

cover

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NEW RUG PERSPECTIVES

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01 A section of the 12,000 m² carpet by Hands installed at the Nur-Sultan Grand Mosque, Kazakhstan

Profile HANDS

Indian brand Hands installed the world's largest handmade carpet in Kazakhstan's Nur-Sultan Grand Mosque last year. **Rachel Meek** discussed this staggering achievement with the company chair, Ravi Patodia, and his sons, company directors Apurva and Pranay Patodia

In India, Hands is a well-known for its residential and custom rugs. In 2020, it was invited to make samples for a very special project: a bespoke carpet for the newly built Nur-Sultan Grand Mosque in the Kazakh capital, Astana. Designed by Dewan Architects + Engineers, the mosque's 12,000 square-metre prayer area can accommodate 30,000 worshippers. Throughout the building, on the heated floor, are more than 17,000 square metres of hand-tufted carpet, made—to the architect's design—in 219 separate parts, with painstaking precision, in just five months. This is the world's largest carpet.

'For us this was a dream project, but at the same time a massive challenge,' says Ravi Patodia, chair of Patodia Exports, Hands's parent company. 'Firstly because of the time factor—we had only 150 days to complete the job—then because of the size of the thing and the intricacies involved. To achieve the level of perfection that was required, in a handmade product, was very difficult. All the credit goes to our production team who did a wonderful job from beginning to end.'

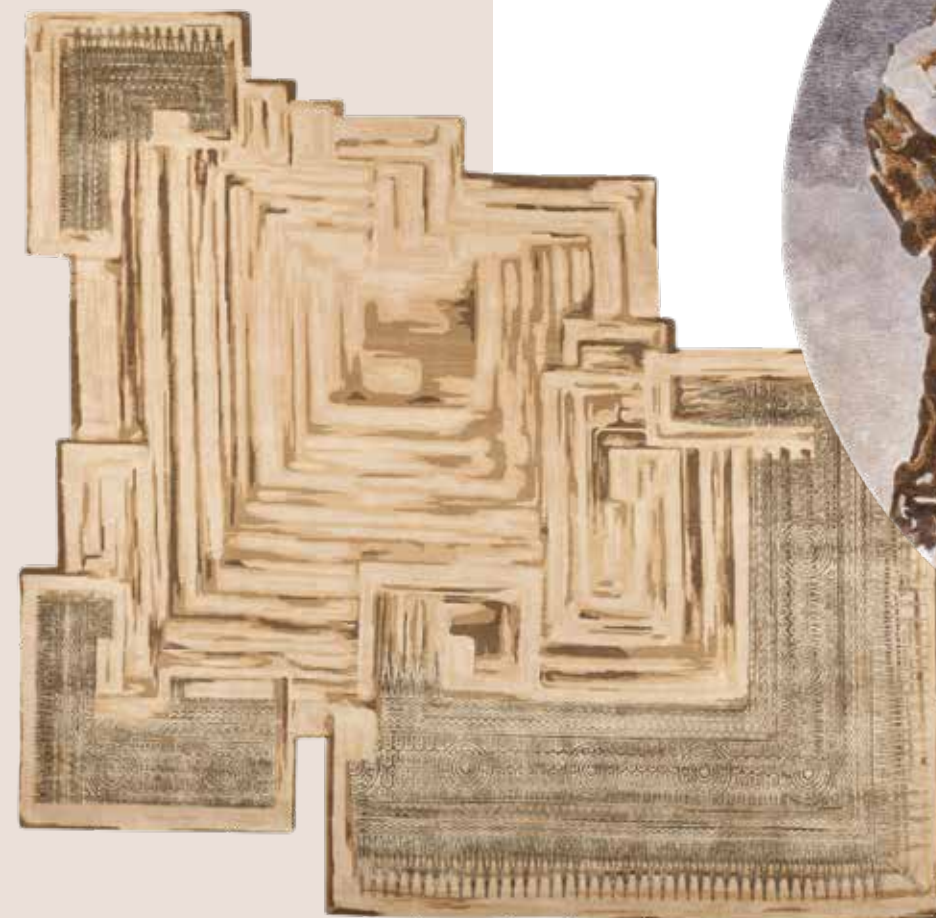
When technicians went to take on-site measurements for the firm, they reported that the spaces were so large that their laser measures were not capable of hitting the wall on the opposite side of the room. When the news came, in 2020, of the vast scale of the samples required, a new hall was built at Patodia Exports' Bhadohi site to accommodate the rigorous inspection process. Kazakhstan's top government officials personally approved the samples, made with the best-quality materials and with a luxurious pile height, taking into account the bare feet of mosque visitors.

Once Hands had accepted the challenge of delivering the gargantuan project, the second wave of Covid arrived; there were internal political disturbances in Kazakhstan, and the sub-zero temperatures of a Central Asian winter loomed large. Eighty tons of New Zealand wool

02 Gaia hand-tufted rug, Hands

03 Gizem hand-knotted rug, Hands

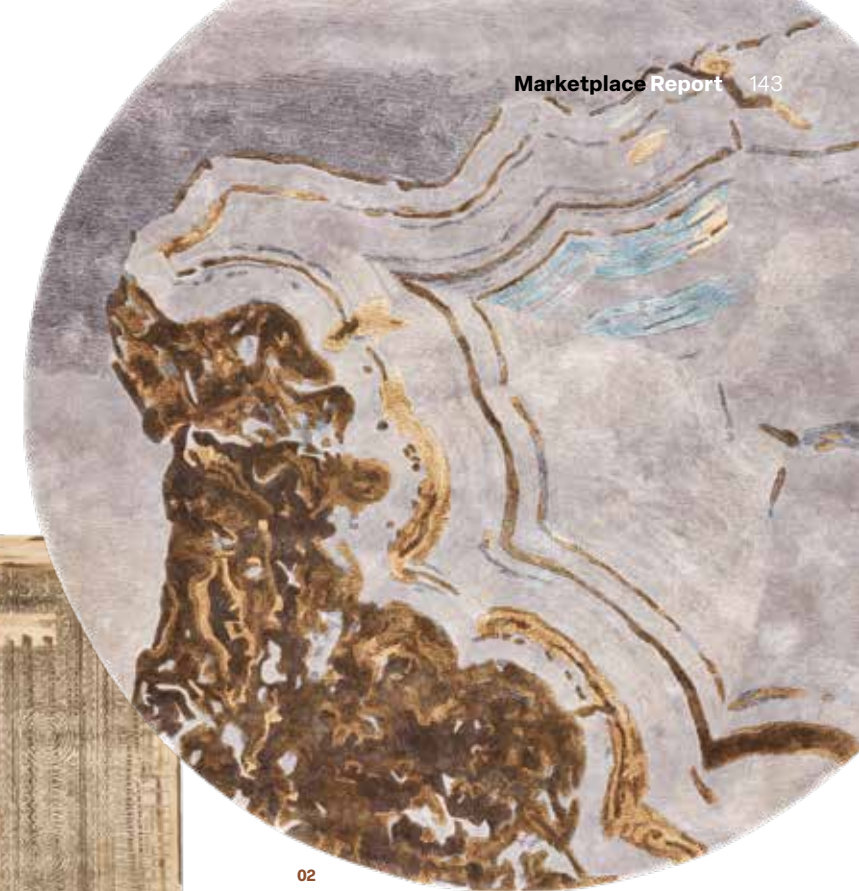
04 Red Sea Crossing hand-knotted rug, Hands



03



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02

had to be spun and dyed with scrupulous tonal accuracy. Great care had to be taken to maintain consistency across all the motifs in the central medallion (70 metres across), as this section of the design was not a repeat pattern, and its centre had to align exactly with the midpoint of the chandelier overhead. More than 1,000 craftspeople were involved in the making of the carpet. Then, from May to July 2022, a specialist team of sixteen people, from Dubai and India, worked for fifty days to install it. 'The sheer magnitude of the job meant that the slightest error in one room would really have messed things up elsewhere,' Patodia Exports' director Apurva Patodia says. 'When we look back, we are not sure how it happened, but it happened!'

The Patodia family are proud to have accomplished this staggering project, and reassured to have proved their capability. The B2C Hands section of their business emerged in 1980, when they took over one of the oldest companies in the carpet industry, established in 1881. But the network of artisans and Middle Eastern contacts that enabled the mosque carpet to happen results from B2B commercial contract and wholesale ventures in both hand-knotted and hand-tufted qualities.

Patodia Exports is responsible for the carpets in some of the world's best-known luxury hotels across Europe and Asia and it has three independent design teams, each specialising in one of its three verticals. These are formed by a winning combination of designers from multi-generational carpet-designing families, steeped in tradition and with a deep understanding of rugs, as well as forward-thinking designers with new ideas who want to push boundaries.

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