

With area rugs, what's old is new

BY BARBARA MAYER
AP SPECIAL FEATURES

The wall-to-wall carpeting is threadbare and stained in high-traffic places, but it's still good around the edges.

Or the hardwood floors, just redone, are worth showing off.

Either case calls for an area rug, or rugs. Area rugs — especially those that reek of old money — are more stylish today than carpeting.

To some extent, this is merely a turning of the wheel of floor fashion. But it coincides with an abundance of affordable reproduction rugs — Orientals, Aubussons, needlepoints and more — and consumer desire for "conversation rugs" that reflect personal interests.

"The reproductions in some cases are so well done that they can fool even the keenest eye," says Bebe Winkler, an interior designer in New York.

The ample supply also coincides with the increasing scarcity — and rising prices — of antique rugs, and with a growing interest in antiques in general, according to David Amini, president of Beauvais Carpets Inc., a to-the-trade importer in New York.

With so many appealing designs, there's a temptation to use more than one in a room. Winkler put two Arts and Crafts style rugs in her living room — a 9-by-12 and a 6-by-9 that share gen-

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carpet fashion coordinator for Shaw Industries

eral design and color themes.

Rather than reproductions, Winkler prefers antique Orientals which have faded to a fine patina, but budgets rarely permit such extravagances. Amini says a 10-by-14 antique Aubusson might sell for \$50,000, an excellent copy for about \$14,000. Good copies of needlepoints and early 20th-century Arts and Crafts rugs are in the \$3,000 to \$5,000 range.

Even more affordable are area rugs found in carpet departments, specialty stores and mail-order catalogs. Rugs that buck tradition and are alive with color and pattern beckon the buyer.

"Consumers seem to be looking for rugs that reflect their personal interests, whether it be fruits and vegetables, birds, golfing, flowers, dogs or anything else," says Pam O'Toole, carpet fashion coordinator for Shaw Industries of Dalton, Ga.

Several new patterns were shown recently in New York by the Carpet and

Rug Institute. From Milliken & Co., LaGrange, Ga., comes a field of quirky birdhouses with a border of birds. Joy Carpets Inc., of Fort Oglethorpe, Ga., introduced a rug featuring brightly-colored balls with letters and numbers.

There's no rule on whether you should shop for furniture or floor coverings first, but those in the know generally start with furniture. A furniture plan helps determine rug size, upholstery swatches can be carried along while rug shopping to help in pattern and color selection. Make sure the fabric swatches are of good size. Little can be learned from a 2-inch square, Winkler says.

"People will find that stripes and small pattern fabrics will work with almost any patterned carpet, but large multicolor floral prints will present more problems," Winkler says.

If you're doing more than one room, she says, don't worry about using the same period or similar colors. A differ-

ent type of area rug in every room is not only acceptable, it is more interesting.

To make the most of your money, choose rugs smaller than 12-by-18 feet because reproductions generally are made in smaller sizes. Therefore, large sizes are disproportionately expensive because they are either custom or antique.

Room-size rugs typically leave a 12- to 16-inch border of wood floor showing. But smaller sizes can be used if you cluster furniture around an area rug, rather than on it. Winkler usually allows about 4 inches of bare floor in front of the sofa. A rubber pad under the rug can anchor it.

Rugs with a center medallion are rather unpopular today because they can throw off the design balance of a room, Amini says.

But Winkler says that shouldn't color your choice, particularly in antiques.

"When these rugs were custom-made for a palace, the medallion probably was in the center of the room or perhaps under a chandelier," she says.

"Nowadays, seldom are we fortunate enough to find a carpet with a center medallion that can be perfectly aligned in a room. I always let the medallion fall where it may and it has never caused any decorating problems.

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