

ORIENTAL RUG GAZETTE



NAVAB BROTHERS
ORIENTAL RUG COMPANY

4409 EXCELSIOR BOULEVARD, ST. LOUIS PARK, MN
www.navabbrothers.com

Winter 2012 Edition

Legacy Looms - Our Looms, Your Legacy!



Legacy Looms Creative Director-
Blair Bender

It's with great pleasure that we are announcing the opening of our newest business venture, Legacy Looms, a custom made rug studio, at International Market Square.

A collaboration between Blair Bender, a twenty year veteran of custom made rug industry and Navab Brothers, Legacy Looms is dedicated to making exclusive rugs based on client design and color preferences. With resources in Nepal, India and Pakistan, Navab Brothers have brought together a team of creative artists that can now make that unusual and extraordinary rug that reflects client needs and requirements.

In addition to custom projects, Legacy Looms promises to be a source for one of a kind and exclusive rugs in modern and contemporary designs sourced by Navab Brothers through their travels and extensive worldwide connections.

**Be sure to visit Legacy Looms at: International Market Square, 275 Market Street, Suite 411
Minneapolis, MN 55405 • 612 338 1376 • www.legacylooms.com**

Cries and Whispers!

Selling Handmade Rugs in Recessary Times

In the ever-changing world of fashion and design one might say that oriental rugs are too traditional to ever go out of style. However, what we sell today is hardly the "oriental" rug of the 19th century. As purveyors of fine handmade rugs we have to look farther and farther to meet current market demands, a task made increasingly difficult by a stagnating recession at home, and improving economies in the developing world.

Farewell Queen Victoria

Even those with a love for hand-made rugs find "oriental" designs—a legacy of the Victorian era—less appealing. For them traditional Persian rugs resemble outdated furniture pieces, unhip, and unsuitable for the modern 21st century home. The preferred style is "contemporary," which has yet to be clearly defined. A return to a more innocent 1950s era design, the "retro look," has certainly taken center stage.

Some consider contemporary to be any rug without a discernible design or with minimal color use. For others it might mean a borderless rug with bright colors and a sharply edged definitive pattern. Some want a handmade rug to resemble

a bound piece of carpeting and others prefer a whimsical, child-like design conveying playfulness and simplicity.

In our opinion patterns that are mistakenly called "Primitive"—perhaps a better term would be ethnographic—such as those found in African Kuba cloth or Moroccan Berber rugs, can also be viewed as contemporary.

Unfortunately, in the world of luxury home ware purchasing inventory leaves little room for guesswork. The business of handmade rugs is extremely capital intensive, and if we don't accurately anticipate our clients' changing tastes we could be left with unsold merchandise for years to come.

The challenges facing any small size retailer of handmade rugs have always been formidable. But when we add the whims of today's market to the mix we have almost impossible conditions for a small company such as ours to survive in.

Large World/Small Market

As countries like China and India improve their economies and achieve higher living standards for

their citizens, it becomes harder for us to make handmade rugs that meet high quality and design standards while remaining affordable.

The market for handmade rugs in most Western countries is a niche market. In the United States the majority of rugs sold continue to be of machine made variety. Simply put, most people don't see a value in purchasing hand knotted rugs, which hold a unique place in the home furnishing market. These rugs require an appreciation for craftsmanship and imaginative design, historical and cultural awareness, and financial means.

Stop Crying and Get on with Business!

Sitting on a plane on route to Kathmandu, Nepal, my brother and I remain haunted by the thought of an unpredictable market. Yet, a love for the product, for the histories and cultures that play a part in its making, not to mention twenty five years of successful business, only make beating insurmountable odds more compelling. ■



Word Weave

By Farzan Navab

We always like to devote a part of our gazette to literary pursuits that relate to Oriental rugs, or to the cultures that produce them. We previously recommended the work of eminent Indian author Ved Mehta. In this issue we would like to suggest Phillip Lopate's "The Rug Merchant".

The Rug Merchant

The Rug Merchant is an engaging book of many sensitivities and reflections. The novel draws us into the world of Cyrus Irani, a Zoroastrian rug merchant living in New York. For years I tried to figure out how best to articulate why this book interests me as much as it does, beyond obvious reasons—the connection to my own life as a "rug merchant," the relation between East and West, ancient and modern. Now I feel that I relate to Cyrus Irani more as a western reader than anything else. Though he belongs to an ancient culture, he suffers from the same alienating modernity, searching for happiness in an age of ever-growing distance between the individual and society. For Cyrus, as for us, technological dependency lies behind the challenges of contemporary life. At the same time it provides us with an easy escape route. It is both the culprit and the panacea.

After choosing The Rug Merchant for this issue's Word Weave, I realized that the book is out of print. However, there are plenty of copies available at various libraries and a few used ones can be found on Amazon. ■



Kathmandu Diaries

By Farzan Navab

As our plane made its final descent into the Kathmandu airport we realized that we were no longer in the flatlands of Delhi. This was a different terrain, consisting mostly of mountain dwellings and small valleys that seemed to have been deforested for agricultural use. The breathtaking aerial view was reminiscent of Swiss villages in the Alps.

Upon arrival we were struck by the sense of quiet and by the relative ease with which people went about their daily lives. Paved roads were less common than narrow, sinuous passageways, well trafficked by streams of cars and motorcycles.

Once known as 'Kantipur,' Kathmandu, a city of fourteen million people, the largest in Nepal, is a political as well as cultural capital. Nestled within a large valley it has a pleasant climate second to none and is relatively safe. Like any big city, Kathmandu has seen rapid expansion in the last decade. The hustle and bustle is typical, and yet, the people remain refreshingly friendly. The old, fabulous palaces, the superbly crafted pagodas, and the monumental stupas are reminders of the Golden Age of architecture in Nepal.

Late September was the height of the tourist season and the droves of European, American, and Chinese tourists showed the popularity of this Shangri-La like destination. The more prosperous streets are lined with gift shops selling Nepalese handicrafts and trekking gear. The variety of religious and spiritual practices expose visitors to a simple, yet profound life experience. But, none of them have led to the kind of conservatism found in India and other surrounding nations. In fact, the opposite seems true. Liquor stores are prevalent and drug use common. It's not hard to see why Kathmandu is the ideal place for young travelers curious about eastern spirituality and looking to trek in spectacular hillsides.

A Bit of History

The Nepali Kingdom was founded in 1768 by Prithive Narayan Shah (r. 1768-1775), a Gurkha king who succeeded in unifying the kingdom of Kathmandu, Patan, and Bhaktapur into a single state. It existed for 240 years under the formal rule of the Shah Dynasty.

Having faced major threats from China during the war of 1790 and from Great Britain's East India Company in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Nepal began making steps towards democracy, albeit a colonial version, in the 1950s.

Royal Massacre

More recently however, Nepal has witnessed some tumultuous periods. The 1990s saw the beginning of the Nepalese Civil War (1996-2006), a conflict fought between the government and the insurgent forces of the Communist Party. The situation for the Nepalese monarchy was further destabilized by the 2001 royal massacre during which Crown Prince Dipendra shot and killed ten people, including his father King Birenda (r. 1972-2001).

From a Monarchy to a Maoist Republic

The decade-long Civil War culminated in several weeks of mass protests by all major political parties and finally, in a peace accord. The ensuing elections for the constituent assembly voted overwhelmingly in favor of the abdication of the last Nepali monarch Gyanendra Shah. A federal democratic republic was established on May 28th 2008.



God of Justice in Kathmandu Durbar Square



Sadhu Mystics in Kathmandu

Religion and Culture

The majority of Nepal's population is Hindu. The country prides itself in being the world's only Hindu kingdom. However, there are many variations of the faith, and there is also a substantial Buddhist and Muslim population.

Most Nepalese speak Nepali, the official language and de facto lingua franca of Nepal, also spoken in Bhutan and in parts of India and Myanmar (Burma). But many speak both Hindi and Nepalese and some have at least speaking knowledge of English.

The Chinese and Tibetan influences seem equally palpable. While China makes its presence known politically, acting as the "big brother" watching over the precarious Nepalese government, Tibetan refugees keep Tibetan Buddhism alive.

Roaming the Streets

The semi cosmopolitan nature of Kathmandu makes it easy to meander through the streets until the early morning hours. Shops and restaurants remain open late. I noticed many signs for "Dance Bars" and "Clubs." There are also a number of casinos. Inside a refurbished colonial era building is "Casino Royal," where you find Chinese gamblers sitting in smoke filled rooms, amidst old, clanking slot machines and black jack tables.

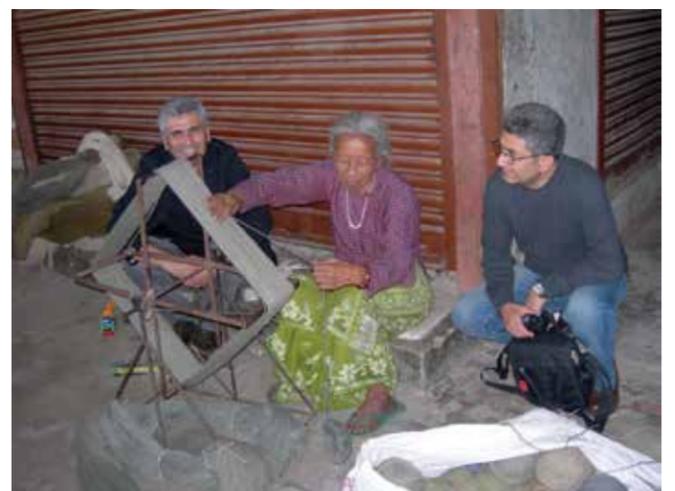
Western-style pastry and coffee shops carry everything from donuts to the most sophisticated French éclairs. At our hotel I tasted a lemon mousse tart, which was delicious. Besides fast food restaurants, authentic Nepalese food is generally good and is close to Indian and Chinese cuisine.

Rug Weaving in Nepal

The historical roots of Nepalese rugs can be traced to Tibet, where rug making is an ancient, traditional craft. Rugs there are woven with changpel, a local highland sheep's wool. Tibetans began migrating to India and Nepal in the 1950s during the Chinese communist occupation, bringing along with them their knowledge of rug making. While the rug business has remained relatively undeveloped in their homeland it is now one of Nepal's largest export industries. Interestingly, Nepal has also become the center for hand knotted rugs with modern and contemporary designs. This can be credited not just to new market trends, but also to Nepalese knotting technique.

Simplified Technique

The Nepalese use a "rod aided" knotting technique that makes it easier to make hand knotted rugs. Typically, a weaver uses his fingers to make knots. However, in Nepalese tradition a rod is first inserted between two or three warps, bringing them forward. Knots are then wrapped around the warp lines making it much easier to tie the knots. Once an entire row has been knotted the rod is removed and the knots are pushed back into place. This technique considerably speeds up the knotting process.



Hand-Spun Wool

With Nepali Friends Dorji and Ram



From Bauhaus to your House

The flexibility, willingness, and hard work of Nepalese manufacturers, designers, and weavers have put them at the forefront of today's rug-making industry. They are able to produce the most experimental designs, from the minimalist to the abstract, in a short amount of time. A "strike off," or sample can be made in a couple of weeks. Bauhaus type rugs inspired by the work of notable designers such as Walter Gropius and Anni Albers, or the Irish modernist architect Eileen Gray are now being reproduced by European and American companies in Nepal.

In Kathmandu we were able to closely observe the making of Nepalese rugs and teamed up with manufacturers who provide custom made rugs for our company in the Twin Cities. Our production in Nepal is based on a variety of samples ordered on our trip to Kathmandu. These samples are currently on display in our showroom in St. Louis Park. Rugs of all sizes can be ordered based on these samples. Color, design, and knot count may be altered by client choice.

A Final Glance

As we said goodbye to Kathmandu we were reminded of the simplicity of everyday life in this mountain city. Religion and belief live in harmony with nature and give western visitors a glimpse of the elusive inner peace we all seem to yearn for. The airport was packed with tourists; there was scarcely a native Nepalese face in sight. ■



Eileen Gray



Sam with Akhter Shaheel, Head Buyer - India

India Office Inaugurated

We are happy to announce the opening of our India office in the ancient city of Varanasi, formerly Benares. Our senior buying agent Akhter Shakeel holds a BS degree from Kashi Ranesh Post Graduate Governmental University and has advanced training in wool dyeing.

Born and raised in India's largest rug producing region, Akhter Shakeel is a fourth generation weaver as well as a modern business manager. Among Akhter's responsibilities will be product development, sourcing, quality control and shipping consolidation. ■



Kuba Cloth



Nettle Rug

Green Revolution and Handmade Rugs

By Farzan Navab

In our latest travels to India and Nepal we also discovered that rug manufacturers are being incredibly inventive with the types of fiber they are using. Of course the mother of all plant-based fibers, cotton, has been used for centuries. Rugs made from jute, which is less common, have been around for at least a hundred years. But who would have thought that you could make silk out of banana stalks or make weaving yarn from a nettle plant? Recently a manufacturer sent me an effusive email claiming to make rugs from such exotic materials as "water reed, sisal, keshab, plub, okra, hysenth, rifya, etc!"

Given today's environmental concerns, plant fiber rugs make perfect sense. Not only are they less expensive to produce, but they are also eco-friendly, contributing nicely to the practice of sustainable agriculture and economics.

Materials and Textures

Each fiber provides a slightly different texture. None provide the feel and texture of wool. Nettle and hemp for example are not soft while jute is an even tougher fabric. Banana and bamboo silk, however, are very soft, even softer than real silk. To provide an overall smooth texture rug makers sometimes mix these fabrics together.

Design Elements

Because of the relative roughness of these fibers they tend to be used mostly in simpler, less intricately designed rugs. Using them in modern and contemporary rugs works well. Many plant fiber rugs seem to have drawn inspiration from African Kuba cloth motifs or Moroccan Berber rugs. ■

Rug Cleaning Near & Far

At Navab Brothers our business does not end with selling rugs to our customers. We also clean and restore handmade and machine made rugs. It is no secret that we are the proud owners of American Rug Laundry, which holds a notable place in Minnesota history. American Rug Laundry is one of the few local businesses that can claim continuous operation since 1895. In fact, thanks to a loyal customer, we recently came across an advertisement in the St. Paul Yellow Pages dating back to 1913 listing American Rug Laundry as the premier place to clean Oriental rugs.



1913 Yellow Pages

In the U.S. many rug cleaning plants still use “dinosaur” like machines of the 1930s. These clunky old systems are ineffective and wasteful. We of course clean most rugs by hand. However, as the number and variety of machine made rugs increase, and as people during hard economic times opt for cleaning and maintaining their rugs rather than replacing them, we feel the need for more efficient and effective cleaning methods. We are currently searching for new equipment that meets this increase in demand. Turkey is among a handful of countries that still manufacture cleaning machines.

Why Turkey?

The improved economic status of Turkish citizens has increased their buying power, and Turkish people’s traditional interest in floor coverings of all kind has created a huge demand for rug cleaning. The country’s close proximity to Europe gives them easy access to the markets of continental Europe and beyond.

Our search for modern rug cleaning machines led us to Istanbul and a number of other cities

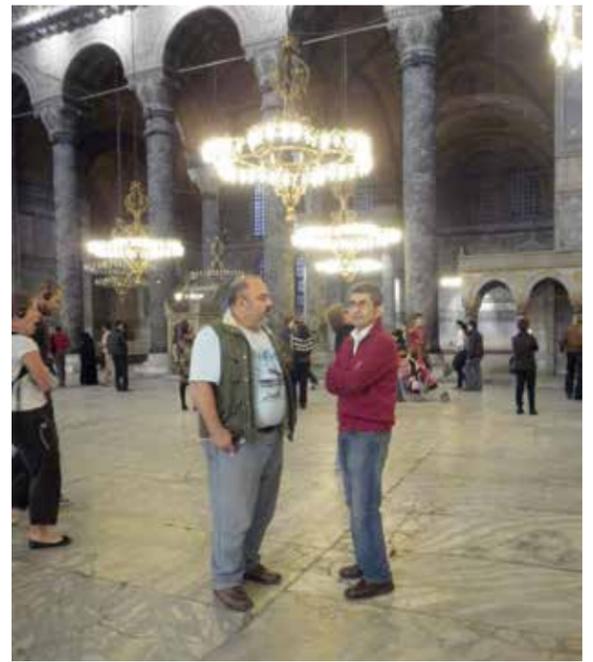
in central and northern Turkey. We recently established an office in Bandirma, Turkey, with the support of American Rug Laundry’s IT specialist Ali Goral. A native of Turkey and a citizen of the U.S., Ali helped us establish a presence in Turkey by hiring a team of experts who track manufacturers that comply with U.S. environmental and energy regulations.

Everywhere we went were met by friendly Turks who were eager to do business with us and share their technical knowledge.

A Bridge Between Two Worlds

In Turkey we witnessed a vibrant economy and huge strides toward democracy. In many ways a European country, modern Turkey continues to act as a bridge between East and West. While the Moazin’s call to prayer is still heard from every corner, modern Turkish women enjoy full freedom, including involvement in all aspects of politics and business. At a bookstore in the trendy Taksim square, I noticed many titles criticizing the current Islamic leaning government.

The emerging dialogue between Christianity and Islam after the capture of Constantinople by the Ottoman Turks ushered in a new era, one that brought the two civilizations closer. To this day the fusion seems to shadow every aspect of our lives, no matter where we live. ■



Sam and Ali Goral in Hagia Sophia



Sam and Farzan in Istanbul



Sam Navab Inspects a Cleaning Machine



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