

WORLD WIDE WEAVING

F.J. Hakimian, perhaps New York City's premier rug purveyor, has created a fabric portfolio with weaving centres in eight countries around the world in just one year. Katie Loux joins him on his voyage of discovery

Joe Hakimian tells me about this achievement in such an understated way, that I could easily not realise that it is an extraordinary feat. "I studied the market, did research, made a lot of contacts, and developed a network," he says.

I am visiting Hakimian in his office and studio on the corner of 57th Street and Lexington Avenue in Manhattan, his base for twenty two years. It is a discreet space, away from foot traffic, occupying two floors. Here he houses his vast antique rug collections, in which every major weaving centre of the world is represented. It's a cornucopia of design, and you can find anything from jazzy Iranian kilims made by the Qashqa'i tribe, shaggy Moroccan Berber rugs, to pristine antique French Aubusson carpets. One abiding passion is for 20th century Swedish rugs and tapestries, and he can boast the largest collection in the world, including works by Barbro Nielson and Märta Måås Fjetterstöm.

It is no wonder then, that he is a favourite amongst interior designers: click through the press section of his website, and you'll see how many of his rugs have been incorporated into interior designs, whether it be for a ski lodge in Utah, or a yoga studio in Los Angeles.

In recent years, Hakimian has expanded his portfolio to include a line of flatweaves consisting of vintage Moroccan, Iranian and Turkish kilim panels made from undyed goat hair, cotton or linen that have been cut and reworked into geometric patterns or stylised forms that draw upon Art Deco art. Clients can pick from a range

of patterns, and manipulate the scale and design to their own specifications.

The fabric collection though is a bold project, but a logical next step for Hakimian. Like the kilims, all the fabrics use undyed, natural yarns, and their splendour lies in the delicate manipulation of weave, tone and texture. He has scanned the globe to find individual weavers and small ateliers that are still producing handwoven textiles; hand-weaving is a slow, highly-skilled process, an unimaginable option for many producers, but Hakimian is not interested in easier alternatives.

In Lima, Peru, he has found a weaver making textiles from a mixture of alpaca wool and silk in an ancient "honeycomb" design: the result is a luxurious fabric of unbelievable softness. All the Lima fabrics use alpaca, which is a delicate fibre, fortified with combinations of linen or silk.

Finding the right marriage of materials for drapery required the assistance of a professor at the city's Fashion Institute of Technology, who is a consultant on a number of projects: many of the weavers that Hakimian works with produce textiles for use as shawls or scarves, but these need to be transformed into either fabrics that will hang elegantly for drapery, or that are sturdy enough to be used as upholstery fabric.

In Latvia, a country famous for its linen, he is working on a range of fabrics that play with traditional Latvian designs and textures. I'm shown a sample in which a wave-like effect is formed through manipulation of tension in the linen's weave. In Bogota, Columbia, he has found talented weavers who had been using synthetic yarns, "the country is not rich with natural yarns", and has introduced natural yarns to their palette, including cotton, silk, linen and horsehair – the latter is combined with silk to create a unique stiffness and sheen to the fabric.

The most experimental collection is designed by a French textile designer in Lyons, who creates weavings in the Philippines. The textiles are made from indigenous fibres, including abaca, a stiff material that is famous for its strength and flexibility combined with softer yarns, like silk. The abaca gives the finely woven texture a structure that makes it ideally suited to blinds or shades. Hakimian shows me some extraordinary cork fabric that he has introduced to his Philippines weavers as an alternative natural fibre to work with: the cork combined with silk results in an unusual texture, part tribal, part couture.

How is the company able to fulfill orders of a large scale when working with artisans? "So far, this problem has not arisen," he tells me. Certain weavers would be unable to produce vast reams of fabric, or they may be employed with other projects, but "we aim for a maximum turn-around of ten weeks for an order."

The most complex of weaves is in a Sardinian textile, a mix of cotton and flax that has two separate "faces", each as sophisticated as the other. In Santa Margherita Ligure in the Liguria region of Italy, he is working on a range of velvets. In India, he is working with a small workshop on developing a line of cotton fabrics.

In today's market, an expensive object, is not always a well-made object, with branding and marketing often replacing craftsmanship. Hakimian's fabrics show that high craftsmanship and quality of materials should be at the core of what is considered luxurious. www.fjhakimian.com

01 *Linear Landscape*, abaca and silk made in the Philippines, F.J Hakimian, New York

02 *PC-Cassiopea-146*, *PC-Cassiopea-144*, *PC-Cassiopea A-145*, *PC-Cassiopea-147* (from the top), silk and cotton made in Italy. F.J Hakimian, New York

03 *RDC-S1085/0001*, baby alpaca wool and silk made in Peru, F.J Hakimian, New York



