Carpet Encyclopedia Article

Carpet

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When the word carpet is used today, it usually refers to the machine-woven wall-to-wall carpets found in homes and offices. However, the modern carpet has its origins in the hand-woven carpets of England and, before that, the intricate rugs of Persia and the Far East.

The first rugs were probably woven by nomadic shepherds. These thick and durable rugs were used as ground coverings, blankets, walls, and doors. Since these nomads had little in the way of music or literature, the patterns displayed upon their rugs became their principal art form. As trade between Europe and Asia increased, the rugs of the Far East became very popular. In most cases they were deemed too beautiful to be trod upon, and were instead hung on walls or over furniture, as decoration.

Until the mid-1800s, all rugs were woven by hand. This was a time-consuming process, for the wool that made up the rug's pattern was knotted through the backing one piece at a time. Generally, rugs with more knots were considered more valuable, and some priceless Oriental rugs contained more than two thousand knots per square inch. Such rugs were coveted in England, where they were considered a status symbol, as well as in Islamic nations, where they were valued as prayer rugs.

In 1839 Scottish inventor James Templeton developed a power loom for the weaving of Asian-style rugs. The British began to use this device, attempting with some success to duplicate the rugs of the Far East. Just a year later, American inventor Erastus Bigelow perfected the power loom for carpets. Carpets then began to replace rugs as floor