

December 2020

RUG NEWS and Design

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Rug News Magazine
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To keep up with lifestyle changes, go to www.rugnewsanddesign.com for shared content, knowledge and past articles.
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Creativity Spawns Creativity

In the fall of 2014, a Cubism exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of Art featured 80 works by Fernand Leger, Pablo Picasso, George Braque and Juan Gris; all were friends. I walked through 7 galleries, experiencing the chronological evolution of cubism. Four friends had pushed each other to his own next iteration of cubism. They delighted in each other's imagination. They bested each other with yet another way to break apart reality into cubes! And so the cubism art movement came to be. Cubism was a visual conversation amongst friends!

I think that is the way creativity works; one idea begets another idea. To me Liora Manne is one of the most creative designers in the rug business. I come away from a meeting with her, with my brain exploding. I started to write an article about Liora Manne's Lamontage fabric which has moved from the floor to ceilings. One of her installations is in the lobby of 260 Franklin Street, Boston. She introduced me to Sara Egan.

Sara Egan is a collaborative artist; she works with architects, designers, and craftsmen. Together they fundamentally tame large spaces to create a total environment. Talking with Sara and Liora one is delighted by the enthusiasm they have for each other's skills. I remember when Liora moved her studio from the West side near the Hudson River to the D&D Building on

3rd Avenue, she said her creative juices were spiked just by being in close proximity with other creative minds. Riding the elevator was an experience!

To me a well-designed space is often more exciting than a single canvas. So many of the products of creative minds come together to create a whole environment. A good interior designer is not unlike a conductor of an orchestra. In another article in this magazine, Stress and Sanity in the Time of Covid-19, Ann Shriver Sargent talks about how her relationship with her vendors is fundamental to the success of a project. Here again the designer, Ann, sees her creativity realized because of the skills of others.

And so here is another reason, Rug News Magazine became Rug News and-Design. Design is the whole; rugs contribute to the design. Unless the rug is the stand-alone piece of artwork itself; which often it is.

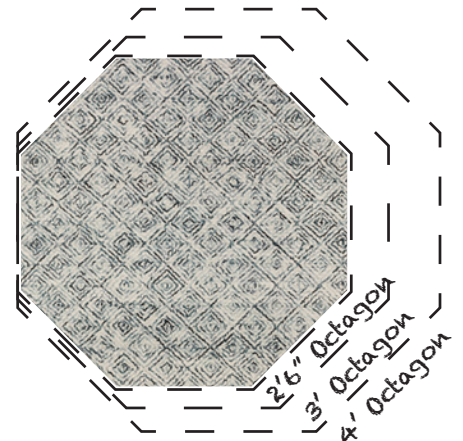
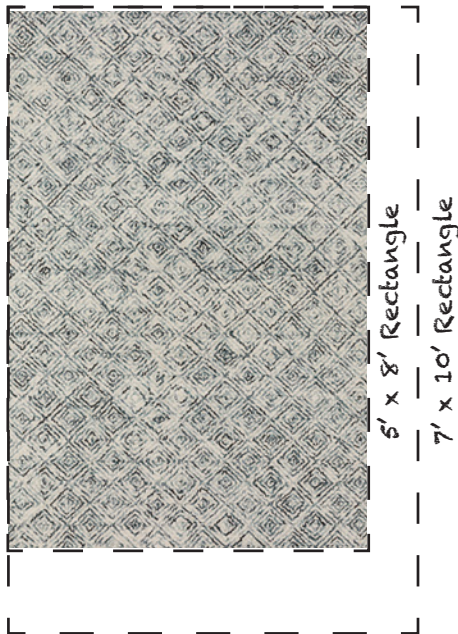
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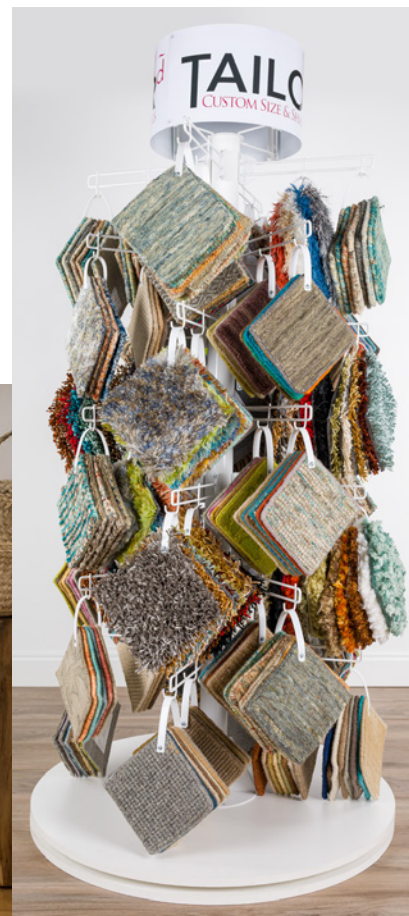
1 :fashioned or fitted to resemble a tailor's work

2 :CUSTOM-MADE

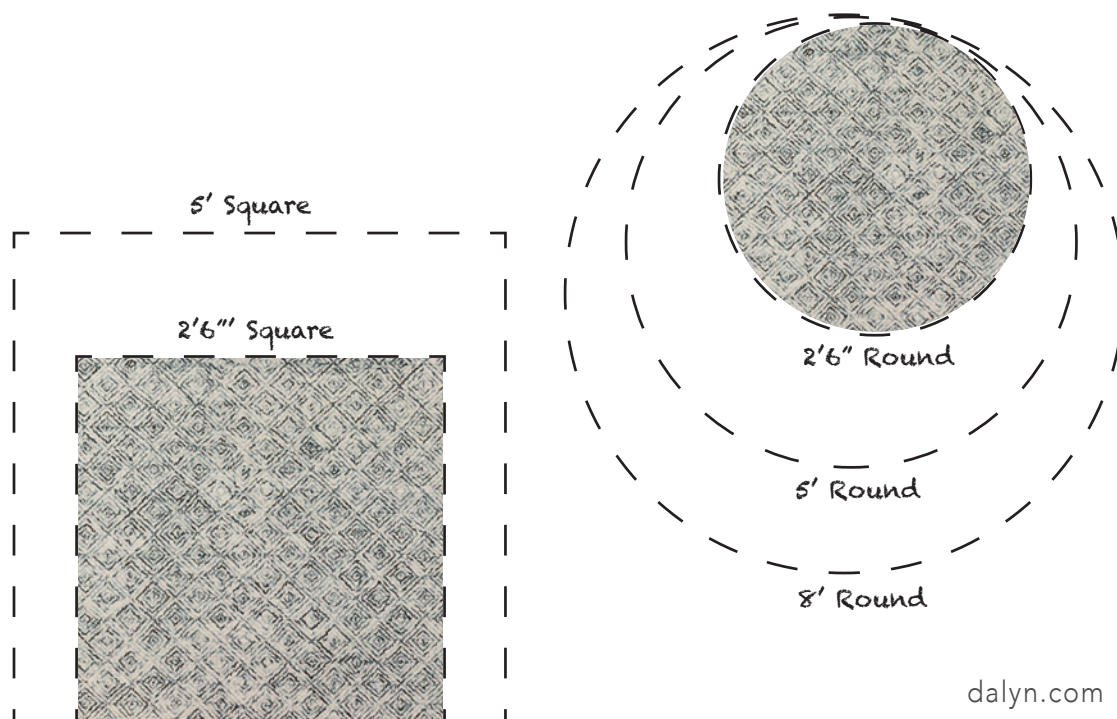
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Observations

Change is not a choice. The Pandemic is a great disrupter. Some of the changes being made are positive. Zoom and the like are here to stay and increase sales rep to client productivity. At the vendor company level we see a lot of experimentation in format, content, and inter-relationships between online and in print that we explore in this issue.

Shifting from in-person to video shifts face time to production time in the back office.

Michael Ackelbein, an old friend who came into and has recently left the business of rugs to sell commercial contract goods, answered some questions in writing to clarify some concerns that I had about B2B marketing and sales territory management. I am most appreciative of his comments in "Marketing Management".

The key insight was that the original target market is finding a vendors top 100 brick and mortar markets and finding the top customers within those markets without cannibalizing those markets. For retailers in those markets I would take the process one step further and manage inventory based on the

top 10 sellers from any one vendor and carry the balance on a drop ship basis.

Between the columns of text, I have explored "Visual Marketing" using illustrations from RMinno's (disclosure: advertiser) RMmarketconnect.com.



From the retailer to designer, the way I read the market, the days of deep stocks and flipping piles are over. Also, from the way I read the market programmed knotted rugs are coming back, not so much at the high end, but at a more affordable price point.

Hand knotted rugs are a touch and feel product and are not competing to be a value at under \$200 per piece. Make no mistake there are some very good looking rugs online at under \$200 per piece, but few brick and mortar retailers have the foot traffic compared to online eyeballs to generate the gross margins needed to support a business dependent on that retail price point.

There has been enough experimentation with kiosk sales to know that samples plus

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A Conversation with Michael Ackelbein

by Leslie Stroh

Michael Ackelbein and I have been talking about selling for more than six years, ever since he came to the rug business from selling to the architectural/specifier market. Sometimes he has been an advertiser, and sometimes not, depending on the strategy for the company he was working for at the time.

He is now back selling to architects/specifiers of large projects. Our conversations have continued. The COVID-19 Pandemic is a wrinkle on the fundamentals in the short run and a reorganization of the selling process in the long run.

My **(LS)** initial question and where this conversation started was “What do retailers need from vendors? And then “What do vendors need from retailers?”

From Michael Ackelbein **(MA)**:

(MA) The short answer is to be less emotional and more data driven when it comes to vendor relationships. Find the best partners in each market and leverage higher volume with limited distribution and superior marketing resources to elevate partners and create brand loyalty. I believe we are both looking for the same thing—more margin, best-in-class marketing, and to work with people that are easy to do business with. The residential market can at times be too focused on “pretty”, but in my opinion they should be more focused on the value proposition and competition in each product segment. A back-to-basics approach of using “feature, advantage, benefit” selling will likely yield better results.

This sounds easy but this process is time consuming but well worth the effort. I jokingly refer to this as the marriage model vs. the dating model.

(LS) How can the vendor organize sales territories and their sales force to service retailers in offering new goods and following up on relationships in response to Covid-19?

(MA) I have never been a fan of markets (coming from the Contract world where we had only one, 3

Vendor to Consumer

RMinno Market Connect is a new B2B advertiser. Their “new arrivals” section will help us with managing “Walking the Market”, a signature on line section of rugnewsanddesign.com.



From Kas: Hamptons’ Highview and Madison patterns in blue and aqua colorways were on display in this summer’s Hampton Designer Showhouse where Libby designed the large outdoor terrace and pool deck areas. Made in China with a 1/2” pile height

New Arrivals from Dalyn: Thurston Collection features a woven polypropylene and polyester blended construction.



From Feizy: The Cosmo Collection is a hand tufted viscose rug hiding a surprise...a jacquard rug on the back!



umer to Retailer



From Oriental Weavers: Breathe new life into any indoor or outdoor space with the vibrantly beautiful hues of Meridian.

From Karastan: A chic contemporary collection of artistically inspired area rugs brings beautiful color to your home with Karastan's Bespoke Collection, artisan hand-knotted with a blend of luxurious wool and silk yarn,



day show per year), then going to a show schedule of 30 days or more per year, where vendors spend hundreds of thousands of dollars and tie up nearly all their internal resources for months throughout the year. All of this for a few minutes of time from a buyer or designer that will be visiting 10 other brands that day. This has got to be the highest customer acquisition cost of all time! I get that this was beneficial in the past when people placed stock orders, but we all know that the behavior has changed, and we now live in a JIT world. I would much prefer to invest the time, energy, and financial resources into a pursuit marketing plan, which allows you to spend quality time with all your key customers in a manner that allows you to listen and learn. It is as important with new business development, so you can invest time connecting with the prospective clients where you best align to your strength and where you can offer the most value to the client.

Covid19 has likely changed markets for at least two years if not forever. Having spent nearly one hundred hours on zoom calls in the past two months, I can tell you that it is a very effective communication tool which allows me to qualify prospects and build relationships much faster and more efficiently than solely being on the road. The key is to have a tailored visual presentation for each meeting. A mix of face-to-face and teleconference is a worthwhile plan that I will utilize full time moving forward. I suggest that the mid to affluent focused retailers embrace the design community in a more collaborative manner. It's only logical since designers are in high demand but are challenged with physically showing product and have a high servicing cost structure. Retailers have a high-cost operational structure with a diminishing customer base. Both parties should get in a room and hammer out a deal that offers a smart user-friendly alternative to the ecommerce model which falls apart with the more affluent customer and higher end goods. However, over the past 3 years I visited more than 75 to-the-trade designer showrooms who are busier than ever and concluded that this is the most important sales channel for a manufacturer of luxury goods. These companies are extremely valuable to the accomplished designers, offer a high service level, but lack marketing expertise. In my opinion Manufacturers that lean into this channel with automated marketing tools and analytics will achieve their sales goals. A well-conceived plan with revenue sharing can make all the difference in this channel.

(LS) As I review my notes, I am struck by the key issue is not what to do, but how to pay for it. Paying for human interaction means putting margin in the goods that are to be sold that will pay for the cost of selling those goods.

(MA) I believe that you can pay for this by utilizing technology to reduce operating & marketing

costs. Establishing KPI's (measure and manage) and holding your sales & marketing teams accountable. Throughout most of my career it is only the sales teams that are held accountable, but that can be a costly mistake. In my experience companies that better align marketing to sales are more successful.

(LS) At one time, maybe pre-2008, the primary sales technique for profitably selling middle market hand knotted goods was 50% to 80% off. That strategy might suggest that the goods were overpriced to begin with.

(MA) I think we can all agree that the customer behavior has changed forever, and they no longer fall for this archaic sales tactic. I think that this is especially true with luxury goods that are being sold by the designer, who is generally focused more on the look and not the margin. One strategy might be to help the designer with lowering their operational costs.

(LS) I think that we have settled on the key point in selling rugs: Margin. Everybody has to get paid, and those payments come out of margin at every level of distribution.

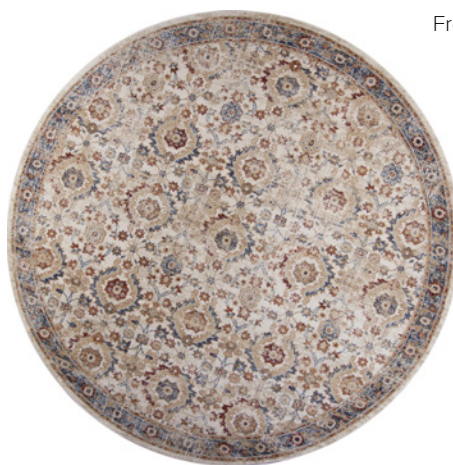
(MA) The new informed customer research everything that they buy. I suggest to you that the industry would be better served by focusing their efforts on content and education to a targeted affluent demographic. More images, product comparisons, etc., and liken to the purchase of high-end watch, automobile. and fine art.

(LS) With thousands of designs in the market, few of them truly ugly how does retailer get protection against the Internet. Twenty years ago, at the start of Internet online sales, Jaunty made a commitment that the Jaunty brand would not be on the Internet.

(MA) With the success of Wayfair and their to-the-trade platform it would be short-sided to ignore this channel. One strategy might be to offer a specific price point segment in only their trade channel that is between \$2,000 - \$4,000 retail (8'x 10') above what most furniture retail focusses on and under what the physical to-the-trade dealers are successful with.

(LS) While the retailer needs protection, the vendor needs exclusivity or at least relative exclusivity at each price point. Each retail territory is location and price point driven and needs to be balanced against population and buying power. Managing a territory at this level is managing the accessibility to benefit the retailer. For the retailer, managing the product availability and margin on behalf of the designer is managing the relationship of the sales agency services that the designer/design firm provides.

(MA) I learned the hard way that you cannot be in



From Dynamic Rugs: Ancient Garden combines traditional classic Persian patterns with an updated fresh modern look. Using a sophisticated color palette, focusing on antique shades and intricate design details.

"New Arrivals" from Dalyn: The Addison Nolita collections offers hand crafted 100% wool area rugs with a unique modern dyed tone on tone colors for today's lifestyle.





From Nourison: The colors of our Montego collection were inspired by the fresh, bright hues of nature. The collection offers a modern twist on classic design and new colors update traditional outdoor decor.



From KAS: Keep it trendy outdoors or brighten up the indoors with one of our finely-crafted Harbor rugs, hand-hooked in China of UV-treated polypropylene.

From Dynamic Rugs: The captivating colors in our Patio collection make it ideal as an exuberant indoor/outdoor area rug.



every market. You need to be laser focused on the top 100 markets which are not always easy to find unless you utilize technology and big data. This is especially true when it comes to locating to-the-trade dealers. I've found that the best markets for luxury products are not where you would expect. They are in small enclaves of wealth with a very loyal customer base where service is more important than price.

(LS) What is becoming known as main street commercial is smaller orders, less labor intensive, adapted from existing stock goods in generally a custom size made from existing broadloom. That business can be up to 30% of a retail merchant's business. The growth of main street custom is highlighting a disadvantage of flooring stores who have difficulty merchandising rugs. How can that market be addressed?

(MA) The commercial A&D community has been slow to discover and utilize the OAK(1-kind or one of a kind) handmade segment primarily due to their lack of connectivity to the sellers and manufacturers reps not knowing how to court this audience. It's a completely difference world and the sales reps and marketing teams of most brands have no experience with this specifying channel. First of all, these designers do not procure product. Most often they specify and then send to commercial furniture dealers who also have almost zero connectivity to the rug manufacturers. I do have a solution but then we would be getting into unpaid consulting. LOL.

(LS) Last but not least Michael Ackelbein pointed out that the sampling operation and the customer service desk were critical to relationship building between seller and buyer. It has been clear to Rug News and Design, that once the price to the consumer is above base price on the internet, the value of the human interface has to be included in the margin. It is also clear to Rug News and Design that the brick-and-mortar distribution channel that has survived the onslaught of the Internet can survive at upscale price points and adapt even more to the new environment with a brick and click commerce server approach beyond social media.

(MA) I've met with hundreds of retailers and to the trade dealers and the conversation has changed dramatically in the past 2 years. In most cases the retailers and trade dealers no longer feel intimidated by ecommerce when it comes to luxury products. They recite customer horror stories about delivery. ☹



Continued from page 8

design presentation will work in a reduced inventory environment. The amount of inventory still in the hands of old time retailers is still counted in billions of dollars.

The human to human element for complex sales is still a key factor in upscale selling. Touch and feel is a complex sale. Fiber still matters, particularly for indoor/outdoor and performance. Cameron Feizy has tagged their rugs as dog (and child) friendly = performance) and handmade. The tags are simple, graphic, and most of all they communicate with transparency.

I have always been struck by how hard it is to read and understand hang tags and yet we want the consumer in the retail store to shop by herself. My personal pet peeve is the sales person who goes up to the hang tag to look for the answer to a question. This also happens at wholesale.

As this is being written Covid-19 cases are surging nationwide. This will have an impact on person to person contact. We like everyone else will have to turn to technology as a communications enhancement tool in upscale touch and feel marketing B2B as well as B2C. Virtual marketing in conjunction with existing social media will become a new normal.

With the surge in Covid-19 cases and deaths, I am pessimistic about

market participation despite the excellent job IMCenters has done in protecting vendors and attendees. The vaccine will help, but after the euphoria around the announcements of developing successful vaccines, a reality of effective distribution is becoming apparent. I am modifying my planning horizon from all of 2021 to possibly 4th quarter 2021, although I expect masking to be necessary for a yet-to-be awhile afterward.

The producing countries are not immune from the Pandemic. Supplies are erratic throughout the supply chain. Container space can be difficult to find. Internet sales are booming. Upscale sales are strong. The shift in communication strategies is extending beyond influencers in social media.

The picture at the head of this column is one of windswept leaves on my lawn shows a random pattern as do the other pictures. It is truly difficult to create a random pattern distribution by hand so I took this picture and a few others to record randomness. Rug patterns are rarely random, symmetric and asymmetric yes, random no.

Inside joke: a rug retailer with trade experience submitted an order to a sales rep for a vendor of prominence for an 11 foot round rug. The response from the sales rep was basically; we can't place your order because you did not supply the length required. ☹



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


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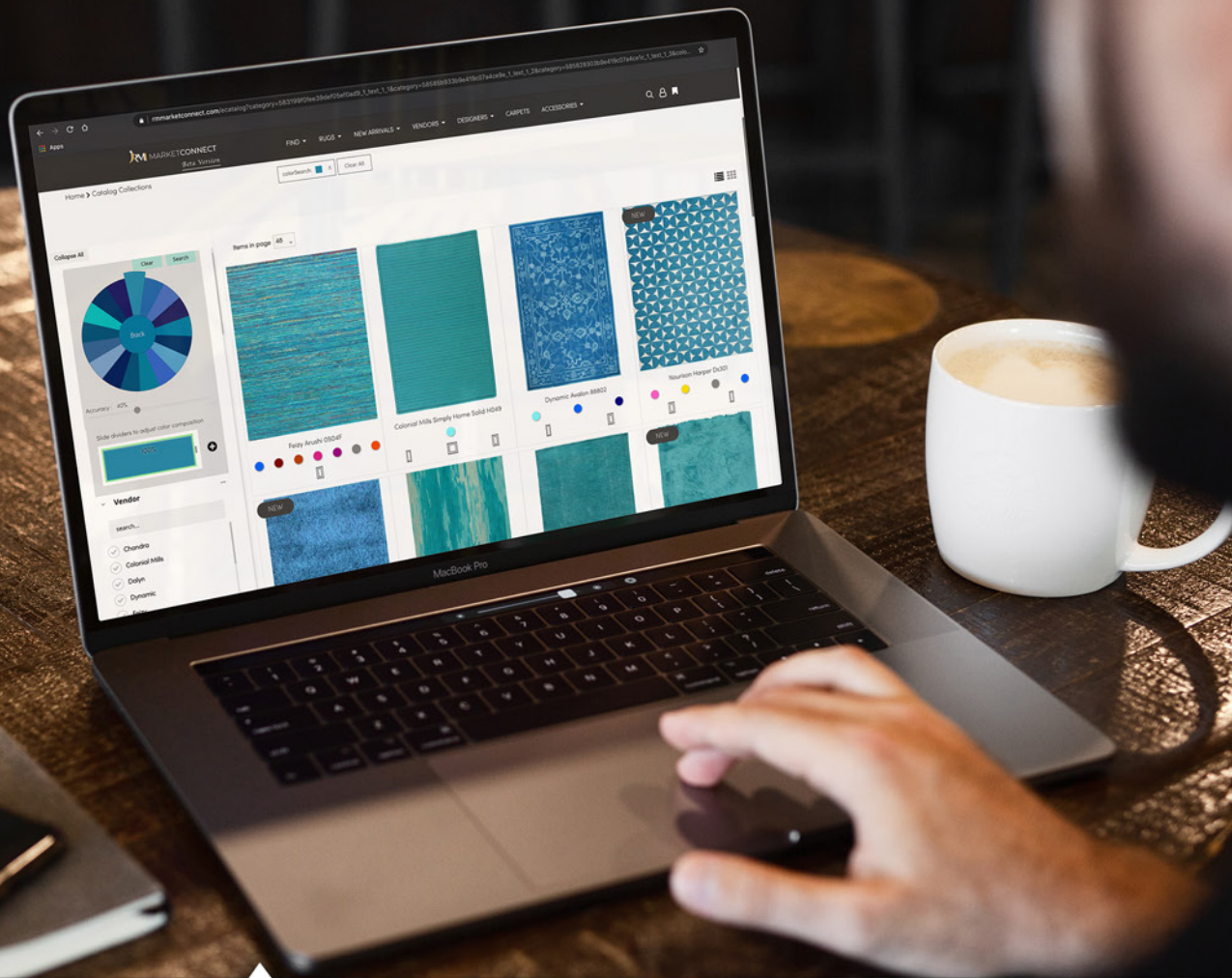
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Walking the Market



This is the Karina Collection from Feizy, hand-knotted in 100% wool. The collection's abash blue-grays and lavenders paired with rust and cyan create a sophisticated feminine color pallet. Organic floral medallions are surrounded by a strong border in these Oushak designs with a delightful color twist.

Rug News and Design experimented at the October 2020 High Point Market. Sarah Stroh Thornton visited 14 showrooms in three and one half days. Not every showroom she would have liked to visit was open. In those that she visited she both interviewed someone on camera and took pictures of rugs. This took about an hour and a half. This was the easy part.

Post production in all its forms takes about five hours more for each vendor. She was on deadline to put together a webinar on Walking the Market for IMCenters the two days after she returned. She presented over 100 rugs from 14 vendors in an 80 minute webinar. She is now in an editing process of vendor interviews and out-take clips from interviews.

I have looked at most of the raw footage. I have learned more about many vendors' product lines than I did walking the market without the discipline of the camera. It is a very expensive, yet comprehensive way to cover a market. The problem I see is one of buyers dedicating 1 hour of time to a variety of vendors, some of whom they do not know.

This article is an introduction to "Walking the Market" in print.

Walking the Market

These pictures were taken by Sarah Stroh Thornton at High Point during this fall's market as part of our project to do video interviews and produce a Walking the Market webinar. That webinar ran 80 minutes and featured about 100 rugs.

We have converted some of the pictures and out-takes from the videos for use in print in this issue. We had plenty of content but only about a dozen vendors.

In the past Walking the Market photo bloggers could see 60-80 vendors depending on markets, and quickly post them to rugnewsanddesign.com. The captions are interpretations of what we heard, or responses to questions we asked.

Continued on page 22

Shown are three new releases from Tamarian's ever expanding "Phoenix Weave Collection"; a highly textured, pure wool quality hand knotted in Nepal. New styles and colors were introduced including the design Longwood (top) and Sequin, below, shown here.



Kalora Orienta is a cotton machine woven rug with texture.



The Magical World of Interconnected Design and Levitating Rugs

Sophy Hotel Bar, Chicago, IL ceiling is by Lamontage

When I start an article, I am never sure where it will take me. And so, it was when I called my old friend, Liora Manne ostensibly to talk about what was happening in her world of rugs – any new installations, any new designs?

She developed Lamontage, a patented felted fabric, for floor coverings a number of years ago. It has been climbing walls for about ten years. But recently, Liora says it has been difficult to keep it on a mundane floor, as designers discover its flexibility and practicality. Lamontage can be upholstery, wall art, and ceiling fabric, separately or all together for a total statement. And it is easy to clean. When used on a dining room walls, it is a cinch to clean up the morning if a Cossack chorus happens to dance up and down the tables slamming emptied vodka glasses against the walls. No problem. Sponge with soap and water, and the room is ready for a bankers' luncheon.

Even the sky is not the limit. Liora says that when designers discover the flexibility of her rug fabric, their imaginations know no bounds. For instance, there are ocean waves on the ceiling of a Rhode Island restaurant.

The ceiling of The Break Hotel in Narragansett, RI is covered in the Lamontage Turquoise Ocean Wave. The room was designed by Digs Design Company.

And then she swept me visually into the recently completed Sophy, a boutique hotel near the University of Chicago. Liora's creations can be found on bedroom walls to enhance headboards, on the ceilings of the bar to create a comforting environment that invites the 2nd drink. It covers the walls of a private dining room, giving it the exclusive feel of a private club

I wanted to use the art from the bedroom wall for the cover of this magazine. But for a number of reasons, it didn't work.

"Will this work?" and Liora produced a picture of a massive felted wall covering. Perfect. She introduced me to Sara Egan of Sara Egan Studios

Sara Egan is an artist with the imaginative skill of transforming her art from canvas to a variety of mediums. Stantec Architects asked

her to create art depicting the "time between winter and spring." Anyone who has attempted a spring in Boston, knows this time is excruciatingly long with many broken promises: glimpses of spring only to be plunged back into the shoulder of the depressing winter of icy puddles and gray skies. It is a complex concept of hope mixed with despair/desire? This Winter-Spring theme was to be the centralizing





Captions left to right, top to bottom:

Original art transformed into a wall covering defines the king sized bed in the Sophy Hotel, Chicago, IL.

Close up of the felt layering process used to translate original art into the wall covering.

The 22' x 11.5' wall covering by Liora Manne for the 260 Franklin Street lobby started as art work by Sara Egan depicting the period between Winter and Spring in Boston.

An approved strike off covering before production began on the 253 square foot Lamontage wall cover.

18'x18' wall of layered plaster on the lobby wall of 260 Franklin Street, Boston

theme of the 2500-3000 square foot lobby of 260 Franklin Street in the Boston financial district. Sara was commissioned to create three separate artworks to be fabricated into glass, wall covering and Liora's Lamontage. The architects, Colleen Aria and Sarah Strang, were fascinated with the possibilities of creating images with the layered felt, because of its texture and handmade quality.

Choosing to create the initial artwork with colored plaster and wax on panel, Sara studied Bruegel's painting "Hunters in the snow" and Pissaro's paintings of snowy paths for composition and atmosphere. Her process of layering the colored plaster was not dissimilar to working with the felted fabric, although the layering is from the bottom up rather than the top down. Sara worked with Liora in her studio in the D&D Building in New York to get the right blending of colors. The two 12' x 5' glass panels and the 18' x 18' plaster wall covering were created in a similar way - first the art work, and then fabrication.

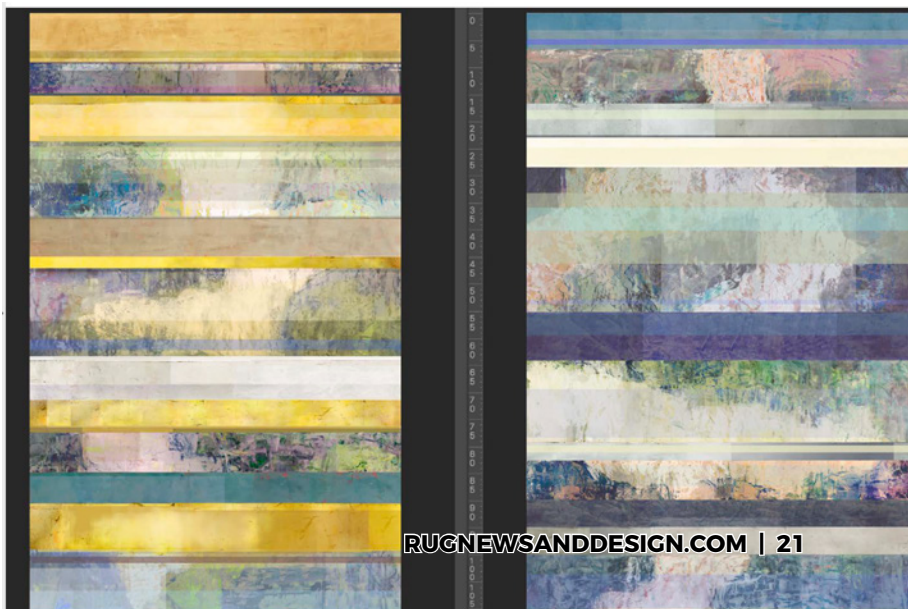
Sara's enthusiasm about her work is contagious. She looks at the world through a variety of mediums. Upon getting a graduate degree from the School of Fine Arts of the University of Pennsylvania, Sara needed money. Interior designers and architects began to ask her if she could solve problems through the application of her art to architectural elements. In order to pay the rent, she almost always, said "Sure." And she solved more and more problems. Today she has studios

both in New York and Cambridge. She works in paper, felt, metal, glass and original plaster panels.

As I was closing down the interview, she said, "And I have worked with rugs but in a completely different way. I work with Yayla. I met Chris because I love his rugs and as a side job I helped people pick up colors, rugs and fabrics."

To be continued in December – Sara Egan and Chris Walter of Yayla talk about working together. This is what happens when Liora Manne's rugs levitate off the floor. You never know where you are going to land. ☘

In each of the two elevator bays, in the 260 Franklin Street lobby, 12'x 5' glass panels repeat the Winter to Spring imagery.





"Pictured, is a detail of a 9'x12' rug woven by Patricia Lukas of Loominaries. The rug is woven utilizing cotton fabrics including denim, as well as outdoor fabrics, and is made in the USA.



Emily Addison, marketing and social media manager, shows Lilihan, a new collection of Wilton woven traditional rugs from Momeni. To the left is a new introduction in the Riviera Collection. This is an out-take from a video.



The Kingsley collection rug from Kalaty in the photo is an example of updated-traditional and abstract designs in modern fashion colors, power-loomed in a multi-textural high-low weave using a creative combination of Silkette™ and acrylic yarns. Bound by hand and finished by hand, this especially fine collection displays a knots-per-square-inch equivalent (620 KPSI) that would be nearly impossible to achieve in hand-knotted styles.



Collection of traditional designs from Dalyn shown on a rack including the "Amanti Collection" using their "Prismatic Color Processing System".



The two rugs shown on the rug rack are from Jaunty's Dublin Collection. These rugs are hand tufted using premium polyester yarn and synthetic backing to ensure long lasting durability for indoor & outdoor use, and are resilient to fading and can enhance the look of any living room, dining room or sunroom.



Hanging 9x12 traditional design rugs, Nourison showroom in High Point



Strada, itself, focuses on a more contemporary aesthetic, showcasing soft curves and linear forms which evoke a new school Art Deco vibe. Colorations work back to Andorra, Evolution and Atlas counterparts adding yet another layer to the coordination story within these collections

Strada patchwork design is part of 10 designs the collection. The Strada collection from Oriental Weavers is the latest addition to their best-selling Andorra, Evolution and Atlas collections. It utilizes the same revolutionary weaving technique that has made these collections so beautiful and unique examples of design and texture.



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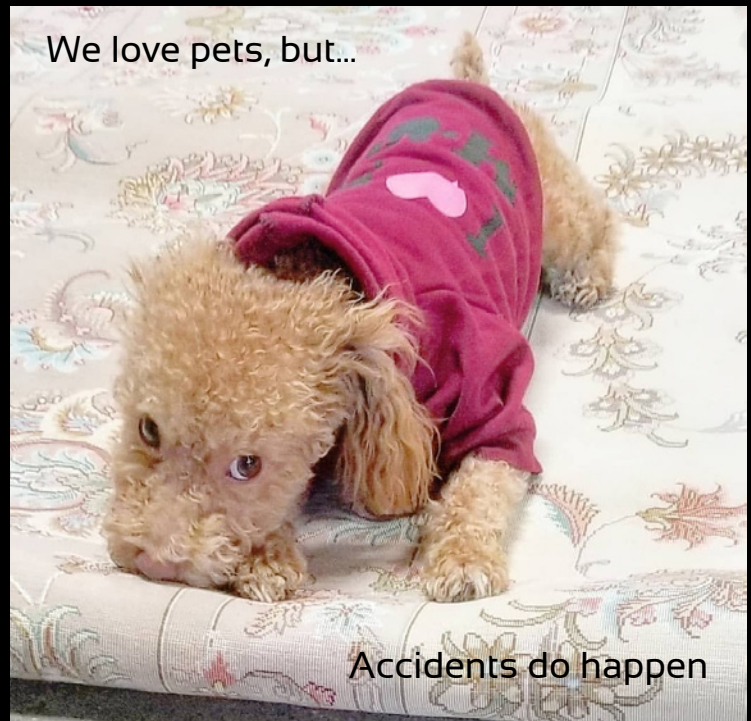
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Wool and Silk Tabriz

A "Make Waves" hand painted natural hide was suspended in this heavy-duty metal frame. It's for a free-standing location, hung from above. Or, this could be placed against a wall as an art piece. The company places original hand painted artwork on sustainable hides with designs that focus on empowerment and equality, created by Susan Kaineg, Be OUTSPOKEN inventor and CEO, Be-Outspoken.



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Sanity and Stress in the Time of Covid-19

Stories of an Interior Designer

David Sargent of Sargent Design Company riding Montana during Covid-19

We've heard it everywhere. When Covid-19 locked down the very rich, they couldn't spend their money traveling around the world on the QE2, racing horses at Belmont, or jetting to have dinner with friends in Paris. With excess cash sloshing around in their pockets, the very rich have been on a home acquisition and home-improvement bender. And then they called their favorite Interior Designer or their friend's favorite Interior Designer with an urgent need to spend cash making over their homes, decorating houses they had just bought to hunker down away from the Pandemic or just maybe redo something that had been bugging them like the mudroom. In the future, an over-the-top mudroom may shout out the Covid-19 Era, the way that aqua tiled bathrooms say 1950s.

What's it like to work during Covid-19? We called our favorite interior designer, Ann Shriver Sargent, who wrote for Rug News and Design until servicing the surge of work with the various Covid-19 complications took over. She and her husband, David, are partners in Sargent Design Company. Between the two of them, supported by a small staff, they have over 500 projects under their belt. During Covid-19 they have been managing 14 projects at various stages of pre-construction, permitting, con-

struction and decoration. Their work has covered a resort and three residential projects.

Sales of country properties have exploded as the rich retreat from the cities to remote vacation areas far from exposure to Covid-19. In Woodstock, Vermont, where Ann often has commissions, there were 139 homes on the market before Covid-19; now down to 39. Many bought sight-unseen, with no inspection and in a bidding war.

This was the case for a 7500 square foot house purchased in August with the request to have it furnished in time for the start of classes in early September. This was a wealthy family's solution to reduced dorm space for their daughter and 2 roommates.

With a depth of accounts for both custom and made-to-order as well as stocking companies, across all product types in their back pockets, Ann and David had no problem accepting the challenge. Only then did they find out that hundreds of designers across the country were doing the same thing. Selections of anything quick-to-ship were painfully skinny. Surprisingly, sheets were the biggest challenge, everyone was back ordered.



The ultimate mud room the sign of Covid-19 times.



Wine Cellars are hot items for clients escaping Covid-19



Private gyms allow Covid-19 evacuees to keep their work-day routine away from home.

After what was a monumental effort to complete the three bedrooms and the kitchen/family room, Ann convinced the owner to take a more thoughtful approach for the rest of the house. Even then there have been challenges; it now appears that both made-to-order and custom are 14-16 week lead-times. Pre Covid-19, the standard was 6-8 weeks.

Managing client expectations have reached a whole new level of urgency. "You would think that these people who are all successful college graduates would understand that Covid-19 has disrupted everything and would be more flexible than before. But NO, they still want impossible deadlines!" emotes Ann.

Smooth coordination of the trades is a hard-learned skill. With Covid-19 coordination can be a nightmare of un-anticipated proportions. The States impose their rules; the trades tend to ignore them. But when working for a resort this practice just cannot happen. One violation would risk the resort's ability to operate the property.

Each year Twin Farm's shuts down for what they call in New England "mud-season." It's the grey and muddy time of year when winter sports are over and summer beauty has not bloomed. The resort uses this time for the major projects. Just days before the widespread Covid-19 shutdowns Ann received approval on a major renovation of a public space and the re-design of a few cottages. Always a killer deadline; the Sargent team was now facing a complete shutdown of the country. The resulting stress and the panic comes through in Ann's words as she recalls the experience: "It was so nerve wracking. This time, we did not know if the resort would be allowed to re-open on

May 1 as usual. So, we were on a constant vigil of the progress of all our orders and the subcontractors. The contractors had to work one at a time in the space; we used to have several contractors on site at the same time. Six weeks after deposits were placed, our flooring vendor returned our money because he could not get the wood. A mad scramble ensued: favors were called in and the floor was laid. The painters were pulling up the drop cloths when we received 90% of the product within a few days of July 19th, the allowed occupancy date. We felt we were pretty lucky that our orders were confirmed just before the shutdown, otherwise we would have been competing with the surge on home furnishings from a housebound world."

Not being able to travel freely has changed the job of interior decorating for the designers and the vendors. Normally, Ann attends at least one trade show in a quarter and visits design showrooms in Boston and New York about 2-3 times a month. (That is 2 trade shows and 16-24 visits to showrooms.) In 2020, Ann has been to Boston once, replacing this with lots of time making selections online for furnishings, fabrics and rugs.

"It is mind numbing and difficult to know for sure scale, weave, color texture and finishes on wood. We have requested copious amounts of samples that are not useful to our current work. The vendors are bearing quite an expense. For the most part, fabric houses have been quite willing to over sample. But we will see this in the increased price per yard for sure," says Ann.

"It's just no fun looking for rugs online. My happy place is in a rug store with piles of handmade rugs around me! Their staff flips rugs and make choices. I always leave a rug hunt with more rugs than I need. But I always sell some, so I return fewer. Now, I have many rugs shipped to me for selection. I return many more rugs! Productive time is taken away from the office staff who have to roll and wrap the rejects. Before we got a handle on these extra costs in labor and UPS charges, we lost money forgetting to cover these new costs. Just one of the many changes in workflow we are getting used to."

And then there are the auctions; online just doesn't cut it. Prior to Covid-19, Ann delighted in auctions especially on the weekends. Live



A modern wood stove heats the room with a view of the river, allowing the client to spend the winter away from Covid-19



auctions are entertainment; they are fun. Bidding online has a learning curve which could be costly.

And what about trade shows; will they survive? “Maybe and maybe not.” Trade shows are the most efficient way to discover new vendors. Because of relationships carefully nurtured over the years since first meeting vendors at a trade show, Ann has been able to source projects during the Covid-19 with a confidence that the younger, newer, designer cannot. She feels for the new interior decorator who has not yet developed enough sources and is without trade shows and access to Designer Showrooms when Covid-19 started. She imagines they are having a tough time now.

David and Ann fear that Covid-19 will end, and the many vendors with whom they have spent years developing a trusted relationship will not survive. It has happened in down turns in the past and to some extent, one has to start over.

How are Ann and David surviving day to day during the Pandemic? Both she and her husband believe they must “Keep sane” while the whole interior design world is turning topsy. They stop work sharply at 5:00 rather than stretch the day another 5 hours as they used to. To make up the hours, they work on the weekends.

And they ride their horses, Baylor and Montana, in the Vermont countryside. Such is life in Covid-19. ☘



Captions clockwise from top left:

A country house project to improve the ambiance for entertaining outside.

Work is still in progress in the living room of the 7500 house used by the client's daughter and two friends for off campus housing.

Ann Shriver Sargent checking the installation of rustic mantel at Twin Farms resort.

Ann making finishing touches on dining table at Twin Farms

Ann's horse, Baylor, waiting to go for a ride.



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The image displays a close-up, high-resolution view of a custom textile design. The pattern is abstract and organic, featuring a palette of deep blues, various shades of green, and off-white or light beige. The colors are blended and layered, creating a sense of depth and movement, reminiscent of a topographical map or a natural landscape like a forest floor or a body of water. The texture of the material appears to be a plush, woven fabric, possibly a rug or a heavy curtain. A semi-transparent black rectangular box is positioned horizontally across the middle of the image, containing white text.

custom rugs fabrics wallcovering pillows

