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Rugged Tale

Founders of artisanal carpet company Fort Street Studio Janis Provisor and Brad Davis talk about their return to Hong Kong

The course of many an artist's life may be attributed to serendipity. That was certainly the case with Janis Provisor and Brad Davis. After starting off in Hong Kong in 1996 with a few carpets showcasing their painterly approach to hand-knotted wild silk rugs, the couple moved back to New York some nine years later to concentrate on expanding their business stateside. They had an 8,000sq ft showroom in New York City, plus a smaller one in Los Angeles. But something wasn't quite right. And so they started looking elsewhere.

"We never had a showroom that worked with the quality of our brand," Provisor admits. "The space had to also be a shipping warehouse. All of our carpets are rolled, which means the building needed to have elevators wide enough to fit our rugs. And we wanted high ceilings." After considering a number of spaces, including one in the heart of Hong Kong's CBD, they were impressed by the smart combination of commercial and industrial advantages offered by One Island South, a Grade A office building in Aberdeen near Ocean Park. They secured a bright sea-facing 5,000sq ft parcel and launched their new showroom in 2014. The lounge is fitted out with vintage George Nelson furnishings, while custom-made

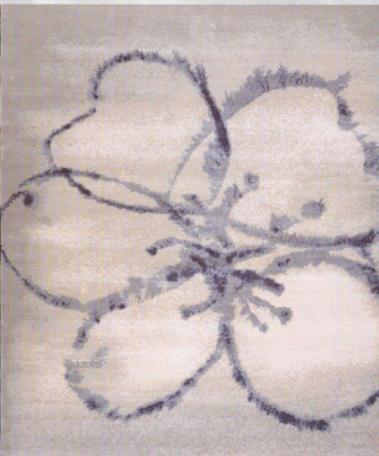
Photography courtesy of Fort Street Studio



display tracks from England properly showcase their singular wild silk and wool rugs produced in India, Nepal and China.

"We were already coming to Hong Kong a few times each year," Davis acknowledges. "We were crossing the street in Sheung Wan one day and we looked at each other... Why not move back, we thought. We were opening a showroom here. We should be here. It's easier to travel – we can go to India and not be jetlagged." They bade farewell to their New York abode in February 2014, around the same time their son relocated from Los Angeles to New York to pursue graduate studies in filmmaking.

The pair readily admits that Davis is more technically inclined. "Brad works in the factories, taking our artwork into patterns," says Provisor. "I do the painting. We recognise that our hand-knotted carpets take a long time to produce. We don't use a gun for tufting; our weavers tie every knot by hand, and there is no real structure to our pieces. It takes four to six months to make our rugs. Designers here in Hong Kong tend to leave carpets to the end of the project, and the culture here is mostly tufted products. We're not the same animal. We don't work with colour poms. We don't do one design in five colourways. We don't do collections; we add to our existing designs. We don't wholesale. Our rugs are classics that will endure, and we think of ourselves as collaborators... problem-solvers. That's why we like to work with designers at the start of a project."



Although their exclusive designs have historically graced high-end residences, the couple now also creates rugs for unique commercial applications. "Boutique hotels, CEO offices... we did something for Swire's reception area recently," notes Davis. "We also did the lobby and ballroom carpets for Andaz in Los Angeles. We're trying to broaden our range. People come to us for innovation, and our goal is to always push boundaries and explore new ideas. It's also more fun; otherwise, we never would have stopped painting."

Balancing the business and creative sides of Fort Street Studio is something Davis and Provisor address regularly with their annual design retreats. Every summer, for five weeks, they go somewhere beautiful and work on their art. Although most of what they produce may not end

up becoming a carpet, the couple find working holidays a necessary component of their business. "Last year, we rented a house in Ubud," says Davis. "We had two studios and a swimming pool. We locked up our devices and painted from early morning until 6 pm, with the occasional dip in the pool."

"This year, we are going to Umbria," Provisor chimes in, her eyes lighting up in anticipation. "We have an apartment there with a 1,000sq ft studio and a big garden." With such bucolic surroundings for inspiration, Fort Street Studio's upcoming designs should be worth the wait.