

Oriental Rugs

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Oriental rugs are usually woven on upright looms. The weaving methods have not changed in centuries. The warp threads are stretched lengthwise from the top to the bottom pole. The weaver sits on a board beside the loom. To make the silky pile for which these rugs are famous, the weaver loops bits of yarn in knots around the warp threads. A pattern hanging on the warp guides the choice of colored yarns to fill in the design. After a row of knots is tied, the weft yarn is shuttled across the rug, then combed and pressed against the knots to hold them firmly. The knot ends are clipped and stand erect as pile.

Weavers may work on household looms in village cottages or in nomad tents, or they may be employed in city factories. The factories hold only the looms--no machinery. Several may work on one rug .

The fineness of the weave and the wearing qualities are determined by the number of knots. These vary from 64 to 400 to the square inch. Of the two knots in use, the Ghiordes (or double knot) is regarded as Turkish and the Sehna (or single knot) as Persian, though both are used in present-day Iran. The finest rugs are made from the wool of fat-tailed sheep. Flat-woven, or pileless, rugs are known as kilims.

Carpet designs have been influenced by the spread of Islam over the Middle East . This strict religion prohibits the representation of human life in art and frowns upon the depiction of animal life. For example, in countries where the austere Sunnah sect is predominant, the rugs feature geometric designs. In Iran, however, the more liberal beliefs of the Shi'ah sect are followed, and Persian rugs utilize flowers, fruits, leaves, birds, and animals in their patterns. Prayer rugs are made with a design of an arched niche, called the mihrab, which is turned toward Mecca when Muslims kneel in prayer.

Among the well-known varieties of Persian rugs are the Khorassan, Meshed, Herat, Shiraz, Kirman, Tabriz, Senna, Sarouk, Herez, Hamadan, Sultanabad, and Ispahan. Among the most famous types of Turkish rugs are the Ghiordes, Kulah, Bergama, Ladik, Anatolian, Melez, KirSehir, and Konia. The hand-weaving of rugs in Turkey has declined since the 1920s, when Atatürk undertook the westernization of the country. Handwoven rugs are also produced in the Central Asian countries to the north and east of Iran, such as Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Azerbaijan, formerly in the Soviet Union. Weaves include the Bokhara, Tekke, Yomud, Sarouk, and Salor. Samarkand rugs are woven in China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region. With the rise of Communism in China, however, the weaving and export of handmade rugs declined.