



TIGER RUG: The Quality Story

BY DAVID KRAMER

WHEN STEPHEN AND ELIZABETH PUTNEY founded Tiger Rug Company just over 15 years ago, their goal was to provide a handcrafted product of superior quality that will last a lifetime. Having both been exposed to quality craftsmanship at a young age, this seemed only natural.

“I grew up in a bungalow furnished with beautiful antiques that were handed down from generation to generation,” says Elizabeth. “We were a multi-generational family living under one roof surrounded by the furniture and chattels collected over many lifetimes, so I acquired an appreciation for beautiful handmade items at a very young age.”

“The first job I ever had was working at a little antiques store that used to strip and refinish furniture,” says Stephen. “Working there gave me a genuine appreciation for antique furniture, as well as quality craftsmanship.”

Before starting their company, Stephen worked as a successful rug and furniture sales representative and retail buyer for more 20 years. “During this time, I developed an appreciation for oriental carpets to the point where I said to Elizabeth, ‘one day I’m going to start an Oriental rug business.’”



“Her reaction was stunned amazement, to say the least. But a few years later, I realized that only with her help, especially her organizational skills, could we do this, and the Tiger Rug Company was born.”

Through relationships forged in the course of his sales career, Stephen was able to connect with a Tibetan carpet manufacturer whose factory in Nepal employed many Tibetan refugees who carried with them the traditions and expertise of fine rug weaving. The couple honored those traditions by choosing the tiger to represent their company because of its symbolic prominence in Tibetan culture.

When the business began, it was devoted mainly to importing traditional rugs along with a handful of contemporary and transitional designs. However, Stephen quickly recognized the need for a specific line of Arts and Crafts-inspired carpet designs and approached Alfred Audi, then owner of the L. & J.G. Stickley Furniture Company, about a potential collaboration. This meeting led to the development of an introductory



selection of carpets designed to complement handcrafted Stickley furniture.

“When I met with Mr. Audi in their facility in Manlius, N.Y., I was awestruck by the level of quality furnishings I saw being produced,” Stephen says. “I walked away from that meeting knowing that making Arts and Crafts carpets was definitely a niche market worth pursuing.”

Since then, the Tiger Rug Craftsman Collection has expanded to include styles inspired by some of the many iconic designers of the Arts and Crafts movement, including William Morris, Charles Voysey and Charles and Henry Greene. The Collection is always evolving, with inspiration often drawn from speaking with customers and colleagues during annual trips to the National Arts and Crafts Conference at the Grove Park Inn in Asheville, N.C. At the upcoming conference in February 2015, Tiger Rug will debut the latest offering of stunning designs developed in conjunction with renowned stained-glass artisan Theodore Ellison.

“We’re constantly developing and discovering new design ideas because the market is ever-changing,” says

Stephen. “Our entire business is focused on producing and importing carpets and only carpets, and because we feel there can never be too many options for our customers to choose from, we also offer an extensive custom program.”

“Folks want and deserve to have something that no one else has because it makes their bungalows truly unique,” says Elizabeth. “If we provide our customers with exactly what they’ve been searching for, then we know we’ve done our job.”

“There is no greater value than buying once and buying well. One of the most satisfying aspects of our business is hearing back from customers who tell us their carpet is much nicer than they anticipated. This short, sweet sentiment is music to our ears.”

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