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By the Numbers:
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Arzu Studio Hope:
Embracing
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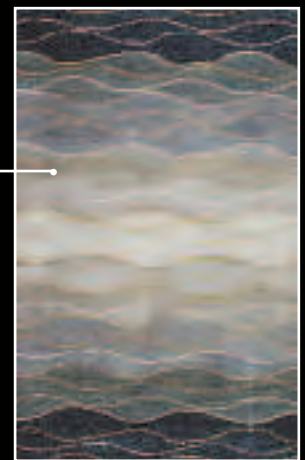
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Observations

Social Responsibility & From High Point

By Leslie Stroh

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

It is our position that the hand woven and hand knotted rug business can only thrive if we can show consumers (mostly women) that we empower women, educate children, and provide healthcare, in a safe working environment.

In this issue, we write about Arzu Studio Hope, which was started with a desire to do good, but realized that they had to be commercial in order to sustain doing good.

You can also find more on Social Responsibility in *All About Rugs* on our website www.rugnewsanddesign.com.

Afghanistan and India appear to be the primary source in the future for hand knotted rugs, although India also produces hand loomed, and hand woven rugs (flatwovens).

Rob Leahy, who worked on the US Government project "From Sheep to Shop," has written an article on his view of the future of hand knotted rugs that appears in *All about Rugs* in www.rugnewsanddesign.com.

Also online in *All about Rugs* at www.rugnewsanddesign.com, is an article about From Sheep to Shop, as well as some archive material on Afghanistan.

India increasingly dominates the hand tufted rug business.

Egypt, Turkey and the USA are the three primary suppliers of machine woven (generally synthetic yarn) area rugs.

A male Indian weaver can make twice the money in a day on a construction job as he can making rugs. A world apart on a Navajo Indian Reservation, a woman who can weave will at least weave a rug that can be sold to meet the family's monthly payment on a truck.

A portion of the potential consumers will pay for social responsibility in the production cycle. It may be a larger percentage

in hand-knotted, but across all products and all price points there is an awareness of social responsibility.

Last year during the Egyptian revolution, Mohamed Farid Khamis, Chairman of Oriental Weavers, Egypt, spoke out in favor of raising the minimum wage; I think alone. Oriental Weavers, Egypt, does take social responsibility for their workers in other ways as well. Social responsibility is good for business.

In India, Jaipur Rugs has announced a program to train 5,000 women to make rugs. So when the construction worker doubles his wage by leaving cottage-based rug making, there will be a woman who achieves financial independence by taking it on.

The other thing that both these companies have in common is that they are currently being run by women. Women make rugs, women buy rugs, and this publication is going to be taking a look at women who sell rugs, as well as where women buy rugs.

In this issue we look at Arzu Studio Hope, an NGO operating in Afghanistan as a "for benefit" rather than a "for profit" corporation. The goal of Arzu is to provide Afghan women weavers and their families with steady income and access to education and healthcare. It funds this program in part by marketing the rugs the women weave.

I don't think we can avoid taking Social Responsibility for the welfare of the people, mostly women, who make our products. And I think social responsibility is good for business, both because it is good for production, and because it is good for marketing.

As already noted, social responsibility is good for business when we empower women, educate children, and provide healthcare in a safe working environment.

Healthcare matters because the time away from the loom is lost revenue for the weavers. They are paid by the knot, not by days, and

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ON THE COVER: NOVEMBER 2012 —

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Observations

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don't get sick days or vacation days. Working means eating.

Afghanistan is a land-locked country. To the refugee camps during the Taliban period, Pakistan supplied capital and materials, washing and finishing services for Afghan made rugs via Peshawar in Pakistan. With the refugees dispersed throughout Afghanistan it has become difficult to organize internal Afghan production on a national scale.

There is no question that some of the finest rugs in the world come from Afghanistan. Even at the high end, rugs are now a fashion product. Traditional weavers weave traditional products or copy existing fashion leaders in Afghan production.

The Green Revolution in agriculture did not take off until farmers saw that new strains of seeds both produced more and better products, and as importantly, crops did not fail as often. The downside to anything new in many rug weaving countries is starvation.

Making rugs is both economic development, and a cultural tradition. To get a reliable supply of rugs, we in the rug industry will have to take social responsibility to supply a steady income, empower women, educate children and provide healthcare in a safe working environment.

On the production side that means contracting for production rather than buying stock. As demand picks up and prices rise, there will be some producers again willing to make stock.

HIGH POINT

If you didn't go to High Point, go to www.walkingthemarket.com to see what we see. As High Point is a furniture market, it should not be surprising that we saw increased interest in rugs from furniture stores. What was surprising was increased interest in rugs from Accessory Wholesalers. When we walked into a major accessory vendor's showroom, there were buyers oohing and aahing rugs, and sharing likes and dislikes. I haven't heard that on rug floors in a num-

ber of years.

Traffic at retail drives buying. So if Furniture and Accessory vendors are increasing their rug selections, then traffic must be shifting. From what we have seen so far, that market sells rugs from samples and not from inventory.

Furniture stores exist as a channel of rug distribution. When you see an increasing number of Accessory vendors carrying rugs, that means that accessory retailers are interested in rugs—a new channel of distribution and competition, notably selling lifestyle as well as product.

The overall tone was positive, and we continue to hear that mass merchants are laying out plans for next year. New is the idea that the rug business should make a profit. For some mass merchants, the race to the bottom will never end until a 5x8 measures a full size 4x6. A lot of the innovation that we see is an effort to create perceived value that includes a profit.

As much as we think www.walkingthemarket.com shows you the new products, it cannot substitute for touching and feeling new products. There is enough new stuff in the pipeline that retailers who don't go to market will be behind the curve compared to those who do.

If as a retailer your business is 50% transitional, and 50% traditional, you will be giving up market share in the fast forward fashion transitional sector by not going to markets, and you will miss seeing the recolored traditional rugs.

Below a particular price point, pictures on the Internet sell. Above a particular price point, touch, feel, and human interaction sell. The price point and fashion vary by market but the reality is that brick and mortar retailers need walk-in traffic. Mass merchants get plenty of traffic but limit themselves by price point and sizes to high volume turnover in commodity goods.

Younger consumers use the Internet to find things. Retailers who do not have a website and a marketing program (including

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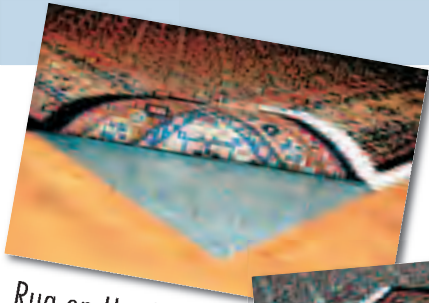
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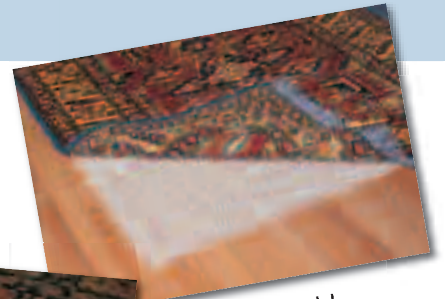
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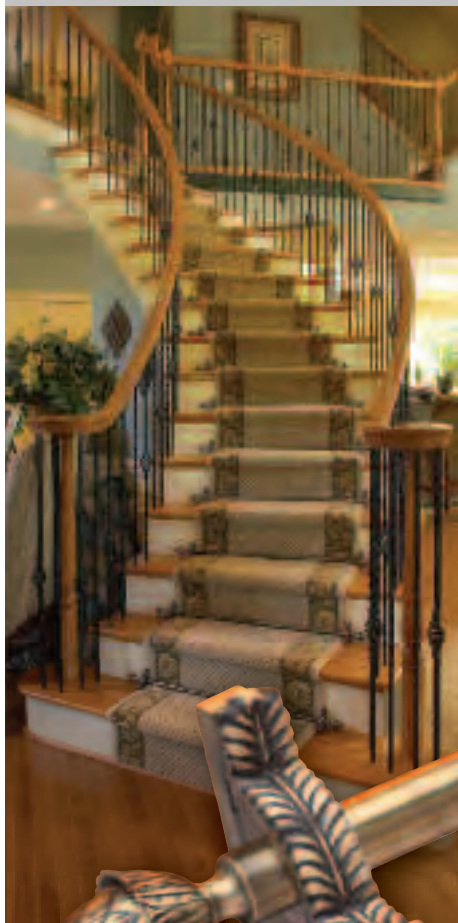
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By the Numbers: Has the Housing Market Already Recovered?

By Jack Maier

It's an article of faith among rug people that home sales drive rug sales. When people buy a new home they buy furniture, including rugs. Since the housing bubble burst – and rug sales collapsed – in 2007, rug people have been lamenting the weakness in home sales. Is it time to give that up, and move on?

You can argue that the housing market has recovered, that this is the new normal. It's not a completely convincing argument, but it's not nonsense either. It runs something like this: after you correct for population growth, there are as many houses being sold now as before all the bubbles. This is what a normal housing market looks like.

It all depends on what you define as “normal” – that is, when was this period “before all the bubbles.” To make this argument work, you have to take the long view.

The US economy endured a series of economic shocks in the late 1980s and early 1990s, including a collapse of the stock market in 1987, the savings and loan crisis, and the steep rise in oil prices brought on by the Gulf War of 1990. Both the finance industry and the real estate market were affected. One result was the collapse of the home market. For example, the number of new single-family homes sold fell from 750 thousand in 1986, to 509 thousand in 1991. Sales of new homes didn't reach the previous peak until 1996, when 757 thousand new single-family homes were sold.

By 1991 total home sales had fallen to 3.7 million, of which 3.1 million were existing homes and 0.5 million were new homes. In 1992 home sales began to recover, growing 10% to 4.0 million. If you take the ratio of home sales in 1992 to population in 1992, and define that as “normal,” then homes sales should be “normal” again in 2012 – in fact, up two percent over 1992, after the adjustment for population growth.

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	Existing home sales (millions)	New home sales (millions)	Total home sales (millions)	Population (millions)	Ratio of sales to population (see note)	Index 1995 = 100	Index 2005 = 150
1989	3.29	0.65	3.94	246.82	15.96	94	85
1990	3.18	0.53	3.72	249.62	14.89	88	79
1991	3.15	0.51	3.66	252.98	14.45	85	77
1992	3.43	0.61	4.04	256.51	15.75	93	83
1993	3.74	0.67	4.40	259.92	16.94	100	90
1994	3.88	0.67	4.55	263.13	17.31	102	92
1995	3.85	0.67	4.52	266.28	16.96	100	90
1996	4.17	0.76	4.92	269.39	18.28	108	97
1997	4.37	0.80	5.18	272.65	18.99	112	101
1998	4.97	0.89	5.85	275.85	21.21	125	112
1999	5.18	0.88	6.06	279.04	21.71	128	115
2000	5.17	0.88	6.05	282.16	21.44	126	114
2001	5.34	0.91	6.24	284.97	21.91	129	116
2002	5.63	0.97	6.61	287.62	22.97	135	122
2003	6.18	0.11	6.28	290.11	21.66	128	115
2004	6.78	1.20	7.98	292.81	27.26	161	144
2005	7.08	1.28	8.36	295.52	28.30	167	150
2006	6.48	1.05	7.53	298.38	25.23	149	134
2007	5.03	0.78	5.81	301.23	19.27	114	102
2008	4.11	0.49	4.60	304.09	15.11	89	80
2009	4.34	0.38	4.72	306.77	15.37	91	81
2010	4.19	0.32	4.51	309.33	14.59	86	77
2011	4.26	0.31	4.57	311.59	14.65	86	78
2012	4.69	0.36	5.05	313.44	16.10	95	85
2013	5.15	0.40	5.55	315.00	17.62	104	93
2014	5.67	0.44	6.11	316.50	19.29	114	102

Sources: Existing home sales courtesy of the National Realtors Association (NRA). New homes sales and population from the Census Bureau.

Notes: The NRA's existing home sales data are for single-family homes, condominiums and co-ops. The Census Bureau's new home sales data are for single-family homes only. Condominiums and co-ops account for only a small part of the home market. Existing condominiums and co-ops accounted for 11% of sales of existing homes in July 2012. New condominiums and co-ops accounted for 3.4% of new home construction in 2009-2011, again according to the Census Bureau. The NRA counts “done deals” only; that is, sales that were completed. The Census counts all deals for which there is a contract, and a deposit has been paid; not all of these sales are completed.

The figures shown in “Ratio of Sales to Population” were calculated by dividing sales by population, then multiplying the result by 1,000. We thought this multiplication made the data more easily comprehensible, without affecting the relative change over time, which is what we were looking at.

There are two columns of indices. The first uses the ratio of sales to population, and assumes that the ratio of 1995 was “normal.” The second uses the same ratio, but assumes that the ratio at the peak of the housing bubble was 50% above “normal.” A value of 100 in either column for any year indicates that the ratio of home sales to population is “normal” for that year, relative to that column's assumptions.



Observations

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direct mail) to drive consumers to their website may as well go out of business now. The days of \$\$\$s off to bring traffic to the store are gone. Now the game is helping consumers find your store on the Internet and giving them a reason to come walk in.

We call Internet viewing “eyeball traffic” and walk-ins “footfall traffic.” We also think that there is a huge shift from carrying inventory to carrying samples where retailers collectively work off a vendor’s inventory, or have the capability to source custom. It takes capital to carry inventory, and there is a lot less capital in the rug industry than there was five years ago.

Flatweaves will be everywhere in Atlanta in January. Much of the story will be texture. Some will be design and texture. Some will be color and texture. Will flatweaves sell at retail? I don’t know. I do know that there is an industry wide push to sell texture.

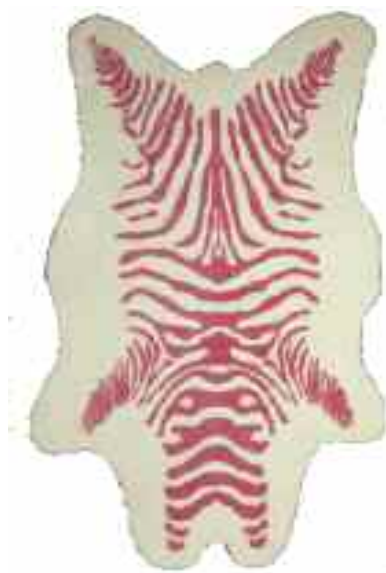
As Wesley Mancini has written in this publication, sofa covers, price points and colors make the rug sell in the furniture store. I think the shift to flatweaves mirrors a downward shift in sofa pricing.

With that in mind, remember that it will be the hand knotted rug that generates profits. The high end hand knotted has a lot of visibility, but that is also where there is a lot of effort to produce a

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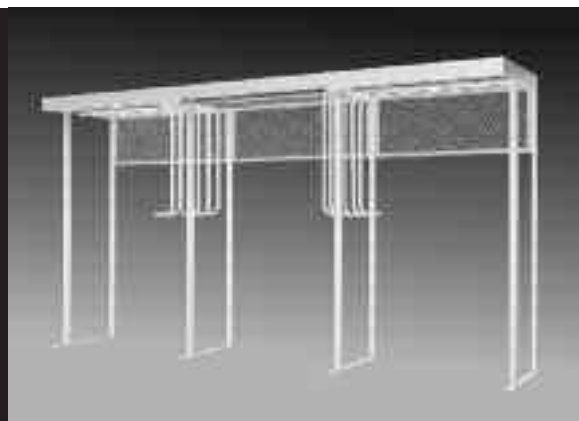


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Observations

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flatweave at more moderate price points. The rich are staying rich and will get richer, but they are few in actual number.

The middle market, which we think we can call the accessory/furniture store market, is a very difficult market for vendors to navigate. The middle market for knotted rugs has to meet a targeted price point with a regular supply of goods from a resource base with rising labor costs (materials costs have softened or are rising more slowly than last year). Because production is not large, it is not possible in this market to lose money on every rug and make it up on the volume.

Gift and Accessory goes together, as does Furniture and Accessory. In these stores, rugs are an accessory, not a destination. Perhaps the question is not about whether rugs will survive as a product, but will they survive as a destination. At what price do we see an increasing supply of machine woven wool rugs?

Everybody at any price point making hand woven or hand knotted rugs is constrained by the cost and supply of labor. It is time to stop thinking about weavers as some amorphous pool of faceless cogs in a human run machine, and start looking at them as artisans with real lives for whom making rugs is the best economic option.

Social Responsibility is good for business. ☼



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andDesign: Women

by Sarah Stroh

"Will they do a full scale charge to a dying industry?"

"But wouldn't women bring back the industry?"

"Then the question really is -Is the industry crying out for a woman's touch?"

Here at *Rug News andDesign*, we've been discussing the rapid evolution of the rug industry. In particular, women coming to the forefront of retail, buying, designing and final decision making.

For years, my father Leslie Stroh and I have been discussing women. Not surprisingly, my father, a 40 year rug veteran, viewed the issue differently than his daughter (in the industry 5 yrs). I believed the moment I started attending tradeshow, speaking with wholesalers, listening to buyers and writing for the magazine, that women were not only important but could (and probably will) save the industry. Leslie Stroh **now** concurs that women are not only important to the rug industry (*they make the product, they buy the product - ed.*) they are integral to the **new** rug industry.

Following our discussion, I reached out to a respected rug buyer and family friend, Roz Rustigian. Roz took over the family business in the '80s. She was President of ORRA, twice; "a published author of articles relating to the operations of the rug business;" conducts classes on how "to judge quality and condition, identify place of origin and determine age" of a rug. Ms. Rustigian also wrote an article for *Rug News* (magazine) on Afghan women coming to college in the US.

I consider her a veteran buyer, who helped me understand the industry from the buyers' and woman's standpoint. Roz's response to questions about what has changed for women in the industry was "they haven't changed." The only way a woman gets any street cred is if you

"repeatedly show up over time at tradeshow and build a reputation." However, a veteran woman buyer does not always gets respect. At a recent tradeshow, Roz entered a showroom, placed an order and two months later had not received the order. She said that even as she was placing the order, she knew by the body language of the rug rep, her order was not going to be processed. These men just were not taking a women buyer seriously. It shocked me when Roz told me this wasn't the first time. Roz said that for many women buyers, the majority of the time they are looked at as decorators — thus not a big enough order to care about.

Women Are Serious About Buying, Selling And Running A Business.

If you don't believe that women have the ability not only to save the rug industry but bring it into the 21st century, then look at a recent column in the New York Times, and a new book by Hanna Rosin.

Op-Ed Columnist: *Why Men Fail*, by David Brooks, *New York Times*, Sept. 11 2012 [<http://rugne.ws/nytwhymen>]

David Brooks states "Over the years, many of us have embraced a certain theory to explain men's economic decline. It is that the information-age economy rewards traits that, for neurological and cultural reasons, women are more likely to possess. You have to be emotionally sensitive and aware of context. You have to communicate smoothly. For genetic and cultural reasons, many men stink at these tasks."

David Brooks noted in a column about Hanna Rosin's book: "a study by the National Federation of Independent Business found that small businesses owned by women outperformed male-owned small businesses during the last recession."

Hanna Rosin's book, *The End Of Men And The Rise Of Women*, made some interesting points.

"There are many professions that have

gone from all-male to female, and almost none that have gone the other way."

"In 2009, for the first time in American history, the balance of the workforce tipped toward women, who continue to occupy around half of the nation's jobs."

"Of the fifteen job categories projected to grow the most in the United States over the next decade, twelve are occupied primarily by women."

"According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics, as of 2011, women hold 51.4% of managerial and professional jobs — up from 26.1% in 1980. They make up 61.3% of all accountants and hold about half of all banking and insurance jobs."

Hanna Rosin is not a radical feminist. She is realistic with research and facts to back up her proposition that women are not only in the work force but pulling ahead of men.

Both David Brooks and Hanna Rosin touched upon the issue of women dominating, taking control and leading us into the future. It may be time for the rug industry to STOP viewing women as an accessory and start viewing them as the rug industry breadwinner.

In her book, Hanna Rosin shared a story that resonated with me in relation to women and the rug industry. I leave you with the story.

"In the Louisville College of Pharmacy for Women, started in 1883 because the regular college would not admit women, the first commencement speaker opened the graduates' eyes to a less romantic reality: "You have chosen to align yourselves with man. You have become his competitor for bread, his rival in work. Look for no other treatment than his fellows." Today, over 60% of pharmacy graduates are women.

Do you have a story about your experiences? Email it to me: sarah.stroh@rugnewsanddesign.com 🌟

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By the Numbers: Has the Housing Market Already Recovered?

continued from page 13

As noted, actual sales in 1992 totaled 4.0 million. They should total 5.0 million in 2012 (based on results through July). Population went from 257 million to 313 million during this period.

Note that the home sales figure combines the data for existing home sales with the data for sales of new homes. Existing home sales data are from the National Realtors Association, who kindly dug out the old data for us. The new home sales data is from the Census Bureau. It's worth noting that existing home sales account for a pretty stable majority of all home sales in all years, pretty much regardless of the state of the economy or the state of the housing market. (The data for new home sales is defined and collected differently than the data for existing home sales, so the percentage of all home sales that are existing homes is a little squishy, but using the data we have, it's consistently about 85%.)

Note that the argument that the housing market recovered in 2012 has nothing to do with the cost or affordability of buying a home (home prices, interest rates, household income). We're just looking at the number of homes sold, and the number of people. (And the numbers work out almost exactly the same if you use the number of households rather than the number of people.)

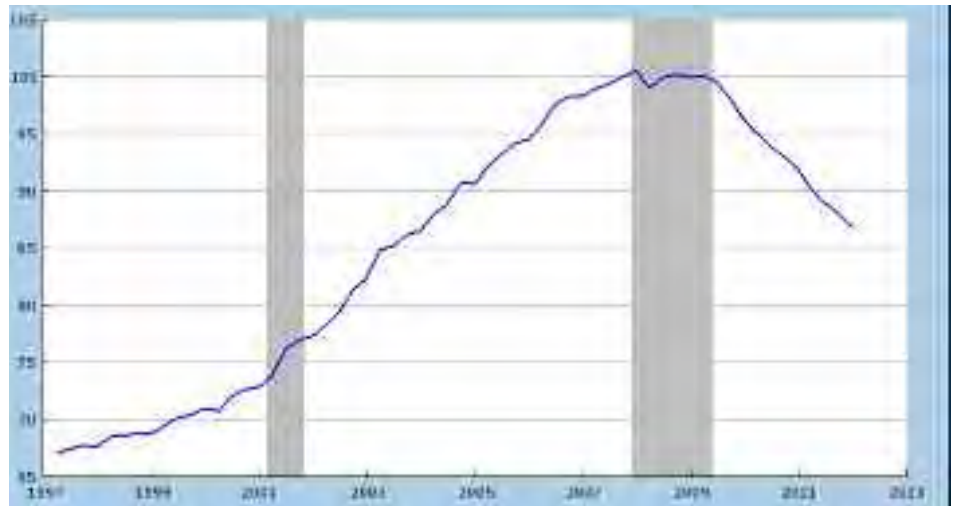
However – and you knew that was

coming, right? – the thing about that ratio between the number of people and the number of homes sold is that it's not smooth. Yes, it goes really high as the housing bubble builds, but it does so by way of a couple of plateaus. It plateaus in 1993-95 at an index of around 108-110. Then it climbs to another plateau in 1998-2001 at around 135-139. It then climbs steadily until 2005, when it peaks at 180. In each of the following three years (2006-2008) it sees a double-digit decline, followed by a smaller decline in 2009 before it hits bottom in 2010-2011, at an index of 93. Then it ticks up (or at least it looks like it will tick

up, based on results through July) to 102 in 2012.

So the question is, what's "normal"? Clearly, the height of the bubble isn't normal. But was it the plateau of 1993-1995 that was "normal" rather than 1992? In that case, the index hasn't quite recovered. It's at 95 in 2012. But if home sales grow in 2013 as quickly as they're growing now (just over 10% annually), then we'll get back to normal next year, with the index hitting 104.

But then there's that other plateau, in 1998-2001. If that's "normal," then we still



Source: FRED (Federal Reserve Economic Data) database, produced by The Federal Reserve Bank of St. Louis (<http://research.stlouisfed.org/fred2/>).

Notes: This graph plots "total liabilities of households and non-profit organizations" against Gross Domestic Product (GDP). The relationship is expressed as a percentage detailed along the vertical axis. Shaded areas indicate recessions. That is, the fact that liabilities were at 100 during the last recession indicates that they were equal to 100% of – that is, they were equal to – GDP.



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have a long way to go. If the index is set to 1998-2001 equals 100, then 2012 is coming in at 75, and a 10% increase in home sales in 2013 will only raise it to 82.

One way of assessing the validity of using any of these three plateaus as “normal” is to look at the value they produce in 2005, the year that home sales peaked. If 1992 was normal, then the peak of the housing market was 80% too high. That is, there were surprisingly close to twice as many homes changing hands as was warranted by underlying real demand. That seems improbable to us. If the 1993-1995 plateau was normal, then the peak of the market was 67% too high. If 1998-2002 was normal, then the peak of the market was 32% too high. Take your pick. Between these two, we prefer 67%, meaning we think the housing market is close to fully recovered now, and projected to completely recover in 2013, with sales of 5.5 million homes.

Or you can split the difference, and say that the peak of the housing market was 50% too high, in which case the index is at 85 now, with projections of 93 in 2013. If home sales continue to grow at 10% a year in 2014, then the market will reach full recovery then, with an index of 102, at sales of 6.1 million homes.

So it's this year or next. Or maybe the year after that. It depends on what you think is normal. But in any event it's here or coming soon. “Coming to a market near you” we'd like to say, but of course the recovery of the economy, and of home sales, has had significant regional variation. You can do the math for your region. Just contact the National Realtors Association for your state and ask for the data on existing home sales, and check the Census data for new home sales and population growth.

As I said, whether the housing market gets back to “normal” depends on what you define as normal, but it also depends on home sales continuing to grow – in our projections at 10% annually.

That depends on the overall economic recovery, and this recovery has been so slow that it's tested our way of thinking about



how to handle a recession/recovery. The whole thing is usually over in two years, but we're five years into this one, and although the economy is growing it's not grown enough to assume its pre-recession projected output. That is, the recession is over, but the economy is depressed. And that's unusual.

What we find the most convincing explanation of why the economy is moribund is one of the simplest: people just owe too much money. If that's what's holding back the economy, there's some good news. Household debt is falling. People have been paying back what they owe, or walking away from it through foreclosure. As shown in the graph, in 2003 total household debt equaled 80% of GDP. It climbed to 100% on the eve of the last recession. It started dropping in 2009. It's down to about 86% now. (It won't get back to 80% until about 2014, but it doesn't have to get that low for consumers to start spending again; there's nothing magic about 80%.)

So we're expecting that the recovery of the economy will slowly accelerate. And more specifically, that home sales will reach more than six million by 2014, which we're calling a complete recovery any way you look at it.

Unless of course Congress does go ahead and raise taxes, and cut spending, on January 1...



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Arzu Studio Hope

Embracing Social Responsibility

By Jack Maier

Arzu Studio Hope is a rug company producing hand-woven rugs in Afghanistan. It's also a 501 (c) 3 non-profit (in the USA) and an NGO providing social services (in Afghanistan). It's also a "for benefit" corporation – as opposed to a "for profit" corporation – and a "social business enterprise." It fits into several categories, but doesn't fit into any of them neatly.

That's because it's something new.

Arzu was conceived in 2002 in the mind of Connie Duckworth, a retired financier, while she was on her way home from her first trip to Afghanistan, which she had visited as a member of the U.S.-Afghan Women's Council. While there she had seen the desperate conditions under which so many women and children were living.

When we think of the solutions financiers are likely to propose in the face of human catastrophe, we're likely to remember something about rising tides and boats. And frankly, as our economy creeps along, we're skeptical. And yet Duckworth's solution, Arzu, came out of the same juxtaposition of public need and private practice.

Arzu would function as an economically sustainable economic enterprise – as does a company that produces goods at a profit – but would operate for the benefit of the communities in which it was located. More specifically, it would operate to improve the lives of women in these communities, and the underlying economic enterprise would be the weaving of rugs, an activity in which so many of the women in these communities were already engaged.

"Arzu" means "hope" in Dari, the *lingua franca* of Afghanistan.

Making Rugs and Doing Good

Arzu offers its weavers a bonus of up to 50% for meeting Arzu's quality standards. To be an Arzu weaver, a weaver and her family must have signed a social contract with Arzu. That contract has three main provisions. First, the family must send all its children to school. The family must also "release" its adult women for literacy training. Finally, the family must "release"

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its pregnant women and newborns for pre- and post-natal medical care.

It's important to note the distinction here. Arzu's rug making operation pays a quality premium. The premium induces families to sign the social contract. But – conceptually if not practically – the rug making operation is not responsible for providing education or healthcare.

Arzu both provides some of these services itself, and assists the weavers and their children to access services available from the Afghan government or foreign aid agencies. But it does so in its capacity as an NGO doing social work in Afghanistan, rather than in its capacity as a rug producer. This is what makes it possible for Arzu to think in terms of a rug operation that is economically self-sustaining.

Arzu conducts a variety of programs in the villages in which it operates that are external to, but work in harmony with, the rug making program. It's built women's community centers and homes. It has a low-tech water purification program. It's established a park. These are all special projects that take place outside of the rug production program, and are paid for with donations raised outside Afghanistan.

Arzu addresses the issues of employment, education and healthcare, which it sees as interdependent. Its rug production process directly addresses the first by providing consistent employment at a premium wage.

Arzu addresses the issues of employment, education and healthcare, which it sees as interdependent.

The same wage premium induces families to take advantage of education and healthcare opportunities.

This fundamental distinction between Arzu's rug production activities and its social activities is one of the

most important aspects of the work Arzu is doing in Afghanistan. If we keep the two activities conceptually separate, the Arzu model allows us – and more importantly, the weavers and their families – to see what is possible with a rug production process that pays a higher wage.

Because weavers are in short supply throughout the rug weaving world, and because Afghanistan, perhaps uniquely, has weavers who are unemployed and



Right: With the generous support of funding from Beyond the 11th, ARZU constructed a playground at the ARZU Community Garden.

Opposite: While their mothers harvest vegetables or attend apprenticeship training at the Community Garden, children make friends and share laughter at the ARZU.

Photos by Sgt. Ken Scar, 7th Mobile Public Affairs Detachment.



Top: An ARZU STUDIO HOPE weaver and her family sit in front of their loom with a rug in progress.

Right: ARZU STUDIO HOPE weavers reference a graph as they hand-knot a rug on the loom in their home. Photos by Thomas Lee

ready to return to the looms, it's likely that wages of weavers in Afghanistan will rise. Weaving as practiced under the Arzu umbrella gives weavers – especially weavers in villages in which Arzu does not yet operate – a sense of what their life will be like when their wages go up. Arzu thus demonstrates the advantages that can flow from change.

Afghanistan has a “traditional” culture. “It” is resistant to change. “Change” in this context includes sending daughters to school and pregnant women to doctors. “Change” in this context means women have more influence in the family, that what they want has more weight, that things will evolve in ways that they see as more just. It's difficult to avoid the generalization that the men are more resistant to change while the women are more open to it. Arzu offers the men as well as the woman in the family of the weaver advantages in exchange for accepting change.

It's fair to point out that under the Arzu program the impetus for change is the link between the rise in wages and the acceptance of change, and that, in a world in which wages of weavers rise because of a shortage of weavers, that will not be the case. But it's equally fair to point out that by living under change – with higher wages, greater use of educational and health-care services, and an enhanced status for women – villagers are able to judge how threatening (or not) such change is. If experience around the world over the last century is any indication, men and women in Afghanistan are more likely to find themselves more nearly on the same page regarding change than they thought they were.

Arzu's Rug Production Program

Since 2004, when it began operating in Afghanistan, Arzu's rug production program has completed two distinct phases, and has now begun a third phase. The first phase (roughly 2004-2008) focused on the supply side. It was when Arzu established its footprint on the ground. It signed up weavers and trained people to assure quality. (It also engaged in various activities to provide access to social services. We'll look at these in the next section of this article.) The goal was to “ramp up” the number of weavers to a critical mass. Arzu now has between 600 and 700 weavers in three villages in Bamyān Province.

The second phase (roughly 2009-2012) focused on the demand side. Until this time, Arzu had sold the rugs made in Afghanistan through special events of one kind or another – including trunk sales – and through its website. During this phase Arzu worked on increasing sales. It recruited a select group of high end retailers. It promoted its rugs to the architectural and design communities. The idea was to increase sales, so as to increase the number of weavers (and draw down inventory).

In its recently-begun third phase, Arzu is concentrating more on balancing supply and demand.



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Practically, this has a lot in common with the second phase, in that efforts to establish Arzu rugs in the marketplace continue unabated. But whereas the goal in the second phase was simply to grow sales, the goal in this third phase is more to balance production and sales.

In the UK, a group of graduates of Saïd Business School at Oxford University is launching OxEthica, a company that will distribute Arzu rugs in the UK – from shops in Oxford and London – with the intention of expanding distribute throughout the European Community.

Arzu's Community Development Programs

As noted above, Arzu and participating families enter into a social contract. Families agree to send to school full-time all children, of both sexes, who are under 15. They further agree to allow all women in the household to attend Arzu literacy classes. Finally, they agree to permit Arzu to transport pregnant women and newborns to clinics for pre- and post-natal care, as well as transport women in labor to hospitals for delivery.

Since most girls are behind educational attainment for their age, Arzu funds "fast track" classes to bring them up to speed so they can be mainstreamed with others of their age at a government school. For grown women, Arzu also conducts education classes in the village that cover literacy, basic numeracy and subjects including health, hygiene, nutrition and human rights.

Arzu's healthcare initiative focuses on child-birth. Afghanistan has one of the highest rates of maternal death (women who die giving birth) in the world. The care pregnant women need to lower the maternal death rate is available at clinics and hospitals, yet women in Afghanistan traditionally give birth at home. Arzu sees that women in families that have signed a social contract are taken to clinics for pre-natal care, are taken to a hospital for delivery, and that they and their babies are taken to clinics for post-natal care. With this program, Arzu has lowered the maternal death rate to zero among the families it serves.

The childbirth program is an example of the successful implementation of social change. In a culture in which women have traditionally given birth in obscurity, and at risk to themselves and their babies, Arzu has introduced specific changes that have reset the process. It's worth asking how.

Part of the success of the program is that Arzu's employees presented the goal to the community, and then arrived – through a process in which those affected by the change could take the lead – at a procedure to achieve that goal. Critical to the success of that process is that all Arzu employees in Afghanistan are Afghans, all drawn from the community.

Predictably, given this process, the solution respects local cultural norms. For example, because the women are transported in closed vehicles and are always

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Left: In 2011, ARZU piloted an alternative housing project using Superadobe construction. Superadobe uses locally sourced materials including to construct houses that are impervious to floods, fires and earthquakes. A Superadobe home is 1/3 the cost to construct that homes made from concrete, stone or wood.

Right: In 2010, ARZU piloted a biosand water filter production apprenticeship. Women were trained to construct these filters through the apprenticeship program.

accompanied by chaperones, their modesty is not compromised. The idea is that Arzu framed the issue in terms of universal values – the health of pregnant women and their babies – rather than in specifically western values.

Arzu undertakes community development projects outside those specified in the social contract it has with weavers' families.

One such project addresses the issue of clean drinking water. Arzu has enabled women in the villages in which it operates to build low-tech but effective filtration devices that are installed at places accessible to the public, such as government building and mosques.

Another project is the construction of women's community centers. The centers provide women with stall showers, a laundry room with warm water, rooms for meetings such as the literacy classes, and a two-story loom room for weaving rugs larger than those that

can be woven in the home. Arzu has one such center in operation and has virtually completed building a second.

Arzu is also pioneering the use of "super adobe" construction in Bamyan province. This involves constructing buildings out of flexible plastic tubes filled with mud. The tubes are stacked (typically to form a circular space), bound together with barbed wire, and then stuccoed. After completing the construction of three trial buildings, Arzu has begun the construction of the first dozen

or so homes. In the area in which Arzu is building these homes, there are some 300 families living in caves (a pervasive problem in a country that has endured decades of war).

The clean water project, the women's community centers and the "super adobe" construction project are all examples of Arzu projects that are funded with donations, and proceed outside of the rug production project.

This narrative only sketches what Arzu does. Arzu's philosophy and activities are described in detail on its website, www.arzustudiohope.org. We encourage readers to visit the site.

Please send comments and criticism to: jack.maier@rugnewsanddesign.com.



Damian A. Tuggey, ASID, Tuggey Interior Design San Diego, CA

WHEN DO YOU CHOOSE THE FLOOR COVERING?

In my projects, flooring materials and area rugs are often chosen early in the project and all fabrics and colors are determined based on the selection of the rugs for each room.

WHEN DOES COLOR ENTER THE PLAN?

Color enters the plan early as the selection of flooring materials, tile, paint colors are needed long before the decorative finishing phase of the project.

WHAT MARKETS OR DESIGN CENTERS DO YOU REGULARLY ATTEND?

I go to High Point, Los Angeles, and Laguna last week.

HOW OFTEN DO YOU PURCHASE A CUSTOM RUG AND WHY?

I rarely purchase a custom rug, because it takes so long to arrive and is so high risk. I prefer to find a rug and try it in the space.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE STYLE OR FIBER?

Always hand tufted wool. I love reproductions of antiques such as Haji Jalili when the budget can afford it

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE SOURCE FOR YOUR AREA RUGS?

I use Outrageous Rugs in San Diego. They are an honest and quality supplier of all types of rugs in all sizes and price points. If they don't have what I want they find it for me.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE IN THE INDUSTRY?

Try to stay ahead of what is happening with color in design in the US, so that you are not behind the trend trying to create rugs after the look or color direction is popular.



“

*Always hand
tufted wool*

”

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Robin W. Carrier, ASID

Robin Wilson Interior Design, San Diego, CA

WHAT MARKETS OR DESIGN CENTERS DO YOU ATTEND REGULARLY?

The Pacific Design Center in Los Angeles is a favorite, as well as the Merchandise Mart in Chicago. Any chance we can get to New York, we'll take it. The D&D building and the New York Design Center are fantastic.

WHEN DO YOU CHOOSE THE FLOOR COVERING AND PLAN THE COLORS?

When we first begin to work on a project, we will provide mood images to a client based on an initial conversation with the client about the ideals for their space. These mood images consist of a concept package, showing a few "big picture" concept photos, photos, and/or sketches showing style of millwork, cutsheets showing furnishings style, images showing appropriate interior architectural details to evoke that mood, and color inspiration by way of some finishes and fabrics.

Once the concept has been approved, we further develop the design by presenting flooring options such as carpet and hard surfaces like wood and stone.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE SOURCE FOR YOUR AREA RUGS?

Depends on the project/client we are working with. We have worked with artisans out of New Zealand, however, we really enjoy working with The Rug Company out of L.A. and AJA out of San Diego.

The reason we look to incorporate area rugs in our projects is that they are a great way to provide texture, and this "layering" of materials creates depth in a design palette.

DO YOU HAVE A FAVORITE STYLE OR FIBER?

Favorite style is definitely customized to each client's preferences. Whether it's working with an established pattern and customizing the color, or if it's working with a design that is created for the client. I receive the most joy from our work when it speaks to the personality of the client.

DO YOU HAVE ANY SUGGESTIONS FOR THOSE IN THE INDUSTRY?

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