

THE DECORATIVE CARPET

FINE HANDMADE RUGS IN CONTEMPORARY INTERIORS

ALIX G. PERRACHON



FOREWORD BY
DORIS LESLIE BLAU

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Matthew Patrick Smyth

"It's rare that I don't use an oriental or decorative rug in my work," states Matthew Patrick Smyth, a designer known for his witty interpretation of traditional interiors that incorporate unexpected contemporary turns. His first real exposure to rugs came when he supervised needlepoint production in Portugal while working for David Easton, his mentor, early in his career. There, he learned to appreciate the complexity of the rug-making process and the beauty of the final product. This experience transformed him, whetting his appetite for all beautiful oriental and decorative rugs from Agras, Serapis, and Tabrizes to kilims and Tibetans. "I find their imperfections, like *abrash*, amusing," he says. "I do love to find quirky things in a rug, especially motifs such as birds, dogs, pomegranates, and water. More than anything, I love carpets that can tell a story."

Smyth points out that clients often don't realize what a Pandora's box they open when they decide to purchase a carpet: "Little do they know the overwhelming variety of colors, designs, and styles they will have to choose from!" Rugs are so intensely personal that every client reacts to them in a completely distinct—and often unexpected—way. Smyth recollects a rug shopping expedition with a client who had an aversion to birds represented in any form or in any medium, including on rugs, art, or furniture. After she rejected a magnificent Persian Isfahan carpet, he asked her why, when it had no birds. She retorted, "No, but it looks like they could be hiding somewhere in there!"

"The rug can either be the star or the backdrop of the room, not both," asserts Smyth. "A busy rug and a busy fabric will neutralize each other." To him, a boldly patterned and colored rug dictates the use of neutrals elsewhere in a

room, while a subdued rug calls for busy, vibrant fabrics. The latter type of rug will reveal its subtle beauty gradually to the visitor, so that it comes as a pleasant surprise.

"It takes out all the fun if you lock yourself into looking for a specific rug type," Smyth says. "You can have an idea of what you're after but you never really know what to expect. Sometimes, you can find a rug that changes your whole scheme." When the rest of an installation is coming together but the perfect rug has yet to be found, he decorates the room using as many neutrals as possible. Once a rug is chosen, he fills in the *décor* with secondary fabrics that pick up on the weaving's colors and motifs. Chancing upon the right piece has a lot to do with luck, he acknowledges: he once found a rug exhibiting a fountain-in-a-garden design that echoed the very landscaping of the garden directly outside the room he was designing.

The deep-toned, highly lacquered wood of the chairs and sideboard are a natural choice to stand up to the saturated cornflower blues, creamy yellows, raspberry reds, and dusty roses of this English Axminster carpet, circa 1850. While the furniture addresses its colors, the subdued, tonal lattice-pattern wallpaper highlights its extraordinarily intricate floral patterning.

