

**TABRIZ'S
EXQUISITE
OFFERINGS**



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TABRIZ'S EXQUISITE OFFERINGS

Tabriz, in northern Iran, has always been considered a centre for fine carpets. The special magic of carpets from Tabriz lie in their durability, their affordability, and the unlimited variety of colour and designs...

by Joan van der Merwe

Dawood Hossein Zadeh talks about Tabriz carpets: "Tabriz is located in Northern Iran and is the capital of the Azerbaijan province. In the 16th century it was the capital of Persia and a most important trading centre for Europe and Russia. It has always been a centre for fine carpets."

The magic of Tabriz carpets lies in their durability, their affordability and the unlimited variety of colours and designs.

For those beginning to learn and collect Iranian rugs, there is no better starting point and no better value for money.

Although the Tabriz are affordable never think of them as the "Cheap End" of the rug market, it is the Tabriz rugs that change hands for millions of dollars and it is Tabriz where the carpets of legend came from. The Ardabil that we talked about last week, and the Ghiyat-ed-din Jami which is in the Poldi Museum in Milan, dated 929 (1522AD) are just two of many examples.

Jalil Hossein Zadeh had the Ghiyat-ed-din Jami design woven again in Tabriz; it is almost iden-

tical and he still has it in his personal collection.

"Although most Tabriz are made from a mixture of pure silk and wool, occasionally we come across a pure silk Tabriz and this is the finest money can buy".

In the showrooms of the Centre for Original Iranian Carpets in Abu Dhabi, there are two carpets which they have been asked to sell for a client. They are a matched pair of exquisite Tabriz, and in October last year, a similar single carpet was sold from Dubai for Dh 1.5 million.

There are two types of Tabriz, as there are in other carpet regions. The "commercials" and the "specials". The commercials are the bread and butter of the industry, and the specials are the honey. But both are genuine Tabriz and both will last as long and be as durable.

"Do not think that every carpet of value has to be an antique, there are some rubbish old carpets just as there are fine new carpets being made today, and remember that the legendary carpets of the past were the 'commercials' of their day.

"The pattern of the Tabriz

varies so much it is difficult to identify by design alone. The Tabriz weavers were and still are so skillful that they can make up any design, even a portrait or a picture. This combined with their durability means that the rugs are equally popular as a floor covering or a wall hanging.

One of the easiest identifying factors of the Tabriz is the clarity

of the colour and this is due to the wool they use. This comes from a particular mountain sheep, which is very hardy. The wool from this sheep absorbs the colour in a special way that makes it clear and durable.

Most Tabriz carpets will feature a clear pomegranate red. Look for the beautiful creamy beiges, the copper pinks and the navy blue. And then kleep looking. Spend a lot of time looking and reading about carpets and you will soon begin to recognise the colours or patterns.

Thirty years ago when huge carpets were in demand for the new palaces and great houses of the Middle East, it was to Tabriz that Jalil went to have these special carpets made. He still has one in

his store measuring 160 sq metres. That was started 22 years ago and finished 15 years later. There is a fascinating video of this carpet in the making, which Dawood often takes with him, when he goes on a lecture engagement to talk about Iranian carpets. More about this particular carpet in the coming weeks. The common loom sizes of a

Tabriz are:

- Poshti - 80cm x 60cm.
- Zarcharak - 120cm x 80.
- Zaronim - 1m. x 1.50m.
- Dozar - 2m x 1.50m.
- Pardeh - 2.80m x 1.80m.
- Kalagi - 3.60m x 2.60.

The runner, which is called a Kenarah, is 1m wide and usually 3m long, but you can also have it made in special lengths. ■



Magical Delights from Tabriz:
All the pictorial carpets in this picture were made in Tabriz

ALL IN THE FAMILY

Head of a family business that has been in existence for over a century, Jalil Hossein Zadeh has experienced and survived the ins and outs of the carpet business with a deftness and acumen that is the envy of many...

by Joan van der Merwe

Jalil Hossein Zadeh is the head of a family business that has been in existence for over a century. Now called The Centre of Original Iranian Carpets, it trades world wide and has established centres in Europe, the UAE, and Japan. But it all began in the 19th century in Tabriz, the capital of Iranian Azerbaijan, where the family originated.

In Tabriz, some of the Zadeh family made carpets and others sold them. Iranian Azerbaijan borders Russian Azerbaijan and the family traded carpets and agriculture between the two Azerbaijanians. The Russian base was a well established and prosperous market, an excellent trading centre for the rest of Europe.

Many of the Zadeh family, including Jalil's uncles, lived there and prospered. They were respected, property-owning members of the community until the the Bolshevik Russian Revolution of 1917. As capitalist traders, they were prime targets of the new and violent regime. The family fled across the border back to Iranian Azerbaijan, leaving everything behind, lucky to get away with their lives.

Jalil was born in Iranian Azerbaijan in 1925. His father died while Jalil was still very young. He was brought up by his uncle, Ali Ashgar Hossein Zadeh, and went into the carpet business when he was 15.

"I was," he says, "ambitious. We had lost much of our European market when the Russian base was closed. I wanted to go out and find new mar-

kets and I wanted to go and see the other carpet areas, Ghoum, Isfahan and Naein. When I was 18, my uncle and my future father in law gave me their blessings and sent me on my way.

"I had few assets at this time, apart from my family name but I soon realised how big an asset this was. It was respected everywhere where carpets were traded, and it was my passport to becoming a recognised carpet broker. I looked for carpets to buy and new markets to sell them. I was always on the move, building up my contacts and my confidence. I loved every minute of it."

Although their hearts and roots are still in Tabriz, since the end of the Second World War, which wiped out their German trading base and once more battered the family fortunes, the company headquarters for retailing, collection and finishing is done in Tehran.

"We have two main sources of supply for Iranian carpets," Dawood takes up the story. "Each small village has its own bazaar, where the weavers will bring in their carpets to sell. Carpet traders, including our agents, buy from these bazaars. But our company also has its own sources. Some weavers send their carpets directly to us, to sell on commission, and some carpets are especially made for us.

"We employ our own designers who will base their design on a picture, an antique carpet, or maybe one of famous museum pieces.

"We have a copy of the Ardabil

in my father's private collection. Our designer can also work from an architect's concept, with an interior designer, to create a carpet for a new building.

"In each carpet area, we have a supervisor who brings all the elements of a carpet together. The supervisor will know which weaver to use, and help them to build the special looms needed.

"The weaver has to be able to create the pattern exactly from the design. Every knot, and there may be millions, must be exactly the same size, or the pattern will go out of shape.

"The supervisor will buy the raw material and take it to the dyer he feels can produce the perfect colours for the rug."

Jalil who has an endless fund of carpet stories, breaks in to tell us about a master dyer who could produce carpet dyes of colour and clarity that no one else had been able to match.

"But he would tell no one his secret of dying, not even his sons. He was so worried they might become careless and produce work under his name that would not be perfect. Eventually he had his own weavers to produce the carpets and to weave his name into each one. He died five years ago taking his secrets with him to the grave."

Jalil, who can from a glance tell if a colour has been produced by this dyer, would not name him because his sons were still in the business and he did not want them to be offended.

Like the renaissance of the Persian carpet in the 16th century, there has been another golden era for the carpet makers, and that was quite recent. In the Sixties and Seventies and to a lesser degree today, came the oil wealth, when the great houses and palaces of the Gulf were being built.

"The Gulf Arabs," Dawood said "have always appreciated fine carpets, and with wealth, they wanted carpets that would equal their new buildings and palaces.

We arranged to have some of these carpets produced.

"These wonderful carpets are the museum pieces for future centuries, and each of them will, with time, become a legend with its own story of the men who made them, and the men who bought them."

And, of course, the men who made it all possible, like Jalil Hossein Zadeh and his sons.

A little frail now, Jalil's proudest possession is his licence from the current Iranian government affirming his position as a government approved trader of Iranian rugs. This allows him not only to trade in carpets but it is to authenticate and date antique carpets.

A little bonus to the ending of the cold war, was a notification recently from the new government of Azerbaijan that the family should contact the government about their property in Russian Azerbaijan. No.7 Verghe Naghorni. That really will be going back to their roots. ■



Above left: A beautiful example of a Tabriz; a combination of geometric and medallion with an invading border

Above: Ali Asghar Hossein Zadeh: This picture was taken in Russian Azerbaijan in 1913.

Below: The legacy continues: Jalil and Dawood Hossein with a rare, new pure silk Tabriz rug

While you're saving up for your carpet and visiting the carpet showrooms regularly to look at them, it is a good idea to buy a book or two to find out more. There are many books available on this subject which Dawood thinks you should read.

"Most good Gulf books shops have a selection of books on this inexhaustible subject. Choose one that you like the look of but try to get hold of:

- *Rugs To Riches* by Caroline Bosley. This is a marvellous book; although Caroline Bosley is dead now, this book is still bought and used as a reference by brokers and collectors. A wonderful read. Well worth ordering and waiting for.

- *Persian Carpets* by Cecil Edwards or *Oriental Carpets* by P.R.G. Ford are two other excellent guides. Again a reputable book seller will order these for you.

