

IMPORTANT INFORMATION ABOUT ORIENTAL RUGS

In What Way Are Oriental Rugs Unique?

- Oriental rugs are different from all others in that their pile (usually wool) is tied to their foundations. That is why they are referred to as hand-knotted rugs, and that, more than anything, accounts for why they last so long- often 50-80 years in use. That also accounts for their expense. The knot-count in a square inch of an average Oriental rug is something like 100.

What is a Kilim?

A Kilim is a flat-woven Oriental rug, made much like Navajo rugs, without pile. They don't last as long in floor-use as a knotted carpet- perhaps an average of about 35 years- nor do they cost as much. Many collectors value kilims because often they retain the oldest and most traditional designs and colors.

What Country Makes the Best Rugs?

No one country has established itself as making the best rugs. For years Iran was most highly regarded, but now she seems to have fallen behind many other countries in the use of natural dyes. Many of the best rugs today come from Turkey, India, Pakistan (made by Afghan refugees), Nepal and China. A small production of tribal rugs with a lot of character come out of Afghanistan.

Natural vs. Synthetic Dyes

Dyes made from natural substances such as roots- have been used in Oriental rugs for virtually thousands of years, or they were until about World War Two. By that time, synthetic dyes had almost entirely taken the place of natural dyes. Starting in about 1980, natural dyes again began to be used in a few rugs, and today both natural and synthetic dyes are used in Oriental rugs. For all practical purposes, both are excellent. Connoisseurs, though, almost always prefer natural dyes, citing especially a pleasant variegation in colors made from natural substances and an impression of character natural dyes seem to impart. Bottom line, the choice between natural and modern synthetic dyes is a matter of preference- and money. Rugs with natural dyes cost around 30% more than those with synthetic dyes.

What is Abrash?

Anyone who looks closely at the photographs of rugs in this web site will notice that, in many of them, colors change in horizontal bands throughout

the rugs. A band of darker blue, for instance, may lie between larger areas of lighter blue. That kind of color-variation is called abrash. Most often abrash is caused by variation in dyelots and is most often encountered when rugs are woven in relatively primitive conditions where each dye lot may consist of only 20 or 30 gallons- as opposed to dye mixed in cities that may consist of 500 or 1000 gallon batches. But there are other causes of abrash as well. There can be large differences in the kind and the natural color of wool used in one rug, and each wool absorbs dye a little differently. Also, when wool is spun by hand, the tension of the spin varies and consequently so does the capacity of the wool to absorb dye. That band of darker blue that we cited above may result from a batch of loosely spun wool that absorbed a lot of dye.

Is abrash a flaw? The answer lies in the eyes of the beholder. Germans, by and large, don't like abrash. Other people enjoy the character that abrash seems to add to oriental rugs. We would like to suggest that strong abrash is not appropriate to finely knotted rugs and carpets made in city workshop conditions- rugs like Kashans and Nains that seem to aim for a kind of perfection. On the other hand, in tribal and village rugs, abrash often looks good and is by no means a flaw. But you, the connoisseur, are the final judge.

Judging Quality in Oriental Rugs

Connoisseurs spend lifetimes weighing which Oriental rugs are worthy of their collections. In the end it all comes down to taste, and for you too, your own taste is finally what matters. Still, there are criteria by which Oriental rugs are often judged that are commonly agreed on. Some are elementary and nearly self-evident:

- Good rugs lie flat on their backs, without wrinkles or ripples along their edges. Rugs with wrinkles, curled edges and so on, besides disturbing the eye, wear prematurely. Still, don't ask for perfection, especially from tribal rugs made under difficult conditions.
- Some rugs are out-of-shape. They came off the loom wider on one end than the other, or with bowing edges or an hour glass figure. All else being equal, a reasonably regular, geometrically correct shape is preferable to a visibly distorted one.
- Some folks love rugs that have faded into a low key, innocuous absence of color, but, again, they should not be surprised when their beloved rug is spurned by others. Good rugs have colors that resist fading in normal light and bleeding when exposed to water.

- Rugs in good condition are prized above those in bad condition. Moth damage, holes, rips, spots and stains and missing ends and edges are tolerable to most people only when rugs are really old.

- Some wool is better than other wool. Good wool has a noticeable glow. It feels fleecy, perhaps a little oily, soft. It absorbs dye well and it takes heavy use. Inferior wool is full of kemp and hair and is scratchy, dry, lusterless and incapable of properly absorbing dye. Obviously, good wool is preferable to bad wool.

Besides the considerations above, there are others that are more controversial, more subjective or more difficult to describe.

Are Finely Knotted Rugs Better than Others?

Most often, finely knotted or finely woven rugs are more desirable than those that are less fine. There are several reasons why that is so. For one, curved lines in a rug's design can be "drawn" more smoothly and gracefully in a rug with many knots per square inch, just as a lot of pixels in a television screen allow for more natural looking lines. And too, rugs that are very finely knotted have such dense surfaces that light is reflected from them in an attractive way. But it must be said that fine knotting alone does not make a rug good. A case may even be made that a fine weave simply is not appropriate in certain kinds of tribal rugs. By and large though, if all else is equal, a finely knotted rug is more attractive than a less finely knotted rug.

What is a Rug's "Drawing"?

Connoisseurs of Oriental rugs often refer to the "drawing" of a rug. My guess is that drawing means something a little different to each of them-but all would agree that it is important. I believe that drawing refers not to a rug's design per se, but to how well the design is executed: whether it is fluid and nimble or clumsy and static. Drawing includes the matter of whether there is harmony among a rug's various components such as its border and field, though to a large extent that has to do with color choices as well as drawing. Undeniably, some rugs are beautifully drawn and others are not. But do connoisseurs agree as to which is which? Well yes, often.

More about Natural vs. Synthetic Dyes

There is agreement among nearly all old-rug collectors that natural dyes in a rug are better than synthetic. But the issue is clouded by the fact that often it is impossible without expensive laboratory analysis to be certain whether a given dye in an old rug is natural or synthetic. So much has

been written about natural dyes vs. synthetic (see *Oriental Rugs Today*, Emmett Eiland, Berkeley Hills Books) that I will not tackle the subject here. But I believe it is safe to say that no rug buyer will ever regret acquiring a rug or carpet with well applied natural dyes. Natural dyes definitely add to the cost of a rug, but they also add to its value.

Hand Spun vs. Machine Spun Wool

For thousands of years, weavers spun wool by hand to create the yarn that makes up the pile of Oriental rugs. By about World War Two, nearly all wool was spun by machines. Now, since about 1985, a small but appreciable number of weavers are again spinning wool by hand. Though a few people prefer the uniformity and formal appearance that machine spun wool imparts to carpets, most collectors and connoisseurs value the effect produced by hand spun wool. When spun by hand, yarn absorbs more dye where it is loosely spun and less dye where it is spun tightly, thus producing pleasant variegation in the colors of a rug. Though there is room for disagreement, I believe that the best Oriental rugs are woven with hand spun wool.

Old Rugs vs. New Rugs

Are old rugs better than new rugs? In good condition, old rugs certainly are worth more than new rugs, all else being equal. Why? Age, or rather use, seems to add character to rugs- at least in many people's eyes. Colors mellow; wool pile acquires a patina. But I believe that most people's preference for old rugs over new was formed during the period from about 1930 to 1990 when new rugs were clearly inferior to those woven earlier, mostly because rugs fashioned during those 60 years were almost invariably made with synthetic dyes. Now, though, a renaissance has taken place in rug weaving, and natural dyes and hand spun wool are back in use in some rugs, and old designs have been restored to the repertoire of modern weavers. Today there is far less reason to prefer old rugs to new. Perhaps there is none. So the answer is: You can not judge whether a carpet is a good one or not by its age.

Can You Judge Quality by Height of the Pile?

Inexperienced rug buyers sometimes mistake a thick pile for quality. In fact, the finest rugs often are the thinnest. Still, if a rug is going to take significant traffic, it should have plenty of body.

Is the Finishing Process Important?

Yes. Good Oriental rugs have a natural glow. They have been either left to age naturally or, at the very end of the rug-making process, are sensitively

washed in substances that subtly tone down the relatively bright colors of a new rug. They are not bleached to death nor muddied up with gunk. Neither are they washed to make them unnaturally shiny.

Summarizing “Quality in Oriental Rugs”

So the profile of a good rug is something like this: It lies flat and straight on the floor and is reasonably regular in its shape. It is in good condition and has lively, lustrous wool. Its colors have neither faded nor bled. In fact its colors probably have been dyed from natural plant substances and its wool spun by hand. Consequently there is a pleasant variegation in its colors and a feeling that the rug has personality or character. It has been intelligently “finished” so that it is not washed out, unnaturally shiny nor unpleasantly bright and harsh. The elements of the carpet’s design seem to fit together nicely and its colors are harmonious. Above all, the rug has an X quality, a hook that grabs you personally, a character that you like.

EMERGENCY CARE FOR ORIENTAL RUGS

If you don’t find the information you need below, during business hours phone 831 373-1009

SPILLS and PET STAINS

1. Whether it is wine, coffee, coolaid, urine, paint or whatever, the first step is to remove as much of it as possible from the rug- as soon as possible. Paper towels work well. Keep blotting until you have got as much out as possible.
2. After blotting, many spills will require diluting. If it is clear that much of the spilled substance is still in the rug, dilute it with water (assuming that the substance is water soluble)- as much water as necessary. That may mean a half cup for a small spill or it may mean a quart of water for a major spill. Don’t get the rug sopping wet unless you need to.

Please note that some rugs have unstable dyes that may run if you put water on them. But they are a small minority of all rugs. Sometimes you simply must take a chance.

3. Now back to blotting. Get as much out as possible.
4. If the rug has become wet in the process, you needn’t panic. Chances are that it can stay wet for at least several days without harm. Still, you will have to manage the wet rug and promote drying. If the rug is quite wet, you may have to elevate it to promote air circulation under it.

You might just stuff some wadded up newspapers under it. You may wish to play a fan on the rug to circulate air.

5. If the rug is still stained after all your efforts, consider taking it to a professional rug washer as soon as you can. Very often spills come out in the wash.

6. Do not use spot removers on Oriental rugs that are formulated for use on wall to wall carpeting. They will harm the wool pile of your rug.

If your rug has become sopping wet from plumbing problems, a leaking roof, as a result of firefighting or anything else, the situation may not be as bad as you fear. A rug can stay wet for at least several days before it is harmed. Still, you must do the best you can to manage it. Even though the water and the rug are dirty, your priority most likely will be to get the rug dry. You can have it washed later.

In many cities there are 24 hour emergency services available to deal with wet rugs. You can find them in the phone book under carpets. Their work seems satisfactory on carpeting, but sometimes inappropriate and even harmful on Oriental rugs. Unless you are simply overwhelmed, you may be better off to handle the problem yourself.

1. If possible, get the rug to a wooden deck, a concrete patio or even a sidewalk. If you have a squeegee on a long handle, use it to squeegee out the water, pushing in the direction of the pile. In a pinch, you can use the back of a heavy garden rake as a substitute for a squeegee. Get as much water out of the rug as possible.

If you cannot get the rug to a flat, outdoor surface, you may vacuum it with a Shop Vac or other wet-or-dry type vacuum, pulling as much water as you can from the rug.

2. After squeegeeing or vacuuming it, you may now roll the rug without folding it and stand it on end, letting it stand until water is no longer dripping from it.

3. At this point the rug is still damp but no longer sopping wet. Finish drying it however you can. If you have good weather, you can dry it in the sun. If you must, dry it indoors in a warm room, elevating it, if necessary, to let air circulate around it. A fan trained on the rug will help.

4. If necessary, you can, at your convenience, have the rug washed by professional specialists.

HOW TO CARE FOR ORIENTAL RUGS

People think that because Oriental rugs are valuable they must be pampered like fine China. But Oriental rugs have earned their reputation of being magical in part because of their sheer endurance. When they are dirty, they can be washed (unlike wall-to-wall carpeting, which can be surface cleaned only). And when they are injured they can be fixed. Their dyes resist fading and running, and their wool, full of natural oils, keeps many potential stains from penetrating and setting. We have seen that in the Middle East some new rugs are thrown into the streets for “aging,” where they are driven over by trucks and camels alike. They come through the ordeal looking much improved. Rugs are, as they say, forgiving.

But still, rugs need a congenial atmosphere and a little attention to help combat their several natural enemies: sunlight, moths, carpet beetles and moisture.

Rugs Fade in Sunlight. Be Careful!

A congenial atmosphere includes protection from too much sunlight. After inspecting rugs in many homes over the years, I have come to think that sunlight may be a rug’s principal nemesis- more to be feared, even, than moths. Sunlight streaming through a window directly onto a rug is virtually guaranteed to harm it, whether morning or afternoon, southern or western sunlight. Naturally dyed rugs and synthetically dyed rugs suffer equally. Colors fade unevenly and wool and cotton dry out and become brittle. A good rug can be spoiled in a month or less. Of course there are situations where the risk to your rug is less clear, like when it is in a sunny room yet does not take direct sunlight. Be careful. Some rugs will take that much light and others will not- and there’s no way to know in advance which will and which won’t. It is possible and prudent to monitor your rug in this circumstance, which you may do by periodically comparing its colors on the front to those on the back of the rug. They should be the same. When colors are softer or lighter on the pile side of the rug than they are on the back, it’s time to take action. You can eliminate or prevent the problem by keeping the curtains closed or by having your windows professionally coated with mylar. Mylar is a film which can be applied to your windows and which filters harmful ultraviolet light. It does not impart a noticeable tint to windows. I must caution, however, that applying a mylar coating to certain windows may negate manufacturers’ warranties. Mylar has the secondary effect of taking a couple of degrees of heat off hot summer sun and softening glare through a window. Most damage is caused by light shining through a window, of course, but often enough rugs are faded by sunlight streaming through a skylight. Sometimes people have no idea that is happening because it occurs at a time of day when they are not at home. In my own house I once had to replace my Plexiglas skylight with Plexiglas that had been UV filtered. A special word of caution: don’t forget

that, if the sun is not coming directly through your window now, it may do so at a different time of the year when, for instance, the sun is lower in the southern sky.

If your rug has already suffered fading by the sun, there is still hope that it can be improved. If the fading is merely on the very tips of the pile (and you can determine that by looking closely at it), then washing the rug (professionally) may help the problem by simply abrading the faded tips of the wool. More severe fading can sometimes be improved by professional clipping of the entire pile. Occasionally a rug is so faded that neither of these methods will work, and then one must decide whether to accept the rug as it is, or to attempt to fade the entire rug evenly. This involves leaving the rug in the blistering sun, covering parts of the rug that are already faded and leaving exposed the previously unfaded portions of the rug. How long do you leave it in the sun? Until the job is done. That might be three days and it might be three weeks. It is obvious, though, that one must be cautious with this approach lest you cook your rug too long.

Moths

The second major enemy of Oriental rugs is moths. The moths you need to worry about are small and hardly noticeable. They are the same moths that raid food in the pantry and wool clothes in the closet. They do their damage in the larval stage when, as (horror of horrors) little maggot looking creatures, they eat tracks in wool rugs. In rugs with wool foundations they often eat right through the rug. They leave behind a web-like material. Moths can cause devastating damage to a rug in a matter of weeks. Here is some comforting news, though: moths rarely infest rugs and carpets that are in regular use. They prefer to be undisturbed, and they seek out rugs that are stored or are under furniture. They also appear to prefer dark places. So a rug that is walked on and vacuumed or swept is hardly at risk at all, except parts of it that may be under a never-disturbed bookcase or bed.

Rugs or portions of rugs covered by furniture must be disturbed from time to time to prevent moths from settling in. That may mean moving furniture off rugs every several months or so and vacuuming or sweeping. When inspecting rugs for moth activity, remember that most moth damage is to the back of a rug where moths are least likely to be disturbed. So examine the back of the rug along its perimeter and look for moths, moth larvae or the casing or webbing they leave behind. You may elect to leave moth crystals in areas that are hard to get at, but remember that moth crystals lose their potency rather quickly. Rugs mounted on walls can attract moths because they typically are never disturbed. Check their backs in particular. I am now in the habit of handling rugs mounted on walls as I walk past them just to make them inhospitable hosts for moths.

If, after all your efforts to prevent moth damage, damage still occurs, don't despair. Your rug can be repaired. The question will be whether the value of the rug warrants the cost of repair.

Carpet beetle is not a great factor in the Western United States, but it is the scourge of East Coast rug owners. The adult is a small oval insect, dark with colored marks on the back, about a quarter of an inch long. Carpet beetles eat pollen and nectar, and often they are brought into the house on cut flowers. They lay eggs in dust and lint in dark, hard to access places. Both adults and larvae eat wool rugs (and sometimes silk rugs), but most damage is done by the larvae. While moths eat tracks through wool rugs, carpet beetles eat right through the rug, cotton foundation and all. They leave behind bristly "shells" of shed skin. The best control is prevention through fastidious housekeeping and proper storage (see How to Store Oriental Rugs below). Carpet beetles may be killed by freezing (-20 degrees F for three days), or through use of pyrethrin or other sprays.

Stored rugs are the most likely victims of moths, since in storage they usually are both undisturbed and in the dark. I would suggest that you store a rug in the following way. Moths seem to love dirty rugs, so start with a clean rug if possible. I would roll moth crystals into the rug, maybe a fistful into a 4 by 6 foot rug. Some people object to the smell and toxicity of moth crystals. An alternative is to leave a rug in the sunlight for a half-day on both sides, hoping thereby to kill any moth eggs in the rug. A third alternative is to spray the rug with a moth spray (Fuller Brush makes one) before you roll it. The smell from a spray seems to dissipate long before the smell of moth crystals does. Fold the rug, roll it up, tie it. The simplest next step is to place it in a heavy garbage bag, or a double or triple layer of bags and to seal it really well. If the carpet is too big to fit into a bag, use garbage bags on both ends and tape them together in the middle. An alternative is to wrap the rug in a heavy paper or plastic wrap, like Tyvac. In any case, the object is to seal them in some container unreachable by moths (and, incidentally, by water). Finally, store the sealed rug where its wrap will not be pierced by something sharp and where the package will not be exposed to water or dampness.

An alternative to wrapping a rug for storage is storing it in a cedar closet or a cedar trunk. Natural resins in cedar wood repel moths. The advantages are clear: no chemicals are involved and no wrapping is required. There are two problems with cedar closets and chests though. First, not everyone has them, and, second, cedar eventually loses its anti-moth properties. My wife and I stored our collection of Oriental rugs in a cedar closet for many years without harm. Then suddenly, in what must have been about the 75th year in the life of the cedar closet, it lost its punch and was breached by moths. I can't tell you what a mess that was. I was told

that sanding it the cedar wood, which I did, might restore its aromatic quality. But I never again really trusted the closet. Cedar chips are sold which may be added to chests and closets. Perhaps they work. Also, perhaps they don't.

When rugs stay wet too long, they become mildewed and, eventually, suffer dry rot. The classic example is dry rot caused by a potted plant placed on a rug. The typical result is a horribly rotted circular area in a carpet that is otherwise in good condition. Don't even think about putting a potted plant on a rug. No matter how clever you are, no matter that you use a glazed pot and a glazed saucer and you put a vapor barrier between the saucer and the rug, the rug will get wet and will stay wet unbeknownst to you and will become a rotten mess in an area about one foot in diameter. Another typical situation comes up when rugs are stored poorly, in a garage for instance, and they become wet without anyone realizing what has happened. Even though dry rot is not inevitable in such cases, a mildew smell is, and sometimes the smell of mildew simply cannot be removed. I have seen several occasions when moisture under a house has caused rugs on the floor above to mildew. Another situation not uncommon is for rugs to be soaked by a leak in the roof or by a plumbing problem upstairs. In my first rug store, a stoppage in a main sewer line caused my toilet to back up, overflow and leave six inches of standing "water" throughout the showroom. (Isn't it amazing that we somehow do get through life's surprises? For the peace of mind of those who might have been my customers in those days, I had each rug washed thoroughly before they again became merchandise.)

Please do not worry needlessly, though. A little water on a rug, or even a lot of water, will not cause it to mildew unless the rug stays wet too long. For instance, rugs one steps onto from a shower or bathtub rarely are hurt by water because they have time to dry out between times. And don't panic if you spill a glass of water on a rug. Just dry it as well as you can with towels, and if it dries in several days, it will be all right.

Unfortunately, besides causing mildew and dry rot, water sometimes causes dyes in rugs to bleed or run. All you can do in this situation is to get the rug dry as soon as possible, preferably with a water vacuum as outlined below.

If a rug is just a little wet, as from a spilled glass of water, do what I suggested above. Merely soak up as much water as possible with a towel or paper towel and everything will probably be just fine. If you are worried about the floor underneath, elevate the wet spot until it dries.

A rug that is thoroughly wet is another matter. The goal is to dry it before it mildews in about four or five days. If you have a Shoepac or other vacuum

that will take in water, vacuum out as much water as you can. If not, lay the rug flat on its back outdoors and squeegee out as much water as you can. In a pinch, you can use the back of a garden rake as a squeegee. If you cannot do that (perhaps because it is raining heavily outside), then roll the rug tightly and stand it on end until water stops dripping out of the bottom end. If you have sunlight and a place to lay the rug, open it and let it finish drying outdoors. Or, if you know that the rug is dirty as well as wet, dry it enough so that you can get it to an Oriental rug cleaning specialist. If all else fails and the rug has been wet for four or five days and you have no prospects of drying it soon, spray it with Lysol. If you must dry a wet rug indoors, keep air circulating around it with a fan or hairdryer. Many a rug has come through seemingly hopeless situations and come out in good shape.

MAINTAINING ORIENTAL RUGS

How to Keep Your Oriental Rugs Clean

Rugs gradually wear as they are walked on. That can't be avoided, but you can lesson the problem by turning or rotating your rugs from time to time so they don't always get walked on in the same places. Walking on a dirty rug shortens its life prematurely. Dirt and sand fragments act like sandpaper as you grind them into the surface of your rug. How often should you have your Oriental rugs washed? On the average of every four or five years, but the real answer is that you should wash them when they are dirty and not before or long after. You can tell whether your rug is dirty by testing it with a white, wet cloth. Rub the rug's pile vigorously with the wet cloth and check to see how much dirt is transferred to the cloth. Don't worry about a little discoloration; any rug has a little dust on its surface. A dirty rug will transfer a lot of dirt to a cloth, and the results of your testing will be unambiguous. Dirty rugs may not look especially dirty, but typically they look flat and lusterless.

Many Europeans are fearless about washing their own rugs and have developed methods so hallowed by time that they are unquestioned. People of German origin have told me about their mothers turning rugs upside down in the snow and beating them on the back. I have no doubt that the results can be quite dramatic when the rug is removed and an impressive amount of dirt is left behind on the snow. And the snow approach must do a good job of freshening the surface of an Oriental rug. But this approach can't really compete with thoroughly wetting a rug and washing it with appropriate materials. I used to wash my own rugs, and it can be done, but these days I let the professionals wash my rugs. They do a better job than I do and they are better at dealing with color-run when that occurs.

Here is a summary of how rugs are (or should be) washed professionally. (I would like to thank David Walker of Talisman in Santa Cruz, California for some of the information herein about washing rugs.) First, as much dirt and dust as possible is loosened and separated from the rug before it is exposed to water. Some professionals use giant tumblers to accomplish this. Professionals test colors for fastness before they wet a rug to determine how they will approach the job. They may protect weak areas of the rug, perhaps by sewing gauze around them. If the rug's dyes are stable and the rug can be washed, the rug is laid out flat and thoroughly wetted. Some experts filter chlorine out of the water. When the rug is wet, it is scrubbed by hand- that is, by brushes, usually on poles, operated by hand. Machines never should be used for the scrubbing. Rotary type machines often tangle the wool pile, and no machine can sense where scrubbing should be lighter or heavier depending on the condition of the rug.

The choice of a cleaning agent, of course, is critical. An unformulated (that is, neutral balanced) detergent is ideal, despite the old caveat that detergent should never be used on an Oriental rug. Conditioners may be added if wool is dry, and so may denatured white vinegar be added to stabilize the dyes. The rug or carpet is rinsed thoroughly and dried and then brushed down to soften and finish the rug's surface.

Does that sound easy? How would you like to turn the hose on someone's \$30,000 antique Oriental rug? Good rug washers live with that kind of pressure every day and rarely have accidents. I have the greatest respect for the handful of specialists who are conscientious and who know what they are doing.

It is possible to freshen the surface of an Oriental rug without washing it. Simply sponging the pile with cold water will brighten it. You may also use the type of appliance made to clean carpeting at home, such as the Spray'n Vac. But do not use anything except water and a little denatured white vinegar (about a quarter of a cup in a gallon of water): no soap, no optical brighteners. You may clean a rug's fringe with soap and water, but don't bleach it.

Do not shake an Oriental rug to dust it. Do not beat an Oriental rug. You may use a vacuum cleaner, even a beater type vacuum, but be careful not to catch the fringe in the vacuum. You may also use a broom. Whatever you do to an Oriental rug should be appropriate to its condition. Don't sweep a ninety-year-old, worn rug too vigorously.

Ends, Edges and Holes

Ends and edges are often the first parts of rugs that need attention as rugs age. It is critical to maintain them in good condition because problems with them soon lead to more expensive problems with the body of a rug. Typically, a rug's fringe begins to wear away noticeably within 10 or 15 years from the time the rug was new and is nearly gone when the rug is 40-60 years old. Fringe can be replaced, though, often, new fringe on an old rug looks inappropriate. Many people who are accustomed to old rugs simply get used to seeing eroded fringes and they don't worry about it. Fringe is not structural, and your rug will suffer no harm from its absence. On the other hand, worn fringe is a sign that the end finish of the rug may be threatened by wear. Rugs are bound on their ends in a number of different ways, but each is designed to keep the foundation threads intact. When the foundation is frayed, a rug begins to lose its pile, and that requires expensive work. So, typically, a rug needs "end stopping" to secure the end from raveling, usually after something like 30 years.

Likewise, the edges of a rug, called selvages, need to be maintained. Selvages are wrapped with wool or cotton to protect the edges of the rug, and eventually this wrapping wears out and has to be replaced. This is routine work and not terribly expensive. To maintain a rug's value it is important that a new selvaige looks just like the old selvaige: the same color, material and so on. Resist the temptation to replace the original selvaige with a cheap, machine binding.

A variety of other problems that need repair may beset a rug during its lifetime: holes, wrinkle lines, curling edges, visible wear, moth damage and so on. There is nothing that cannot be fixed. The question always will be whether the value of the rug warrants the cost of repair.

The Controversial Practice of "Painting" Oriental Rugs

When a rug in need of repair is judged not to have enough value to warrant repair, an alternative to consider is having it "painted." Painting is neither repair nor maintenance but is simply a cosmetic quick-fix. Painting is an emotionally charged issue because it has most often been used as a device to hide wear in order to sell a rug. Painting is just what it sounds like: textile dyes of appropriate colors are painted onto a rug, usually with a stiff paint brush, in such a way as to cover worn areas. Ideally the process is inexpensive and remarkably effective, sometimes making a badly worn rug look really good for another ten years. Eventually the paint wears off, so painting is never a permanent solution- except with a rug so worn that it will not survive the paint. Many people are opposed to painting, usually, as I have said, because its practice is often associated with dishonest rug dealers. Furthermore, a bad paint job can be quite noticeable and off putting. And finally, if the wrong materials are used, the "paint" can run when exposed to water and bleed into the rest of the rug.

Some object to the idea of something foreign to the rug being added to it, and a few people simply don't mind wear in Oriental rugs and would rather see wear than know their rug has been painted. One further objection: the value of some very desirable, collectible rugs may be hurt by painting.

Having duly noted all these objections, I still submit that sometimes painting is a reasonable approach, especially when a rug lacks enough value to warrant repairing it properly. I say this knowing full well that by doing so I have just established myself as a butcher in the eyes of some

WHAT TO DO ABOUT SPILLS AND OTHER ACCIDENTS

The best medicine for spills is to get the substance out of the rug as fast as possible. Use a paper towel or anything handy to absorb the spill. Some people pour salt on a spill, but doing so just makes a mess. If color from the spilled substance is still visible after you have sopped up as much of the spill as possible, you will have to dilute it by sponging on cold water (assuming that the spilled substance is water soluble) and then removing as much of it as possible. It is best not to get the rug really soaking wet. If you do, you will have to deal with it as we describe in the section of this chapter called What To Do with A Wet Rug. If a stain persists after all this, you will probably have to have the rug washed. Do not use off-the-shelf carpet stain removers. They are formulated for the synthetic fibers of carpeting and are likely to hurt a wool Oriental rug.

URINE

Urine stains from pets are probably the most common of all stains in Oriental rugs. They present a special problem because urine actually changes the chemical composition of dyes once it has had a chance to set. The best strategy then (besides preventing it from happening) is to remove it the same way as other stains- as fast as possible. After removing as much as possible, rinse the area with a solution of water and distilled white vinegar- about one tablespoon per cup of water- and then remove as much as possible from the rug. If a urine stain is already dry when you discover it, act as quickly as possible anyway, and get the rug to an Oriental rug cleaning specialist. Enzyme type urine removers feed on wool and should not be used on Oriental rugs.

SHOULD YOU USE RUG PADS?

The people who live where Oriental rugs are made do not use rug pads under rugs, but it is customary there to remove street shoes upon entering a home. No one has ever methodically demonstrated that rug pads make rugs last longer, but clearly rug pads prevent many accidents by keeping rugs and people from slipping around on hardwood floors. For that reason

I usually recommend them. There is no need to have thick rug pads unless you especially want a cushy feel underfoot. Most likely your Oriental rug will outlast its rug pad many times over. Pads tend to dry out and eventually they crumble. I have seen cases in which pads have discolored hardwood floors, especially when they have been used on newly finished floors that, presumably, have not had sufficient time to cure. Pads are now available that are designed to go between wall to wall carpeting and Oriental rugs. They are most effective if the carpeting underneath is not terribly long-piled. There are many products on the market, and you should ask your rug dealer for his or her recommendation.