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## ORIENTAL CARPETS AND THE ULTIMATE TRAVEL TROPHY ACCORDING TO RUG DESIGNER LUKE IRWIN

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Obsessed with ancient civilisations, a lover of Italian sojourns and ardent about hand-knotted, custom-made rugs, Luke Irwin is a traditionalist to the last.

Dublin-born, Irwin spent much of the 1980s living in New Orleans, and now divides his time between his studio and shop in London and his home in Wiltshire. His rugs are handmade in India, Nepal and Pakistan and can be found warming the tiles in some of the world's most beautiful interiors – from the Gritti Palace in Venice to Heckfield Place in Hampshire. His client list includes the royal family (his wife, Alice Elliot, is the niece of the Duchess of Cornwall) and members of U2 (he is a Dublin man after all).



Irwin's collections (and the references that inspire them) are far reaching – ranging in location and timeframe from Italian peasant design of the 18th and 19th centuries to more modern pan-global stylings. In contrast, his travel advice is decidedly more concise: "pack light and charge your suitcase."

### How would you describe your aesthetic?

I am fascinated by the ancients – Egyptians, Greeks and Romans – so I would say my aesthetic sometimes draws inspirations from patterns, designs and motifs of that era.

## Where are your rugs made?

Our rugs are hand made in India, Nepal and Pakistan, which means lead times can vary slightly. It's also incredibly interesting to see how the wool varies from country to country.

## Your rugs are knotted in the manner of antique Persian carpets. Talk us through the process involved.

Once we have finalised a design, the materials are carefully selected. Any wool that we use needs to be hand-carved – a time-honoured process that sees the wool refined into something workable. This process can only be done by hand as the woollen strands are combed together, ready to be hand-spun. It is both the hand spinning and the carding that gives each rug its own uniqueness. Once knotted, the rugs are splashed with mild soap and water, with the washers pushing paddles across them. This brings a suppleness to the rug which develops further as they are hung out to dry in the sun.



## Where can we find your designs?

Currently, our [Les Billets-Doux notecards](#) can be found in Alex Eagle's Studio and the Wild by TART Shop. Our rugs can be bought online, from our showroom on Pimlico Road and we will soon be launching a John Lewis diffusion line so a select few of our designs can be found there as well.

## Which are your most-frequented travel destinations?

Probably the US as we have a loyal client base there. I love the crumbling, decaying glories of [Savannah](#) and [New Orleans](#) and the local stoops and haunts in [New York](#).

## What do you think makes a good hotel?

A beautiful view to wake up to whether that be the sea, the hustle and bustle of a city or the awe-inspiring mountain adjacent.

## Top five hotels...

[Claridges](#) in London; [Crosby Street Hotel](#) in New York; [Six Senses Zighy Bay](#) in Dibba, Oman, [Le Roch Hotel & Spa](#) in Paris and [Masseria Torre Coccaro](#) in Puglia, Italy.

## What have been some of your favourite projects to date?

The Mosaic Collection was very special to me. Builders were digging in our back garden for electrical wiring when they uncovered a colourful pattern. The discovery of a beautifully preserved ancient mosaic floor was almost too good to be true. The unearthing was unparalleled in size and historical relevance and eventually prompted me to develop the novel design – The Mosaic Collection. Another project I have particularly enjoyed is the development of our "Seat of Power" in collaboration with Little Halstock. It was our first flurry into the world of furniture with the pieces acting as commentary and vehicle for conversation examining the changing nature of power.



## Which places have you found particularly inspirational?

I love the Sarcophagus room at the Sir John Museum. The room makes that extraordinary house even more magical and mysterious.

## What creative references do you return to time and time again?

History, always history. Everything we need to know about the future has already happened in the past. History will always inform me about creative and cultural references.

## What projects are you working on at the moment?

We are launching Rug-in-Rug this spring which is our first collection of completely sustainable and organic rugs. The line is inspired by the use of natural fibres and un-dyed yarn seen in Native American horse-blanket making. We have also just released Les Billets-Doux, a collection of 12 unique hand-drawn illustrations by Eleanor Hardiman alongside classic French expressions such as: "Coup de Foudre", "Je Ne Regrette Rien" and "Cinq à Sept".



## Best places in the world to shop for art?

I love the John Martin Gallery in [London](#).

## One destination you would go back to immediately...

New Orleans. I lived there for a while in the 1980s and just loved it.

## What are you reading at the moment?

A Gentleman in [Moscow](#). It's a beautiful book which perfectly illustrates how you can make a narrow world into a universe.

## One piece of travel advice...

Embrace the culture and try to find coffee shops and eateries where locals go.



## What are your travel essentials?

Wallet, passport, books and phone. It's taken years to train myself not to worry about anything I've forgotten - you can always get what you need wherever you are.

## And finally, what's in your SUITCASE?

Not much, I travel relatively light. I can't live without my Away suitcase - the phone-charging battery in it is genius.