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Home Décor Starts on the Floor

Rugs make bold fashion statements with new looks, innovations

■ By Cecile B. Corral

When she launched the home division of the Kathy Ireland Worldwide design and marketing company 21 years ago, the model-turned-entrepreneur chose area rugs as her first product line.

"In the home, it's important to start with a rug that you love, something that speaks to you — the color palettes, the textures," she told HTT during a special appearance at Nourison's IFFC lobby-level showroom during High Point Market in October. "Have that be your anchor."

The area rug category's relevance is more important than ever, spurred by suppliers' efforts to polish their fashion offerings, ramp up brand partnerships, invest in innovation and boost customization services for decorators — to name a few initiatives sweeping the business.

Fabric house Fabricut is jumping into the fray, adding area rugs for the first time. Product development is currently underway, and the line will include "practical" fashion looks, including performance-focused qualities, that speak to the company's upstairs designer-centric aesthetic.

The introduction of rugs speaks to the company's broader expansion of the Fabricut Finished Product division, which currently offers customizable window/drapery and will grow by year-end to include decorative pillows in a range of sizes and styles — also a new category.

"Our finished product division is really taking off, and our designer business is a big part of that growth," said senior director of marketing Danica Jones.

Designer Thom Filicia of Bravo TV "Queer Eye" fame was at High Market celebrating the 20th anniversary of his eponymous interior decorating firm in New York, a decade-partnership with Vanguard Furniture and five years with Eastern Accents for luxury bedding. He plans to announce a new rug licensee and an all-new collection "sometime later this year or early next." Area rugs have long been a core piece of his branded assortment.

Lux bedding and accessories house Lili Alessandra recently unveiled its first customizable area rug collection — the company's third rug collection to join the mix — less than two years since it became a category player.

Edge to Edge is a grouping of wool-viscose-linen blended pieces hand-woven in an Indo-Tibetan construction. The collection comes in 10 patterns — "all of them influenced from my best-selling bedding designs," president and creative director Sandra Hernandez Yedor noted.

She continued, "My designer customer is a segment that is really growing for me. This collection caters to them and their clients' needs."

Jaipur Living is also expanding its custom rug services as

it looks to double its designer business over the next two years.

Today's discerning shoppers are seeking more handmade, artisan-crafted products, "different from the inexpensive products sold online," said CEO Asha Chaudhary. "They want rugs that are unique, special, artisanal."

Custom rugs have been part of Surya's offering for years, and the company has deepened its bespoke investments with the launch of its first curated line of one-of-a-kind vintage rugs. The first batch hails from Turkey and spans 50- to 100+ year-old antique pieces. Surya has roughly 300 in stock and plans to quickly ramp that up with more varieties from sources in other countries.

"We were getting more and more requests for one-of-a-kind from our designer customers, so we made sure to bring a strong assortment to them here," president Satya Tiwari said during High Point Market. "We already have longtime, established relationships with many sources, so these rugs are an easy add-on for us."

Industry giants Karastan and Oriental Weavers (OW), known for their program rug lines, are scouting new niches to compete in the interior decorator/designer customer arena.

"The designer business is definitely of interest to us, and we're finding better opportunities for us to move into that segment of the market," said OW president Jonathan Witt. "We have started introducing some higher-end products on both the handmade and machine-made sides to become more attractive to designers."

The artisan population continues to shrink as younger generations opt for more promising trades or careers, means the marketplace is experiencing a growing shortage of handmade product, Witt noted.

That shift is an advantage to OW, which he said is answering "more and more customer requests for natural fiber machine-made rugs" of better qualities due to their more reliable availability.

On example is the Lilihan collection that launched this summer.

"We are constantly hearing from those retailers that the supply of quality handcrafted rugs is dwindling each year," he continued. "We see that is a real opportunity for the machine-made business in general and more specifically this collection... We have taken the limits of the Axminster loom and stretched them beyond the engineer's imagination. While Lilihan's roots are that of a classic Axminster woven rug, we were actually able to cross-weave on an Axminster loom for the very first time." **HTT**



Surya's one-of-a-kind vintage rugs include 50- to 100+ year-old antique pieces.



Expanding custom rugs plays into Jaipur Living's strategy to double its designer business over the next two years.



Lili Alessandra's Edge To Edge custom rug program offers wool-viscose-linen blended pieces hand-woven in an Indo-Tibetan construction