

# DREAM WEAVERS



*Meet the Hong Kong-based designers of exquisite haute couture silk carpets, which adorn the homes of stars including Madonna and Elton John*

BY ANNABEL NOURSE



**A**t the Fort Street Studio showroom in One Island South, you'll be tempted to stroke the carpets on display because they are so invitingly soft and have delicate, luminous colours.

The creators of these haute couture carpets are husband and wife team, Brad Davis and Janis Provisor, artists from New York, who had the opportunity to live and work in Hangzhou making woodblock prints, but stumbled on the chance to make carpets instead.

"Our whole carpet project was very serendipitous. I just decided to make one for our house," explains Davis. "As it was the centre of the silk industry, I thought, 'why not make a silk carpet?'"

Just as Davis and Provisor set out to transform their watercolour paintings into carpet designs, a lot of domestic silk in China was being exported and the carpet industry couldn't afford it anymore. However, the infinitely more durable wild silk produced in northern China that had previously been requisitioned by the army for use as parachutes and gun belts,

suddenly became available when they switched to synthetics.

"We came in just at that moment and it was exactly what we wanted; it was stronger, hardier and had this great texture," says Davis.

The couple's designs are hand-knotted, which is the traditional artisan way of making them. "Most commercially made carpets are machine tufted, and the more high-end ones are hand tufted," says Provisor. "Hand-knotted is far better quality. While a hand-tufted carpet might take five weeks to make, a hand-knotted one can take four or five months."

The firm has three dedicated workshops in China and has recently expanded elsewhere to find other carpet specialists, including small-scale, traditional, Nepalese, Indian and Thai producers, to create its unique designs.

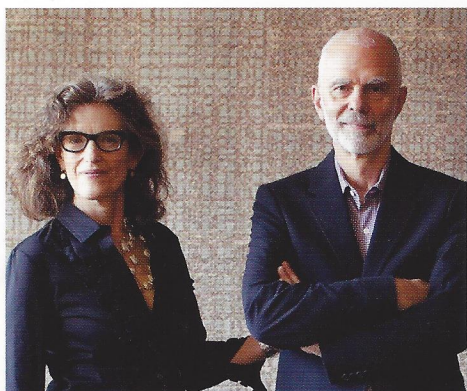
"This small Thai silk village grows the silk worms, processes the cocoons, dyes the yarn and finishes it all, just for us," says Provisor. "They can only do 1,500 sqft a year so it's very precious, that's about 10 or 12 carpets."

#### THIS PAGE

Hand-knotted carpets created in the traditional artisan way include designs such as (from left) Aura in blue; Flats; Slide in Dijon and Geo in lemon (other colours are available)

#### OPPOSITE PAGE

This stunning Red Ring design is beautifully displayed in the Fort Street Studio



#### ABOVE

This striking Plaid Blue carpet is beautifully displayed in Fort Street Studio; Brad Davis and Janis Proviso create exquisite silk carpets fit for an emperor

Around 70 per cent of the studio's output is custom work and this is a company that takes pride in working with the very best architects and interior designers, and a few celebrities too – Madonna, Elton John and Tom Clancy all own Fort Street Studio carpets. It has also collaborated with Hermès to create six designs for its in-house interiors brand, Maison, and has recently teamed up with *Wallpaper* magazine to work with artisans in Afghanistan, via Afghan Made, to help revitalise the traditional carpet weaving industry there.

Apart from the sheer craftsmanship involved in each carpet, what is also striking is the beauty of the designs. And the inspirations behind them are often from surprising sources, such as an article in an airline magazine which influenced one particularly stunning creation.

"I read that the Qianlong emperor's personal quarters in the Forbidden City were being refurbished. They were reproducing these metal and silk carpets that he had there," says Davis. "My manager in China found out where they got the yarn for the metal and we've done two limited editions of this quality. They are a much higher knot count, take twice as long to make and are twice as expensive. Despite this it's been one of our best sellers."

Carpets fit for an emperor – that's certainly something to aspire to.

## KEEP IT CLEAN

- The high gum content of wild silk ensures that most spills bead on top of the dense pile before being absorbed by the silk fibres – this allows time to dab up the spill.
- Blot the spill with clean absorbent towels – do not rub or scrub. Let the area air-dry. Do not apply heat. Once dry, lightly brush the pile with a soft bristle brush.
- If a stain remains, use a damp rag and repeat the process of blotting, drying and brushing. Room temperature club soda or carbonated water may also help in removing the stain.
- For persistent or oil-based stains, contact a professional cleaner of fine hand-knotted Oriental carpets.
- If you take your rug to a professional cleaner, they should use only cold water and a mild, pH neutral soap. They can also be dry-cleaned.
- Never use standard carpet cleaning solutions from retail outlets. The harsh chemicals may destroy the silk fibres and alter the colour. In most cases, quick action and water or club soda will tackle the spill.
- Do not steam-clean silk carpets. Steaming will de-gum the silk and fade the colours, ruining the soft matte finish.
- Preferably use only natural materials as padding under your carpet. In a hot, humid climate like Hong Kong's, no padding is necessary and it often traps moisture, which can cause mildew.
- Turn your carpets every few months to avoid wear patterns.
- Use coasters under heavy furniture or pointed legs. Marks from your furniture are easily removed by lightly running your fingertip over the pile.

## KNOTTED HISTORY

### What's it made of?

100 per cent Dandong wild silk, from north China

### What's so special about it?

It is hand-cut and hand-knotted

### How's it made?

Each silk yarn has 15 strands of silk in it. A knot has 30 strands. There are 120 knots per linear foot. A standard size 9ft x 12ft carpet has exactly 1,550,000 knots, all tied on to cotton warp and weft.