

A Lori Pambak Razak Caucasian rug in the Hagopian residence.

DAN DEAN/staff photographer

BEAUTY and LEGEND

By Helen Vincent
special writer

UPON ENTERING the world of fine, hand-made Oriental rugs, you soon discover it is far more intriguing and complex than you might ever have expected.

Some of the best guides for untangling the complexity of this special world are right here in our area. They are Edgar Hagopian of the Hagopian World of Rugs, George Nigossian of Nigossian Oriental Carpet Co. and Robert Zankute of Tadross & Zankute.

Each is an experienced and distinguished rug dealer, as well as a self-styled connoisseur of the subject. They have a lot in common by building their family businesses on trust. Yet their different perspectives on Oriental carpet gives us insight.

Edgar Hagopian underscores the nomadic origins of Oriental rugs, with his characteristic seriousness. He explained that the current array of patterns, symbols, and colors used in Oriental rugs had their beginning in ancient legends and myths from regions that eventually became Turkey, Iran and the Russian Caucasus.

USING A RUGGED Lori Pambak Caucasian rug from the Kazak district of the USSR as an example of the nomadic influence, Hagopian said, "A great part of the charm is in the inconsistencies, unlike a machine woven rug that mechanically translates a design. A special quality — you can call it character — emerges when the weaver and the designer are one and the same person."

What is making these rugs increasingly valuable is not a matter of how many knots-per-inch are used to make the rug, he continued, "but the eventual unavailability of skilled workers who create them gradually shift into other industries. This is because the regions which produce these rugs are becoming more industrially advanced. At the same time, a Caucasian rug in this quality is valued up to \$10,000."

George Nigossian pointed out the gradual shift that has occurred in the acceptance of all types of rugs, including the finely knotted Oriental rug. His examples were that of a Nani, with 600 knots per square inch, a Tabriz and a Isfahan. All of these rugs were derived from a high court tradition, sharing a common element of using a centered medallion on a field with an elegant and intricate border.

"Without even being an antique or a semantique, these rugs can easily command prices up to \$16,000, depending on size," he said.

In contrast to the Caucasian and nomadic styles, Nigossian said, the finely knotted rugs were designed by great artists, often Persian miniaturists to please the sophisticated taste of various dynastic rulers.

"As early as the 16th century, if not before," he said, "these fine creations were first prized by European kings and then later by the growing middle class. Modern and other painters incorporated Oriental rugs in their portraits and studies of interiors. By the 16th century, Oriental rugs — called 'Turkish' no matter where they came from — were an integral part of the American Colonial heritage, sometimes even used as table covers."

When asked about the ongoing embargo of Iranian goods, Nigossian said other countries, such as China and Pakistan, have used it as an opportunity to produce rugs in the ancient Persian tradition. As for the fact that imports are always labeled, Nigossian believes it is his responsibility to educate his clients on the differences.

Robert Zankute's knowledge and sophisticated perspective transcends time and region when he focuses on a finely knotted wool and silk rug displayed behind glass in his showroom. "A true collector's item, part of the Oriental rug is an archaic adventure," he said.

The small, 50-year-old rug is indeed an adventure and a remarkable one as well, because it exquisitely depicts a scene from an Omar Khayyam poem.

In asking how an Oriental rug can also possess strong architectural qualities, Zankute shifted his attention to another spectacular, silk, prayer rug made with 600 knots per square inch. It is from Qum, the ancient capital of Persia. The rug's pattern of columns and arched roof supporting a holy lantern is beautifully scaled to the dozar size of 6-feet-10-inches by 4-feet-6-inches long — a size special to fine Oriental rugs.

As important as the structured pattern and the detail is the color palette of only six colors juxtaposed in various combinations. The end result is an extremely subtle now-you-see-it, now-you-don't effect that no solid color could produce. As Zankute remarked, "This represents an ultimate statement of what a fine Oriental can achieve. The rug's price is in the \$25,000 range, but its value is immeasurable."

On the theme of value, Zankute told of a recent incident when a descendant of one of his father's customers insisted that Zankute buy back several rugs bought in 1914, his he said. One could see from the yellowed invoice a listing of several relatively small Saruk Faraghans and a Royal Bokhara sold at \$60 each.

"Today," Zankute said, "these rugs can command prices of about \$1,500 to \$2,000 easily."

Zankute said, "each Oriental rug is like an individual looking for a home."

"After all," he said, "even churries, which used to be used to wrap fine Orientals for transport, have come into their own, attracting professional decorators and individuals alike."

"Almost any highly detailed, well-executed, hand-knotted rug made today is destined to become a valued antique," Zankute said.

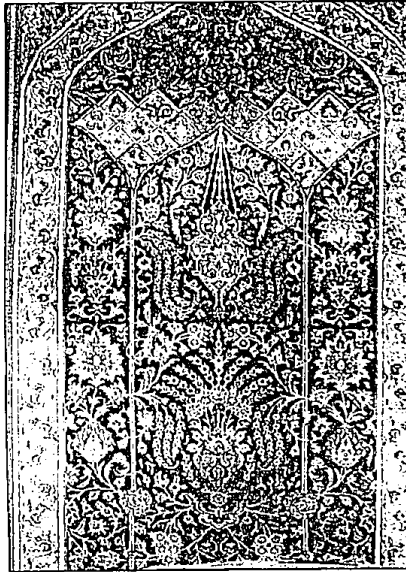
So it seems the ancient tradition that started with the nomads will continue as an object of great value — both monetarily and in terms of a legacy.

— Helen Vincent



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

A finely knotted wool and silk rug, this 50-year-old creation exquisitely depicts a scene from an Omar Khayyam poem. Actually, an image of the poet is in the upper right-hand corner of the rug's border. It is valued at \$18,000.



DAN DEAN/staff photographer

An Oriental rug can also possess strong architectural qualities. Here, this all-silk prayer rug, made with 600 knots per square inch, is from Qum, the ancient capital of Persia. The rug's pattern of columns and arched roof supporting a holy lantern is scaled to the dozar size.

What to look for when buying a rug

WHAT to look for when buying an Oriental rug.

- The authenticity of the color combinations, relative to the

style or type of rug.

- How well the design or motifs are executed, also relative to the style and the size of the rug.
- The quality of the

construction: the number of knots per square inch isn't the only thing to look for. The quality of the yarn is also important and the knotting techniques figure into the overall quality.

- How well rugs can fit into your home. Sometimes two smaller rugs, or one larger and the other smaller, do a better job than one very large rug. Remember, Oriental rugs were meant to be used in combinations with each other.
- A reputable dealer who is willing to answer your questions before you make a commitment to buy.

SOME OTHER things to keep in mind — definitions:

- An antique rug is 75 years old, or older; a semi antique rug is between 50 and 75 years old.
- The distinction between handmade and handknotted. Some Chinese and Indian rugs are made with a hand-held device that tufts yarn through the back of a canvas. This allows the importer to say that it is hand-made. A hand-knotted rug is the one we've been describing: each knot is positioned around the warp yarns in rows. Each row is separated by woven filler yarn to keep the knots in place. It is inherently a better quality.

- Fine Oriental rugs with a pile of upright yarn is hand-knotted; a dhurrie or a kilim are both flat woven but in slightly different ways. Needlepoint and chain stitch are entirely other techniques also used for rugs but fall into a different category.

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