



AXA ART Collection Management Series: Caring for Antique Carpets

by Jan David Winitz, President & Founder, Claremont Rug Company

Proper care of prized antique carpets can ensure a lifetime of enjoyment and maximized investment potential. “Maintenance” may seem like a word better suited to vintage automobiles, but fine antique Oriental rugs—like all objet d’arts—benefit enormously from proper custodial care. Connoisseurs understand the importance of protecting their investments, both for themselves and for posterity.

A vivid example of stewardship is the 17th century Persian Kirman—its colors, whimsical leaf design, and structural integrity still superb after three centuries—that set a world auction record for an Oriental carpet in 2010, selling for \$9.59M. For collectors, the good news—for the moment—is that carpets from the Second Golden Age of Persian Weaving (ca. 1800-1900) are still considered “undiscovered”, their valuations significantly below comparable forms of art. But recognition of these exquisite, meticulously handcrafted works is rising, especially in the wake of the 2011 opening of the permanent Islamic exhibit at the Metropolitan Museum of New York and a similar exhibit which opened in Fall 2012 at the Louvre. The best 19th century carpets are disappearing into private ownership and becoming increasingly more difficult to find. Today’s buyers will likely be the last generation with access to Golden Age rugs in floor condition. Proper preservation is more important than ever.

Basic Care

A few simple practices will go a long way toward preserving your rugs for a lifetime of enjoyment:

-Proper padding. We strongly recommend using high-quality pads under antique carpets. These will significantly extend the life of your rugs, preventing sliding, wrinkling and stretching, and guarding against punctures from furniture legs. Padded rugs also feel better underfoot and provide better sound absorption.

-Furniture cups. Always use furniture cups for heavy furniture pieces and pianos placed on carpets to prevent crushing the carpet’s pile. When moving heavy furniture, lift or use sliders to prevent tearing.

-UV protection. Given daily exposure to direct sunlight in areas where draperies are not desirable, we recommend screening your windows with a product that minimizes the damaging effects of ultraviolet rays. Using either Low-E glass or a spectrally selective applied window film effectively inhibits sun-fading of the rug’s naturally dyed colors.

-Spills. Fine antique Persian carpets were woven using lanolin-rich wool, which is amazingly stain resistant. Blot up spills with a moist cloth, and then wipe the pile with a rinsed damp sponge. If the area remains moist, elevate it for quicker air-drying. Avoid using home remedies for stain removal, as they can cause irreversible discoloration or dye-run.

-Cleaning. A manual carpet sweeper is best. Avoid using electric vacuum cleaners; the rotary action is unnecessarily strong on antique rugs. Also steer away from all chemical, pesticide or steam treatments. To protect the natural qualities of hand-spun wool, have your rugs hand-washed by a professional Oriental carpet cleaner, in most cases every five to seven years.

-Long-term storage. After being professionally washed, rugs should be stored in a clean, dry environment at between 60-75° F. The ideal humidity is around 65 per cent. Cleaning rugs before storing makes them far less attractive to moths. Always wrap your carpets in paper, as plastic can lead to moisture condensation and mildew. Use cedar chips or a cedar-lined trunk for short-term storage. For storage over a period of months, have rugs professionally packed.

-Restoration. Annually inspecting the front and back of carpets will reveal any restoration needs while they are still minor. Necessary work should always be done by a specialist.

For complete care instructions, visit <http://www.claremontrug.com/educational-center/carpetcare.aspx>

For more information on AXA ART insurance products, contact us at 212-415-8400 or 877-AXA-4-ART.

Jan David Winitz is an eminent art dealer who has specialized in highly collectible and investment level 19th century Oriental rugs for more than three decades as the Founder and President of Claremont Rug Company.

Image: Persian Motasham Kashan, 7ft 6in x 10ft 5in, circa 1825. Copyright: Claremont Rug Company.

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