

Untangling a Woven Web of Mystery and History

As with a painting, you might purchase a rug merely because you like it. Likewise, just as a painting becomes more personal and meaningful to you when you know the story behind the artist, a rug becomes more valuable when you know the story behind its origins.

“Oriental Rug” is a catch-all term referring to rugs knotted in Iran, Turkey, Romania, the Caucasus, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India, China, and Nepal. Each pattern and design is filled with symbolism, folklore, culture, and tribal history, passed down from family to family, village to village, created with art and skill of the highest order.



In modern times, you will find that a Turkish rug is not always woven in Turkey, a Persian not always woven in Iran, etc.. Nowadays, the name refers to the origin of the *design*, not necessarily where it is produced.

Oriental rugs can be loosely divided into these categories:

Persian: The finest of Oriental rugs with intricate curvilinear designs up to a 400 knot count. Some of the most desired rugs have woven silk through the wool yarns.

Turkish: Courser and brighter than Persians with primary colors and simple geometric designs. Many are now made in Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.

Chinese: Woven with deep piles and fewer knots. Recognizable by their center medallion, open background, large border, and soft colors in cream, Ming blue and green, gold, and pink. They are often sculpted or beveled. Some Persian designs are copied.

Indian: Less valuable in terms of investments. They are traditionally cotton, woven flat - and therefore, reversible. All styles originating in other countries are re-produced in India. Dhurries and Kilims are also very popular.

Tibetan: Woven in Nepal, Tibetans have a beautiful, thick pile typically 60, 80, or 100 knots per inch. The secret behind the luster of these rugs lies in the pudgy sheep of the Himalayans. Because of the altitude, these sheep produce thick wool with an abundance of lanolin.

Other: While not technically “Oriental”, these are popular: **Moroccan** rugs are usually red and brown with simplified Oriental designs. **Savonnerie** and **Aubusson** rugs originated in France over 300 years ago. The **Savonnerie** has a large-scaled pattern and deep rich colors. **Aubusson** is a flat tapestry weave with Oriental inspiration and muted colors. In our own country, we can be proud of the genuine **Navajo** rug made in Arizona and New Mexico. They are flat tapestry weaves representing native tribes. Imitations are made in Mexico and Japan.

Quality Control

Rugs can be a sizable investment, and since their authenticity can be a mystery to many buyers, it is crucial to purchase from a reputable dealer. Prices are based on the country of origin, quality of wool, intricacy of design, size, age, and knot-count.

All handmade rugs, except Chinese, are counted on a knots per square inch basis. The more the knots, the more the work, the finer the pile, the costlier the rug. Common knot counts are 60, 80, 100, and even 400 in

the case of Persians. Chinese rugs are based on a number of knots per linear foot. Most common are 70, 80, and 90 knots per line.

Knots

The process of hand knotting is labor intensive. Each knot is normally tied on 2 or more warp strands. A skilled weaver might tie 1,000 knots per hour corresponding to 4 to 20 square inches of carpet - depending on tightness. A knot corresponds to 2 strands of pile.

There are 3 basic types of knots: Persian, also known as Senneh or asymmetrical, used mainly in Iran, Pakistan, and India. Ghiordes, also known as Turkish, horse-shoe or symmetrical, used in Turkey, the Caucasus, Iran, and parts of Europe. Jufti, also known as the False knot, used in Turkey and Iran, it is tied to 4 warp threads instead of two.

Hand-woven versus Machine-made

Sometimes it is difficult to distinguish between the two at first glance. Look for machine stitching along both sides of a rug and look for perfectly straight lines on the backside. Both of these indicate a machine made rug. The fringe of a machine made rug is almost always sewn onto the rug as opposed to being an extension of the warp. Perfect sizes such as a 4 x 6, 5 x 7, 8 x 10, and 9 x 12 are usually made by machine as this variable is difficult to control on a loom. Pricing is also a reflection of the social and political climate of a country. About 15 years ago, I tried to order a rug from China but because of a political embargo, in hindsight, I would have waited 18 months to receive it and would have paid much more than what it was worth.



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If taken care of properly, a rug will increase in value over time. Ironically, the more expensive a rug, the less it needs care given its quality. But, I recommend proper care for all rugs no matter the cost. A good quality rug can last a couple 100 years! These antique rugs are highly desirable if in good condition. Here are some Tender Loving Care tips:



- Vacuum a couple of times a week depending on foot traffic.
- Use a rug pad. It will lengthen the lifespan of the fibers. A pad also elevates the rug which allows dirt particles drop into the pad instead of matting into the rug.
- Every few years, have it professionally cleaned.
- If you have a liquid spill, use white towels to soak up the moisture. Then use cold water to blot (never rub) until dry. If you have a food spill, manually pick up, vacuum, or use a dull knife so as not to damage the fibers. If the stain remains, have it professionally cleaned.
- (Lanolin is nature's "Stainmaster". Lanolin helps release soil and stain in wool which is why you only see products like Stainmaster applied to nylon).
- I do not recommend store-bought stain remover since the chemicals in the product may adversely react with the contents of the stain. You will then have even a bigger mess on your hands!

Cocktail Conversation

Have ever experienced that awkward silence with a person you've just met at a cocktail party? If so, try these stunningly interesting ice-breaking fun facts:

- Wool is the oldest natural fiber known to man.
- New Zealand wool is naturally white. Argentinean wool is glossy. Indian wool is crush resistant.
- Scottish wool comes from black-faced sheep.
- Berber is a tribe in North Africa. They do not dye their wool when making rugs but leave it in its natural, beige, brown, charcoal and black color. Today, the term Berber has misguidedly transformed into the description of a type of machine tufted looped carpet.
- A "carpet" is an installed floor covering extending wall-to-wall. A "rug" is not attached and only covers a portion of the floor.
- A rug must be at least 75 years old to be considered antique.
- For design purposes, do not buy two or more of the same rug.
- If your rug has a medallion in the center, note whether your furniture placement will cover it.
- Do not make the predominant color of the rug the same predominate color in the room (unless you are making a carefully designed and intentionally strong statement).
- A neutral room can handle a bold rug.
- Let your rug placement define spaces in a large open-planned room.
- It is better to buy a nylon rug than a cheap wool one.

