

AREA

Summer 2018





For Renowned Designer
**Matthew Patrick
Smyth**

The Future Of Handmade
Decorative Rugs Is Solid

While antique decorative carpets have rarely claimed center stage in the last few years, custom handmade rugs command a strong presence in the work of Manhattan-based interior designer Matthew Patrick Smyth whose projects are located across the country and Europe. Dating back to his early days working for his mentor, the legendary designer David Anthony Easton, his passion for the hand-crafted carpet has remained unabated. Now, it's generally no longer a question of finding that special piece; it's all about creating it.

The designer's first foray in creating handmade rugs goes back to the early years of his career—1982-1988—when personally supervising needlepoint production in Portugal for his then employer Mr. Easton. This hands-on experience whet his appetite for all handmade weavings. In the 1990s and early 2000s, he featured an impressive array of decorative carpets, including many antiques, in most of his interiors including Serapis, Herizes, Tabrizes, Sarouks, Aubussons, Savonneries, tribal rugs, and needlepoints. He relished the thrill of the hunt for that special piece. For him, a piece's quirky imperfections embody the very essence of its appeal.

This early Portuguese needlepoint production experience also fueled his interest in the custom handmade rug-making process and developed his understanding of the

LEFT The designer's knack for seamlessly juxtaposing the old and the new comes alive in this living room where a soft ivory/blue Kirman exudes a contemporary flair as it sits below a graphic photographic triptych. Photography by John Gruen. Courtesy of Matthew Patrick Smyth.

STORY BY ALIX G. PERRACHON



ABOVE The luminous silk in the floral repeats in a custom-designed floral handtufted wool-and-silk rug enhance the luxurious feel of this Park Avenue living room featured in Matthew Patrick Smyth's book *Living Traditions*. Photography by John Gruen. Courtesy of Matthew Patrick Smyth Inc. OPPOSITE The interlocking square repeats exhibited in a custom silk carpet give a contemporary edge to this living room showcasing furniture both traditional and new. Photography by John Gruen. Courtesy of Matthew Patrick Smyth Inc.

complexities involved. Today, about 30% to 40% of floor coverings Mr. Smyth uses are custom—handmade in Nepal, India, and South America—while sisal carpeting represents much of the balance. Thanks to his expertise, he has developed the Matthew Patrick Smyth carpet collections for designer supply house Patterson, Flynn & Martin. “For me, the attraction of producing handmade custom rugs is the ability to control the pattern, color, and size,” states the designer who has consistently been listed as one of the top designers in *House Beautiful*, *Traditional Home*, *New York Magazine*, *New York Spaces*, *Elements of Living*, and *Gotham Magazine*. “You have the ability to control the fibers in a handmade rug in a way that can’t be replicated in a machine-made carpet. Also, there is more personal input in the design and the feel of the rug.”

When explaining how decorating has so notably

veered away from using traditional carpets in favor of contemporary pieces, Mr. Smyth points to a confluence of factors. “The last few years have witnessed a definite decorative shift toward visually simple and clean lines with less pattern and more neutrals,” comments the designer renowned for his comfortable timeless interiors executed with impeccable detail and an acute sensibility to the classic and modern. As Baby Boomer clients age, their tastes are leaning toward overall simplicity in their décor and lifestyle. The virtual disappearance of the dining room as a separate entity in new residential construction illustrates this overwhelming trend toward casual living. As a result, he continues, “We no longer shop for dining room rugs which used to be a big part of our business.” Meanwhile, the Millennials are not yet among his clientele as they are basically a decade behind in terms of home ownership.







ABOVE The mocha jute ground and ivory silk border are echoed in the walls and furnishings in this cozy alcove. Photography by John Gruen. Courtesy of Matthew Patrick Smyth Inc. OPPOSITE The concentric box-patterned carpet evokes a folk art appeal that works well in this dining room featuring Early American furniture. Photography by John Gruen. Courtesy of Matthew Patrick Smyth Inc.

Whereas Mr. Smyth typically always started the decorating process with the rug when using traditional pieces, custom rugs dictate the reverse approach. “There’s no point in starting with the rug when you are doing custom,” he remarks. “It’s much easier to start with fabrics and then focus on producing the rug.” Fabrics are an easy first step for clients as they help them visualize their future room. The custom rug colors and pattern draw their inspiration from a variety of number of elements including the room’s fabrics and architectural detail.

Despite the overwhelming modernist trend, Mr. Smyth is also beginning to see signs of a stylistic shift potentially afoot. “I had hoped that ‘Downton Abbey’ was going to be the catalyst, but that didn’t happen,” he remarks calling to mind the British hit TV series of 2010-2015. Lately though, he continues, “Colors have started to brighten up. I see oriental carpets

slowly slipping into the mix. The modern rugs are losing their luster a bit and the added dimension and character the antique carpet can offer is looking fresh again. It’s a harder process to introduce them to younger clients, but we have sold more lately than in the past eight years.”

Interestingly, a couple of clients recently asked Mr. Smyth to freshen up their current décor featuring exquisite antique rugs and furniture. Wanting to emulate their friends, who were all flaunting their new minimalist neutral-based interiors, they were about to discard most of their precious artifacts. Lo and behold, however, they changed their minds when visitors to their home told them how amazingly beautiful and unique it was. “These clients were so happy that they waited for neutrals to go out of style and didn’t make and changes!” exclaimed Mr. Smyth.

Whenever the client is receptive, Mr. Smyth

DESIGN FOCUS

loves to mix things up a bit. “It’s nice to break up custom rugs with some antique pieces,” notes the designer reputed for his mastery in blending contemporary with antique. He recently completed a project for a client where he used a Karabagh gallery rug in an entry hall adding a burst of pattern and color amid the custom stair runners and the adjoining rooms. He also placed an antique Kirman in a dining room whose hues influenced those in the custom rugs nearby.

Convincing clients to opt for handmade rugs is not a problem thanks to Mr. Smyth’s profound understanding of their intrinsic value. “Clients are not afraid to use handmade rugs if they feel good to their touch and they like the general look,” he comments.

ABOUT THE DESIGNER

After studying interior design at the Fashion Institute of Technology (FIT), Matthew Patrick Smyth worked for David Anthony Easton from 1982 to 1988 when he established Matthew Patrick Smyth Inc. Based in New York with a pied-a-terre in Paris, his residential projects are located throughout the United States and across Europe.

The designer is also involved in product design including the Matthew Patrick Smyth carpet collections at Patterson Flynn Martin and a Matthew Smyth line of fabrics and wallcovering designs at F. Schumacher.

Mr. Smyth has been consistently listed as one of the top designers in *House Beautiful*, *Traditional Home*, *New York Magazine*, *New York Spaces*, *Elements of Living*, and *Gotham Magazine*. His work has also been published in magazines including *Elle Décor*, *Colonial Homes*, *The New York Times*, *Architectural Digest*, and *Interior Design* and in books such as *The Decorative Carpet—Fine*

“There’s absolutely no hesitation.” Moreover, budget is not a factor as the handmade options are not significantly more expensive than their machinemade counterparts.

The interior designer’s role has evolved in today’s changing marketplace and with the dramatic rise of internet sales. “There is a lot on the market and retailing has gotten very good,” states Mr. Smyth. “The designer’s role now is to offer clients custom options.” In that respect, the future of handmade rugs is solid. “Designers would be foolish not to explore them,” he adds. As for the resurgence of traditional decorative rugs, he concludes: “Fingers crossed.... as it made decorating more interesting for me!”



Handmade Rugs in Contemporary Interiors. He has appeared twice on *CNN’s Style* with Elsa Klensch and his book, *Living Traditions: Interiors* by Monacelli Press, is now in its second printing.

His awards include the 2012 Alpha Workshop Award, 2011 Stars of Design Award, and *Elle Décor’s* Top 25 A List. He has participated in numerous showhouses including Kips Bay Boys & Girls Club Decorator Showhouse and was selected by Hearst Media Group to design *Elle Decor’s* first “Designer Visions” apartment in Tribeca.

The contemporary feel of an ivory ground custom lattice-like tan patterned rug is in counterpoint to the antique furniture in this country nook. Photography by John Gruen. Courtesy of Matthew Patrick Smyth.

