

'We work closely with the weaving community'

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When one thinks of carpets and rugs, one is often reminded of the lavish royal *darbars*. The tradition of carpets, which has been handed down to us from the times of Mughal emperor Babar hold rich aesthetic value in Indian households even to this day. Over the years, its appeal has even transcended beyond the country. This has resulted in the establishment of several social business models that cater to underprivileged sections of the society. One of them is Jaipur rugs, established in 1978 by Nand Kishore Chaudhary who directly approached weavers from Indian villages. Today, it has converted into a network of 40,000 artisans, spread across 600 villages. Excerpts:

Q Does Jaipur have any special relationship with rugs?

What do people think about carpet weaving, the eastern Uttar Pradesh region or the Bhadohi-Mirzapur belt come to mind. Kashmir is another area that is synonymous to carpet weaving. But only a few people know that many communities in Rajasthan have a rich carpet weaving history. The journey of Jaipur Rugs starts in a small town a few kilometres from the capital city of Jaipur where we began with nine artisans and two looms. Currently, there are 240 villages in Rajasthan where carpet weaving is done for Jaipur Rugs.

Q How does the illustrious history of Indian rugs reflect in your products?

Indian carpet weaving tradition is centuries old and are reflected in the design, weaving technique and colours that we use in our rugs. The processes that go into making a rug are the same that have been practiced for centuries. We continue to work with over 2,500 women yarn spinners from Bikaner to spin yarn on a rudimentary *charkha*, consciously choosing not to replace hundreds of hand-spinning jobs with machines.

The finishing process that involves 18 steps and close to 500 people is also done by hand and in the traditional way to make our products truly handmade. While the designs and colour palette are more contemporary the process behind them is centuries old.

Q How has the brand contributed in modifying the Indian rug industry?

The first transformation brought about in this industry was the elimination of middlemen who often exploited the artisans and engaged in child labour. We worked directly with the weavers and gave them sustainable livelihood at their doorstep. This has helped in keeping alive the dying art of carpet-weaving and made it a lucrative prospect for the coming generation of weavers who were otherwise abandoning their art.

With the Artisan Originals collection, Jaipur Rugs use the artisan's creativity and designing skills to make rugs that are competing with big design houses and professional designers and winning global awards. Also, we provide a platform to connect the weaver directly with the people who have bought their rugs and bring the two ends of the spectrum together.

Q Who comes up with the designs?

It is Kavita Chaudhary, the design head at Jaipur Rugs who usually comes up with designs. She is a globally renowned designer who has created the international brand Kavi. She uses rugs as a form of artistic expression and her designs are modern interpretation of age old observations. She closely works with the weaving community and the artisan behind the Artisan Originals collection.

The Artisan Originals is an initiative which taps into the untamed fashion from the villages of India. It experiments with the originality of rural craftsmen to nurture their creative potential, which is explored at a global stage. For the first time ever, weavers get to be the designers of their own rugs. Each rug in the collection is a mas-

terpiece for the design inspiration it weaves. It is imbued with the individuality of its artisan evident in unique artistry.

Q What is the current design and fabric trend in rugs?

A rug has a tremendous effect on space and size, texture, colour, pattern, and shape are all variables to consider. With changing times and people giving more attention to details, the trends today can be defined as anti-design, a term used to defy any design language and follow the heart.

Inspired by the 50s and 60s, designers rediscover vintage florals and bring them up to date with impactful scales and a romantic colour palette.

The style is about clean, sleek lines, found both in geometric and organic forms with accent of pastel vintage colours. In terms of fabric, silk and wool carpets still remain the favourites, but sustainable alternatives like bamboo silk are also gaining popularity.

Q How has it evolved over the years?

A few decades ago, traditional designs dominated the carpet industry. Floral patterns and shades of red were the standard design language of carpets everywhere. As homes and interior designs became more modern, rug designs started evolving in the same direction. Carpets now come in pastel shades and abstract designs. While the vintage designs continue to have their niche, a more eclectic design language is the flavour of the new generation.

Q Are the internationally exported rugs generally customised according to the respective cultures? Or is there more

Nand Kishore Chaudhary, founder, Jaipur Rugs, gets talking about the team's endeavour to connect artisans with consumers and bring two ends of the spectrum together

demand for Indian designs and patterns?

Customisation depends entirely on the customer's requirement. We often get customisation requests regarding size and colour. The demand for contemporary designs and pastel shades dominates the international orders, but we do get significant requests for Indian designs as well.

