

HOW TO SPEND IT

The Claremont Rug Company — one of the world's best sources of antique carpets

— is co-owned (with wife, Christine, and another partner) by Jan David Winitz, who inherited two things from his grandmother: a collection of great rugs and a love of art. Since 1980, he has been combining the two, offering beautifully unusual floor coverings to those with friends kind enough to share the secret of his showroom. There are many places you can pick up a Persian, but, as Winitz points out, though the majority of 20th century rugs were handwoven, they were also copied, again and again - often obviously, shoddily - for westerners. Winitz specialises in something more rare: 19th century handmade carpets which were individually commissioned, usually for family estates.

It took master weavers between two and seven years to complete one of these - and it shows, in the subtlety of the colors (not farm-fed salmon orange, for instance, but sunburnt

terracotta) and the intricacy of the designs, each one like a storyteller's woven portrait of home. They are less room furnishings than, as Winitz says, "art for the floor".

Acquiring major estates all over the world are where Winitz finds this art. Recently, an 88-year-old Swiss woman left more than 250 rugs, amassed over 50 years, lying on her floors in Geneva, Provence and the Hudson Valley. Winitz acquired them, and they are now part of the broad collection he offers to clients. Prices start from \$20,000,

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and every purchase comes with a Lifetime Full Exchange Policy (if your house, or taste, changes just trade the rug in).

Though it is best to walk into the showroom, and around these rugs, the company prides itself on being

able to "act like a local store anywhere" - using its internet site, digital pictures, even at home sampling, to show you what the options are. Clients in Kansas City relied entirely on photographs and digital files when buying rugs for their home - "18 extremely rare pieces from us," says Winitz, "without ever having to leave their home".

For some clients, such as those looking to furnish their estate on the island they own off the east coast, the company will even fly out samples. However you choose between its wares, the company will remind you what it's like to tread softly on a dream...

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