

FLOOR SHOW

LUKE IRWIN'S ELEGANT
RUGS ARE AS UNIQUE AS
HIS DESIGN STORY

WERE YOU ALWAYS INTERESTED IN DESIGN?

My route into design was quite unconventional. I was in theatre, after which I worked at Christie's, then in PR, before ending up back in antiques. It was in 2002, at a lunch party, I was sitting beside a young man whose Tibetan father had a rug business, and I became fascinated. My mother was an interior designer and I'd always been interested in aesthetics, but until then it was quite surface. Six months later I was still thinking about the rugs, so I got in touch with the boy's dad and he invited me to Kathmandu. It felt like such an adventure; it's magical, a different world, and so that's how my obsession began.



HOW DID YOU BEGIN CREATING RUGS?

My first designs were based on crop circles, and initially I only had enough money to make eight prototypes from which to hopefully take orders. I'd worked in antiques, so I knew some interior designers and for the first few years I'd show my rugs from the boot of my car, as well as doing a couple of design fairs. Eventually, I was able to leave antiques behind and focus on the rugs. I opened my shop on the Pimlico Road in London, in 2010.

TELL US ABOUT THE DESIGN PROCESS – WHERE DOES YOUR INSPIRATION COME FROM?

When designing, I always begin with a story, which could be based around anything from architecture to history to poetry to something abstract, like the crop circles. For me, a rug has to be more than functional, so my aim is to imbue designs with a narrative. I try not to look at what everyone else is doing as I find subliminal influences mean you're always behind the curve.



WHERE ARE YOUR RUGS MADE, AND HOW?

Originally, all of our rugs were made in Kathmandu using the Tibetan hand knot. This lends itself well to contemporary rugs as it's quite fast to make. Now we have rugs woven in India, Nepal, Pakistan and Afghanistan too. We deliberately card yarns so the rug will have imperfections, which create tonal colours and more depth and body.

HOW DID THE COLLABORATION WITH JOHN LEWIS COME ABOUT?

John Lewis approached me as they were keen to offer customers something unique. What was joyous was that for the first collection they jumped for sari silk. There's a lot of wastage in the textile industry, and someone I know in India found a way to recycle leftover fabric from sari making. We also did rugs that were a mash-up of paintings by Turner and Rothko, and the 2021 collection is based on Ikat – a loose structure of repeat patterns with lots of colour. If ever there was a time when we needed some colour and joy, it's now! •



Luke Irwin rugs in various sizes, from a selection available at John Lewis & Partners, from £1,800