

perspective

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INSPIRING ARCHITECTURE & DESIGN

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NATURAL SELECTION

How a tourism centre in Guilin is changing the cultural landscape

+ 40 UNDER 40 2017

- The winners
- The forum
- The party

Rathbone Square, London
—p.22

TRIM house, by Apollo Architects
—p.28

WeWork Hong Kong, by Nelson Chow
—p.42

Q&A: Ma Yansong
—p.88

Magic carpets: Omar Khan's rugs
—p.136

Conservation architecture in Sichuan
—p.90

Gray Box, Guangdong
—p.98

The magnificent seven: leading Chinese designers
—p.104



HK\$48
US\$18
€15

Weft of centre

Omar Khan's approach to rug design makes his products works of beauty in their own right

TEXT:
Michele Koh Morollo
PHOTOGRAPHY:
Lane Crawford

Dream weaver: Omar Khan infuses a graphic sense of storytelling into his striking rug designs

Setting eyes – and foot – on an Omar Khan rug is an almost surreal experience, yet a thoroughly pleasurable one. Khan's rugs are richly textured, often with vivid colours and an almost hallucinogenic, three-dimensional quality. They are a lot more than mere floor coverings: they bring as much personality into a space as a painting purchased from a fine-art gallery.

A globetrotting Singaporean of Dutch, Chinese, Egyptian, Pakistani, and German ancestry, Khan was educated in New York, lived in Hong Kong for a while, and is now based in Kuala Lumpur with production facilities in Bangkok.

"As a kid, I was always very bad at math. The only way I could express myself was through art and craft," says Khan, who studied animation and graphic design at Parsons School of Design in New York before joining On Pedder in Hong Kong as a visual merchandiser, then establishing his own brand Omar Khan Rugs in 2014.

"When I was in Parsons, I thought I was going to be a Pixar guy and develop the next *Finding Nemo*, but there was too much technology involved and I just wanted to draw beautiful things," says Khan, who did, however, learn the art of storytelling through his animation education, something that he now applies to his design process. "My training in graphic design was very useful for what I do now. Graphic design taught me about space, topography and composition, which all come together in my work. A good rug should be like a movie poster that tells a story."

Khan's rugs are largely inspired by his dreams, which he immediately jots down in a journal upon waking each morning. "I dream in colour, and the images I see linger in my mind's eye for some time after I wake. Slowly, I'll flesh them out, like a story that needs to be told. I use texture and dimension to further illustrate the narrative," he says.

While his inner life proffers many ideas, Khan understands that designing for the interiors of homes requires the input of others. Each day, he makes a point of creating 20 new designs. Then, to find out which have the greatest appeal, he holds what he calls "dinner party focus groups" for three consecutive evenings. Before the party begins, Khan pins up A4-size drawings of his latest designs on a wall. He then invites his guests to anonymously indicate which designs they like and which they don't by putting a coloured sticker at the bottom of each drawing.

"A white sticker means the husband and wife both like it, a green sticker means one partner's decision trumped the other's, and red means they both didn't like it," says Khan, who believes family dynamics are an important aspect of rug selection, because design decisions should be about getting everyone on board. The designs that get the highest number of white stickers are usually the first he sends to his factory to have samples made.

“ I dream in colour, and the images I see linger in my mind's eye for some time after I wake ”

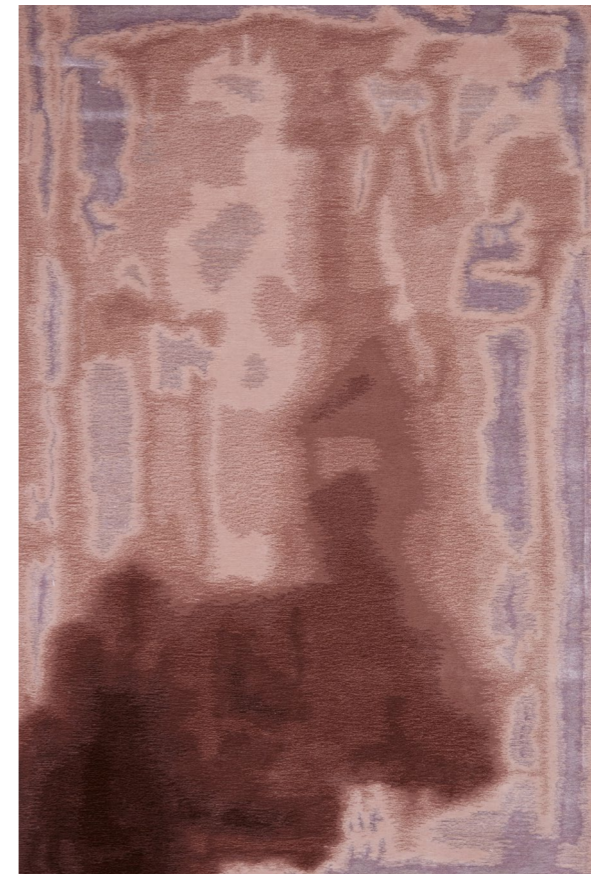
Bamboo silk and New Zealand semi-worsted wool are Khan's favourite materials, though he also sometimes uses corn Sorona – a material that is both stain resistant and hypoallergenic. His methods of construction are either cut pile, loop or a combination of both. "My choice of material and weaving method depends on the design. If there is an extraordinary amount of carving work, then I like to use full wool, which has a more sculptural quality and holds those details better," he says. "But if the client is interested in a more visceral experience, then we will play with textures and interweave bamboo into the mix so the feel is super-soft. Often, I mix materials and construction methods to create contrast and depth. This enhances dimension and texture for a couture feel."

According to Khan, a rug is "a big statement of who you are" and a single good couture rug, even if combined with simple loose furniture from Ikea, can transform a space, adding a unique narrative to one's home.

"A rug creates a breathing space in between the walls and the floor, and can make or break a space. A thoughtfully designed rug tells a lot about its owner: what they stand for, what they want to hide and what they want to show the world. When you get your first glimpse into someone's home, the rug sets the scene; there is something magical and highly personal about them," he says. ●



Geometric illusions feature in the Panos area rug



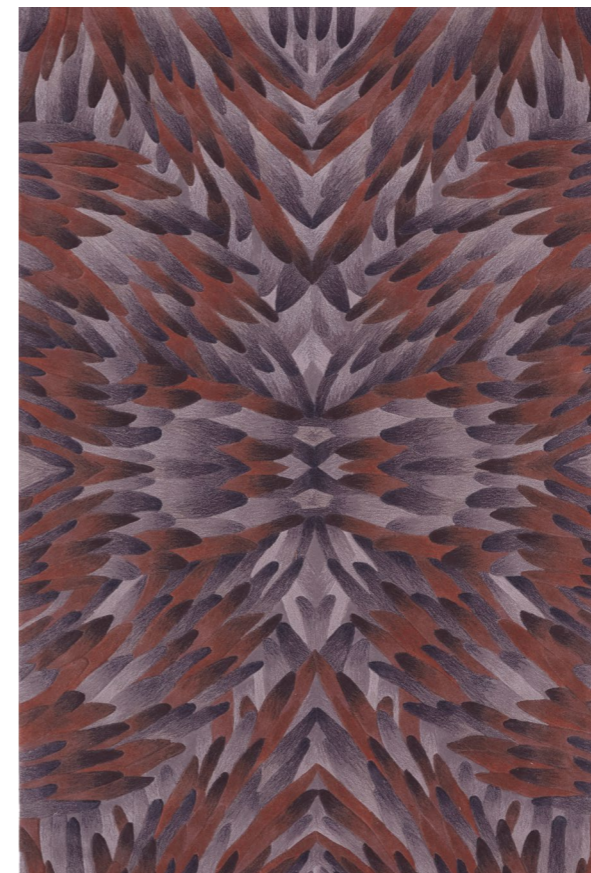
Subtle shades of grey and brown lend an industrial feel to the Richter area rug



In the Bilquis area rug, leaves twirl with abandon in a symmetrical tableau on worsted wool



A bold dark diagonal is the central feature of the Oscar area rug



The Sofia rug's rippling pattern is the perfect backdrop for minimalist interiors



The Aura area rug has an organic theme that makes use of striking contrasts