

Jardin Intérieur
collection rug by
India Mahdavi for
Manufacture Cogolin

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India Mahdavi

The experimental, adaptable and much-lauded architect/designer speaks to Rachel Meek about her colourful approach to a diverse range of projects, including two rug collections and her newly-opened third space in Paris



© Gaielle Le Boulleaut



29 Rue de Bellechasse, Paris, 2020

'I just opened a new small space in Paris close to all my other showrooms on Rue las Cases. It is like a canvas: a white cube which will have a different temporality where I will be able to express myself in a different way.'



The Gallery, Sketch, London, 2014

'My first desire was to paint it all pink and stage the customer as if part of a film... Pink remains my reference to pop culture.'



© Thomas Humery

These days we are well accustomed to blush, but the swell in pink's popularity was just in bud in 2014, when 'Radiant Orchid' was the Pantone Colour of the Year and India Mahdavi designed the swiftly-iconic The Gallery at Sketch. Her radical use of soft saturation exemplifies her inspired, joyful approach to design which means she is as comfortable designing a sushi restaurant as a fine art exhibition as a shop as a chair as a rug.

The Iranian-French self-proclaimed 'polychrome and polyglot' opened her Paris studio in the year 2000, followed by a showroom in 2003, the Petits Objets boutique in 2011—a place to promote a range of crafts and ancestral techniques as well as

her signature colour palette—and, in keeping with her ever expanding oeuvre, she has just opened another premises 'halfway between a window and a gallery'. All are within a stone's throw of each other.

Two rug collections are included in her portfolio: Garden of Eden for Golran (2018) and Jardin Intérieur for Manufacture Cogolin (2015). Characteristically different, the latter collection of modern kilims broke the brand's almost century-old tradition of using repeat patterns by offering a system of modules; patterns woven by panel that can extend infinitely to create an 'open experience', rather than something framed or enclosed.

www.india-mahdavi.com

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REDValentino, Sloane Street, London, 2016

'It was essential for everything, from floor to ceiling, to convey the substance of fun somewhere in between reality and fiction, function and dreams.'

What concepts were behind your two collaborative rug collections? In my work, I strive to give meaning to tradition through a contemporary vision; integrating know-how and enhancing heritage is part of my design journey. A rug defines a space within a space, it sits a room and its furniture down and provides a sense of comfort. It gives a room another dimension, certainly more depth. Both collections are about abstracting a garden, as with traditional Iranian rugs. Jardin Intérieur for Cogolin plays with repeated graphic patterns and flat-tint colours in relief; Garden of Eden for Golran is about rediscovering the idea of a garden of paradise in which the wind gushes. Both carry a very rich colour palette to add joy to a room. I love colour the same way I love people: truly, radically, generously; in fact, I am more shy with people than I am with colours!

How does your approach to rug design compare to that of other custom furniture? Even though I feel that the rug chromosome is embedded in my DNA due to my oriental heritage, I am no specialist. I simply try to channel a certain interpretation of joy—which is the case with all my projects.

Why do you think that your pink room at Sketch made such a major impact on the design world?

It was the very first time that a designer worked with the colour pink in such a radical way—saturated with an unseen strength, a sort of 'ultra pink'. This interpretation of pink, usually seen as a girly and frivolous colour, had a strong influence.

How can design inform atmosphere? I believe that spaces affect one's mood. There is a possibility of creating joy in our surroundings; I like to convey a 'joie de vivre' and I use whatever I can find to express it. It might be an experience, a memory, or an impression that I capture and transform into something else. I approach every project as an artistic journey and for me, that means having the ability to use the primary colours of my emotions—

like an instrument or like an actor—to create specific and original spaces. If there is a method to my work, it is to avoid bringing preconceived ideas of what a project should be. The most important moment for me in every project is the 'here and now' of the first encounter with a space and with a client—using real emotions and real thoughts in the most genuine and simple way.

Could you speak of your feelings for Tehran and Paris and how these cities have informed your work? Tehran and Paris are two capitals that I love. They live within me and echo one another—like black and white versus colour, curves versus geometry, craftsmanship versus industrial design. These cities constitute who I am, somewhere over the rainbow, between a pop and cosmopolitan world, rich in history, encounters and combined energies.

You are passionate about film—can you name some of your favourites? I particularly love Blake Edwards' *The Party*, starring the fantastic Peter Sellers—I am equally fond of the James Bond saga, but also Fellini, Stanley Kubrick, Visconti, Jacques Tati, Hitchcock... The list is long.

Why do you feel it is important to promote crafts and ancestral techniques via your Petits Objets boutique? I am emotionally attached to objects whose vocation is to tell stories in relation to crafts from around the world. They channel the energy of the hand, the gaze of the craftsmen, exploring beauty as a promise, a hope, a way of exalting everyday life.

What projects are you focussed on for 2020 and beyond? I am currently working on the scenography for the retrospective of Pierre Bonnard at the National Gallery of Victoria in Melbourne, Australia—for which I recreated an abstraction of Pierre Bonnard's interiors, including rugs. I am also designing my second capsule collection for the French retail brand Monoprix, which will launch in May and will include homewares and clothing, and a restaurant in Miami—Makoto, due to open in July.



Homo Faber, Venice, 2018

'The know-how of craftsmanship is at its best when serving the imaginary. When the might of the hand is combined to the might of the mind, the magic is revealed. Beauty only results from this encounter.'



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