

Rugs: The Basics of Good Design

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Rugs are artwork for your floor. Today they have really become a fashion statement and are an easy and effective way to start a decorating scheme. Rugs are easy because they can provide you the basis for choosing a great color scheme. They are equally effective because they anchor furniture groupings, provide valued acoustic benefits, and when well made can become family heirlooms. With so many options on the market today, choosing a rug can be an overwhelming process. The tips and ideas here are designed to make it simpler and even fun!

The first myth to dispel is that if you have wall to wall carpet you don't need rugs. You do! Rugs are perfect for defining a seating grouping, adding color and interest, and creating mood. Without them, too often furnishings look cut adrift in a sea of carpet. The advantage is that, if you do have wall to wall, you only need rugs in accent size. Most often in a living/great room area this is 6x9. If you have hardwood floors you may want to consider a larger 9x12 rug. The rule of thumb is that either all of your primary furnishings are off the rug (except the coffee table), so with a 6x9 your sofa and chairs sit off the rug by about 6" or more, or all of them are on the rug. If you have a 9x12, both your sofa, chairs, and all tables will be on the rug (unless you set your room up at yodeling distance, no recommended!). In a breakfast nook or dining room, the most popular size is an 8x10, this allows all of the chairs at the table to remain on the rug when pulled out. You want to avoid a wobbly effect of half on, half off. Smaller rugs, such as 3x5 and 4x6 can be used to great effect in a foyer/entry or in front of the kitchen sink. (Please use bathroom rugs for bathrooms only, not in the kitchen.)

Now that you have an idea of the sizes you are looking for, we can address the different types of rugs and their benefits. Hook rugs are among the most cost effective, and they aren't at all what your Grandmother had. They have a level loop, rendering them far more durable than cut pile carpet. (Many of you may compare it to a berber look.) Today, hook rugs come in either wool or cotton. Wool is the longest wearing and easiest to clean. They typically have a rubberized backing with fabric applied to prevent pulling out. The skies the limit on color and pattern, whether you enjoy a lively floral, muted neoclassic feel, arts and crafts geometric, or blue and white arabesques. Many manufacturers are also realizing a boon in the children's market with speciality rugs in shapes, flowers, animals and the like. Hook rugs also come in both a standard loop size and micro hook (twice the price), that has a very refined needlepoint look.

I recommend hook rugs most often in kitchens and breakfast nooks, also in high traffic areas and in areas that you'll want to change out in three years. (Trends come and go, and if you like to keep up, this is an easy way to do it!) They wear well, look great, offer low maintenance and with a busy pattern can hide a lot of sins.

To fully protect any rug always ask for a stain guard treatment, force field by Vecta is among the best and your rug dealer should be willing to apply this for you. You can buy a bottle and spray it yourself, just be prepared to stay off the rug for 24 hours. It is also critical to any rug to have the proper pad. Again, a reputable dealer will recommend and cut the right size for you. On hardwood floors a superloc pad is your best bet. It has a synthetic jute-type fiber with a rubberized backing, and adds both comfort and durability to your rug. (Proper padding extends the life of your rugs and protects your floors.) A tile floor may be better with a wicker-loc pad, this is a rubberized pad

with a waffle look (don't confuse this with any other similar pad, others have been known to mark hardwood floors permanently.) Over carpet, a sticky back pad is available; this is much like a piece of thin felt that is sticky on both sides, preventing the challenge of rug "creep." Pads can also be life savers in the case of slick wood floors and the wrong step!

Pile rugs are the most prevalent type of rug, and can be divided into three main categories: machine made, hand knotted, and flat woven. The quality and price in all vary widely. The best machine made rugs, known the world over, are Karastan. They use all wool with typically cotton base for a truly sturdy construction. Many of their rugs are used in commercial applications (such as hotels) as well. Karastan is also known for great designs and creating collections of rugs that all work together, so flowing your rugs room to room is automatic and easy. They represent the best of design in a box.

Another line that appeared in recent years and rivals Karastan in the wool construction, but with a more casual look is called Patina. These are also created to coordinate, but the collections are considerably smaller and a bit less flexible. The advantage is the cost is about 1/3 to 1/2 of Karastan. The same manufacturer of Patinas makes a line called Gabbehs, very popular in the last 5 years. The unique element here is the fiber, a man-made polypropylene (anyone remember olefin!?) it feels like velvet and wears like iron and cost is unbeatable. In Karastan, a 6x9 may be approximately \$799, in the Patina the same size would be \$549, and in the Gabbeh it would be about \$259.

Other machine made rugs abound, but be careful. You do get what you pay for, and in my experience, better to spend a little more now than twice later on replacing. Rugs can make a significant difference in the continuity of your home, the flow from room to room. Even if you don't purchase all of them now, it is helpful to select rugs in tandem and record your decisions so you have a master rug plan.

In hand knotted, everyone gets caught up in the knot count. Don't. The most important thing is that you are working with a quality dealer who will be there in the years to come, avoid the going out of business bargains. For current rugs, new hand knotted, you are buying fashion. If you buy antique rugs, you are investing (though there is never a guarantee of return.) When buying antique rugs, a worthy dealer will offer to trade your rug in at a later date for what you paid, depending, of course, on its condition. You may not get the added value, but it does add flexibility. This is not the case with new rugs. But, again, new rugs have a much broader spectrum of colors, you can dictate size and prices are far more reasonable. A new 8x10 handknotted from India or China will typically range \$2000-\$5000+, while an antique will usually be twice to three times that and can run into many thousands of dollars.

Certainly if you are interested in and can afford the antiques you are getting a true one of a kind, while some one of a kind do exist in the newer rugs, many are mass manufactured. Be aware too that one of the principal reasons hand knotted rugs are priced so is that it may take an average of a year or two to produce a single rug. (Can you live off \$5000 a year??)

Moving on to flat weaves, there are the popular dhurries and kilims, reversible, light weight and with more uses than just the floor (great on walls, over a bed, a table topper, even on an iron rod at a window.) These again can be new or antique and priced accordingly. Another flat weave type

is known as a Caucasian and tends to have a shaggy reverse side, where the yarns are left unclipped, this is much denser than the dhurries and kilims, and historically comes in very dense colorful patterns. A take off of this in new rugs is known as a Nourmak, again dense, but with the back clipped, it is reversible and with a nice thick pad under it, is ideal in either a dining, living/great room, or even under a breakfast table. The flat weaves generally lend themselves well to a more casual mood and a cooler sense, so welcome in hot climates like Atlanta.

While often relegated to strictly country decorating, rag and braid rugs are still sought out. The advantage is often the low maintenance and possibility of machine washing with small ones, they are also reversible. Today there is a trend to the artsy rag rugs, made from scraps of materials and even leathers that have a shaggy look and touch. Check out your local art fairs for the textile weavers and see if these strike your fancy.

Truly we've just touched the tip of the iceberg on rugs here. Loads more to explore and options to consider. As mentioned, find a qualified rug dealer, some of my top consumer recommendations in Atlanta and surrounding areas include Roswell Rugs off Alpharetta Highway in Roswell, World Imports for contemporary pieces off Dawson Blvd., and for antique Persians see Rugs and Treasures or Century rugs at Miami Circle. A good dealer will let you check out three or more rugs for at least 48 hours, don't agonize in the showroom, take them home and see if they work. Light and setting may change your mind, or confirm your decision. Most importantly have fun, and if you need help, an interior designer can be your best source.

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