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### **Rug First, My design mantra**

When I set out to decorate and furnish a clients' home, rug shopping is the first journey we make together.

While shopping for a rug with a client it opens up my understanding of their sensibilities. Their color choices and the degree of color saturation which they desire become apparent. I learn from this journey whether they like cool, warm or neutral colors. When standing in front of a well made rug a client often has a knee jerk reaction to them. It is at that moment when my design detective work has been fulfilled. I realize clients love or distaste for solids, stripes, plaids, floral patterns. Mission accomplished! The flood gates open and I become confident that I will fulfill the design needs of my client.

Tom DeMarco, of Odegard Carpets and founder/owner of Kooches Carpets has guided me for years on the quality and design possibilities of wonderful area rugs. He is Aladdin and rug guru all in one.

DeMarco was kind enough to answer some commonly asked questions by my clients. Below is the interview.

### **Why do you believe that the finest quality rugs are made in Nepal?**

There are typically both excellent quality rugs and not very good rugs coming from most handmade rug producing country. There are however, a number of reasons that Nepal has an edge over many other countries.

Firstly, Nepal's proximity to the Himalayas provides relatively easy access to extraordinary Himalayan sheep wool. This high lanolin content wool is extremely hardy and lustrous and makes fabulous carpet wool. In the hands of a knowledgeable, meticulous producer this yarn is both carded and spun by hand to maintain its inherent superior qualities.

Another surprising reason that such a large percentage of desirable rugs come from Nepal is the relative youth of the carpet industry in there. Handmade rugs were not produced in Nepal before 1959. Most other rug producing countries claim a thousand years or more of carpet production history. With such long standing traditions, often comes a level of stubbornness which manifests as resistance to make designs and colors dictated by western designers and importers. The carpet industry in Nepal, started by the Tibetan refugees, has been open minded from the very start and it was possible even in the early 1960s to order the production of rugs in the designs, colors and sizes we in the west desired.

### **I'm confused weren't these rugs made in Tibet?**

Naturally Tibetan knotted carpets were made in Tibet a 1,000 years ago, but these carpets were utilitarian, and seldom seen outside Tibet. When the Chinese takeover of Tibet started the wave of Tibetan refugees in 1959 and the coming years, these refugees, with the aid of the Swiss Red Cross, set up weaving facilities to make carpets for export. Naturally the unique Tibetan knotting technique was used to make these rugs and this is why they are known as 'Tibetan' rugs - especially for the first few decades of the production.

### **How does making these rugs benefit the Nepalese people and culture?**

The production of Nepalese carpets grew steadily and the need for tens of thousands of weavers and yarn spinners created new and much better paying employment for the Nepalese. The Tibetans trained the Nepalese in their weaving techniques and the Nepalese natives found steady higher paying work in a country where unemployment was a staggering problem. The overwhelming majority of workers in the carpet industry in Nepal now are Nepalese.

### **What makes Kooches rugs unique?**

This willingness by the Tibetans and Nepalese in Nepal to learn new things and follow direction is not lost on me. At Kooches we have taken this potential for ingenuity to the next level and have started a dozen or more new weaving techniques previously never made in Nepal. The vast technical knowledge at Kooches, the best of the best yarn in all our rugs and killims and our revered color sense place Kooches in a very elite and unique class.

### **Why is Odegard such a strong force in the industry?**

Since 1987 Odegard has been making rugs in Nepal with little concern for how much the carpet cost, as long as it was the best quality that we could get. Odegard was also one of the very first designer/importers to market their carpets directly to the designer without the middleman. Odegard has also insisted on producing carpets in the most environmentally and socially responsible way possible – from the very first carpet Odegard ever put on loom. This ethos has established Odegard as a carpet design house to be looked up to and emulated for 30 years.

### **Where can one view the collection?**

In the New York Design Center at 200 Lexington Avenue in NYC

### **Can you talk to me about different rug styles?**

Yes, I could for weeks. But since we don't have weeks, I would say that a useful way to break down handmade rugs is in the following categories:

There are knotted carpets with a pile and woven carpets that are flat. There is a very wide range of textures, pile heights, and yarn thicknesses. Generally the finer the yarn is spun the more refined or formal a carpet can appear. The designs can be broken down into geometric or curvilinear and the scale of the design into large or small scale. Color is a very personal thing to my mind and also the most important factor to get right.

### **Why do you use different threads such as silk,aloe and wool?**

Wool is the ultimate carpet fiber. It is strong, cleans well and ages gracefully. The better the wool, the better it will do all these things. Silk, hemp, aloe are alternative fibers that can be used as an accent in a rug or even for the entire carpet. These alternative yarn fibers reflect light differently from wool and can add visual interest and texture to a carpet.

### **Are these rugs durable?**

Amazingly.

### **How long has Odegard been in business?**

Since 1987.

