

# Persian Rugs and Carpets

This New, Superb  
'Big Book' reviewed  
by  
Angela Steinhausen

**A**ngela says:  
This is a big  
beautiful book!

Persian Rugs and Carpets gives us a journey around Persia in glorious pictures of rugs showing the weaving and pattern styles of the great number of regions and tribes.

We visit places such as Esfahan, Kashan, Qum, Tabriz, Bakhtiari and Qashqai among others - being shown the huge range of carpets woven in Persia from about 1850 to the latter years of the 20th century.

The book is arranged with an introductory section followed by regional sections containing a general overview of the style and history of rug making of the region and the most sumptuous colour plates of sample carpets.

But first the author, Essie Sakhai is one of the best-known dealers of oriental carpets in London. His family has been in the business for over 200 years. Essie was born in Iran to a family with this long dealing history so it was perhaps inevitable that he should become a respected expert on Oriental and Persian carpets. He gained much of his knowledge from his father, Benayahoo Sakhai. Essie lives in North London, although he spends much of his time at his business - Essie Carpets in Mayfair.

But Essie is not merely a dealer in carpets, he is a true enthusiast about his passion and, through his lectures, interviews and writing (his previous books include 'The Story of Carpets' and 'The Buyer's Guide') he shares his knowledge and love of carpets with a wider audience.

**Now to a synopsis of this beautiful book:**

We start with a little history of the carpet - the evidence for the history of woven carpets is fairly fragmentary. There is evidence for knotting of fibres in Ancient Egypt but the actual objects made are linen-based pillows



with small areas of yarn-based pile, probably intended to be sat or lain on. It is the type of knot that is significant. To find evidence of actual rugs we must look to the 3rd and 4th

Above: A Bakhtiari 'khan' carpet from the Chahar Mahal Valley with an inscription panel stating that it was made in 1923. Note the stunning colours. Wool pile on a cotton foundation 4.27m x 2.22m.

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centuries BCE. The most important find was made in the mountains of Siberia, an almost complete carpet with symmetric knotting was found in the tomb of a Scythian prince. This is considered by experts to be of Persian origin. It is thought to be a commercially woven rug and was, perhaps, placed in the tomb as a sign of the wealth and standing of the dead Prince. From this early date there is a gap of a thousand years before the next body of historical artefacts can be verified.

There is an appreciable group of carpets dating from the 15th Century when Persia was ruled by the Mongol Timur Lang (Timor the Lame or Tamburlaine) these usually have an elaborate medallion centre and are often a great length. They are all related in style, technique and materials and were made over a length of time, even as late as the 17th Century.

In the 19th Century there was a great revival of Persian carpet weaving due to a process of amalgamation between traditional Persian city workshops and Western entrepreneurship. There was a growth of middle class income in the west coincidental with changes in aesthetics which started in the area of painting with the Impressionist and filtered into the fine and decorative arts. The influence of the Great Exhibition of 1850 cannot be overestimated in this revival. One has only to look at a few paintings of the period to note the inclusion of oriental (or as they were then called Turkish) carpets.

Essie then looks at the types of knot used to make the rugs in different regions - this is of great importance in the attribution of rugs, particularly for collectors. The main knots are the Turkish or Ghiordes knot which is a symmetric knot (and has very little to do with Turkey) and the Persian or Senneh knot which is asymmetric in formation.

Generally the prevalence of these knots can be divided by a line running North/South passing through Shiraz in the Qashqai region. The majority of rugs woven in villages to the west of the line being symmetrically knotted and those to the east having asymmetric knots. This is, however, a generalisation and Essie is careful to point out the exceptions.

As well as the familiar pile rugs, Persian carpets are also made using a flatwoven method - the most usual is the slit-tapestry technique usually known as Kelim or Ghiileem. The best examples of this style usually have a dense all-over pattern of stylised floral motifs, frequently with a central medallion.

Essie then devotes a section to the complex issue of dating carpets and



Above: Early 19th Century ghiileem from Abhar or Qashqai. All wool. 1.9m x 1m.

follows it with some points for collectors including a discussion on reproductions and/or fakes and advice on storage, conservation and cleaning.

Then we have almost 400 pages of the most fantastic plates showing the rich heritage of Persian carpets.

Esfahan is one of the great historic weaving centres of Iran which lies almost in the geographical centre of the country, south of Tehran. From

the late 16th century to the early 19th century Esfahan was the capital of Persia and so occupies an important place in the political and social life of the country. It is still the cultural capital of Iran and Essie claims it is its most beautiful city.

Carpets have been woven in Esfahan at least since the establishments of royal workshops by the ruling Shah Abbas in the 1590s. The

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two main groups associated with Esfahan are the 'Polonaise' carpets in silk and the red-ground floral carpets often called 'Indo-Persian'. Following a doldrums period in the 18th and 19th Centuries when the history of most Persian weaving cities is vague, the great era of Esfahan weaving began in the 1930s. These rugs are special because of their quality of weave and elegance of design. The most characteristic design is a complex medallion with sixteen lobes surrounded by complex, delicate floral arabesques.

Another region covered is Bakhtiari - either the place or the tribal group. Bakhtiari lies to the west of Esfahan in the foothills of the Zagros mountains. Already an area where wealthy khans built lavish palaces, the area became even more wealthy when oil deposits were found under the winter pasturelands. This is one of the most productive weaving districts in Iran. Known as Chahar Mahal carpets they are all fairly similar in design. There is a small group, however, often referred to as 'khan' carpets which have an inscription cartouche giving details of the commission, date etc.

Kashan is also a great weaving city. Some Kashan rugs were embellished with silver metal brocading which can cover the entire ground in a form of relief. There are also pictorial carpet designs from Kashan some of which have their design origins in Western artists such as Landseer.

In all Essie takes us to twenty two different centres of weaving and gives us their history and characteristics before showing us many examples of carpets and other items such as saddle bags and cot covers and smaller rugs.

The 366 colour plates in this book show, in incredible detail, the diversity of weaving styles and variety of patterns making Persian Rugs and Carpets an exquisite source of inspiration to designers as well as an essential addition to the shelves of carpet collectors.

Essie includes this quote from the designer Julien MacDonald:

'The Persian culture has been a constant inspiration to myself as a designer and the Persian carpet tells a story through the fabulous richness of colour and intricate detailing that parallels the luxury of my collections, which is why I choose to use them in my shows and have them in my home.'

Persian carpets are one of the supreme oriental art forms, they have always been most desirable and as such are the ones that are most emulated. This book provides ample opportunity to do just that - or just to luxuriate in the pictures!



Above: A Kashan pictorial rug showing the influence of Western art. Wool pile on cotton. 2.02m x 1.37m.

'Persian Rugs and Carpets, The Fabric of Life' by Essie Sakhai, edited by Ian Bennett. The publishers are Antique Collectors' Club. The cost in the UK is £75.00, ISBN: 978-1-85149-507-8. The approximate size of the book is 34cm x 27cm and it has 448 pages in full colour. Available from all good booksellers or direct from the publishers: Antique Collectors' Club Ltd, Sandy Lane, Old Marllesham, Woodbridge, Suffolk, IP12 4SD, or e-mail: sales@antique-acc.com

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