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Fort Street Studio

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Sometimes, reinvention isn't a conscious choice; it just happens. This has long been the case with Brad Davis and Janis Provisor, the husband-and-wife creative force behind Fort Street Studio. The company, which is best known for its luxurious, painterly carpets of wild silk, came about almost by accident in the early 1990s, when the well-regarded painters left their home in the United States to spend a year painting in China, and became intrigued by the idea of making a carpet for their New York loft based on their watercolour designs. Little did they know at the time that what they thought was a one-off project would lead them to an entirely new career. 'We knuckled down to solve an artistic problem, and opened up the next chapter of our artistic lives,' Provisor recalls.

By 1996, Davis and Provisor had moved to Hong Kong and opened a showroom there that would be followed by two more, in New York (2002) and Los Angeles (2007). The couple became known for their innovative design approach, which combined abstract motifs with an almost three-dimensional depth and richness. 'What we were attempting to do was to make a successful carpet with artistic qualities that was not a surrogate painting,' Davis says, 'or a replica of our work.'

It was a challenge at first to make the leap from brushstrokes to knots per square inch, but Davis spent two and a half years helping to develop the software that made it possible. Now, of course, similar software is widely available, with the result that 'painterly' has become a widely imitated style in contemporary carpet; at this development, the couple felt it was 'incumbent on us as designers' to expand their vision — cue yet another change.

While Fort Street Studio continues to produce its signature in wild silk, Davis and Provisor have moved from

'implied texture to working with actual textures'. Not only have they expanded their palette of materials to include wool or wool-silk blends, but just as importantly, they're using traditional rug-making techniques 'to modern ends' — integrating the antique Tibetan *kelim* style with contemporary pile techniques to create something entirely new, or making flat-weave silk carpets in a Thai workshop that does everything from growing the silk cocoons to producing the finished high-end product.

It was this shift in the way they thought about making their carpets — and their wish to be closer to their sources of production — that led Davis and Provisor to move back to Hong Kong earlier this year after twelve years in New York. At the same time, they moved to a new showroom space, in the One Island South development in the city's up-and-coming Wong Chuk Hang neighbourhood, a hotbed of new galleries, restaurants and creative enterprise that Provisor likens to New York's SoHo in the early 1980s. The 500-square-metre space, the design of which was a collaboration between Davis and designers Madeleine Ashwin and Sue Loughry, has a loft-like, residential feeling. Its exposed ceilings and pale, wide-plank wood floors showcase the same thoughtfully curated mix of 20th-century modernist and contemporary furniture and art that characterises Davis and Provisor's own apartments in Hong Kong and New York, as well as their other showrooms.

Davis and Provisor spent part of the summer in Bali, 'painting in tandem', as Provisor describes it, and then translating those paintings by computer into new designs. Their sojourn, she says, was 'particularly fertile, but also challenging. We began with a very singular vision in 1996, and now our vision is fractured in innumerable new directions.'



A small seating area inside the new Hong Kong showroom of Fort Street Studio. The curved sofa, which Davis and Provisor designed as an homage to the 20th-century Italian master Marco Zanuso, was custom-made in Hong Kong and is covered in a heavy silk from Jim Thompson. The sofa is complemented by a vintage Italian chair (newly upholstered in a fabric from Pollack) that Davis and Provisor bought in Los Angeles, a French table from the 1960s and a large-scale floor lamp from Artemide.



The 500-square-metre space, with mountain and sea views, has what Davis calls a modernist aesthetic — ‘clean, with an industrial bent’. The ceiling was left in its rough state in order to maximise the height of the space, and to make it easier to hang full-sized carpets, but it also makes the space look emphatically not like an office



The floor, which Davis describes as 'the stage for our theatre', is made of wide boards of engineered oak with a custom finish. Beyond the two large piles of 3-by-4-metre carpets is a vintage Harvey Probbler low table in rosewood, on top of which sits a German ceramic beneath a photograph by Eason Tsang. In the simple room to the left is a plastic table designed by Antonio Citterio for Kartell, flanked by chairs from Stellar Works that are re-issues of a 1955 design by Danish designer Vilhelm Wohlert.



At the office end of the showroom are desks and a storage unit that were designed by George Nelson. The space is punctuated with some of the couple's personal collection of pottery. The dramatic 4-metre ceilings were a must for Davis and Provisor in order to show their work the way they think it should be seen.