

[Market Report]

A 21st-Century Persian Rug

The contemporary reinterpretation of the Persian workshop rug by one Hamburg-based firm could, with its newly received Red Dot Award, show an ailing industry a path for its own renaissance.

Hossein Rezvani talks to Ben Evans



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THE DEVELOPMENT OF contemporary design carpets over the past twenty years tells the story of the renewal of an ancient tradition, the successful alignment of modern tastes and trends with an old handicraft tradition. There is something heartening and reassuring about a tradition that has provided humans with both warmth and a means of artistic expression for at least two and half thousand years having the ability to adapt and change with time thereby remaining relevant and not reduced to a cultural curio, a relic of a bygone era.

Therefore it has always seemed strange to me that although contemporary carpets now transmit and translate the expressions of some of the world's foremost

artists and designers, that Iran, the country that is synonymous to many with 'the art of the carpet', has remained quite steadfast in its own carpet culture and not developed any avante gard or contemporary carpet productions.

Indeed given that there is ample record of Iranians collecting and appreciating modern art, that there is a thriving Iranian contemporary art scene and a large, young, dynamic and cosmopolitan Persian community spread across the world, it is astonishing that I had not witnessed any Persian carpet production in the international market over the last twenty years that combined original contemporary designs with traditional Persian weaving skills.

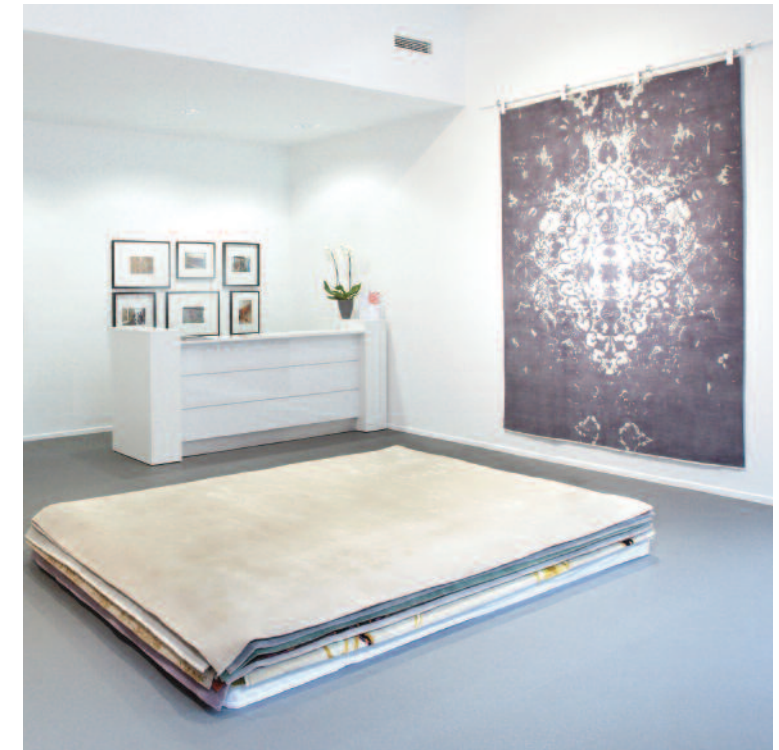
01 Hossein Rezvani with *Tabriz Grey* rug from the Persia Reinvented Collection

02 Rezvani's new Hamburg showroom with *Jade Orange* and *Bakhtiar Lilac*

03 Rezvani's new Hamburg showroom with *Tabriz Grey*



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That was until I met Hossein Rezvani, who has taken up this idea and is now creating perhaps the finest Persian modern design rugs available today, in colours and patterns that have quickly won not only admirers across the world but also global acclaim in the form of a prestigious 2011 Red Dot Design Award for the popular *Tabriz Lilac* rug. The award has generated a lot of attention for the fledgling company, interestingly particularly in Iran itself.

The road to success began only in 2009 but, as Hossein himself admits, has not been easy: "Our weavers are based in Esfahan, Iran, and even though they were previously making traditional carpets it has been very difficult for them to adapt, not in terms of skill but

more to the concept to making something new and having to leave their knowledge of design and colours behind. It has taken a lot of time, a lot of nerve and money but we now have 35 master weavers who work exclusively for us."

Establishing these hard-won working relationships with some of Iran's leading weavers was aided by the fact that Hossein, originally trained as an economist, is the third generation of his family involved in the rug industry: his grandfather and father, who moved to Hamburg in the 1960s and worked in the wholesale business focused on fine Persian rugs made in Ghom, Tabriz, Nain and Esfahan.

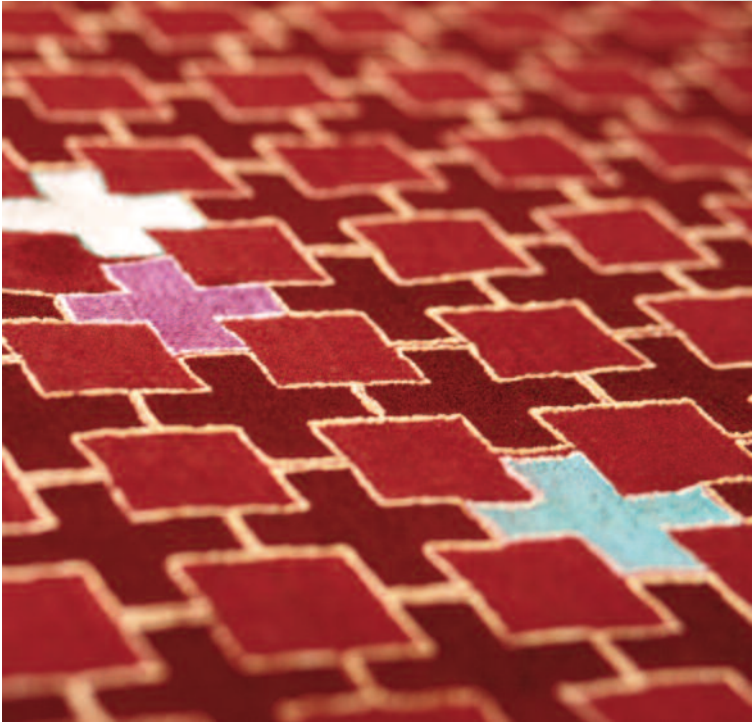
The international reputation of Persian rugs was built on the

04 *Tabriz Lilac* rug, winner of a 2011 Red Dot Design Award

05 *Carre Red* rug (detail)



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appreciation of their design skill as well as material quality, allowing Persian workshops to establish their products as a byword for luxury and connoisseurship. It is this aspect that Rezvani has maintained in his work, creating exceptionally fine rugs but without the mastery of technique becoming an end in itself. “We make our carpets in three different qualities. Our Persia Reinvented and Design Collection are both made in Esfahan and come in two qualities: the exclusive ‘superfine’ quality with one million knots per sqm using the finest Persian cork wool and silk, or the ‘premium’ quality with 400,000 knots per sqm which uses Persian highland wool and silk. The Classic Collection is made in India in 120 knot quality with New Zealand wool and silk mix.”

By creating a contemporary design Persian rug but with a traditional weave and technique, Rezvani’s rugs have found a ready-made audience, and it is not surprising that the reaction in the Middle East – the primary market for traditionally designed modern Iranian rugs – was very strong but this has now spread to have representation throughout the world. The firm’s new showroom has just opened in Hamburg and there are new designs and collections in the pipeline, including one perhaps by the most famous Persian architect working today, with whom Hossein shared the stage at this year’s Red Dot gala in Essen, who also happens to be an old family friend.

www.hosseinrezvani.com