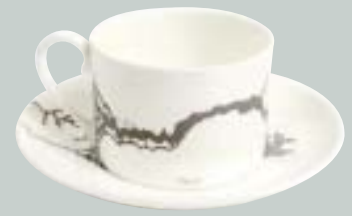


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The course of the Nile River starts on the World River saucer and meanders on to the cup, taking on the look of abstract art. Sets with the Mississippi, Loire and Yangtze rivers are also available, £24.95 (Dh150), www.snowdenflood.com

The prints of Persia

Hossein Rezvani is on a mission to revolutionise the Persian carpet industry. **Selina Denman** finds out why

"We are giving some prestige back to Persian carpets," says Hossein Rezvani. "We are making them a must-have item again."

He's not exaggerating. The 34-year-old German-Iranian launched his eponymous carpet brand in 2009 and has already received his first Red Dot award, the prestigious, internationally recognised seal of quality for product design.

His creations, which combine the quality of traditional Persian carpets with striking, contemporary designs, are a breath of fresh air in an otherwise stagnant market.

"There's no innovation; that's the problem with the Persian carpet business," he continues. "The Persian mentality is, 'Why should I change something that's been working for 200 years.' In the 1970s, 1980s and 1990s, Persian carpets were unbelievably popular, but there comes a time when you have to move on. And if you don't do that at the right time, the opportunity is lost and you can't catch up again for a long time."

"If you look at Nepal or India, they've adapted and they've changed. They look at what the trends are and what the popular colours are. With Persian carpets, they say, 'This is how we do it so this is how you'll buy them.'"

In response, Hossein has embarked on a one-man mission to revolutionise the industry – an idea born out of a casual conversation with his close family friend, the renowned architect Hadi Teherani. "We were discussing the carpet business and he asked me, 'Why don't you modernise the Persian carpet?' That's where the idea came from."

While his family has been in the carpet business for generations, Hossein had studied economics and opted not to join the industry – until that fateful conversation, which inspired him to rejoin the fold and develop his own unique, contemporary brand of Persian carpet. The idea was to create high-end, handmade products that paid homage to the quality and craftsmanship of the age-old Persian tradition but also embraced a more modern design aesthetic.

Rezvani's first challenge was convincing his father of the value of such an endeavour. His second was finding artisans that could actually do the work. In principle, Hossein's pared down, simplified designs should be easier to produce than the extremely intricate, multicoloured style of the traditional Persian carpet. Not so in practice.

"One of our carpets might have three different wool types and one type of silk in three different colours. In a normal Persian carpet, you can have 10 different colours within one centimetre. But the problem was finding weavers that were able to produce this kind of quality, and to get them to do what we wanted them to do, rather than what they wanted to do. It took a lot of time, a lot of nerves and a lot of money to get it right."

While he had no formal industry experience and no artistic inclinations to speak of, Hossein had a childhood spent shadowing his father to call upon. "I have been travelling with my father since childhood, going to production areas in Iran. We used to go into the villages, meet the weavers, buy the carpets and my father would always ask me what I thought. I always knew what I liked and I always had an eye."

"When you grow up with carpets, you always have an interest in them. It's a great business. You travel all over the place and you see people creating traditional handicrafts. You see how a product is developed, and then you sell it on and you see where it ends up. The carpet business is an interesting microcosm in itself."

Although headquartered in Hamburg, the Hossein Rezvani brand made its official debut in Dubai during Index 2009. "This is a region that knows Persian carpets and appreciates quality and design. The local market is not just looking for a cheap, good-looking carpet made in India or China. That's why we thought Dubai would be a good place to start," he says.

The carpets were originally divided into two distinct ranges. The Design Collection combines colourful contemporary motifs with quality of up to 1,000,000 knots per square metre. Hossein's first-ever creation,



With bright, oversized patterning and a contemporary motif, Hossein's first-ever creation, Jade (left), sets the tone for his Design Collection as well as what he set out to do with his work: modernise the Persian carpet. On the cover, the lilac version of his Tabriz rug earned Hossein a prestigious Red Dot award earlier this year. Ravindranath K / The National

Jade, sets the tone for the Design Collection with its bright, bold, oversized floral patterning. Meanwhile, the Classic Collection is made in India and is more muted. Understated patterns are coupled with a gentler colour palette consisting of lilacs, ash greys, ivories, mint greens and light blues.

He launched a third collection, Persia Reinvented, in January. As the name suggests, the collection takes popular Persian motifs and gives them a contemporary twist. The carpets feature abstract interpretations of familiar patterns combined with colours that are not part of the traditional palette.

Bakhtiar, for example, is made from Persian Highland wool with natural silk, and comes in beige, grey, blue, ivory and lilac. Tabriz, which is made of Persian Cork wool with natural silk, is available in lilac, grey and blue. It is the lilac version that earned Hossein a Red Dot award earlier this year.

Persia Reinvented encapsulates Hossein's desire to create carpets that are highly contemporary but still recognisably Persian. "The contemporary carpet market is very abstract at the moment. You see lots of different colours and lots of different designs. There are only one or two companies creating products where you can actually see where they're from. For us, being the only ones doing this in Iran, it was even more important to show where we are from," he says.

It's an approach that is striking a chord in Europe, in the UAE and even in Iran, where people are waking up to the fact that there are alternative ways of approaching an ancient industry.

Hossein plans to open a new showroom in Hamburg in the coming months and will be attending a series of trade shows over the course of the year. But growth will remain measured, he says. "We are a small, unique business and we want to stay exclusive. We are not making mass products; that's not the aim. Every carpet should be a masterpiece."

● For more information visit www.hosseinrezvani.com or e-mail info@hosseinrezvani.com.



Hossein's new Persia Reinvented collection, which launched in January and includes the light grey Bakhtiar pattern, puts a contemporary twist on traditional designs. Courtesy of Hossein Rezvani



From left, the Classic Collection, which includes the light blue Thyja, is made in India and is more understated. Courtesy of Hossein Rezvani; Bakhtiar in blue features 400,000 knots per square metre. Ravindranath K / The National

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