

All about rugs

Practical and profitable for the trade, popular with the consumer: rugs are big business. Cleaning Specialist looks at the options ...

A RUG is one of the most practical and profitable commodities in the floorcovering industry.

Consumers buy rugs for many reasons – to add warmth and colour to wood or vinyl floors, to brighten up an old carpet or simply on impulse because a bright colour or unusual design has caught their eye. If displayed properly, rugs will almost sell themselves. Profit margins can be high, delivery costs virtually non-existent and wear problems negligible. Almost every furnishing need is catered for by machine-made products in wool, synthetic or vegetable yarns, dyed sheepskins, and handknotted, tufted and flat woven goods in wool and silk.

Rug sizes range from 1ft squares to extremely large carpets. However the most popular sizes remain 5x3ft, 6x4ft, 8x5ft, 9x6ft and 12x9ft. The market is highly conscious of furnishing trends so design portfolios and colour palettes are constantly updated.

Machine-made

Britain used to have a thriving rug industry but this was decimated by the introduction of cheap broadlooms and the influx of synthetic rugs from Europe. Now most rugs sold in the UK come from Belgium or the Netherlands. Machine-made rugs are either Wilton woven or tufted, with a small number in Brussels weave.

Modern Wilton production can include as many as 36 shades in one design. This is particularly advantageous when the classical Persian or William Morris styles are being woven. Intricate designs can be faithfully reproduced and the mellow appearance of antique rugs can be replicated.

Both production methods use acrylic, nylon (polyamide), polypropylene or wool yarns or blends. Some yarns are heat-set to prevent the tufts splaying out, and may be treated to be anti-static, fire retardant or stain resistant. The type and weight of the yarn or the density of the pile determine quality and price.

Oriental rugs

Once a consumer has bought one Oriental rug a second purchase is almost bound to

follow. The fascination of owning a rug which has taken a weaver in a faraway country months to make rarely palls.

Handmade Oriental rugs were brought to Britain centuries ago, but until recently remained a luxury product. In the late 1980s the market exploded when huge volumes of cheap rugs were imported from China. For a while the mass market became very erratic, with quality decreasing as prices plummeted, but the current trading climate is very different. The emphasis is on better-quality goods at affordable but sensible prices.

Only two examples of ancient weaving exist. One, a 2,400-year-old Turkish knotted rug, was found in 1949 preserved in ice in southern Siberia. The other, a fragment dated at 4,000BC, was discovered just a few years ago in China.

Rugs are made in a broad swathe of countries from Turkey and Egypt in the west through Armenia, Azerbaijan, Dagestan, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, northern India, Nepal and Tibet to eastern China.

Types

Handmade rugs fall into three broad categories – flatweaves, handknotted and handtufted. Kilims are perhaps the best-known flatweaves, and are made in Afghanistan, China, Iran and Turkey. The coloured weft yarn is woven in and out of the warps. Indian dhurries are made in the same way, although the majority are now produced mechanically with overprinted designs. In Soumak weaving, the weft yarn is carried forward over four warp threads and then backwards under two in a slanting effect.

Handtufted rugs are mostly made in China and India. There is a small UK production but this is mostly for bespoke designs. Canvas bearing a design is stretched over a vertical frame. A handheld powered tufting gun shoots yarn into the canvas filling in a block of colour with continuous loops. These are cut to form the pile which may then be carved to emphasise the pattern. The average number of tufts or shots per foot width is 70, but the better qualities have 80.

The styles range from plain colours, through traditional Indian, Chinese and Persian styles to modern geometrics in bright or pastel colours. Handknotted rugs are all made on

wood or steel looms. Village and workshop looms are upright, while nomadic looms are used horizontally and are collapsible.

Dyes

The advantage of chemical dyes is that the exact shade can be produced and will not fade. Vegetable-dyed yarns will change colour over the years and, as dye lots made from plants and insects vary in shade, it is possible to have several variations of the same colour in one rug.

Glossary

Axminster: short pieces of yarn are inserted to form a 'U' tuft as the backing is woven

Brussels weave: a loop pile is formed by a continuous yarn

Cut or velvet pile: the loops formed during manufacture are cut across the top to leave 'U' shaped tufts in the carpet

Cut/loop pile: combination of cut and loop pile resulting in different pile heights forming a patterned or textured effect

Gauge or pitch: expresses the density of tufted, ie 1/8th gauge is eight pile ends per one inch width. Other gauges include 1/10th, 1/4th, 5/16th, 5/32nd and 5/64th

Loop pile: loops formed on the surface using continuous threads of yarn in the manufacturing process

Shot or pitch: expresses the density of Wilton weaving, ie 8-shot is eight tufts per inch width

Tufted: rows of needles insert yarns into a primary backing. A hook catches the loop as the needle retracts. This action determines the height of the continuous loops on the surface

Wilton: the backing is woven at the same time as a continuous weft yarn forms loops on the surface

Wilton face-to-face: costs are reduced by weaving two rugs simultaneously with the yarn passing from one to the other. The rugs are separated by slicing through the 'sandwich' of yarn between the two.

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The art of rug cleaning

RUGS tend to be neglected by home-owners when it comes to cleaning. Perhaps it's because, unlike carpet, many rugs can be taken to the door and given a quick shake. Either way, here's how you can help ...

It's worth knowing that most rugs are made with wool or wool-rich pile. These include many Oriental, Persian and Turkish rugs, as well as Chinese and Indian – although the latter can be made from fine animal hair (usually goat).

As a rule, rugs should be hand-cleaned. Start by vacuuming thoroughly both sides and then pre-treat with one of Prochem's spray-on traffic lane cleaners, such as **B107 Prespray Gold**. Don't forget to lightly agitate the pre-spray down into the pile to loosen any greasy soils.



Fibres can be identified by doing a burn test.

Next, using a wet soil extraction machine and hand tool, rinse-extract with **B109 Fibre & Fabric Rinse** in the tank. This acidic rinse agent is approved by the "Woolsafe" organisation and gives a better 'hand and feel' after the rug has dried.

B124 Odour Fresh can be added to the cleaning solution as wet wool rugs may have a strong animal odour.

Rugs can all be cleaned this way subject to the usual tests: the fibre should be identified and the stability of the dyes should be tested, especially if the rug is woven with many different colours (in which case all the colours should, of course, be tested). The rug should be cleaned in small sections at a time, working across the width.

Burn test

Fibres can be identified using the burn test. To carry out the burn test, take a small sample of the fibre out of the rug from the back or edge.

Hold the fibre to a flame and then examine the ash and smell the smoke. If the material is wool, the ash should be dark and crusty, and the smell should be like burning hair. If the sample is real silk, it should ball to a hard bead which can be crushed to ash between the fingers, and the smell should be of burning hair but not so distinct as wool.

It is important to do this test because if the rug proves to be real silk you should only clean with a dry cleaning

solvent such as **B140 Dri Pro**. If you do not possess an approved solvent extraction machine, you can pre-spray the solvent to the carpet, work it into the pile and wipe off with terry towels. Alternatively, on large rugs, use the rotary machine and Prochem's Soil-Absorb Bonnet to absorb the loosened soil.

After cleaning, the pile should be carefully reset. Always lay the pile in one direction. If the pile is not re-set the result may look patchy and the customer will not be satisfied that the rug is clean since patchy shadows look like dirty areas.

Neutralise

Rugs often have white cotton fringes. To clean these, pre-spray and hand scrub with **S709 Multi Pro** diluted at 250ml per litre of water. Then extract rinse with **B109 Fibre & Fabric Rinse** to neutralise.

Finally, remember to advise your customer to allow the rug to dry thoroughly after cleaning. This is especially important if they intend to roll it up for storage. Equally, a damp rug should never be replaced on carpet as dye may transfer to the carpet during the drying process. For this reason it is often more practical to take a rug away for cleaning to a place where it can dry safely on a flat surface – but check your insurance cover if you intend to do this!

Rug cleaning is good business for carpet cleaners working in the domestic market, as it is an excellent 'add-on'. Too many tend to steer clear of rugs thinking that they are problematic. But follow these recommendations and you should obtain excellent results.