



Patterns Fit for Any Surface

Rug designers say they find a creative outlet in blending patterns, color and textures into an stunning array of artworks suitable for displaying on floors or wall spaces.

Design Notes

By KATHY BRYANT
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Area rugs let you put the best art in the house on the floor. At least, that's the opinion of Los Angeles interior designer Mark Enos, who uses them extensively. Since many houses today have wood floors or other hard surfaces, plush rugs provide much-needed soft oases.

"To me, they create a focus and give a space an intimacy. They're something to gather around," Enos says.

Two L.A.-based rug designers, Denis Colomb and Shari Cornish, are making artworks for the floor. Colomb was inspired by the Arts and Crafts movement; his geometric designs use squares and circles as well as wide bands of color.

"I like the ancestral idea of carrying on a tradition, but I add my own palette of colors," says Colomb. "I'm very inspired by Asia, which is one reason why I like to live here. Here we face Asia, while in New York we faced Europe. I think that makes for an interesting cross-culture look. But, no matter what I design, I always look for balance. I started my first rug collection in 1996, in felt," says Colomb, who moved here just over a year ago from New York.

"Then, in 1998, I started working with Tibetan weavers in Nepal, who took my felt designs and turned them into hand-woven wool rugs. Today all my rugs are made in Nepal of 100% wool."

Colomb's first rug, "Neptune," done in 1998, used the blue-gray color of his Burmese cat, for which it is named. Other early rugs, with names like "Manhattan" and "Paris," have palettes of dark blue, gray, beige, black and cream.

Some have bold stripes of color, others are Zen-like, with cream circles encased in a cream squares in an ocean of chocolate. Circles sometimes refer to Paris' Tuileries Gardens; curved lines symbolize energy, and stripes evoke skyscrapers.

"Since I moved here my colors have changed," Colomb says. "I now use strawberry, terra cotta, more cream. Although those colors had already been in my mind, since I found them in India and Nepal too," he says. His rugs' names have changed too. Now there's "Los Angeles" (little black zigzags on beige and cream), "Sausalito" (cream to pale loden green) and "Milan" (strawberry, coral and persimmon).

Hand-knotted rugs are the latest creations from Colomb, who was born in Aix-en-Provence,



AL SEIB / Los Angeles Times
Shari Cornish, with dog LuLu, uses bright colors and playful patterns in her rug designs, which are made from 100% New Zealand wool.



All of Shari Cornish's rugs are based on painted floor clothes.

France, and graduated from the Superior Architecture and Design Institute in Milan with a degree in architecture. In 1992, he won the European IDI design award for his architectural design of the Tehen fashion stores in Europe.

"My designs are very simple and modern, and they go well in

contemporary rooms," he says. They're also very architectural, with geometric shapes. Colomb produces two new designs every six months; right now he's interpreting the tiger with brightly striped rugs. Fifty percent of his work is custom, and his rugs showing up regularly in home design magazines, usually to complement large abstract artworks on white walls.

Prices range from \$1,600 for a small rug to \$5,800 for a larger one. They may be seen at Arden House, 920 N. La Cienega, Los Angeles. (310) 855-1888 or online at www.deniscolomb.com.

Shari Cornish focused on surface designs for the floor when she was at art school, designing floor cloths on felt. "I started by making floor cloths out of industrial felt," says Cornish, who graduated in 1988 from the Kansas City Art Institute. "Traditional floor cloths are made from stretched canvas, which is then painted and varnished, a tradition that goes way back before the Civil War in America."

Although her pieces were meant for the floor, all the works

she sold ended up as paintings on walls. "That's partly why I started doing rugs," she says.

All of Cornish's rugs are based on her painted floor cloths, although they can be customized. They are brightly colored and playful, with just a touch of humor. "Pie & Coffee" has dots, cups, triangles and curves in coffee and black colors; "Auntie's Apron," her first rug, uses blues, pinks and gray-green. "Pages of Envy" is green, while "Fall Back" has autumn-colored leaves.

Cornish has always loved rugs, and early in her career earned money conserving antique Persian rugs. "I love the lushness of carpets," she says. "When I decided to go into area rugs in 1999, I searched to find weavers who could translate my designs into rugs, because I didn't have the time to weave them myself. I also wanted to make sure that they made a living wage."

"Since I didn't have the money to travel all over the world looking for weavers, I finally found a firm in New Jersey, through word of mouth. It's a family business, and I send them the designs and they hand weave them from 100% New Zealand wool." The rugs are made in a commercial grade, most of them cut pile, although she has designed a few shag rugs; they retail for around \$60 a square foot.

Cornish's rugs and floor cloths can be seen through March 9 at the Gallery of Functional Art through at Bergamot Station, 2525 Michigan Ave., E-3, Santa Monica. (310) 829-6990. They are also available on the Web at www.homeportfolio.com.

LA. Before and After: Urban Growth," a panel discussion with photographer Julius Shulman, historian Norman Klien and SCIARC instructor Kazys Varnelis, moderated by Paulette Singley, will take place today at 6:30 p.m. at Woodbury University's Center for Community Research and Design, 6518 Hollywood Blvd. Admission is \$7. (323) 852-7145.

Mitchell Owens, interior design director of Elle Décor, will talk about the legendary taste maker Pauline De Rothschild next Thursday at Hollyhock, 817 Hilldale Ave., West Hollywood. The event begins at 6 p.m. with drinks, with the lecture following at 6:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$25 and benefit the Decorative Arts Council of Los Angeles County Museum of Art. For reservations, call (310) 777-0100.

Romero Studio, 1625 Blake Ave, Los Angeles, will have a "White Elephant Sale" on Jan. 26 and 27 from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., featuring art, antiques, rugs and jewelry from private collections. (323) 226-0356.