



# View from the Fringe

## Newsletter of the New England Rug Society



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[www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org)

### November Meeting: Robert Mann on “Cleaning Oriental Rugs: Making Sense of the Options”

Our November speaker, Denver-based Robert Mann, will discuss *Cleaning Oriental Rugs: Making Sense of the Options*, a topic which causes much confusion and angst for many oriental rug owners.

The cleaning of Oriental carpets is basically a simple process, so why is it often difficult to make sense of the conflicting things one hears when the topic is discussed? A surprising amount of folklore and misinformation is prevalent in the field, and though there are legitimately differing opinions on some questions, there are simple answers to others.

Should a rug be cleaned? What is the best way to do so? Does your rug really need cleaning? Should some repairs or stabilization be done prior to the cleaning? Will cleaning harm the rug? Can stains be removed? Will dyes bleed? Ask these questions and you'll be surprised how widely the answers vary. How do you find a rug cleaner? How do you talk to one once you do?

Bob, one of America's foremost rug and textile conservators, will present slides illustrating the cleaning process and provide an overview of the commonly available options. He will discuss how to work with cleaners and provide suggestions on how to clean a rug yourself.

Bob became interested in oriental rugs in the early 1970s when he traveled in several rug producing countries. In 1978 he took a job as an apprentice rug repair man. Today he heads a twenty person organization, *Robert Mann Oriental Rugs Inc.*, which provides cleaning and restoration services to many of America's major museums, dealers, and collectors. The company also represents *Woven Legends Restoration*, a restoration facility in Izmir, Turkey, and provides technical consulting services to many manufacturers of new handwoven carpets.

Bob, who has spoken at several ACOR meetings, always provides an informative discussion. He encourages audience participation, so bring your questions and any rugs that have cleaning or restoration problems. This is a fantastic opportunity for you to clean up any confu-

#### November Meeting Details

**Date:** Friday, November 6

**Time:** 7:30PM

**Place:** Collins Gallery, 694 Mount Auburn Street, Watertown

#### Directions:

**From Harvard Square** take Mount Auburn street west 1.5 miles. The Collins Gallery will be on your right, just before a sign saying “Celebrity Pizza.” If you get to the Arlington street intersection you've gone a little too far.

**From Watertown Square** take Mount Auburn street (Rte. 16) east for 1.6 miles. The Collins Gallery will be on the left, just beyond the “Celebrity Pizza” sign, a little after you cross the major Arlington street intersection.

**You can also get there by taking the MBTA bus line 71 from Harvard or Watertown Square.**

**Parking:** Parking lot in back of gallery (driveway is between the gallery and the pizzeria), and on street

sion about oriental rug care and learn how to get down and dirty with your rugs.



Rug repair tools (courtesy of Robert Mann)



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

By Jim Adelson

*Editor’s note: since this article deals with color, the black and white illustrations in the printed version of this newsletter are not of much use. Therefore, contrary to our usual practice, we made no effort to improve the appearance of these b&w illustrations, concentrating instead on the fidelity of the colored illustration in the electronically distributed version. All readers can see these illustrations in full color on our website [www.ne-rugsociety.org](http://www.ne-rugsociety.org).*

On September 25<sup>th</sup> Wendel Swan kicked off the 2009-2010 NERS season. A large group of about 50 members and guests heard Wendel talk on color theory, and how the principles of this field may help explain the great appeal of some rugs.

Wendel opened with the oft-repeated rug mantra “Color, color, color,” but went on to note that color is actually a very complex concept. Collectors often associate better color with natural dyes, while a number of other factors, such as wool quality, also affect the perception of color. In fact, what we label as a single color is often made up of many different hues. So Wendel elaborated, saying that his theme for the talk would be color in context. He wanted to make clear that he would be exploring color theory, not dye quality, collector color preference, specific color symbolism, or color as an indicator of age.



[1] Anatolian kilim (detail)

Wendel pointed out that colors don’t actually exist—they are merely perceived by the beholder. Painters have always had an understanding of the way that the viewer sees color, but scientists have also studied this. In the 17<sup>th</sup> century, Isaac Newton was the first to express the concept of a color wheel, and various scientists and artists have since constructed color wheels. Wendel used this as a way to introduce the idea of color contrast. He showed an example of a red-ground Bordjalou horse cover with large-scale designs in blue, black, and ivory, and a large-scale reciprocal border. Prior to his exposure to color theory, Wendel said he would have mentioned several characteristics as appealing—the bold design elements, their standing out from the red ground, and the strong, well-articulated border. Color theory has provided a more precise way of appreciating and describing this. The Bauhaus teacher and author Johannes Itten, in his book *The Art of Color*, identified seven different types of color contrast: light and dark, saturation, hue, cool and warm, complementary, simultaneous contrast, and proportion. Wendel proceeded to explain and illustrate each of the seven types, spending particular time on complementary contrasts, which are the contrasts between a given color and its opposite on the color wheel. The Bordjalou horse cover illustrated light and dark, hue, proportion, and complementary contrasts.

Wendel turned next to several Anatolian kilims. The first was a very long one (multiple niche saph?), with a simple crenellated design of one color on a background of a different color, with this design repeated a number of times in different color combinations [1]. According to Wendel, some of the power and appeal of this kilim comes from the selection of complementary colors for the design and background, with each hue made more attractive by the adjacent complementary color. Additional kilim examples illustrated the contribution of contrasts of light and dark and of proportion.

Collectors have long favored natural dyes, although Wendel pointed out that, from a color theory perspec-

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tive, synthetic dyes are not automatically bad. He had an example of two bagfaces—one naturally dyed and the other including fuchsine—where the synthetic dyes had faded, thereby disrupting and diminishing the color balance and contrast in the piece. But in another case, he showed an artificially dyed mola, with stable synthetic colors that retained the strong contrast of primary hues.

Wendel proceeded to compare pairs of rugs, evaluating the appeal of the contrasts in each rug. The first example was a pair of small rugs from Northwest Persia or the Caucasus, with diagonally striped main field designs [2]. One exhibited greater contrast of light and dark, complementary colors, and proportion, but a poll of preferences in the audience was pretty evenly split. The next pair included Caucasian prayer rugs—one Fachralo, the other Chi-Chi. According to Wendel, the Fachralo exhibited greater contrast of proportion, and the audience preference poll certainly put the Fachralo in the lead. The next duo were details from a Salor chival and a Karakalpak carpet, each employing the so-called turret gul. The Salor example exhibited more contrast of saturation and moderate light/dark contrast, while the Karakalpak piece featured stronger cool/warm, proportion, light/dark, hue, and complementary contrasts. Audience response was split on this one. The next pair included two carpets with checkerboard designs, one an Ersari and the other a Qashqa'i gabbeh. The Qashqa'i

example had the stronger contrast of hue, and audience preference went with the Qashqa'i piece, though the Ersari had its fans. The rest of Wendel's examples in this section of the talk were Anatolian rugs, with a terrific central-medallion piece from the Vakiflar, a Mudjur, and a Konya piece demonstrating contrasts of proportion, hue, and light/dark, while weaker examples from Melas and Oushak lacked most of these appealing contrasts.

Having spent time exploring contrasts, Wendel acknowledged that collector preferences and market values don't always reflect such contrasts. He talked about the relatively strong market for late Oushaks with very bland color contrasts. And in an even more striking example, he showed the Shah Abbas carpet from the Doris Duke collection that sold last year for almost \$4.5 million, commenting that its contrasts were pretty minimal, and joking "when I spend four and a half million on a rug, I'll want more."

To illustrate his own preferences in the light of color theory, Wendel selected a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Mughal fragment from the Met, shown in the *Flowers Underfoot* exhibition 11 years ago [3]. He labeled it "one of the most beautiful objects I have ever seen." Wendel said the virtues of this carpet were most evident when observed closely, with tremendous contrast of hue, saturation, light/dark, and proportion. He also noted an

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[2] Caucasian and Kurdish striped designs



[3] 16<sup>th</sup> c. Mughal rug fragment (detail)





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element he hadn't previously discussed in his talk, namely outlining. Wendel indicated that outlining is common and traditional in many of the oriental rug weaving areas[4], but asked rhetorically why that was the case? He suggested that the answer may be found in color theory and rooted in human color perception. When the eye observes primary colors that are directly adjacent, the boundary seems to vibrate, and we struggle to determine where one color ends and the other starts. With outlining, this direct adjacency and the resulting confusion are prevented, making it much easier to perceive the piece. Wendel did give examples, though, of pieces that successfully presented color without outlining—one an early Anatolian kilim, the other a silk velvet ikat.

Wendel concluded his talk by recommending that we replace the phrase “Color, color, color” with “Color, context, contrast.” And he suggested that the next time you see a piece that particularly appeals to you, consider which of the many different color contrasts may be at work.

Given the breadth of Wendel's topic, the show-and-tell of NERS member pieces was extremely diverse, with Anatolia, Persia, and the Caucasus particularly well represented. There were a number of bags and bagfaces, mafrash panels, prayer rugs and other carpets. Members brought several flatweaves, too, with a kilim, a silk jajim, and a warp-faced, striped textile of uncertain for-

mat among them. There were also a few less frequently seen objects, such as a Zoroastrian trouser panel and an Aymara warp-faced piece. Wendel concluded the show-and-tell portion with a Bukharan velvet ikat fragment, since that type of weaving is one of his favorites from the perspective of color appreciation [5].

Our thanks to Wendel for sharing this framework and its application to the esthetic enjoyment of weavings!



[4] Outlining in Saryk chuval (detail)



[5] An ikat velvet panel: winner of the Best Color award among the show & tell pieces



## October Meeting: Bertram Frauenknecht on “The Myth of the Shahsavan”

By Jim Adelson

*See illustrations on next page.*

On October 9<sup>th</sup> Bertram Frauenknecht spoke to NERS on a topic he has written about as well: Shahsavan weaving. He subtitled his talk “The Myth of Shahsavan,” because of what he went on to characterize as confusion and mislabeling of both the peoples and the weaving.

Bertram started with comments on both Shahsavan history and their physical location over time. The Shahsavan, literally “the lovers of the Shah,” originated just after 1600 when Persian Shah Abbas called for supporters to protect the borders from invasions and also to fight in the interior of the country. The Shah’s request drew a lot of discontented people from Turkey, who were unhappy with the policies of the Ottoman rulers. The Shah rewarded them with fertile lands in areas like the Moghan and Shirvan steppes.

These immigrants became Shiites, and over the next century developed a reputation as fighters, and very brutal ones at that. Eventually the Shahsavan’s military success brought on a degree of complacency, allowing for more successful incursions by Russians and Ottomans. From 1736 to approximately 1800, Shahsavan fighting prowess resurged, but their political tendencies became more complicated, with many groups fighting among themselves and also allying with Russians and Ottomans when they felt it served their purposes.

During this period, the Shahsavan occupied a broad area in Azerbaijan and Northwest Persia. This area was all under Persian rule until 1828, when the Russians conquered a large part, making significant numbers of Shahsavan their subjects. On the Persian side of the border, the areas occupied by nomadic Shahsavan have shrunk significantly since that time, leaving only a small concentration in a couple of areas of northwestern Iran. And according to Bertram, ironically these Shahsavan are not the ones who had been responsible for the weavings that we label as Shahsavan—these remaining groups have always produced a much lower quality of carpets and flatweaves.

Turning more extensively to the weavings, Bertram

showed slides of a large number of pieces, primarily mafrash panels and khorjins, with the flatweave examples outnumbering the pile pieces. A few of the pieces were dated, mostly from 1870 and 1898, as well as one dated piece from the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In several cases, Bertram presented several examples of the same design, commenting on which one he believed to be the older one. Typically, older examples had more open space, somewhat less infill of small designs, and in some cases looser and more rounded drawing of certain figures such as birds.

One of Bertram’s key points was that many of the Shahsavan people who were in the areas that came under Russian rule remained in place and became commercial weavers, although they were no longer referred to as Shahsavan. Many of the rugs that we think of as Caucasian were woven by Shahsavan peoples, and in many cases incorporated Shahsavan designs. Bertram said “a Moghan carpet is a Shahsavan carpet.” Similarly, semi-nomadic and settled Shahsavan wove commercial rugs on both sides of the border, with types that we label as Gendje and Heriz, among many examples.

Given the popularity of Shahsavan weavings with collectors, many NERS members had brought pieces for the show-and-tell following Bertram’s formal remarks. One of the first pieces shown was a complete mafrash, while a number of mafrash end and side panels followed. There was also a complete double khorjin, probably from mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, as well as a very striking large khorjin with exceptional color and drawing. There were several jajims or covers, plus several smaller pieces of uncertain function. The members’ pieces also illustrated a number of different weaving techniques—soumak, reverse soumak, slit-tapestry kilim, pile, and more—with a few pieces utilizing multiple techniques.

Our thanks to Bertram for sharing the historical perspective in all its complexity, helping us understand the Shahsavan underpinnings, and for showing us many “Shahsavan” weavings: some that are explicitly attributed to the group, and others now referred to as Caucasian or Persian.





## October Meeting



Examples of similar  
design motifs in  
Shahsavan bags and  
Caucasian rugs

Left: cruciform medallions

Right: Trees of life







## Upcoming Rug Events

### Future NERS 2009/10 Meetings:

**Feb. 5:** Alberto Levi on *Primitivism and Abstraction in Persian Tribal Flatweaves* (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; dates may change—inquire before you go):

**Kaminski**, Beverly, MA, 10/24 (incl. rugs)

**Sotheby's**, NY, **12/16**

**Bonham's**, San Francisco, **12/15**

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

**Bonhams**, London, 12/8

**Bonham's**, Los Angeles, 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](http://www.athm.org) for more information.

**Spirit of Afghanistan: Carpets of War and Hope**, will highlight Afghan carpets, mainly from the last thirty years. University of CT, Storrs, 10/30-12/5. For more information visit [www.cpbm.org/events/cultureconnect/spirit-afghanistan-carpets-war-and-hope](http://www.cpbm.org/events/cultureconnect/spirit-afghanistan-carpets-war-and-hope)

**Traveling the Silk Road: Ancient Pathway to the Modern World**, American Museum of Natural History, NY, NY, 11/14/09-8/15/10. For more information visit [www.amnh.org/exhibitions/silkroad/pressrelease.php](http://www.amnh.org/exhibitions/silkroad/pressrelease.php).

### Conferences:

**Volkmanntreffen 2009:** Hanging Gardens and Shining Stars—Embroideries From Settlements In Central Asian Oases; Berlin, October 23-25. For information visit the website [www.volkmanntreffen.de](http://www.volkmanntreffen.de).

### Tours:

**Discover Transylvania 2010**, 5/20-29, organized by Susan Scollay and Stefano Ionesco. For information access [www.transylvanianrugs.com/wp-content/ups/discover\\_transylvania-2010](http://www.transylvanianrugs.com/wp-content/ups/discover_transylvania-2010).

**We welcome the following new members:** *Doug and Carol Currie*

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, [doryon@rcn.com](mailto:doryon@rcn.com)

**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](http://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](mailto: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



## What in the World Is This?

This spectacular textile (detail below) is woven from golden-colored silk threads produced by more than one million golden orb spiders. To obtain the silk, female spiders are collected daily from their enormous webs on telephone wires in the Madagascar countryside and eighty feet of filament drawn from each spider. The intricately-

patterned four by eleven foot weaving featuring stylized birds and flowers is based on a Madagascar highlands weaving tradition known as Akotifahana. The weaving is on exhibit until late March at the American Museum of Natural History in New York City.

*Ann Nicholas*



**New England Rug Society**  
Post Office Box 582, Lincoln, MA 01773



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