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MAGASINET

SCANDINAVIAN WEAVING MAGAZINE

- IN THE BEGINNING THERE WAS THREAD
- HANDTOWEL COMPETITION WINNERS
- DAMASK AND JACQUARD

Hand-woven textiles close to his heart

TEXT TINA IGNELL PHOTO BENGT ARNE IGNELL/F J HAKIMIAN STAFF

The office phone rang one day, and at the other end was F J Hakimian. I didn't quite realize at first he was speaking from New York, at which point I quickly worked out it must be morning over there. Mr Hakimian said he had just received the latest issue of VM and now wanted us to send all the issues we had done in English.

– This is all very interesting, he said in a calm, considered manner.

– And if you are coming by New York, you are very welcome to drop in.

Seize the opportunity when it appears! In summer 2010 we were going over to New Mexico to take part in Convergence. So on the way back we planned a visit to Mr Hakimian's huge showroom at 136 East 57th street.

He met us at the door to his office, greeting us warmly:

– At last we can see each other! Fabric portfolio boxes were stacked in his office, and textiles lay around us on all sides.

Rows of rolled up carpets lined the big gallery outside his office. We had come to one of the world's best –known rug collectors.

MR HAKIMIAN CAME TO THE USA in the 1960s to go to university. He brought to this new country all his knowledge about weaving and rugs, mainly Oriental carpets. That was where he had started.

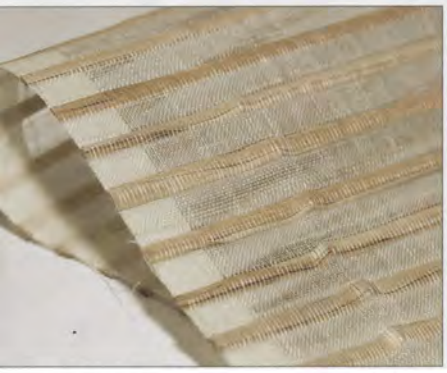
It was mostly by chance that he got interested in Swedish rugs. On a visit to Stockholm more than 25 years ago, he saw a rug designed by Barbro Nilsson, woven up at the Märta Måås – Fjetterström studio.

– I had never seen anything like it before. You could say it was love at first sight: the simplicity, a touch naive and not completely perfect, yet at the same time fantastically well made, all struck at the core of my rug-collector heart.

HIS FAVOURITES WERE AND STILL ARE the rugs and wall-hangings produced at the Märta Måås–Fjetterström studio. On the wall of his showroom he has the beautiful weaving designed by Nilsson, called "Hjälta". It was made (and is still) in many colourways and dimensions.

– People here love it, he said, smiling.

Other weavers representing out of the ordinary designs are, according to Mr Hakimian, Ingrid Hellman–Knafve with her relief pile rugs, Ingrid Dessau with her stylistic purity, and Marianne Richter with her colourist ryas. But many of the rugs he buys are by unknown designers, which does not really matter. The important thing, he emphasized, is that they speak to the heart. ▶



Light, open-woven fabrics that screen against the sun and protect from view, appeal to city customers: fabrics woven with various plant fibres are occasionally designed in France and woven up in the Philippines. Some fully realized in the Philippines. The fabric featured in the top image has cut strips of sea grass inserted into woven abaca fibers.

Featured in the top image is one of Barbro Nilsson's most popular wall hangings, dubbed "Hjälta". On the sofa, a few cushions by Märta Måås–Fjetterström's studio. In the bottom image, a Vintage Kilim Composition and numerous Swedish cushions by Märta Måås–Fjetterström's studio are featured within a showroom designed by Patrik Lönn.

Above, **Exciting textural effects exist in many of Hakimian's fabrics. These are, for example, achieved when a thick silk yarn with a little loop is thrown into the field of a translucent fabric (see bottom image for reference).**

When Mr Hakimian began buying Swedish rugs, there was not a lot of competition. Now it is a bit different. People are beginning to wake up to what is handwoven, and foreign buyers have, with their interest, in part raised the prices and in part cultivated greater interest at home. Yet he feels it could be better still.

– You don't see yourselves what is just around the corner. The textile tradition and the wealth of pattern, colour and technique you have are quite unique.

A COUPLE OF YEARS AGO his field of interest broadened out into interior textiles. Most of his customers are interior designers and architects who get commissioned to do a whole look. His contacts extend pretty well worldwide.

WE LOOKED AT SOME COPIES OF VM lying on the table. Post–it notes were sticking out everywhere.

– Can anyone weave this? he wanted to know, pointing to some traditional rag rugs, or this, looking at a mosquito net curtain. We promised to mention this in the article so that anyone so called could make contact, either with us at the editorial office or directly with him. He nodded agreement.

There were, though, a certain number of challenges. He glanced up over the rim of his glasses.

– I have seen beautiful swatches that caught my attention, and when I then ordered larger quantities, the fabric did not look the same as in the swatches. The quality must be consistent and deliveries have to be on time.

THESE DAYS, for example, he is working with a small family firm in Sardinia. They weave beautiful rugs, many in a loop-technique weave. They are in the process of settling on some designs and bringing out a collection.

Another collaborative project is with a French designer, who creates textile designs which are then woven in The Philippines with indigenous materials.

Typically, he said, the work of bringing out a new rug or textile happens as follows: small swatches measuring ca 30 x 30 cm are woven up. These are then sent out to customers to get their feedback. Interest in specific samples then generally leads to larger orders of the selected rugs or fabrics. He would not dream of first bringing out a hand-woven collection, then having it machine woven in larger quantities.

– It must look handwoven, which it only does when it has been handwoven. I don't want to deceive my eyes. If I was looking at this purely financially, I would not get involved in this way, but for me this is work I do with my heart.

A family firm in Sardinia weaves these loop – technique rugs for F. J. Hakimian in a multitude of designs.

Katarzyna Olesinska, a Master in Artistic Weaving, is one of 10 employees at F.J. Hakimian.She composes vintage kilims and repairs antique carpets and wall hangings.
Above, **Vintage Kilim Compositions–an assemblage of vintage kilim fragments from the 1940s. These fragments are sewn together into room-sized rugs, based on a client's specifications. The composition featured in the image on the right was inspired by an Art Deco fabric.**

Neither would he allow somebody to weave up copies of another person's design, without it first being approved.

– It is important, you can't go behind the back of people you collaborate with, or if you do you won't last long in this business.

A FEW FLOORS UP is the workshop where repairs are carried out. They also make up what are known as Vintage Kilim Compositions. These are highly successful as New Yorkers appreciate these light rugs which can be ordered in any size. The starting point is with narrow hand-woven kilim panels from Iran (formerly Persia) and Turkey. Most were woven in the 1940s and 50s. Nomad girls wove the 30-60 cm wide pieces in hand-spun wool, cotton, linen, hemp, and goat hair for their dowries. After marriage, the weavings would be used to decorate the interiors and exteriors of their tents.

These kilim panels, with all their natural shades, are sewn up into wide rugs in the studio. The stitching can either be in neutral wool or linen, or, as in some speciality pieces, more prominent with the use of metallic thread or wire.

SOME OF THE KILIM PANELS are so frayed that they cannot be used whole. These are cut into smaller pieces. When lined, they acquire the stability needed to use them in "Modernistic" designed Vintage Kilim Compositions, where several fragments are stitched together to form a full carpet. These often appeal to the modern city dweller.

ON THE WAY OUT of the workshop, we passed rows of rolled up rugs. Nestled within these sophisticated Oriental rugs, we found a rug by Edna Martin. It turned out to be a piece woven in the 1950s for the Secretary-General Dag Hammarskjöld's New York apartment.

These premises resonate with the wing beat of history. So much has been produced here! And so much is still being made. We spoke about Swedish textiles making their presence felt in wider circles.

– With regard to the USA, to this day, there are still only a few young professionals, amongst architects and interior designers, who know much about Swedish textiles. Nothing of the kind has been shown here since Märta Måås–Fjetterström exhibited at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in the 1930s. Quite simply, the potential is unknown. ■

For more information and to see many different rugs from all corners of the world, please visit www.fjhakimian.com. This site is a useful guide to the patterns and forms of the rug world.
Current: International Conference on Oriental Carpets in Stockholm, June 16 –19