. Although they may still be made by hand in factories, the very nature of the cost cutting of large production runs requires extensive and therefore uniform dyeing. One even sees fake abrash in machine made carpets.



Carpet Dyes The Tale

The Witches Chant from MacBeth: “Eye of newt, and toe of frog, Wool of bat, and tongue of dog....”.

Alchemy was the dyers' magic prior to our complete knowledge of chemistry. “Today a turquoise from your plain wool, tomorrow pure gold from your old coppers.” The Englishman Richard Hakluyt, belonged to a “Middle Temple” and sent a dyer to Persia in 1579AD with the written instructions...”In Persia you will find carpets of coarse thrummed wool, the best in the world, and excellently coloured: those towns you must repair to, and you must use means to learn all the order of dyeing those thrums, which are so dyed as neither rain, wine nor vinegar can stain.”

The Mystery

The vast and glorious kaleidoscope of colour found in oriental carpets came from dyeing traditions now mostly lost, like the nomadic horsemen themselves, cultural victims of the Industrial Revolution and 20th Century imperatives. The trail of evidence has been picked up in various areas and disciplines.

The Clues

The published work of Bruggerman and Boehmer identifies dye flora growing today in Turkey and then matches the compounds found in these plants to the colouring compounds identifiable in old rugs. Exact recipes, however, are more difficult. Scouring old Persian texts has been an interesting if sometimes puzzling source, coming up with descriptions like this, “Rose Colour: Take ratanjot, a thought of cochineal, madder or Lac colour a very little, add cinnabar and water and soak for 12 hours. Add the wool and steep for 36 hours, boil for 3 hours, then bathe in alum and wash well. Afterwards dry in the shade.”

Extenuating Circumstances

Like the colour of wine, regional variations occur even within the same recipes. But each village area and especially each tribe had their own palette. This greatly assists tapetologists, (carpet and textile enthusiasts: term coined by said enthusiasts), in detecting the origins of various rugs but does not help to find and reproduce particular dye recipes. Compounding this was the secrecy that protected the dyers guild. Weird and wonderful ingredients and transmutation processes were included in recipes to obscure the important steps and preserve the dyers' standing as a magician in the community.

The Dyes - Traditional Organic

Reds were produced from the roots of the madder bush but a skilled dyer could conjure shades ranging from pale orange to deep purple with the same root, even the same dye bath. Blues are vat fermented and came mostly from indigo tinctoria although the Afshar and Belouch preferred the anil and linifolia varieties. Yoghurt and pomegranate produce a bright orange regarded as the true Afghan colour by Afghans themselves, but labelled synthetic by dilettantes. With every Mohan, Lal and Baksheesh entering the noble and historic carpet trade misinformation abounds! The leaves, but especially the sour inedible pith and skin, of the pomegranate, could produce red through yellow hues by the judicious application of mordants and astringents such as alum, yoghurt, wild citrus, walnut galls, potash and rusted iron water. The mordant was used to fix the colour as well as to change the hue. For instance, the West Iranian wild delphinium flower (*Delphinium Zalil*) produces yellow with alum and green with copper sulphate. Most greens, however, were double dyed yellow with blue and most yellows show safflower or plant to be predominant. The beautiful shades once produced by these dyers were always a complex mixture of plants and minerals.

The Dyes - Imported - A Feminist View

The dye, cochineal, a native of Guatemala, became popular in Europe during the English Georgian period and was imported in vast quantities into Turkey then Persia and later via Russia and India. This flourishing trade died overnight, eclipsed by the discovery in Germany of aniline dyes - red, blue, brown and black at first and others later. By the 1870's these inferior dyes were widespread, and by 1900 appeared in rugs from even the remotest communities such as the nomadic Tibetans. The second generation of imported synthetic dyes were, unfortunately, light fast. Bright apricot and orange colours were most popular with the weavers.

The advent of synthetic dyes in the East was coupled with advances in weaving technology in Europe like the invention of the jacquard loom. Almost overnight, tens of thousands of Persian and South Asian shawl weavers and fabric printers; traditional male occupations; became redundant.

The carpet weavers, mostly women at home became the money earners. Most importantly however, they were released from the tyranny of the dyers, and a more titanic change could not have been forecast - women could purchase and use the dyes themselves!

Many women took on the role of principle breadwinner in many households and this improvement in status continued into the 20th Century. The emergent wealthy Trans-Atlantic middle classes had already deemed oriental carpets the height of fashion. There were public brawls at Liberties' carpet openings and sharp merchants profiteering among the Virginian plantations. Carpet making revenues in the east rose accordingly.

The nuance. What seemed to be bad, the synthetics, had a good outcome for many.



The Attitude of Altitude

"There are connections between the low country, mass production and religious fundamentalism, and the high country, family weaving and liberalism."

Traditional handmade wool rugs are a function of altitude. Secondly, the value of most rugs is related to the level of feminine involvement in the weaving. The first statement may seem self-evident as higher, colder altitudes demand the warmth and insulation of wool. A point is reached with rising latitudes where the summer thaw is too short for the warm-fingered time-intensive work required. There is more than meets the eye however with the second statement.

Look at the "carpet belt" which stretches across the world from Morocco in the west to China in the east. For instance, Morocco has a traditional carpet weaving culture synonymous with the Berber and Arab tribes grazing their flocks in the mountains and high plains. Boys tend the sheep, men prepare the looms, and the women weave. Coastal weaving is of the flat-woven cotton tapestry type carried out in ateliers with flying shuttle looms manned by skilled men. An exception is modern commercial weaving where rugs are hand knotted with an eye on western markets. These are made in similar ateliers regardless of country or tradition. This scenario holds true across the "carpet belt".

The modern countries of Turkey, Iran, and Afghanistan, the core of the "carpet belt", are almost completely plateaux and mountains. The surrounding countries of Syria, Iraq, Kuwait, the Gulf states, India/Pakistan are mostly under 1000 metres above sea level and traditionally produce only flatweaves. The cold northern neighbours, Russia and the "Stans" are mostly at lower altitudes and preferred to make less labour intensive felt rugs. India/Pakistan has a royal carpet weaving tradition that stemmed from 700 years of ruling mountain Persian Afghan dynasties.

Distinctive also are the materials. Cotton requires broad-acre farming which presupposes flat lowland conditions and is so intensive in its land use it requires land ownership. Cotton fabric is less insulating, and cotton weaving is logically a lowland occupation. By contrast sheep pastures are usually elevated and are mostly lands held in common. Wool production and wool weaving are elevated occupations.

Pure wool rug making is value adding to a family's flock of sheep. All materials come from the family or are produced by someone in the wider clan. Cotton is a trade commodity that must be bought or traded by the mountain rug-making people to use instead of their own wool. This implies a cash component in the making of a rug, adding a subsequent cash or trade value to the finished product. Cotton therefore is often found to equate with commercialisation of the rug-making process.

If we look at loom technology, we find the number of shafts or "sheds" inversely proportional to the geographic elevation of the loom. Traditionally, knotted pile rugs were made at altitude by family units using simple one-shaft looms, while lowlanders produced flatweaves and mass-produced rugs. The lowlands are the domain of the fine silk brocades, shawls and other fine clothing fabrics.

It is interesting to note that religious fundamentalism also seems to be a function of altitude, or lack of it, calling the lowlands and deserts home, while the mountains and the high plains are home to a more liberal outlook. Look at a map of say, the USA and find that topographically, the "Bible Belt" equates with the "green" areas. Do this with maps of relevant parts of Asia for a similar result.

There are connections between the low country, mass production and religious fundamentalism, and the high country, family weaving and liberalism. Mass production involves working men with jobs outside the family, whereas family-weaving is done by the women of the house.

Traditional knotted pile weaving flourished in the freedom of liberal but conservative communities driven by family, community and a complex and nourishing mysticism. Family designs, clan motifs, and talismans are all part of a rich vocabulary that evolved over long periods. Like musical harmonies these designs form colour fields in an endless interplay; where rug weaving becomes a form of prayer, of connection with the universal, a humble submission. It is this that gives the Oriental Carpet true value.



The Bearskins of Oxiana

In “Mountains of The Gods”, Ian Cameron writes:

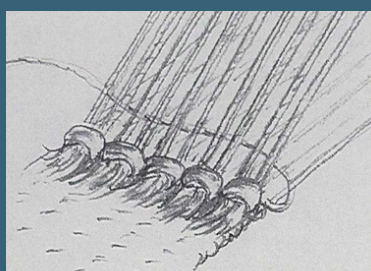
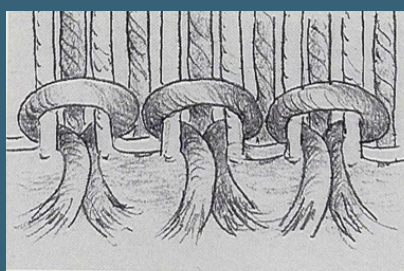
“The Pamirs are a paradox. They are still being born, still thrusting up at the rate of something like two-an-a-half-inches a year; yet in the very moment of their birth, they are dying, for the ranges to the southeast are rising even faster and each year are blocking off more and more of their inadequate rainfall, converting their already barren slopes to desert. This is one of the bleakest and least-known corners of the world; remote, mysterious, and, at one time, dubbed The Third Pole.”

I have been successful in finding rare weavings from this area.

“This is definitely going to have an adverse effect on my marriage,” I thought, as I came across another few of these outrageously hairy weavings. Years ago, when I first started returning home with a Bearskin or two, she-who-must-be-obeyed would coldly sniff and say, “typical”, inferring defective genes but with a kindly beseeching, “Can’t you just be normal!” Not that she favoured the silk monstrosities of the time, for she was a woman with a usually good eye. But the Bearskins of Oxiana are a very different matter, I admit. The Bearskins don’t look like a typical Oriental Carpet as there is little or no pattern, and they are extremely coarsely woven. They are however soft and plush, with a friendly, flexible handle. You just want to roll in one, so immediate is the thrill.

I love these rugs, these archaic, passionately elemental energies. Later, after a couple more acquisitions, she still didn’t really complain, until she found out that I was actually paying for them!

Referring to our 500-odd customers worldwide, she said, “Does anyone collect these?” “Of course, can’t you see?” I said, pointing to the ever-mounting pile of Bearskins. “I do!” The fact that the supply has virtually dried up pleases her immensely. She has that sort of triumphant patience, whispering quietly to friends and acquaintances, “he likes Bearskins,” as if it is somehow tawdry! I never wavered in my love for the Bearskins, and, in fact, I have increased confidence in them since more research has been completed, and historically important textiles are bringing ever-higher prices.



When knotting is done on an open shed, knots are tied on alternate warps. A weft is put through the shed and beaten down behind the knots. Then the opposite warps are raised and the process is repeated.

These unusual long rugs picked up the Bearskin moniker because that is what they resemble. When I bought my first one in Kabul, Afghanistan in the 1970's, the Uzbek merchant called it Djul-y-khir, or skin-of-bear, literally, in the archaic Persian, the lingua franca of Central Asian merchants. If Bearskin is a risqué metaphor in the Arctic Circle, the Djul-y-khir certainly fulfills the same purpose, real and metaphorical, in the snow country of these nomadic graziers, where a yak race is considered a joyous picnic.

Who are these weavers and where are they now? The last century and especially the last two decades have not been kind to these people and they have, as far as researchers can tell, mostly dispersed. But surging political forces have not stopped the research into these fascinating rugs. Originally all lumped together as Uzbek, it is now fairly conclusive that they are Arab; a semi-nomadic yurt dwelling tribe of Arabs, living like the similarly housed Lakai Uzbeks in the upper reaches of the Amu and Kashka Daryas, where the rivers rise on the western slopes of the Pamirs, in deep Oxiana. These Arabs, Islamic Jihad nomads from Arabia, settled in Central Asia in the 8th Century, partly converting the locals, who retained flavours of their Buddhist, Shamanist, and Manicheist practices in their brand of Islam, along the way. They remained culturally distinct, their unique, archaic method of weaving

even influencing later migrations into the area of Turko/Mongol hordes. In many ways they may have been amongst the longest surviving, culturally distinct groups in the area. Now, as far as we know, they have largely been lost to us, overrun in the last century of the Great Game, the superpower fight for control of Central Asia. Today, a scattering of sedentary Central Asian Arabs remain in subsistence farming villages in Kashadarya.

The actual Bearskin technique pre-dates the knotted pile technology that we know as the Oriental Carpet of today. Very fine carpets, as fine as the best today were already being made twenty-five hundred years ago. That makes the Bearskin technique indeed ancient. A type of antique Tibetan weaving, now defunct, is considered to be an original prototype of the knotted pile rug. It has similarities that place it in a time scale after the Bearskin and before the pile rug of the last couple of millennia. The woven-and-knotted Bearskin technique could be the earliest knotted pile technique, and appeared around, or just after, knitting and loop pile in the historical development of weaving.

Other thickly woven bedding rugs are the Pashtun Kouchi of Afghanistan, the Tulu of Anatolia, and the Berber sleeping rugs of the Moroccan High Atlas Mountains. The Lakai Uzbeks, living in close proximity to these Arabs since circa 14th Century made a coarse similar rug but with typical Uzbek patterning.

We are incredibly lucky to have these Bearskins available to us in the early 21st Century. After the centuries of war and migration, the conquering armies of Genghis Khan, and Tamerlane, the Bolsheviks, Josef Stalin, and USA/USSR proxy wars in Afghanistan, it is amazing they have survived at all. Survive and flourish they did, for thirteen hundred years; right up to the modern era. Just as the tradition ends we have picked up the last surviving examples of thousands of years of unchanged weaving and for this we are thankful. Even she-who-must-be-obeyed now agrees with me, such is the power of these rugs!



“My heart has burned with passion and
has searched forever
for this wondrous beauty
that I now behold.”

Jalaluddin Rumi

Persian Sufi Lyrical Poet & Mystic 1207–1273



The Spirit of Truth Belouch

To be too sensitive about a statement being true or false in the traditional carpet making lands is to be uncomfortable, out of touch. The most important thing is the spirit behind the statement. Was it meant to be kind and helpful? Yes? Then the facts can be wrong. For instance, never ask for directions as the answer is always “straight on”. When queried, it can change to be either left or right, but is never “I don’t know, sorry, can’t help”.

A Belouch rug can also be a Kurd, a Persian, or even a Mongol! Rugs and carpets that come under the general banner of Belouch actually represent at least a dozen distinct tribes and numerous sub-groups. These groups have at times presided over their own dynasties but always returned to a life of shifting alliances in the frontier areas between the Persian and Moghul Empires, and the Tartar states to the north. This area roughly equates modern day West, Central and South Afghanistan, Eastern Iran, Western Pakistan (Baluchistan) and Southern Turkmenistan.

A number of the tribes federated in the 19th Century. The men of previous generations had sacked both the Persian and the Moghul Empires, and decided they were better united than fighting each other. They called themselves “Chahar Aimaq”, meaning The Four Tribes even though they numbered about ten. This federation comprised groups with different ethnicity, language and religion and became politically redundant by the 20th Century.

When researching the Belouch at source, I found an incomprehensible scale of anomalies that showcased my rigid Western thinking and uncovered a cavalier attitude to tribal attribution by the locals. For instance, when did a major part of the Yacoub Khani become the Salar Khani? When they changed their name. Why the change of name? Was it the murderous tribal politics, and affiliations? No, the women simply made the choice because the clan head was handsome and strong and rode a white horse! Obviously these rug makers have little regard for our finely wrought attributions.

The Mushwani, selectively categorised as a separate tribe by western tapetologists were, as an ethnic Pashtun group, unheard of in their supposed homeland. The term mushwani does not refer to a separate tribe but means ‘running mouse’ and was a slang term for the various groups living towards Chuckansur in the south as well as the name of these groups’ preferred design.

There does seem to be a need for some serious ethnographic work on the 10 million farmers, pastoralists and nomads that lived in Central, West, and NW Afghanistan and Eastern Iran.

What about the term Hazara, one of the largest weaving groups? Or Pashtun, or the local terms for the pure nomadic rugs, Kouchi and Moldau, or even Kowdani? These are never used in the West where selective tribal attributions follow fashion as much as truth. The word belouch in modern Persian can refer to any impoverished person living outside town, a gypsy, or even a beggar.

Belouch, being incorrect in most cases, seems to be the only generally usable term as most people know it refers to specific attributes; such as smaller sizes, soft, shiny wools, geometric, sombre, even dark toned and subtle colours.

It is the spirit of kindness that is more important than truth in Central Asia!

Mathematics, Meaning & Mystique

Many of us have spent a lifetime trying to fathom and analyse the utterly beguiling business of simply looking at Oriental Carpets. So much of our emotional lives match the colour-fields that are rugs, fleeting and ungraspable. Great artists like Cezanne, Mondrian, Klee and Matisse all accepted Persian Islamic Art as a teacher to help them translate the infinite variables of visual experience into a two dimensional structure without murdering the magical, and we still have beautiful, intriguing rugs teaching us. To many Western eyes, much of Islamic Art seems obsessed by an almost scientific method of visual analysis. If those repetitive-patterned rugs have such an apparent scientific, formal rigour then why do they remain so wonderfully elusive and charged with mystery? Not all is left to the vaporous musings of obsessed tapetologists! There are some technical, objective and logical pointers: look at the dimensions of rugs, the simple measurements of length and width and discover this simple dry subject is imbued with cosmic form!

Firstly, you may have wandered into a rug shop and suggested a square or even a round rug only to be met with a quizzical look. The pleasing proportions of The Golden Rectangle have dictated rug dimensions for centuries. The Golden Rectangle, The Golden Mean, or as it is sometimes called, The Golden Ratio, is not a new concept. It has an aesthetic force that has been recognized for thousands of years. The Golden Rectangle is one where the ratio of the length of the larger side to the smaller side is equal to that of the sum of the two sides to the larger side. If we assume that the smaller side has a length of one, then the formula for the length for the larger side is $X = (X + 1) \text{ over } X$. The only positive solution for this equation is about 1.61, or as some quite nearly put it, at "about one and two-thirds", or even more loosely "two is to three".

A rectangle of this proportion has generally been considered to be most pleasing to the eye, neither too thin, nor too square. It has been used as the basic format for countless paintings and buildings in both Western and Persian cultures, from the awe-inspiring classical carpets and buildings of antiquity, to the works of Rembrandt and modern advertising. Why do most traditional rugs follow these proportions? For instance: 100x60cms or 200x125cms or 3x2m etc. The answer is The Golden Mean.

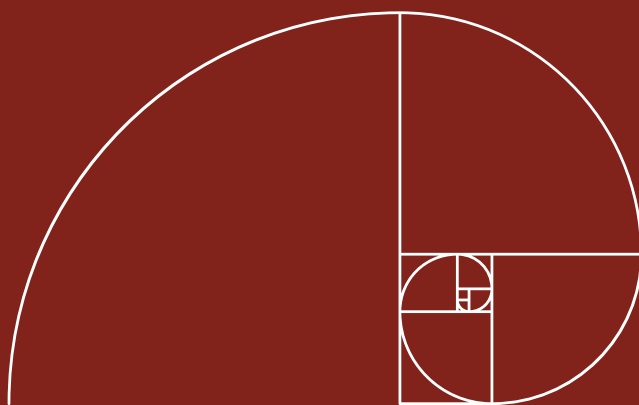
Now secondly, if we look at the mathematical series discovered in the 16th Century Universities of Herat and Samarkand and brought to the west by the Italian mathematician, Fibonacci, we see a relationship with rug sizes reflecting the Golden Mean. The Fibonacci series is made by adding the two previous numbers to get the next: ie. 1,2,3,5,8,13,21,34,55, and so on. In fact any two adjacent numbers in this series will read like the inventory in The Rug Shop. 2x3, 3x5, 8x5, 13x8 and the near 6x4, 9x6, 12x9 and so on. Just choose your system of measurement: centimetres, feet and so on, to fit.

The Fibonacci Series is a formula used to create a spiral and that is what the mathematicians in Central Asia were indeed doing, attempting to define the nature of Allah by investigating the natural world. They came up with the series by measuring the spirals in nature such as the arrangement of seeds on the face of the sunflower.

Now for the non-scientific. Most traditional weavers and designers of Oriental carpets and rugs will all have some idea of the possibility of an extra force exerted by the rug and will compose towards that end: the rug as a metaphysical tool. Whether she is an illiterate tribeswoman in a remote black tent or an educated master-designer employed by the Sultan, the metaphor remains. This is expressed in English by terms like power-centre, whirlpool, vortex, etc, meaning a sort of axis between the netherworld and the enlightened sky, around which all revolves and a certain "life-force" or "regenerative entropy" fluctuates. The dance of Shiva, the Shaman's dance, the whirling of the Dervishes - these ideas are as old as The Golden Rectangle and should be seen to be inseparable with the movement of the seasons, human reproduction, and night and day, in the mind of the rug weaver.

"There is increasing evidence from neuroscience:" Oliver Sachs wrote, "for the extraordinarily rich interconnectedness and interactions of the sensory areas of the brain, and the difficulty, therefore, of saying that anything is purely visual or purely auditory or purely anything." Sachs describes "the enormous act of analysis and synthesis, the dozens of subsystems involved in the subjectively simple act of seeing." He writes, "at the level of the imagination there is a continual struggle for concepts and form and meaning. At this level one can no longer say of one's mental landscapes what is visual, what is auditory, what is image, what is language, what is intellectual, what is emotional, they are all fused together."

In fact, The Golden Mean, The Fibonacci Series, and the simple dimensions of an apparently coarse tribal rug are inseparable, and part of a long arcane and magic continuum, about which we have a lot to learn and from which we have much to learn.



Fibonacci

The Fibonacci Sequence is a pattern where each number is made by adding the two before it.

1, 1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 13...



Synesthesia A Design Genesis

When the Sufi Master Abdul Qadir began teaching, the jealous scholars of the city sent him a full glass of water, implying that there was no room for yet another learned man. Abdul Qadir placed a rose petal on top of the water without spilling a drop and sent it back, saying: "Whoever among you can hear these flowers, can hear his Lord."

Synesthesia is a condition in which a stimulus in one sensory modality automatically triggers a perceptual experience in another.

Research suggests that tribal peoples such as the indigenous Australians and nomadic peoples of Iran have a much higher rate of synesthesia than found in modern western societies. Just as some important western artists had the condition, it is postulated that at least some of the great artists who developed the original designs and wove the best carpets and kelims were synaesthetes. Hearing colours and seeing sounds is apparently the result of the brain being active and creative and emotional, rather than the static, passive receiver-and-filter of tradition. Some scientists hypothesise that synaesthetes may be further along the evolutionary road and that periods of minor synesthesia may be common.

For the illiterate, emotional nomadic weaver, the story of a carpet is a totality of experience as well as a narrative. It is a combination of the motifs and colours and intensity of passion that produces a connection with the carpet and implies a synaesthetic response.

Before this age of mass production and economic imperialism, where the market drives the production, an Oriental Carpet was a statement of the weaver's personality and pedigree. It was also a vehicle for strong magical totemic tools. It follows, that her emotional relationship with her weavings, would have been highly charged. That a vigorous experience produces a dilation of perception and allows a development of unusually creative parts of the mind is the next stage of the riddle.

Did these guls, these achiqs, these trees of life have multiple meanings beyond metaphor? Some people see water when they see a good old rug. Others simply see glossy wool. Some nomadic Belouch music relates both to life passages and two-dimensional designs relevant to the seasons and weather. This cross-disciplinary research shows that oriental carpet scholarship may be entering a new phase.

Maybe the last word should go to the tribal Elder in Bruce Chatwin's book "Songlines". He impressed Chatwin, for when given a brand new vehicle by the authorities, he drove it into the desert and upturned it for protection from the sun.

Waqf in Central Asia

Much is made in the West of the presence of Christians in Central Asia and their influence on the culture of carpet designs. The reality that seems to be emerging is that these groups were very small in comparison to the local population, and were being either completely ignored or just tolerated, and as such should be considered insignificant to the rug enthusiast. Generational changes in scholarship are humorous when one views collectors turgidly seeing Christian crosses in every gul. (tribal symbol or emblem). The clarity of hindsight and a greater wealth of information, however, has its own responsibility. Although there were Abbeys of Nestorian monks from early Christian times and whole villages following the teachings of Mani, called Manichaeists, current scholarship points away from the idea that they had any lasting influence on the pervading Muslim culture. In fact most weavers were only nominally Islamic with local sects of unorthodox Sufism being more important. Buddhism was a great early influence. Some experts point to pre-Buddhist Tibet as a crucible of the weaving culture with Buddhist Tibet having a great design input right through to the 19th Century.

It is now accepted that minority Islamic groups such as the Naqshabandi and Qaderi Sufis have had an influence far beyond their numbers. We do know that since Seljuk times, Naqshabandi networks have been a barely underground political force of some importance. Intriguers and political commentators ignore them at their peril, but in terms of their effect on the weaving culture, one turns to the recent research into the Muslim practice of Waqf. This deeply embedded custom is where a hereditary line would be responsible for the upkeep of local shrines, ruins or indeed any building or chaman of historical or cultural importance. In a highly convoluted form of modern branding the hereditary caretakers would accept sponsorship payments from tribal Khans, effectively selling the rights to be associated with the shrine. The profits may often support charities for the disadvantaged. Great honour and social acceptance went to the tribal group associated with the Waqf. The Waqf would also provide an essential diplomatic connection with the settled peoples and respect would be gained by dialogue. The great Khans developed their Waqf before any period of military expansion.

The Fosters Melbourne Cup as a Central Asian idea! Only, to better match the Central Asian Waqf one would have The National Trust selling the rights to specific buildings as well as having powerful local families self-aggrandise by judicious maintenance. God knows how expensive the upkeep of an old building could be, and the noise one could make about it! Occasionally, other powerful families with nomadic connections could prove they were better caretakers, and by doing it cheaper would have more largesse to spread around the settled community. Thus, wresting control of the shrine and it's profits. It all sounds very modern, does it not!



Certainly, recent knowledge of the Waqf shows it provided a deep connection between the nomadic pastoralists and the settled farming and small business populace. We can now forget the idea of never-ending antagonism depicting the nomads as noble and insular, pillaging at will with the decrepit farmers cowering behind their garden rakes. Was this Hollywood cowboy reality? “Oh the farmer and the cowman should be friends” goes the 1950’s musical Oklahoma!

It is still too early to attribute actual specific abstract designs, but the weight of knowledge is heading in that direction. The Turkoman practice of making outsize Wazirat carpets (with plain centres to the guls) for local government buildings is part of Waqf. Imagine appearing in court in a property dispute and having your own coat of arms on the floor of the court! There are depictions of the ruins of Persepolis in late South Persian weavings. Various shrines appear in Kurdish and Bakhtiari carpets. The Timurid minarets and the Jome Masjid of Herat are woven into Chahar Aimaq rugs. Even the conservative Turkomans wove realistic depictions. The Sulaymanli Mashad Shrine pardahs and the Jangal Arouq prayer rugs are examples. These designs are well known simply because they are realistic and obviously representational. But it is in the understanding of the ‘carpet lands’ sense of metaphor that is important. Take the motifs *ak su*, or running water, and *gol-i-badam*, or almond flower. It is generally posited that, when woven, they were not disassociated single thoughts but would have been a metaphor for something like spring, sex and marriage. Indeed, the very reason for going to the shrine would most probably be fertility, or health of a family member. The power of the Naqshabandi Sufis and the Waqf in the minds of the weavers, would have these motifs refer to specific places and events. The blessing by the Sufi and the running water at the shrine and the almond flowers in the cloister would have a strong appeal to the nomadic weaver as a connection to the shrine experience. Later on, weavers would just refer to these motifs without knowing their specific geographical Waqf reference. For instance the triangular motif called *mushka* is woven into a carpet to reflect a blessing from the Sufi. This blessing is traditionally written on paper and placed inside the talismanic amulet, which is either textile or metal. The carpet design then becomes a reflection of a real event and a specific motif that started from a fixed place, subsequently becoming a design continuum, a motif used again and again. This is a new addition to the origins of design.



Designs & Motifs Mir & Mushka

The designs such as Mir and Mushka transcend simple folk art. The tribal and village women who used to weave these motifs believed they had the power to protect and transform their world. They were the open-sesame, the abracadabra talismans of the traditional world, and probably represent 2000-plus year-old Shamanic beliefs kept alive in the female realm. The voodoo of Central Asia was one of witches' spells where every rock could hold a malignancy, every change in the weather a meaning, every bird a spying sorceress. This could be a malevolent and frightening world from which the weaver protected her family.

The Mushka is an amulet, a charm to protect against the evil Djinns, witchcraft spells, and the evil eye. It can be made from cloth and contain a prayer written on paper sewn inside. This is then worn attached to clothing and may even be put on a favourite horse or donkey. The triangular or V shape holds the protective powers and can be seen on many traditional old rugs, sometimes in the simplified form of three convergent lines.

The mir-i-boteh, or simply boteh, is called the mango in Hindustani India because the shape resembles the fruit. Made famous by the Paisley shawl in Europe, the boteh's Persian origins have been under review by rug scholars.

In the country patois of old Persian, mir means everlasting, and boteh means a flower in the botanical sense. It is a metaphor for infinite time. The everlasting flower is not a flower but a seed pod and the shoot from the top is just that, a new shoot, representing life, and because of life, death.

In new or city Persian, mir is the respectful term for a royal personage and boteh means a type of firewood. The top of the cypress tree is the required shape of the boteh and it also fulfills the sense of immortality. Cypress trees are planted to signify a cemetery from a distance.



Mir



Mushka

Carpets & Investment

I was invited to speak on carpets and investment at an Art Seminar for trainee Investment Fund Managers. I initially refused, as one doesn't usually find the liquid world of the rug dealer in demand at the concrete jungle end of town. I then came across some hard data to present and decided to accept the invitation. When 'The Times' of London was the pre-eminent newspaper in the glory days of Fleet Street, they kept a record of antiques and art to go under the hammer at then top auction house, Sotheby's. It was called, eponymously, the Times Sotheby's Index.

Dealers and collectors kept market watch as the values of Chinese Snuff Bottles or Euro Porcelain reacted to the auction market. The final Index was presented in the late 1970's and it included an average of the affluent post-war years that makes fascinating reading: All categories rose, none fell. The percentage rises expressed in per annum averages ranged from 8% to 32%.

I gave the trainee Investment Managers a short questionnaire to fill out. They were invited to punt on the main categories of art and antiques in order of investment value. Compared to the actual Index, the managers' woeful figures pre-disposed them to a great many surprises.

Surprise number one: At the bottom was, unexpectedly and infamously, English Silverware. Considered for generations as a rock-solid investment, a guaranteed hedge against inflation, it performed the worst. This great traditional social signifier of the intrinsic worth of a family, like Jeeves and Bertie, had become irrelevant in the modern era.

Surprise number two: Old Master Paintings, considered the pinnacle of European Art and proof of the artistic and cultural superiority of European Society only just made double figures. Much higher by comparison was the category of "Old Master Prints". Who, amongst the investment managers, said a print would be a better investment than an actual oil painting? None.

Surprise number three: The highest two categories and the only ones showing average rises of over 30%p.a. were Chinese Porcelains and Eastern Carpets. However, both these categories were ripe for investment as they were, in the outdated Euro-centric paradigm, labelled pejoratively as, "decorative arts" or "domestic arts". This was in support of the failing concept of Western Painting being "Fine Art" and therefore somehow superior to all other "arts" or "crafts". A new generation of scholars, collectors and young dealers recognised a much more absolute aesthetic, one that included a range of human endeavour wider than the narrow Oxbridge paradigm. Straight after buying "Blue Poles" and De Kooning's "Woman V", the Australian National Gallery purchased a Central Asian embroidery known as a Suzani and hung it next to those two great paintings to great effect.

Surprise number four: The modern world of Art Investment includes: (and how could our trainee investment managers have guessed it): embroidery! The possibility that domestic embroidery may be a better investment than a clock, a piece of furniture, or a painting by a famous deceased artist was a new paradigm. We went to the tea break, agog with such revolutionary stuff.

Later, I showed them authentic rugs and textiles with a knowledge backed by my many years in the trade. I showed Pre-Columbian textiles over a thousand years old, coarsely woven antique Kazaks and fine velvety Turkoman rugs, and of course, embroideries. I also showed the commercial end of the spectrum, (useless for their investment purposes), crazy silk rugs, Chinese copies, cheap auction rugs with dyes that will run, basically the other 99 percentile.

The trainee managers were very open, and talented enough to absorb much of this difficult art form. I was impressed with their questions and their grasp of what is a very moveable feast. The bazaar is no place for an amateur. I congratulated them and told the story of a Persian friend, a well-off merchant who was having some plumbing upgraded in the family haveli (family home or mansion). With spanners in hand, he was taking taps apart. I asked him, "what is a rug merchant doing on the floor inspecting the innards of simple water taps?" He replied that he was "...looking at the quality of the teflon/rubber washers used".

The moral? Try to acquire some knowledge before entering a market. Perhaps relevant here is the adage: "good taste is easy, just buy the best".

Since opening my first carpet gallery in 1974 many carpets have come back to me as trade-ins. This is something we love to do. Overwhelmingly, people are impressed that they still have a desirable and valuable item after they have had many years of wear and the daily pleasure of a beautiful object. In an age of planned obsolescence and price point mass production this is the 'cream on the investment cake' that is good Oriental Carpets.

Sofreh The Persian Ritual

A record auction price, USD14,000, recently paid for a small rug, just a metre square, highlights the discovery by a wider audience of a formerly arcane oriental rug called a Sofreh. The Sofreh is a special event rug with the same name as the dining ritual – SOFREH, pronounced soff-reh, with emphasis on the aspirated “h”. Persian cuisine is totally intertwined with Persian culture and is inseparable from Persian carpets. Iranian families gather around the Sofreh for dinner, which is spread on the floor, usually over a larger Persian carpet or kilim. Although many modern city dwellers now use chairs and tables in the Western manner, the Sofreh is still the cornerstone of Persian culture and a place of gathering, laughter, and relaxation.

Importantly, the dishes remain constant, rich or poor, city or country, and reflect the naturally egalitarian nature at the heart of Persian society. The Sofre have distinguishing tribal and geographic characteristics, just like traditional rugs. They are mostly some types of flat-weave but with interesting variations not found in more prosaic rugs. A single Sofreh may contain wool, cotton and camel, goat and horsehair all worked in a variety of techniques; Knotted pile, Soumak, Kelim and brocade techniques all in the same Sofreh!

Like the Sofreh, Persian cuisine is individual and very distinct. It is a cuisine filled with strong tastes and wonderful aromas, ranging in taste from sweet, to very sour, or spicy. It is not Middle Eastern. Many Persian recipes are unique in ingredients and ways of preparation. Many Iranian dishes consist of rice and stews with different sorts of meats and vegetables. Iranians spend a lot of time in the kitchen but the cuisine offers simple to very elaborate dishes.

The Iranian Sofreh offers some extra staple ingredients that stay on the table during the course of the meal. These small dishes refresh the palate between courses and include sliced cucumbers, peeled steamed sugar beets in winter, various dips, Persian pickles and relishes, and of course yoghurt, alone or with other ingredients such as spinach. The meal starts and ends with fresh fruit such as seedless grapes, small fragrant stone fruit and the ubiquitous sweet melon slices. I was told once, in all seriousness, that the reason why Iran was the best country in the world was because there is a year-round supply of melons due to the climatic variations.

Most Sofrehs are usually a metre square or have the rectangular dimensions of a small rug. This is perfect for the nuclear family, but one finds long narrow Sofreh among various nomadic tribes to suit the enlarged families of the nomadic tribal culture. Brothers remain “at home” so when they marry (often more than once) and have children, the family require ever-larger Sofreh. Some Baluch Sofreh are 3 by 1.5 metres. The Sofreh of the great Khans of the Shahsevan and Bakhtiari were rightly sumptuous and glorious. These royal Sofreh may have been brocaded in gold on silk but they were generic and not as distinctive as the woollen tribal types. There is Baluchi Sofrehs, Afghan, Shahsevan, Afshar, Lori, Qashqai and Kurdish Sofrehs, special wedding Sofre, amongst others.

Even the most modern Persian still finds comfort in the tradition of Sofreh, as old as Persian history, bringing friends and rivals closer for millennia.





Some Weeks Are Like That A Provincial Tale

The week did not start out well. A long drive to a so-called stately home in the country gave me plenty of time to ponder the possibilities. The Livingstone Family estate sale at Megaw & Hogg. The big house in Adelaide with a collection of William Morris designed carpets made at Killybegs in County Donegal a century ago. Was there also an Alexander Morton as well as some Voysey large drapes? Then just down the road an elderly lady had covered the guest beds in Central Asian Suzani (large scale embroideries). To obtain the former, one should run the gauntlet of the English Trade and the latter requires drilling the Arasta Bazaar in the Sultanahmet quarter of Istanbul!

The rain came down in buckets and reduced the safe speed to a crawl. The stately home had been refurbished in the 1970's and it showed. The carpets showcased perfectly the profligacy of the period: Central Iranian Qum silks with garish turquoises and weird mushroom pinks. One has come to accept aberrations in small sizes but room-sized examples are now worth an even smaller fraction of their original value. Down the hall, and into another large, cold room. A giant, (and at first sight), handsome, Esfahan carpet in typical central medallion and quarters style, but with the vicious bleeding-dye maroons and chocolates of the period.

Back down the hall: was that an early, Circa 1830 Cedar Clothes Press? And into the bedrooms each with what must be one of the worst types of rug ever made: a colourless dry wool Turkish Kazak clipped to ape the corroded blacks of true antiques. By this time I was beginning to question my own sanity, and tiredness drove me out of the house and back into the storm.

The tape loop of a bad experience playing in my head: the answer to the question "was the house furnished when you moved in?" was "those old carpets were so dusty and worn and we didn't really like them and those heavy drapes and old fashioned furnishings we threw the lot out. Some went to the local second-hand dealer". Twenty-five years ago! Just another little Baghdad Museum moment, another little Buddhas of Bamiyan, lowering the aggregate stock of the planet.

Back home the following day and a call from Charles in Caboulture. Some Persian, Turkish and Afghan rugs. Age? "Oh yes quite old I bought them from so-and-so." (who wouldn't know an antique rug if he fell over it). The clincher was the reason for the fire sale of these 12 rugs: he is going sailing. If ever there was a group of modern-day Philistines. Poor quality generalisations and only two days into the week and things weren't getting any better.

Next day a prospective customer asks for a plain green rug. And the size? Square, of course, negativity is becoming second nature. Oriental Carpets are rarely green, rarely square and never plain and certainly never all three unless they are especially made that way to the occidental taste. So I apologetically explain this and am told curtly “well they should be!”

Finally towards the end of the week a customer who is not at all knowledgeable wants to buy the two Ghoris that had been languishing at the back of the shop. Made by sub-groups of the Taimani in Central and West Afghanistan they are referred to by New Yorkers as the ‘Kazaks of Today’ with their spontaneous, friendly elementality and unusual use of undyed wool shades. Strangely, a prominent member of the UK trade recently saw them for the first time on a visit here and had never heard of the type. Frogs and ponds!

The completely intuitive novice cuts to the heart by sheer talent, untainted and direct. Allahu Akbar God is Great. I am beaming, overly glad for her with her two Ghoris and then her friend is attracted to the primitive Djulykhirs woven like, and called literally, “Bearskins”. They are the nearest thing to a Mark Rothko canvas, powerful and metaphysically brooding, the technique pre-dates actual knotted pile in the history of weaving.

So, by the end of the week I had sold a few things, gained some new talented customers and rejoiced in restored faith for this wonderful aesthetic world.

And the Cedar Clothes Press? Well, that’s another story.





mobicash
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Pure Cognition

Seeing With the Heart

We look at an old carpet made under the original conditions, and we see a complexity of design. Symbols of flora, fauna and spirits, that are richly dense with subjectivity. The eye recognises the presence of colour.

Perceptions change and the attentive consciousness shifts from the measurable world to the immeasurable.

The design is then seen to become less important, a simple construct, a value judgement, even meaningless xenophobic bigotry, and finally a vehicle for colour alone.

Only colour has a life of its own and only colour can speak directly. The designs are merely the script. The arrangement of colour then allows the carpet to release its inner self. This is the point at which we can feel what it is to be truly human, elevated to our essential humanity, in contact with the carpet's makers and the archaic heart at the bottom of us all.

This is pure cognition, seeing with the heart!

Care of Oriental Carpets

- Preferably sweep with a stiff straw broom. Vacuum only lightly in direction of the pile, not against the grain.
- Turn and use upside down every spring for a fortnight.
- Move furniture a few centimetres every few months.
- Spills-wipe or scrape excess. Sponge with cold water but not to excess. May use suds from a eucalyptus wool wash to sponge. Always sponge inwards. Lift and turn over wet area till dry.
- Never leave a carpet on the floor wet. Never put pot plants on the carpet.
- Call us!

Enjoy your Oriental Carpets and Rugs. Don't be too precious as our rugs are pure top-grade wool and virtually indestructible. There are many antique rugs still going strong today. Remember just stay natural, no modern chemical cleaners or machines.

Return the rugs to us for a complete wash when necessary or about every few years.

PS Some rugs enjoy a picnic!

A Prayer

May you entertain this notion:

That because the earth is beautiful, it has been a mother to these craftswomen whose high precision skills formed this sacred art, these gifts of peace and joy, and that it will, given time, sweeten the sourest mind and produce a boundless compassion, shared by all.

And may you bring these gifts of peace and understanding to those around you, knowing life is full of joy, and thereby helping those who are hateful, jealous and warlike, focus instead on the boundless wonders of the appreciation of beauty in an everyday reality.

For only by contemplating beauty are we saved from that hurtful misery so ready in the philistine's empty heart.

Vote one for beauty, and sharing, because the policies are joy, and compassion.

Amen

Milton Cater

The Rug Shop 



The Rug Shop

Since 1974

Family Business

