

BEYOND LUXURY LIVING

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THE
MEANING OF
HOME

WHERE THE
STORY BEGINS
NATHALIE KÜPPER HENARES,
PIE ÁLVAREZ,
DEREK RAMSAY,
CECILE ZAMORA, AND
CANDY DIZON

FAST-FORWARD FAMILY

JESSICA
KIENLE
MAXWELL &
STEPHANIE
KIENLE GONZALEZ

ON KEEPING UP WITH THE EVOLUTION
OF FILIPINO DESIGN



A MAGIC CARPET RIDE

An ancient industry in need of freshening up, **FORT STREET STUDIO** arrived with the use of technology and painterly designs to change the carpet world

Text **SARA SIGUION-REYNA**

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Ask anyone in the know about interior design and carpets and the first name on their mouth will be Fort Street Studio. The company, known for its luxurious, hand-knotted carpets is the brainchild of artists Brad Davis and Janis Provisor and is the leading name in carpets.

The story of Fort Street Studio started in 1989, when Crown Point Press, a fine-art etching press based in San Francisco invited the artists to China to make prints in the traditional Chinese Watercolor Woodblock technique. Always interested in Chinese art but never able to visit, Davis and Provisor jumped at the opportunity.

In three weeks, they went to Shanghai, Suzhou, Hangzhou, and Huang Shan. “While in Hangzhou, we had a sense that we would return one day to spend more time there, and in 1993/94 the opportunity arose for us to do so,” says Provisor. “We decided to take a year’s adventure away from NYC, grabbed our young son who had just turned 6, and away we went to Hangzhou and Hong Kong.” In the book *A Tale of Warp and Weft: Fort Street Studio*, Davis says everyone thought they were crazy, because at that point he and Provisor had significant art careers, showing in the United States and Europe.

Due to the 1993 recession, the art world in the US had turned to conservatism, and it was the perfect time for an adventure. China, meanwhile, was beginning to open up. “One felt that you could do and make almost anything,” says Provisor. While neither of them can point to any specific influence, Provisor believes there was no doubt that the experience of living there; meeting people, and encountering daily life had its impact. “Artists are like sponges, soaking in what they see, smell, understand, and translating all this stimulation into their work,” she says.

At the beginning of their artistic careers, working with fabric and textiles was not something they both thought they would ever do.

Provisor says that while she had always been fascinated by fashion, it was not something she ever thought she would dip her toes into. Davis, who was part of the Pattern and Decoration style movement in the late 70s and 80s, used fabric as merely a decorative border element on his paintings.

Their interest started when Davis met a retired manager of a state-run carpet factory. Davis then asked Provisor if she was interested in collaborating on a carpet for their loft in New York. At the time, they were based in Hangzhou, the center of the silk industry. In their small studio area, they made watercolors, which could be translated into a silk carpet.

"We had no idea how difficult this would be. We were setting ourselves up against a time-honored tradition of how to design for a carpet to be woven," Provisor says. But artists are always ready to take on a challenge, and are nothing if not solvers of problems, she says. What began as a one-off developed into something far different than anything they anticipated.

The duo was inspired by an art deco-era carpet they both had that featured a flower with a bleed-through shade from one color to another, and they sought to replicate that effect. "That was the first real intuition about how we could make a carpet that looked like a watercolor," says Davis in *A Tale of Warp and Weft*.

Mrs. Liu, the retired carpet manager, had reservations, citing the impracticality of attempting to make even a sample. At the time, carpets were designed in shapes or forms within patterns rather than with bleeding watercolor effect. "Creating a readable pattern in a knot-by-knot manner was the innovation," shares Provisor. "When we began there was no software for this, all carpet patterns were drawn by hand full scale."

The eureka moment happened when someone suggested Davis try Photoshop. "Brad had an idea that a knot was a pixel, and then found someone eventually to help him realize his 'light bulb moment' into a weavable pattern," says Provisor. This, she says, became the innovation.

The whole process took around six to eight months of trial and error, with none of their carpets making it off the loom for almost two years. "It was sort of crazy, but we were determined. Before this we were very 'low tech,' not even owning a computer!" says Provisor. Nowadays, programs exist that make this a simple step in the design process, but for the couple at the time, it was very much just them—and whoever was teaching Davis Photoshop.

Once they were able to convince their weavers to work on the pattern and start producing carpets regularly, the next step was to break into that world. This proved easier said than done. Like any business that had existed for centuries, the carpet industry was resistant to change, be it on the innovation front or the design front.

"The industry has changed remarkably in the last 25 years, but it was a tough and closed business when we began," says Provisor, adding that they had tried multiple avenues, from working in multi-line carpet showrooms to wholesaling, and to furniture showrooms. "When we first entered the market people were either amazed at the watercolor effects or believed we were a one-note wonder that wouldn't last. But, we were always looking for new techniques, new ideas that spurred us on," she says.

L Janis Provisor & Brad Davis at the mill by the yarn spool winder
T The Lulu Light, a carpet from the Progetto Passione collection, in production
B The yarn room at the factory



Eventually, both of them realized it was better to have their showroom. Thus, Fort Street Studio was born.

Today, the brand's line of carpets is in the home of tastemakers and titans of different sectors. "There are many aspects of being in charge of your studio that is very satisfying. Seeing your work from conception to the finished product is a great feeling," says Provisor. "Seeing what you've made existing in people's homes is also quite meaningful. Working with talented interior designers and others in the world of design gives us great pleasure, as well."

They have also collaborated with Louis Vuitton and Hermès for stores and showroom design. Provisor took particular pleasure at the results of the Hermès, mentioning that it was an enjoyable experience to design something that was "Influenced by someone else's design culture, but also stayed true to our signature...that was great fun."

RESPECTFUL PARTNERSHIP

For most people, their creative partnerships take place in the workspace. But Davis and Provisor are partners not just at work but also at home. Provisor shares that naturally, in their 25 years of working together there have been ups and downs. "We are both rather stubborn, and we had to set ground rules," she says.



It is very important for Provisor that while their work is recognized for its high aesthetic value, clients know that their pieces are meant to work in the overall environment. After all, as she says, “A carpet is the soul of a room, it’s the hearth, both figuratively and literally. It integrates furniture and works as a beautiful platform for all that happens on it. Walking on a luxurious carpet is a sensuous experience, and on a more prosaic level, cats, dogs, and kids love to roll around it. Carpets add nuance to a room, and tie the entire design idea together.”

WOULDN'T CHANGE A THING

As they find themselves with more time away from the everyday business of Fort Street Studio, Provisor mentions that they would like to take on more “special projects” for their creative juices. As many artists are wont to do, they occasionally wish to break the mold, just as they once did in their groundbreaking painterly designs. “[We do wish we could do] some wild pieces that don’t bother to take the furniture into account or do something very different than the Fort Street Studio recognized aesthetic,” she says.

Both open to embracing change and following their noses to different experiences, Provisor says they had never expected to build a successful luxury boutique carpet company that holds great respect in the industry. “Brad and I have had an endlessly interesting life, and no doubt it’s kept us going, kept us young or young at heart, as the saying goes,” she adds.

In their spare time, Provisor mentions that both she and Davis are voracious readers of a variety of materials, from fiction, non-fiction, design, and books about art. They regularly visit art galleries and museums and enjoy jaunts around the world but due to the pandemic, find themselves both at home and enjoying their chosen streaming service.

One other thing taking up their time is the process of buying a country home. “Just

As artists, they both felt it was important that neither imposed their painting ideas and aesthetics into the carpets, but rather work in tandem to create something specific for the carpet design. “We had arguments, even over design direction, but that changed, and people do marvel at how ‘simpatico’ we are now. We’re lucky, we respect each other’s ideas and are willing to explore together, and laugh together,” says Provisor.

In the beginning, the couple each did everything in the business, learning along the way. Eventually, their tasks diverged. Today, Davis does the transformation of the watercolors, drawings, and designs into a weavable pattern, while Provisor moved on to being in charge of sales and marketing.

“I might do 70 percent of the watercolors and drawings, but not all for sure, and we choose the color, fibers, scale, and all things about the overall design together. We are each involved in the production in various ways, and, thankfully, we now have others who work for us on the numbers,” says Provisor.

In the book, Davis mentions that the period in which they began was a time when art had divorced itself from life: “The art world was so estranged from design, so estranged from architecture, and so estranged from living with art. I mean, a lot of it denied the object. It was an idea. It was ephemeral, it existed as a set of strategies.”



thinking about what we want to do with it is filling our brain...looking at the design, auctions for furniture, on and on,” she says. Before carpets, their first collaboration together was building a house in Colorado, which won an American Institute of Architecture Award in 1986. “We’re now excited to go down this adventure again; it’s a form of adult play!”

“My entire life I knew I would make art and Brad would say the same thing...we are both makers, we like making things, whether it’s art, or carpets or ceramics, jewelry, prints,” says Provisor. “I couldn’t imagine a more fulfilling life even if it has not always been easy. It’s fair to say that we both can’t imagine doing or being anything else than artists.” ■

A TALE OF WARP AND WEFT: FORT STREET STUDIO will be available on [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com) and [rizzoliusa.com](https://www.rizzoliusa.com) on April 13. The Fort Street Studio showrooms are located in New York, London, and Hong Kong. For more information, please visit [fortstreetstudio.com](https://www.fortstreetstudio.com)

T Janis Provisor & Brad Davis with the key factory team
B Tribeca living room of Janis Provisor & Brad Davis / Karl Moss carpet

HOMIE COMPANION

Once relegated to merely decorative fodder, coffee table books still have a lot to show and say, and can have a substantial life of their own. Here are some of our favorites that wax poetic about home and design

Text SARA SIGUION-REYNA



BIBLIOSTYLE: HOW WE LIVE AT HOME WITH BOOKS

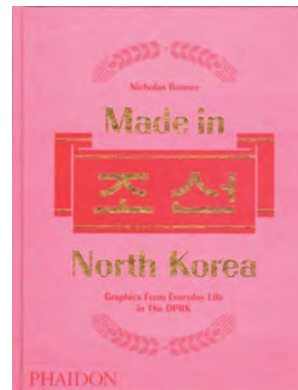
BY NINA FREUDENBERGER
AND SADIE STEIN

This is a visually inspiring look at the at-home libraries of a diverse set of people. From writer Karl Ove Knausgaard to fashion designer Philip Lim, the tome is perfect for anyone in need of storage tips, or those curious about the book collection of some of the world's biggest tastemakers.

A TALE OF WARP AND WEFT: FORT STREET STUDIO

BY BRAD DAVIS AND JANIS PROVISOR

Ever wonder at the intricate transformation of a watercolor painting into a beautiful silk carpet? A Tale of Warp and Weft: Fort Street Studio is a beautifully illustrated book that explains the process of New York-based artists Brad Davis and Janis Provisor. The duo's style in contemporary carpet design and manufacturing led to major innovations in that industry.



MADE IN NORTH KOREA: GRAPHICS FROM EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE DPRK

BY NICK BONNER

Anyone curious about what design inspiration is like in a hermit kingdom should look no further than Made in North Korea: Graphics From Everyday Life in the DPRK. Bonner is a frequent visitor to the country and has amassed a huge collection of ephemera, from hotel stationery and tickets to brochures and restaurant menus. The result is an enthralling visual essay that (surprisingly) pleases the eye.

WHERE TO GET IT:
Fully Booked, Fully Booked Lazada,
Instagram: @estante.bookstore and amazon.com

ACCIDENTALLY WES ANDERSON

BY WALLY KOVAL

Everyone knows the "look" of a Wes Anderson movie. Across 10 movies, his aesthetic has stayed true, from clothing, shade palette, and, most importantly, architecture. From Russia to India, Accidentally Wes Anderson explores true-to-life locations that look like they were dreamed straight out of the director's mind.

