



ANTIQUE ORIENTAL RUGS: THE WRITING IS ON THE WALL

BY JAN DAVID WINITZ
CLAREMONT PRESIDENT & FOUNDER



While echoing the grandeur of this finely crafted Great Room, this antique Ferahan Sarouk carpet creates a comfortable ambiance for intimate conversation and relaxation in the two seating areas.

Architectural and Interior Designer: Mitchell Weiner – Ross, CA

CLAREMONT RUG COMPANY

ANTIQUÉ ART CARPETS

As I begin to write I become once again immersed in the 200-year-old Persian Bakshaish “Dragon and Phoenix” carpet that hangs on the wall above my desk. The rug, which I fell in love with some 40 years ago, remains completely beguiling. That it’s attracting my attention right now, as I gather my thoughts about the burgeoning trend of hanging rugs on the wall as art, seems particularly timely.

The Oriental rug world has evolved dramatically since I started my business in 1980. Then, almost all dealers viewed antique rugs merely as elite decorative furnishings. Over three decades later, we are witnessing a tremendous change in the perception of the best antique Oriental rugs. Beginning in 2011, we saw a dramatically increased interest in putting noteworthy antique rugs not only on the floor, but in hanging them on the wall alongside paintings. While



Detail from 200-year-old the Dragon and Phoenix Bakshaish carpet.

From the collection of Jan David Winitz



The exquisite 150-year-old Persian Laver Kirman carpet gracing this master bedroom reflects a connoisseur’s taste for the intimate details and extraordinary beauty this style offers.

Design: Deanna Staats & Co. / Peggy Platner and Associates — Malibu, CA

for years, most of my clients could not visualize my suggestions of hanging rugs on walls as art, those who did found the effect enchanting. Today, some clients are even extending this non-floor use by displaying their rugs under glass on tabletops or draping them over stair railings and sofa backs. In fact, in 2011 more than half of our client projects involved using rugs in non-floor display.

The Ascent of Great Oriental Rugs on the Art Radar

Historically, Oriental rugs served as confirmation of one’s status and level of refinement. Since Marco Polo introduced them to Europe at the end of the 13th century, rug enthusiasts have ranged from queens and emperors to corporate titans and Silicon Valley entrepreneurs. But for the most part, their true and rightful merit has been overshadowed in the Western world by the idea that something *walked on* is something less valued, at best more craft than art. ‘Under foot’ equaled under-appreciated.



The geometric simplicity of this spectacular antique Serapi carpet harmonizes the Pre-Columbian artifacts, Napoleonic mantle and mirror, and elegant designer chairs.

Design: Gary Hutton, Gary Hutton Design — San Francisco, CA

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So what explains this transformation of attitude among collectors? My view is that it stems from a confluence of factors.

In 2010, antique rugs received center stage recognition when Christie’s London sold a mid-17th century Persian Laver Kirman for \$9.59 million, almost double the previous world record set just a year before. *The Wall Street Journal* ran a feature entitled “The Rug Market Takes Flight”, citing both historical carpets and 19th century antique rugs as major collecting niches, adding, “These days, top antique rugs are sold more like works of art than pieces of décor” (6-19-10). *The Financial Times*

struck a similar tone, emphasizing, “Antique rugs are as valuable as art — and not always for treading upon” (11-19-11).

The recent attention given to these “portable monuments,” as the *New York Times* called them (10-27-11), is already having an enormous influence on the interest in, and steadily increasing value of, these weavings in today’s market. Long “under the radar,” they’re finally emerging to take their proud place alongside traditionally recognized artworks.

Although museums such as the Metropolitan Museum in New York, the J. Paul Getty Museum



A 150-year-old Kermanshah carpet in this sitting room creates a triangle of artwork with the two paintings that together cumulatively establish an atmosphere of romance and timeless elegance.

Many who collect other art forms extol the merits of adding great antique carpets to rooms that showcase their art collections, recognizing how harmonious the ensemble becomes.

in Los Angeles and The Museum of Islamic Art in Qatar are actively acquiring major historical carpets, the best art-level rugs from circa 1800-1900, the “Second Golden Age” of Oriental rug weaving, can still be found in private homes. The art value of pieces from this era can be seen in purchases such as a Caucasian “Eagle Kazak”, measuring 4x7, selling for \$341,625, more than 13 times its \$25,000 high estimate at Freeman’s Auction in Philadelphia.

Numerous connoisseurs are building major collections of art-level 19th century oriental rugs, storing their pieces that are not on display in dedicated chests or rug vaults. They consistently note the tremendous “staying power” that elite rugs possess and often emphasize that rather than growing tired of their rugs, one becomes ever more enthralled, discovering the myriad individual designs and nuances of color the weavers employed to create a unique vision of balance and harmony.

A trend I have witnessed during the 40 years I have been collecting 19th century Oriental rugs is dramatically escalating at this time. While there is still a supply of 19th century decorative-level carpets on the international market, art-level antique rugs typically become available only when families divest long-held collections. A result of their increased recent exposure is that art-level pieces are disappearing much more rapidly as established collectors purchase more ambitiously and younger aficionados strive toward higher-level pieces. I firmly believe that the art-level rugs occasionally found today will not be available to the next generation at any price.

The Impact of Rugs as Wall Art

There are several advantages to displaying antique Oriental rugs vertically. It literally “elevates” the rug’s accessibility; when examined from a distance



Caucasian Shirvan

3ft. 5in. x 5ft. 5in. | 3rd quarter, 19th century

Striking in its combination of a rarely seen, radiant French blue field, extremely clear articulation of design, and an assured use of asymmetry, this virtuoso piece holds great interest for the seasoned art collector either as wall art or used on the floor.



Ferahan Sarouk

3ft. 6in. x 4ft. 10in. | 3rd quarter, 19th century

This small art-level rug’s exquisite medallion and fascinating variety of flower forms would be equally spectacular when hung on a wall or used in a number of possible applications on the floor.





of only a few inches, the rug's subtle color shadings and ambitious, imaginative patterns can be explored more intimately. Unlike many works on canvas, the finest vertically displayed rugs have a deeply satisfying impact when viewed at close range or from across the room.

Displaying antique rugs on the wall also allows them to interplay with the furniture, architectural details and especially other works of art in the room. I have always found art-level rugs to be "great unifiers." Many who collect other art forms extol the merits of adding great antique carpets to rooms that showcase their art collections, recognizing how harmonious the ensemble becomes.

Certain types of 19th century rugs are experiencing an upsurge of attention for vertical display. Particularly favored are antique Caucasian tribal rugs because of their extraordinarily graphic, elemental designs and primary colors. Art-level Caucasian rugs marry extremely well with contemporary and postmodern decors. Many clients with more traditional decors hang classical Persian rugs with intricate floral designs, exquisite color shifts and a significantly tighter weave. Styles they consistently favor for vertical display include 19th century Persian Laver Kirmans, Hadji Jallili Tabrizs and Ferahan Sarouks.

19th Century Rugs as Art Investments

My longtime research indicates that magnificent rugs from the regions of Persia, the Caucasus Mountains and Turkey have impacted much of Western art. Rugs are portrayed in Renaissance paintings such as

An oversize mid-19th century Persian Sultanabad carpet with its welcoming, time-softened color and glowing patina adds tremendous character to this hospitable large family home.

Design: Bradley Thiergartner Interiors — New York, NY

those by Holbein and Memling, and their influence in 19th and 20th century Western art touches everything from the large, bold blocks of color found in Matisse and the Fauves and Gauguin to the power and resonance of abstract shapes in Kandinsky and Klee.

Given the often prohibitive cost of major paintings, lithographs and sculpture, coupled with a continuing unpredictable economy, today's investors are pulling funds out of the stock market and other traditional portfolio venues and re-investing them in precious tangibles that will accrue in value over time and enhance the quality of their lives every day.

For all their potential merit, gold bars, corporate certificates and commodity shares cannot provide the same satisfaction as living with a never-to-be-reproduced work of art. Reuters' observations in a recent article concur with my own, "Many of these families who have been holding gold for a decade or more... are now taking profits and putting the money to work in the art market" (10-12-11).

Now as I finish this article, I again look up at the monumental Bakshaish carpet above my desk. Its creators are unknown, yet their artistic vision touches my feelings and sets my mind to wonder. I experience a deep sense of inner satisfaction, recognizing how grateful I am that my life's work has been to introduce the profound artistry of great oriental rugs to three decades of clients. ♦

Visit www.claremonrugs.com to view images of a number of Client's Homes, an entire Whole Home Project, and 1,000 art-level rugs from our vast inventory.

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To learn more about furnishing your home with and collecting fine antique Oriental rugs, visit our website — www.claremontrug.com — to read various enriching articles in the EDUCATION section. Also view screen-size images of 1,000 art-level carpets from our collection.



Jan David Winitz, President and Founder of Claremont Rug Company in Oakland, CA, has built a global reputation among carpet collectors and connoisseurs since he founded the company—at age 25—in 1980.

Born into a New York family of art collectors and scientists, “Winitz inherited two things from his grandmother: a collection of great rugs and a love of art.”

(*Financial Times of London*). His stated vision was, “to introduce fine families to antique carpets possessing equal or greater artistic magnitude to works of art usually displayed on the wall.” Claremont Rug Company continues to be a leading source of 19th century museum-level Oriental carpets in the world. The author of “The Guide to Purchasing an Oriental Rug,” Winitz has an international clientele for whom antiques are a great passion.

The long artistic tradition from which this 19th century Shirvan tribal rug from the Caucasus Mountains derives enhances the fine 20th century workmanship of this spectacular observatory.
Architectural & Interior Design: Carla Carstens Designs – Soquel, CA

