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DESIGN FOCUS
Gideon Mendelson

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Gideon MENDELSON

*Handmade Decorative
Carpets Are
the Obvious Choice*

For New York-based interior designer Gideon Mendelson, handmade decorative rugs have been the obvious choice long before he founded Mendelson Group Inc. in 2003. Indeed, they have always played a pivotal role in classically based interiors exuding a comfortable contemporary flair. “I knew what an Aubusson was before I was ten,” he laughs. His mother, also a designer, fed him the basics of decoration along with his oatmeal, but Mr. Mendelson’s approach to space is informed by his training, which includes an undergraduate degree in architecture from Columbia University. Although many designers think of floor coverings as purely decorative elements, he believes they are architectural as well: “There are four walls, a ceiling and a floor that define space...I love graphic pattern on the floor. It expands the space and creates instant drama.”

In the designer’s view, there is no substitute for a hand-knotted rug: “You can see the hand of the artist, which cre-

A boldly patterned rug with its medium blues and ivory--echoed in the walls and furnishings--illustrates Gideon Mendelson's passion for graphic pattern on the floor. Courtesy of Mendelson Group. Photography by Eric Piasecki.

STORY BY ALIX G. PERRACHON





A transitional carpet exhibits a discrete underlying pattern in soft neutrals calling to mind a Mamluk inspiration and adds a luxurious textural layer to this contemporary Manhattan sitting room. Courtesy of Mendelson Group. Photography by Eric Piasecki.

OPPOSITE The geometric interplay between the ivories and blues in this geometric meander-patterned carpet, combining flatweave and pile textures, is offset by the classic floral chair fabric. Courtesy of Mendelson Group. Photography by Eric Piasecki.

ates a spirit and a soul,” he remarks. “They are works of art, idiosyncratic and unique. The impression of luxury, both aesthetically and psychologically, cannot be overstated.” He marvels at the impressive range of sustainable materials, qualities, construction techniques, and designs now featured in these artisanal contemporary weavings which set them apart from their machinemade counterparts generally exhibiting a more defined two-dimensional look. “You simply can’t achieve the same impact with broadloom which I generally use in children’s rooms, offices, or budget jobs,” he continues.

While every project—ranging from the formal Manhattan Upper East Side apartment to the casual beach house—presents its own set of requirements,

Mr. Mendelson prefers beginning a design scheme with the rug. No wonder, given that it is probably the largest single element in a room influencing subsequent design decisions.

Moreover, Mr. Mendelson’s passion for custom-making contemporary and transitional rugs dictates early decisions to ensure timely deliveries. Thanks to his unique understanding of the craft, in most cases, he convinces his clients to start the process with a high-quality handmade decorative carpet.

Given the designer’s modern esthetic, his taste in rugs leans toward the contemporary and transitional. He is namely drawn to designs with historic roots kept fresh thanks to their reinterpretations in novel construction techniques. His over-arching interest in





The plush luxury of a Moroccan-inspired high-pile rug establishes the mood of luxuriant comfort in this bedroom. Courtesy of Mendelson Group. Photography by Eric Piasecki.

the craft of custom making rugs with all-natural fibers—including wool, silk, cotton, bamboo, and hemp—has blossomed under the expert guidance of his cousin, an accomplished rug designer. Plays on scale, differentiations in pile height, and unusual palettes are his stock in trade. “Ten years ago, it was all about graphic pattern, but today it’s more about organic materials and textural varieties,” affirms Mr. Mendelson who has been featured in top shelter publications including *Architectural Digest*. He is fascinated by how the subtlest moderation in texture, such as in the variation of pile heights or in the creative juxtaposition of heathered and stippled grounds, can infuse the rug with distinctive beauty.

In addition to custom designing carpets, Mr. Mendelson often selects existing pieces with a traditional base in sync with his contemporary vernacular,

including mid-century Art Deco and Swedish pieces. Particularly drawn to Moroccan rugs, both vintage and newly interpreted pieces, he comments: “I love their high pile and graphic tribal patterns which work well in modern interiors. I’m a barefoot type of guy and enjoy walking on a rug and noticing its chunky pile.” He is also attracted to the artful perfection and imperfection of ikats exemplified in their tie-dyed bleeding effect. When working with existing rugs, he often layers them over a simple contemporary flatweave to create an interesting multi-dimensional effect. “I love layering rugs,” he adds.

The designer’s rug selection much depends on their intended location in the home. For instance, he may choose a more luxurious and glossier silk-and-wool carpet for a classically elegant Manhattan apartment living room while opting for a more rustic bam-



A cream ground rug with a North African-inspired tribal repeat with mocha hues contrasts with the broad strokes in the contemporary painting hanging above. Courtesy of Mendelson Group. Photography by Eric Piasecki.

boo-and-jute piece for a Hamptons beach house. In most cases, room-sized rugs prevail, but he places more than one piece in a single space depending on the circumstances. He used two identical soft cream-colored silk rugs in a beachfront house not only to delineate separate dining and living room areas but also to heighten the impact of a spectacular ocean view. In contrast, he opted for two bolder rugs for a space in a New York City apartment to draw attention to the floor rather than to the brick wall outside.

For Mr. Mendelson, mixing and matching rug and fabric patterns has a lot to do with scale. “I love layering pattern over pattern in a room as long as they are not competing,” he notes. You have to carefully think of how you are using the rug, he advises. It’s key to keep in mind that the rug lies flat on the rug on a horizontal plane and to see how it looks from an

adjoining room. Each pattern in the room—rug and fabric—needs to have its own individual breathing space. When working with a patterned rug, he recommends positioning a neutral sofa atop and playing up the rug pattern in the pillows. When coordinating pieces from one space to the next, color is generally the common thread as opposed to genre. A highly patterned rug in one room will inspire the selection of a piece with a more textural dimension in the juxtaposing space. When dealing with two contiguous textural carpets, a subtle modulation in pile heights from one piece to the next can be vital in establishing the rugs’ respective individualities.

Equally important is the surface on which sits the rug. Choice of flooring depends on client preferences ranging from wood to a variety of stone including travertine. “A wood border around a handmade deco-

rative rug adds another element to a room,” Mr. Mendelson remarks. While he often places smaller pieces over larger area rugs, he never does so over wall-to-wall carpeting. In fact, his New York clientele increasingly limit their use of carpeting to children’s rooms. “My clients are currently spending more money on handmade floor coverings than on practically anything else in the home,” he asserts. The tremendous creativity in the rug industry is responsible for fueling this trend. Contrary to other home furnishings items that are restricted in their design scope, such as ceiling fans, there is no limit in the variety of

handmade rugs that can be created due to the high degree of customization now possible. “You never need to use the same rug twice,” he adds. “I hope that the rug industry continues to be so inventive!”

The interior design trade also has to play its part to ensure handmade rugs’ continued popularity by stimulating their clients’ awareness of the craft. Faced with online competition promoting an abundance of product, designers increasingly need to be experts to help clients understand the value in owning a distinctive carpet. “It’s now all about education more than just about budget alone,” he concludes.

OPPOSITE The beige pile from the classically derived all-over floral design in an exquisite pile and flatwoven rug is reflected in the upholstered furniture and walls. Courtesy of Mendelson Group. Photography by Eric Piasecki.

ABOUT THE DESIGNER

Gideon Mendelson is a graduate of both Columbia University with a degree in Architecture and The New York School of Interior Design. He founded Mendelson Group in 2003 and has been involved in the architecture and interior design of numerous projects in Manhattan, Westchester, Miami, and the Hamptons. Featuring a classical base with a fresh and modern esthetic, Mendelson Groups’ architectural and design projects focus on creating functional, comfortable spaces that are not only decoratively pleasing, but also timeless, youthful, and energetic.

Mr. Mendelson’s work has been featured in publications including *Architectural Digest*, *The New York Times*, *House Beautiful*, *Luxe*, *The Wall Street Journal*, *Istdibs*, *Traditional Home*, *Coastal Living*, and *Casa*. He has participated in showhouses including Kips Bay. He has recently appeared on NBC’s Open House TV conducting a tour of his own home in Sagaponack, NY.



