



FOR MANHATTAN DESIGNER

# Kati Curtis

A RUG'S IMPERFECTIONS  
MAKE IT SPECIAL

For Manhattan interior designer Kati Curtis, a beautiful handmade decorative rug is an authentic work of art that finds no equal among its machine-made counterparts. “Finding a one-of-the-kind handmade rug, as opposed one that is mass produced, brings incomparable value and authenticity to an interior,” states the designer, a graduate of the renowned Savannah College of Art. Thanks to her academic training, Ms. Curtis has cultivated a passion for the decorative arts which she teaches at the New York School of Interior Design. It also nurtured her deep appreciation of handmade rugs, both antique and contemporary, from an esthetic, cultural, and sustainable design standpoint. For this Maine native transplanted in her teens to Asheville, NC—a self-avowed “half Yankee, half southern belle”—handmade decorative rugs play a pivotal role in her design philosophy where sustainable one-of-a-kind craft solutions are paramount.

“It’s the imperfections in a handmade rug that make it special—it’s art,” comments Ms. Curtis whose international clientele has taken her all over the country and the world

LEFT A formal Meshed with its rich cranberry reds become the bold esthetic statement in this modern living room featuring contemporary furnishings. Note how the cornflower blue hues in the guard border are played up in the walls. Courtesy of Kati Curtis Design. Photography by Marco Rubio Studio.

STORY BY ALIX G. PERRACHON



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including to India, Japan, Qatar, and England. It was only natural that her long-standing interest in antique decorative arts fueled her passion for antique rugs, primarily for Oushaks, Sultanabads, Donegals, Swedish rugs, and Chinese Art Deco pieces.

Ms. Curtis has a unique knack for placing traditional oriental rugs in contemporary spaces infusing them with a fresh “now” look. This is in part thanks to her ability to overcome client concerns that rugs’ patterns and colors are too busy and overwhelming. In fact, she says, nothing could be easier than decorating with an oriental rug—simply use their hues as the foundation for the room’s palette and add today’s

fabrics and furnishings to create a contemporary flair. Moreover, contrary to most designers, she enjoys the challenge of sparking the design process with a client’s existing oriental rug, whether it be antique or new, thereby regenerating it rather than casting it off. “I love when this happens—I feel blessed” she notes. “If it’s a good quality rug and there’s sentimental value attached to it, I want to give it a try. I want our work to look curated and sophisticated, not just simply designed.”

Beyond antiques, Ms. Curtis decorates with a whole spectrum of handmade decorative carpets including Egyptians, over-dyed, Moroccans, and

TOP The blues in the bay lying beyond are the inspiration for the adjacent transitional aqua rugs in this seaside bedroom. Courtesy of Kati Curtis Design. Photography by Marco Rubio Studio. OPPOSITE The blue in this Tibetan rug is echoed in a charming children’s bedroom’s walls and furnishings while its copper linear copper pattern is offset by the circular repeat in the window treatments. Courtesy of Kati Curtis Design. Photography by Marco Rubio Studio.



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contemporary Tibetans. She loves the latter for their range of materials and patterns—from abstract painterly to traditional. An enthusiast of needlepoints and Aubussons, she has begun noticing a resurgent interest in these European-style rugs: “I love their quality—they’re classics,” she states.

In addition to their esthetic merits, oriental and decorative carpets rival other floor coverings from a practical viewpoint. “A wool patterned rug is the best in terms of not showing dirt and stains,” she comments. In contrast, she isn’t shy about her disdain for sisal floor coverings. “I hate sisal rugs because among other things they show water stains,” she

remarks.

The architecture of the house or the space is her main inspiration guiding her rug selection. When working on an Arts & Crafts house, for instance, she gravitated toward Oushaks and Donegals. In addition to the client’s personality, outdoor space also plays a role. “I think of the outside as part of the interior,” she comments. “Windows are essentially framed pieces of art that have a huge impact on the space.” In a master bedroom, for example, she let the color of the sea seen from the window inspire her choice of two aqua rugs. Only when the rugs are set, do the fabrics come into play. “I don’t like to work around fabrics,” she

ABOVE A cream Sultanabad-inspired rug anchors a seating area in a hall way beckoning the visitor to the adjoining living room featuring a companion carpet. Courtesy of Kati Curtis Design. Photography by Marco Rubio Studio.



continues. By the same token, she's not afraid of mixing and matching rug and fabric patterns. "I'm all about pattern on pattern!" she exclaims. When coordinating the two, it's key that they speak to each other color-wise.

On occasion, the rug has been selected at the end of the design process and the designer admits, "I've been known to purchase rugs for clients without actually seeing them in person...It's always worked out perfectly, thank goodness! I like things to be a little 'off' so if the rug colors don't exactly match the chair fabric, even better. It gives the room a more 'collected' feel."

"I prefer placing large rug in the room over having several pieces," remarks the designer. Indeed, a room-sized piece is invaluable in protecting a wood floor and provides warmth and insulation. However, she also likes the rug to have some "breathing room" to show off the wood floor. Using two or more pieces in a space can be invaluable in delineating seating arrangements and helping scale down an over-sized room. She feels free to mix different rug genres—such as an antique oriental rug with a new Tibetan—as long as the colors are complementary. When working with rugs of the same feeling or type, as she did recently with several Egyptian rugs, she used the fab-

ABOVE An array of contemporary and rustic furnishings are the perfect complement to this soft overdyed transitional rug exuding an under-stated tribal flair. Courtesy of Kati Curtis Design. Photography by Marco Rubio Studio.

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ric to tie them together.

According to Ms. Curtis, it's important to focus on the overall vision of the room, not just on its individual components, when integrating handmade decorative rugs into a space. For instance, when laying a rug atop a wood floor, it's not always necessary to adjust the latter's color. "You need to see it all in the context of the big picture," the designer asserts.

As a LEED-accredited designer, it's no wonder that Ms. Curtis is acutely aware of handmade rugs' green attributes and of their value in sustainable design. For her, antique rugs are the greenest of all having been passed down from one generation to the

next. However, she adds, all handmade decorative rugs are sustainable as they are made from organic fibers. While clients don't overtly come to the designer with ecological concerns foremost on their mind, she has noticed a heightened awareness of chemical sensitivities particularly when children are involved. This has driven her clientele's demand for handmade decorative rugs. In one instance, a client had insisted on ordering a synthetic carpet for her child's bedroom only to return it, as it was off-gassing and triggering an allergic reaction. In the end, an over-dyed hand-knotted oriental rug was purchased.

Ms. Curtis is not bothered by the surge of online

ABOVE A traditional Kashan takes on a contemporary twist in this bedroom thanks to the artful juxtaposition of antique and modern furnishings. The designer has artfully played up the rug's blue gray accents in the wall covering and in the print window treatments. Courtesy of Kati Curtis Design. Photography by Boston Virtual Imagery. OPPOSITE The grays and hints of lavender in this overdyed rug are enhanced in the circular chrome ottoman sitting atop. Courtesy of Kati Curtis Design. Photography by Marco Rubio Studio.



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shopping that plagues the interior design industry. In effect, she comments: “People come to us because they want something unique, art—not disposable design,” she comments. With her high-end clientele, she has noticed a renewed interest in antique rugs and

in handmade decorative rugs as a whole. Faced with the onslaught of mass-produced decorative items, including of rugs, she sees her role as a designer evolving into that of a curator responsible for handing down pieces from one generation to the next.

### *About The* **DESIGNER**

A native of Maine who moved to Asheville, NC at 13, Kati Curtis received her design training at the prestigious Savannah College of Art and Design. She founded Kati Curtis Design (formerly known as Nirmada) in 2005 in New York City after over 12 years of working in international architecture and engineering firms on both the East and West Coasts. She quickly developed a following among an influential Manhattan client base with projects located in New York City and abroad including far-flung destinations such as Qatar, India, and Japan.

Kati Curtis Design specializes in distinctive contemporary design in both residential or commercial spaces. Creating signature sustainable one-of-a-kind “crafts solutions,” Ms. Curtis's portfolio includes historic restorations, contemporary renovations, and new construction projects.

A Leadership in Energy Efficient Design Accredited Professional (LEED AP), Ms. Curtis has



been featured in publications such as the *Wall Street Journal* and *Financial Times*. She teaches decorative arts at the New York School of Interior Design and is active in the interior design community including on the board of the New York Chapter of the American Society of Interior Designers (ASID) and the Northern California Chapter of the International Interior Design Association.