

Ravishing Rugs

By E.T. Robbins



"Cypress Trees" from northern India. Photo courtesy of Landry & Arcari

Don't know the first thing about buying an oriental rug? No problem. Three of the area's most respected rug dealers weigh in on what you should keep in mind when buying your magic carpet.

KNOW THY DEALER

Understanding oriental rugs is a lifelong endeavor - just ask anyone who grew up in the business.

"It's part of our life. It's who we are. It's something that I've grown up in since birth and something Scott has grown up in since birth," says John Gregorian, owner of Arthur T. Gregorian, Inc. in Newton Lower Falls.

Scott Gregorian, vice-president of the company, says it's more important for consumers to research the dealers, not the rugs. Talk with friends, family, and consult the Better Business Bureau and Attorney General's office.

As for associations that police the industry, Steve Boodakian, president of Koko Boodakian & Sons in Winchester, says, "There are trade organizations who try to 'professionalize' the business...but as a trade organization, you have to essentially be open to the trade. So I would not rely upon membership in a particular trade organization to be a sign of quality."

RUG MAKEUP

Of course, the rug itself is still important.

Boodakian says, "We determine quality by the weave, the wool, the dyes, and the consummate clarity of the rug. Oftentimes people rely upon weave. Wool, in my opinion, is the most important thing and where weave comes in is in the general sense. Is the weave fine enough to properly express the design you're trying to show?"

Boodakian notes that "consummate clarity is that 'je ne sais quois.' You put all those things together and two rugs can have the same weave, the same wool, the same dyes, but one just has a better balance of color, a better balance of design, and a certain sparkle to it that the other one doesn't have. It should and will demand a higher price."

"The materials that go into a carpet are probably the most important thing," says Jeffrey Arcari, owner of Landry & Arcari in Salem and Boston. "We specialize in hand-spun wool with vegetable dyes."

Arcari says handspun wools and natural dyes were used in previous centuries. That's one of the reasons why antique rugs maintain their beauty.

A RUG IS A RUG IS A RUG?

An oriental rug is a hand-knotted rug from the Near East, Middle East, or Far East. A Persian rug is an oriental rug from Iran (formerly named Persia). However, contemporary definitions result in quibbling even among rug dealers.

John Gregorian notes that the name "oriental rug" came about in the 19th century and refers to the "Silk Route" made famous by Marco Polo. For example, rugs going from Turkey to China to the United States were dubbed "oriental rugs."

Scott Gregorian adds, "A Persian rug used to be a rug that came from Persia, which is Iran. Today when they use the term 'Persian rug,' it's generic. It means the design - Persian design. It could be from lots of different countries."

ADVERTISING SUPPLEMENT

"There's no country that's any better than the other any more. It used to be that if wasn't a Persian rug...then it just wasn't any good. And that was true to a certain extent up to the early 1980's. By the mid 80's, that started to change...every rug weaving country makes a fabulous selection of rugs and they also weave oriental rugs that you could use to cover your flower beds for the winter."

CLEANING & MAINTENANCE

Proper care is important. Cleaning every 3-6 years is the general rule of thumb, but there are other factors to consider, namely location. A rug that is used in a heavy traffic area, such as the front hallway, will need more cleaning than a rug that's used in a spare bedroom.

Arcari says, "Dirt can get into the foundation of the rug, and the grit can act as sandpaper and cut some of the fibers at the foundation. That's what can cause wear. So a dirty rug will wear out three times faster than a clean rug."

Boodakian advises his customers to use professional cleaning services. "A proper cleaning of an oriental rug - with few exceptions - is a total wet-wash, in-plant cleaning. Shampooing on location like you shampoo wall-to-wall carpeting is not appropriate. It's the difference between a shower and a sponge bath."

Check regularly for damage. Fraying fringes or edges should be fixed immediately. Ask your dealer about restoration services.

PRICE

The Gregorians warn that many dealers come across as trustworthy while offering naive buyers unrealistic discounts.

Scott Gregorian says, "There are no deals any more...the final price that you pay is going to be within

a few percentage points of anybody. It's just a question of whether you come here and we tell you it's a \$10,000 rug and it is a \$10,000 rug, or you go someplace else and they'll tell you it's a \$30,000 rug. But they'll sell it for \$15,000 and they'll give you another five grand off" for some other reason.

Boodakian says, "A good quality 9x12, new, oriental rug would go from \$2500 to \$10,000. Most 9x12's we sell are probably \$4000-\$7500."

The dealers emphasize that you have to find the right rug for you and that there's more to value than price.

Gregorian says, "The one thing that people do is they judge value by price. If they're looking at two items and one is 30 percent more than the other one, the one that's 30 percent more is going to better - whatever that means...In rugs, that's not true...They're different. They appeal to different tastes...so if you can save yourself money, it's an absolutely good thing."

TOP FIVE THINGS TO REMEMBER

1. Research and visit several dealers.
2. Create a detailed floor plan of the room, including measurements. Note furniture and colors. If the dealer offers to pay a home visit, take him up on it.
3. If the "deal" sounds too good to be true, it probably is.
4. Never be pressured into buying a rug.
5. Have fun. As Steve Boodakian says, "You're buying something that's beautiful that you're going to live with for a long time, so relax and have a good time choosing it."



Photos courtesy of Landry & Arcari