



View from the Fringe

Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



Vol. XVII, No. 1 September 2009

www.ne-rugsociety.org

September Meeting: Wendel Swan on “Color, Color, Color: The Appeal of Oriental Rugs”

On September 25, Wendel Swan will speak on exploring and explaining the appeal of color in rugs, a discourse that evolved from his years-long effort to explain, if only to himself, why some rugs, whether they are city or nomadic, pile or flat-woven, appeal to us while others don't.

In real estate, the mantra is “location, location, location,” and for oriental rug enthusiasts the mantra is “color, color, color.” We all know what colors we like, but often we don't understand why we like them or just how complex the issue of “color” can be.

To begin with, color is a matter of perception and we all perceive colors differently—sometimes not much differently but sometimes very differently. Wendel will discuss traditional color theory and how the selection and juxtaposition of colors in rugs may lead us to perceive them in ways that are entirely different than we might have imagined. There will be considerable audience participation in the program.

Following his PowerPoint presentation, Wendel would like to discuss rugs and textiles from local collections in the context of the lecture. He hopes that some of our members can bring in some very old rugs, some that are minimalist and some that have large “blocks” of color in them. Most of all, he would like to discuss rugs that our members feel have outstanding color, regardless of age or condition.

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October Meeting: Bertram Frauenknecht on Shabsavan Weavings

On October 9 Bertram Frauenknecht will discuss Shabsavan weavings, many of which are small soumak bags. The Shabsavan are a confederation of Turkish speaking nomadic tribal groups most of whom are now settled in northwest Iran. Bertram became fascinated with their flat-woven pieces in 1971 when he encountered a group of Shabsavan nomads near Tabriz. After visiting with them several more times and collecting their weavings, in 1993 he published “Shabsavan Sumak

September/October Meeting Details

Date: Swan: Friday, September 25

Frauenknecht: Friday, October 9

Time: 7:30PM

Place: First Parish, Bedford Road, Lincoln

Note: Non-members welcomed for \$10 fee

Directions:

From Rte. 95 (128) take the Trapelo Road West exit (#28B) in Waltham. Proceed west about 2.5 miles to a stop sign at the five-way intersection in Lincoln (there is a white planter in the middle of the intersection.) Go right on Bedford Road for 0.1 miles to Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your right. **The parish house is on your left.**

From Rte. 2 take Bedford Road, Lincoln Center exit (eastbound, turn right at light; westbound, go through light, turn right, and circle 270 degrees to cross Rte. 2 at the light.) Proceed 0.9 miles and you will see Bemis Hall, a large brick building on your left. **The parish house is on your right.**

Parking:

In back of the parish house plus along the street. It's OK to park in front of Bemis Hall **provided the building is dark and not in use.**

Taschen,” a catalogue of some sixty 19th century soumak Shabsavan bagfaces.

“To understand the Shabsavan it is important to understand their history,” he explains. In the talk he will first discuss Shabsavan history from their assumed origin up to the present time. Then he will use images of their weavings, both piled and flat-woven, to compare their colors and designs. Finally, in comparing these

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September Meeting

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Wendel Swan has collected rugs since 1968. Although he is primarily known for his interest in bags from Northwest Persia, in recent years he has also become more interested in early Turkish carpets as well as Swedish folk weavings.

Wendel was the president of the Washington Textile Group and the International Hajji Baba Society for

16 years. He serves on the Board of Trustees of The Textile Museum in Washington, is chair of the Executive Committee of the International Conference on Oriental Carpets (ICOC) and has lectured at various rug societies, conferences and museums throughout the United States and in Europe. He has spoken to NERS on several occasions.

April Meeting: Mike Tschbull on “A Contemporary View of Old Caucasian Village Rugs” By Jim Adelson

On April 17th, long-time NERS member Mike Tschbull gave a talk on Caucasian village rugs, some of their design influences, and changes in the weaving over time.

Mike started by noting that despite their popularity, so much is uncertain about older village weavings—“so many Caucasian rugs, so little is known about them.” The popular rug literature leaves a lot of questions unanswered. Ulrich Schurmann’s book is the bible, but doesn’t contain a lot of ethnographic information. Ian Bennett’s book on Caucasian rugs combines text that he wrote with a set of rug slides from Germany. There are several other books, none of which are particularly recommended when it comes to Caucasian village rugs.

From outside the rug literature, there are a number of sources, but they tend not to contain detailed information related to weaving. The Empress of Russia sent a couple of German investigators to the Caucasus in the late 18th/early 19th century, but they wrote about plants and animals, rather than rugs. Some 19th century photos collected and shown by Alexander Bainbridge show certain relevant things, such as a woman weaving, or cloth merchants with sheepskin caps, but there isn’t enough on rugs to be very comprehensive. There are more photos in the Azarbayjani Museum in Baku, but again they don’t provide a very complete picture of Caucasian village weaving.

According to Mike, there *are* some things that are known. Many of the weaving villages are found in the Kura river valley, at altitudes ranging from 1000–2000 meters. He commented that “I think the variety of rugs you see coming out of the Caucasus reflects the topog-

raphy—villages kept separate by the landscape.” The ethnic make-up of most villages has varied a lot in the last couple of centuries, with almost all groups, most of whom were Turkic speaking, having been moved around and brutalized by the Russians. The primary exception has been the Georgians, who appear to have stayed in the same place for thousands of years.

Following these introductory remarks, Mike discussed some of his suggestions for design origins and influences. He commented that he thought the influence of felts on weaving design is underestimated. Design rendering in felt helped develop the sense of negative space. He showed pictures from around 1890-1900 of a wedding yurt in the northeast Caucasus decorated with felts. He also displayed felts with reciprocal borders and other design elements that are very similar to Bordjalou pile rug designs.

Mike then noted the effects of slit tapestry kilim weaving on pile designs. Certain overall design concepts, such as diagonal stripes, may trace their roots back to earlier kilims. Some individual design motifs, such as latchhook and stepped designs, seem connected to the structural characteristics of slit tapestry weaving. Zigzag border designs may have come from slit tapestry kilims, although it is also possible that warp-faced designs were a source for this. In addition to kilims, jajims may have contributed, with their vertically striped patterns, a possible influence on the development of vertically striped pile designs.

A number of designs ceased being woven around 1860 under Russian efforts to standardize production.

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April Meeting

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Even the designs that survived suffered—Mike showed an example of a boteh design rug from the Russian era, and a less stiff example from perhaps two generations earlier.

He felt that Russians collected many older Caucasian pieces during the period from 1850 to 1880, during which time they also closed a number of mosques. In addition, fewer of the older Caucasian pieces remain because they hadn't been made in great numbers, since there wasn't as much demand as from the end of the 19th century onward. Finally, the older rugs were prone to destruction, partly from oxidation, and partly from deterioration of their cotton selvages and ends.

Mike commented briefly on many other possible design influences. Prayer rugs were driven by architecture; he used the example of a Moorish building in Toledo that exhibits shapes utilized in prayer rugs. He made a link between an Anatolian slit-tapestry prayer kilim and the design(s) used in Fachralo prayer rugs. He also showed another piece with a central medallion (Lori-Pambak?), pointing to a possible origin from Turkmen guls, but depicted in a simpler, less cluttered fashion.

A number of possible influences came from or through Iran. Mike showed an example of a Gujarati embroidery, coming through Iran and possibly providing inspiration for the lattice prayer rugs in the Caucasus, such as those attributed to Shirvan and Daghestan. He showed pieces that originate from a cypress tree design. Mike displayed a Turkish antecedent for a cruciform design seen in Caucasian rugs, and then stated that this design perhaps goes back further to the Persian garden design in architecture and carpets.

Throughout his talk, Mike made mention of the dif-

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From top:

Nogai 19th century yurt with mosaic felt panels

Example of design transfer from supplementary warp decorated Azarbayjani jajim to Qarabagh pile-woven prayer rug

Examples of a "Shirvan" design combination that apparently died out before about 1880





April Meeting

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ferent color palette of earlier Caucasian weaving. Older pieces had many more color variations. They utilized different yellows and greens, and particularly multiple reds in a single piece. The weavers lost the ability to make purple dyes after about 1860.

Following his remarks, there was a lengthy show-and-tell of pieces that people had brought, and Mike commented quickly on those items. This portion started with a Karagashli-design piece, displaying the three reds that Mike had mentioned for older Caucasian weavings. A Kuba piece with palmettes and the so-called Chi-Chi

border design also contained three different reds. There were multiple pieces using the Memling gul design, though it wasn't clear that all were woven in the Caucasus. Several pieces sported Armenian inscriptions and dates, including one piece dated 1914, and a very curious piece using the Turkmen Ak-su design, with an Armenian inscription and the date 1861.

We very much appreciate Mike's willingness to share his observations and thoughts. It's amazing that so much remains uncertain regarding Caucasian rugs, one of the more widely admired and collected types within the oriental weaving field.



Above:
Design possibly derived from a water course, 15th C.
Anatolian vs. Kazak

Left:
Older vs. newer versions of the same design,
probably north central Transcaucasus

What in the World Is This?

Some twelve million immigrants entered America through Ellis Island. Today the Ellis Island National Monument documents the immigration experience there. Upon entering the Immigration Center building the immigrants first checked their baggage in the baggage room and then proceeded through the inspection process. Those who passed claimed their baggage and left the island. Today a pile of unclaimed bags is exhibited in the great domed registry hall. Among the many wooden trunks and wicker suitcases, Rich and I were amused to find several large woven bags and even a rolled up oriental rug.



Ann Nicholas

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President's Year End Review

I am happy to report that the society's finances remained in sound shape over the past year, but once again we experienced a drop in membership. As of June we were down 6% from last year's level, ending the season with 152 members (103 memberships).

Why the continuing drop in memberships? No doubt it reflects current economic conditions. And it is probably symptomatic of a widespread declining interest internationally in oriental rugs and textile art. However, the good news is that we are still 100% viable and remain one of America's largest and most active rug societies.

Whatever the cause of the drop, your Steering Committee will be doing its best to generate new interest and attract new members. We'll also need your help. Historically, the principal source of new members has been through word-of-mouth from existing members. So we welcome you to bring new prospects to meetings as your guests, to talk up the society with your friends, and to generally get the word around.

We can afford to be smaller, so there's no cause for alarm. But keep in mind that losing members decreases our financial base, limiting our ability to bring speakers to our meetings from across the country and the world. So please do what you can to help.

It was a year of well-attended and well-received meetings.

The NERS 08/09 season kicked off with **Dr. Harald Böhmer's** sumptuously illustrated talk on Anatolian nomads. In October, **John Kreifeldt** gave us a most interesting survey of Borneo textiles, including showing many examples from his own collection. The Textile Museum's then-director **Daniel Walker** was our November speaker, providing an intriguing look at the great Mughal carpets of India and sharing his profound knowledge on the subject. Then in February we were hosted by **John Collins** at his Watertown gallery for a detailed pictorial survey of Persian bags, most of which were from the estimable collection of the late Leslie Orgel.

Jean Burks, head curator of the Shelburne (VT) Museum, joined us in March for a presentation on American quilts, with illustrations drawing heavily from her museum's outstanding collection. And in April, **Raoul "Mike" Tschebull** brought us up to date on

the latest thinking about Caucasian rugs in a talk at the Armenian Library and Museum of America in Watertown. Our usual thanks to **ALMA** for its on-going hospitality. And finally, we closed out the season in May with our annual picnic and show-and-tell at the beautiful Gore Place in Waltham.

As in past years, we maintained our practice of making modest donations to worthy causes. These included The Textile Museum, the Boston Museum of Fine Arts' Textile and Fashion Arts Department, the Textile Museum of Canada, the American Conference on Oriental Rugs (ACOR), and ALMA.

Year after year I have the pleasure of thanking that great gang of members called the Steering Committee without which the New England Rug Society just plain wouldn't work. As ever, the group whirred like clockwork to make things happen: **Lloyd Kannenberg** and **Gillian Richardson** handling food and refreshments at the meetings, with **Lloyd** additionally shepherding our a/v equipment when needed, **Yon Bard** doing the newsletter with the able assistance of **Jim Adelson**, **Ann Nicholas**, **Tom Hannaher** and others, **Julia Bailey** and **Jeff Spurr** helping to coordinate the speaker arrangements, **Bob Alimi** administering our website, and **Janet Smith** handling the logistics of mailings, nametags, and other indispensable clerical tasks. We also thank **Buzz** and **Louise Dohanian** for managing our projector screens.

Special thanks are due those members who went the extra mile with Patron and Supporting memberships. Their donations went a long way toward helping the NERS secure its financial health, and we warmly appreciate the generosity of these members:

Patron Members: **Jim Adelson & Debbie Sheetz**, **John Collins**, **George Grillo**, **Michael & Nancy Grogan**, **Jeremy & Hanne Grantham**, **Lloyd & Susan Kannenberg**, **Beau Ryan**, **Peter Pap**, **Richard Belkin**, **Mario & Caroline Ratzki**, and **Deborah Barthold**.

Supporting Members: **Mitch & Rosalie Rudnick**, **Tom Stocker & Jim Alexander**, **Gillian Richardson**, **Phil & Sharon Lichtman**, **Tom & Ann Hannaher**, **Klaudia Shepard**, **Peter Walker**, **Karl**

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President's Year End Review

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Johnson, and Steve & Happy Spongberg.

Our membership continues to be as diversified as it is enthusiastic. Here's a breakout of our members' whereabouts:

Eastern Mass.	120
Western Mass.	3
Connecticut	6
Rhode Island	3
New Hampshire	4
Vermont	3
Maine	4
New York	4
Indiana	1
Illinois	1
California	3

A personal note before closing: this will be my last year as president of the society. It's been 15 years since I assumed the mantle, and I've enjoyed every bit of it.

But now it is time for others to take over and keep the society moving ahead. Ann Nicholas has already taken on responsibility for arranging the upcoming 09/10 program and has done a fabulous job of lining up great speakers, as you'll note elsewhere in this newsletter. I'll continue to manage the membership and finances for the upcoming year, after which it will become others' responsibility. And various committee members will share the duty of running the meetings. If you'd like to get more involved in helping out, let me or another committee member hear from you. Every little bit helps.

Finally, many warm thanks to you, and to all the members of the NERS for such generous support over the past season, for pitching in when help is needed, and for contributing the enthusiasm and encouragement that is so vital to keeping our organization a healthy and rewarding one. Stay with us; we couldn't do it without you!

Mark Hopkins

What in the World is This?

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Occasionally our collector members receive unsolicited email offers of rugs from countries around the world. Here is an example which arrived recently from Russia:

"Dear Sirs,

"Would like to offer to your attention unique piece of art: hand-made carpet with the image of well-known political figures of 20th century Lenin and Stalin. The size of the carpet 250sm on 210sm. In the lower and upper central part of the carpet, two inscriptions are printed (on photo is not visible). Inscriptions tell that the carpet that the period of production of carpet is 1936 till 1937, it was done by hands of six Turkmen women (listed their names and surnames) from sketches and drawings of the famous painter of that time Zhukov.

"Carpet beautiful and majestic. Due to the unique technology of thin carpet image quality is tremendous."

As far as we know, the rug is still available. We urge our members to please not fight over it.

Mark Hopkins



We welcome the following new members: *David Brown and Barry Curcio.*

Newsletter contributors and helpers: Yon Bard (editor), Jim Adelson, Dora Bard, Mark Hopkins, Ann Nicholas, Janet Smith.

Comments/contributions/for sale ads to: Yonathan Bard, e-mail doryon@rcn.com



May Meeting: Picnic, Show & Tell, and Moth Market

On May 16 we gathered on the grounds of the Gore Place estate in Waltham. The weather cooperated, and, as usual, we enjoyed a wide variety of textiles—both for sale at the moth market and on display at the show and tell. A random selection of the latter pieces is presented below and on the next page.



Kirgiz horse blanket, velvet with silk embroidery



Pair of Anatolian kilims



Baluch rifle bag (?)



Banjara (Indian gypsy) cradle cover



Anatolian tülü; undyed wools



Moroccan wedding shawl



May Meeting

Clockwise, from right:
Turtle (?) mola;
Ersari (?) main carpet fragment;
Sumatran couched decorative textile;
Uzbek ikat coats modeled by Cheryl Mezak;
Tari coca gathering cloth, Northern Peru, 7-8th
century;
Central Asian mirror cover, silk embroidery on wool





Upcoming Rug Events

Future NERS 2009/10 Meetings:

Nov. 6: Robert Mann on *Care and Repair of Oriental Rugs* (Collins Gallery, Watertown)

Feb. ?: Alberto Levi on *The Artistic Appeal of Bakhtiari Grain Bags* (Collins Gallery, Watertown)

Mar. ?: Jeff Spurr on *Collectible African Textiles* (First Parish, Lincoln)

Apr ?: Thomas Farnham on *The History of Great Classical Persian Carpets* (ALMA, Watertown)

May ?: Picnic and Show & Tell (Gore Place, Waltham).

Auctions (*major carpet sales in bold*):

Grogan, Dedham, **9/14** (collection of Myrna Bloom, including many rugs, textiles, and books), 10/18

Sotheby's, NY, 9/16, 10/2

Bonham's, San Francisco, 9/20, **10/12, 12/15**

Rippon Boswell, Wiesbaden, 9/26, **12/5**

Bonhams, London, 10/6, 10/13, 12/8

Christie's, London, **10/8**

Sotheby's, London, 10/9

Bonham's, Los Angeles, **10/12, 10/25, 11/15, 12/15**

Skinner, Boston, **12/5**

Christie's, NY, **12/8**.

Exhibitions and Fairs:

Textile Revolution, a Journey Through Space and Time, ongoing at the newly reopened Textile History Museum, Lowell, MA. Visit www.athm.org for more

information.

International Carpet Show, Gramercy Park Armory, New York, 9/20-22 (www.nyics.com)

Antique Rug and Textile Show, Motel Capri, San Francisco, 10/15-26 (arts.jozan.net).

Conferences:

Volkmanntreffen 2009: Hanging Gardens and Shining Stars—Embroideries From Settlements In Central Asian Oases; Berlin, October 23-25. For information contact erber@erber-statik.de, or visit the website www.volkmanntreffen.de



Out of 421 entries, Tom Stocker's "Painting of a Persian Gabbeh" (depicted above) was one of three works selected for the Juror's Recognition Award by Jessica Papathan, Ass't Curator at St Anselm's College. The show was the Sixteenth Annual Juried Summer Exhibition 2009, AVA Gallery and Art Center, Lebanon, NH 03766

The New England Rug Society is an informal, non-profit organization of people interested in enriching their knowledge and appreciation of antique oriental rugs and textiles. Its meetings are held six to eight times a year. Annual membership dues are: Single \$45, Couple \$65, Supporting \$90, Patron \$120, Student \$25. Membership information or renewal forms can be obtained on our website www.ne-rugsociety.org, or by writing to **New England Rug Society, P.O. Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773**, calling Mark Hopkins at 781-259-9444, or emailing him at mopkins@verizon.net.

NERS 2009/10 Steering Committee:

Mark Hopkins (President)

Jim Adelson

Robert Alimi

Julia Bailey

Yonathan Bard

Tom Hannaher

Lloyd Kannenberg

Ann Nicholas

Gillian Richardson

Janet Smith

Jeff Spurr



October Meeting

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weavings to dated pieces he will establish a framework for answering that age-old question of many collectors, "How old is that piece?"

He first became interested in antique tribal weavings in 1969 when a proud collector showed Bertram his weavings. "I was stunned, intrigued, and instantly fell in love with these antique pieces," he confides. In the 1970s he traveled extensively in Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, and India. "In 1976 I finally acknowledged that my true interest had become old tribal rugs and flat-weaves," he recalls. "I quit my day job as a teacher of chemistry and biology to open a gallery,"

Soon he opened one in Nürnberg for antique rugs

and textiles. In 1978 he published his first rug book on Anatolian prayer kilims, which has been followed by other books and articles on Turkish weavings, woven bags, and Middle Eastern travels. Presently Gallery Frauenknecht is located in Istanbul and owned and operated by his wife, Mariola. Today Bertram considers himself a consultant on antique rugs and textiles, although he does help Mariola with the gallery.

Bertram is a very informative and entertaining speaker, as many NERS members will recall. The collection of Shahsavan weavings he will share with us, both in images and a few actual pieces, is among the very best. Members are encouraged to bring Shahsavan pieces for a show and tell after the talk.



New England Rug Society
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