

THE DECORATIVE CARPET

FINE HANDMADE RUGS IN CONTEMPORARY INTERIORS

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Bruce Bierman

For Bruce Bierman, the warmth of a handmade rug offers a much needed respite from the uniformity of our cold technological surroundings. Trained in architecture and the fine arts, he is acutely sensitive to the importance of considering every surface in a room's design—including the floor. "Every job of mine has a rug," states the renowned Manhattan-based designer. "When selecting a piece, whether antique or new, I take my cue from the architectural space." Long before being "green" was in fashion, Bierman was drawn to rugs' natural materials for their durability and overall aesthetics. Of the many styles of rug he has used throughout the years, his favorites include soft-toned Tabrizes and Agras, more formal Aubussons, needlepoints, and contemporary Tibetans, both monochromatic and patterned.

"Always start the room with the rug—it sets the tone," insists the designer, whose rooms often feature one single, room-sized rug to keep the look clean and simple. "Rugs are so spectacular that I like them to stand alone in the room unobstructed by competing fabric or wall patterns." While he favors monochromatic textured linens, leathers, and silks over patterned fabrics, he also warns against deliberately matching rugs with other elements in the room because it will seem too contrived. Sometimes, he likes to create the unexpected as, for instance, when he chose a very formal, bold, red Aubusson needlepoint-design rug with a traditional central medallion motif for his own contemporary loft.

Bierman freely mixes different kinds of rugs from room to room in the same project. The unifying theme may not necessarily be the design of the rugs themselves but other elements in the space, such as wall color. In one project, he placed Aubussons in the entrance hall, living room, and dining room, a needlepoint in the

family room, and contemporary Tibetans in the library and media room.

The designer works to make choosing carpets a painless process for his clients; he has found that the key is to properly educate them with shopping expeditions—where they can see rugs and get a feel for the market—followed by in-home trials. "People are often initially distrustful and afraid of the rug selection process. They have no gauge of their worth and are unfamiliar with their foreign names," he explains. When dealing with a challenging space, the designer's approach is also practical and methodical: he plots the furniture placement over a photograph of the rug to determine the size needed and to minimize any potential surprises for the client.

Bierman has also found that the increased incidence of allergies, including asthma, has triggered a downward trend for wall-to-wall carpeting in favor of area rugs. "I can't imagine that rugs will ever go out of fashion," he states.

An Aubusson-design needlepoint featuring an oval, Louis XVI-style medallion radiates in this Florida living room. Ocean-blue accents picked up in the throw pillows make a crisp contrast with its clean ivory ground and touches of sand-colored hues in the borders, transporting this traditional European rug smoothly to a contemporary home in the tropics.



ABOVE Contemporary design in a Ralph Pucci rug, hand-knotted in Turkey, exhibits dark gray and silver tones. The piece at once anchors the seating in this large living room and softens the hard edges of the modern furnishings.

OPPOSITE An early-twentieth-century Persian Tabriz takes the decorative lead in this contemporary living room. Its delicate, all-over, sand-colored floral design on a midnight blue ground is played up by the white monochromatic furnishings while its sinuous curves are loosely echoed in the modern painting that forms a compelling backdrop.